

**Question on Notice
No. 1460
Asked on 9 October 2008**

MR WEIGHTMAN asked the Minister for Emergency Services
(MR ROBERTS)—

QUESTION:

What measures has the Government put in place to mitigate the possible impacts of bushfires and storms this summer?

ANSWER:

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) has developed a range of strategies to reduce the bushfire hazard and improve the safety of the community.

In preparation for the upcoming bushfire season, QFRS has contracted the services of three water bombing helicopters for a period of 84 days which commenced from 25 August 2008. Further support is provided by 32 aircraft operators across Queensland who provide a variety of fixed/rotary wing aircraft suitable for reconnaissance and/or water bombing and transport.

The QFRS Air Operations Unit has trained 56 staff and volunteers in air observation, air attack supervision and aircraft officer positions to support firefighting ground crews during wildfire events.

Wildfire preparedness workshops and equipment testing have been conducted in all QFRS regions. All regions have Regional Wildfire Plans; dedicated Incident Control Centres supported by mobile Incident Control Centres; dedicated Regional Operations Coordination Centres; and appropriate resources to manage large scale incidents. Local Action Plans have also been prepared for communities considered at risk.

To further enhance preparedness, all QFRS regions have undertaken: a minimum of one major and two minor exercises to test procedures and command structures; assessments of communication plans and contingency arrangements; and training of both operational and non-operational personnel to work within coordination centres and for deployment to other areas within an incident.

Numerous joint training exercises are taking place throughout the state such as the Joint Australasian Inter-service Incident Management Training, which includes permanent, auxiliary and volunteer firefighters and representatives from Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ), the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Department of Natural Resources and Water, the Department of Primary Industries, Queensland Rail and local governments aimed at enhancing the ability of agencies to work together during a major incident.

Bushfire Prepared Community meetings and workshops are being held throughout the state in communities considered at risk. These are educational meetings to help prepare the community for any upcoming bushfire threat. Residents living in and around bushland are also being made aware of the "Prepare, Stay and Defend or Go Early" QFRS policy. The policy enables a person with the option to stay and defend their property if they have made adequate preparations. Authorities may still require residents to evacuate if the situation becomes too dangerous.

An Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) on Bushfires was established following a recommendation from the 1994 Bushfire Audit, which examined Queensland's preparedness following the major bushfires that occurred in Queensland and New South Wales in 1994.

The key purpose of the IDC is to provide a forum for the coordination of policy and procedures relating to rural fire management in order to achieve a consistent and comprehensive Whole-of-Government approach to the management of bushfire hazard reduction and suppression activities.

In 2007, Regional IDCs were established to ensure an overall consistent approach to fire management matters across the state, whilst still providing a localised approach to bushfire management. Regional IDCs provide support to established local Fire Management Groups, which have a membership comprising QFRS staff, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Department of Natural Resources and Water and local councils.

Television, radio and print media interviews occur at the local level in line with each region's anticipated fire season which advise the community of strategies to mitigate fire danger to people and property from the summer fire season.

Last year EMQ established the SES 132 500 telephone hotline to provide a more efficient and coordinated response to requests for assistance during storm and flood events anywhere within Queensland.

In November 2007, the Department of Emergency Services and NRMA Insurance announced a major three year partnership between NRMA Insurance and the SES which provides additional funds to increase community awareness for storm preparation and safety.

The Queensland Government has an Agreement and Protocol with the ABC to broadcast emergency messages, updates and advice prior to and during storms and floods.

EMQ has organised pre-season cyclone, storm and flood seminars throughout the state from mid October 2008 to early December 2008. The workshops are aimed at refreshing emergency managers and disaster planners on the warnings and tools available to help ensure public safety.

EMQ and the Local Government Association of Queensland have developed two disaster preparedness tools for children and young people. "Red Alert" is a collection of digital stories from young people for young people and "Get Ready Kidnas!" is an online interactive resource for children. Both resources have been nominated (as the one project) in the Emergency Management Australia's 2008 Safer Communities Awards. The project also won the State Government Category in the 2008 Queensland Safer Communities Awards.

EMQ is participating in a State Risk Profile report being developed to aid planning and resource commitment. Draft maps are being developed for a range of hazards including severe thunderstorm, and flooding which are being overlaid on critical infrastructure, land-use and population.

EMQ has received results from the Queensland Household Survey report 2008 which are being evaluated to inform the further development of community education programs aimed at mitigating the impacts of summer storms. EMQ is also developing a range of display banners to enable staff and SES volunteers to deliver community education on priority hazards for each region.

The review of community disaster preparedness information on departmental websites is underway. Content is being updated and new downloadable fact sheets and planning templates are being developed.

The Queensland Government is committed to helping Queensland communities prepare for and reduce the impact of bushfires and storms.