Questions on Notice
No. 1384
Asked on 6 October 2009

MS BATES ASKED THE MINISTER FOR POLICE, CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (MR ROBERTS)—

QUESTION:

With reference to reduction burns in Springbrook, Lower Beechmont and Bonogin—
(1) How many cold reduction burns were implemented and successfully undertaken in 2009-10?
(2) How many burns were stopped and why?
(3) What is the current estimated fuel load in Springbrook, Lower Beechmont and Bonogin?

ANSWER:

In Queensland, the reduction of fuel and fire hazards is the responsibility of the land owner.

The Gold Coast City Council considers approximately 50% of its area is in a medium to high risk category of wildfire and has a Bushfire Management Strategy for its own land which includes programmed environmentally friendly hazard reduction burns.

For the last three years, the Gold Coast City Council has commercially contracted Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) through the Commercial Development Unit to assist with the planning and execution of its hazard reduction burns. The contract between the Council and QFRS is for three years and expires on 30 June 2010.

Burns for the Gold Coast City Council are undertaken weather permitting and according to the annual plan. All hazard reduction burns undertaken by QFRS are undertaken strictly to a plan which includes target figures for variables such as temperature, humidity, wind speed and flame height. On many occasions, adjacent land owners also participate in the burn program to reduce their hazards at the same time.

The annual plan for Gold Coast City Council hazard reduction is produced and communicated to affected residents prior to the commencement of the burns. QFRS Commercial Development Unit engages local Rural Volunteers as paid temporary employees to conduct the burns.

Approximately 89 controlled cold hazard reduction burns have been conducted in the Springbrook, Lower Beechmont and Bonogin area on private land, in National Parks and on Gold Coast City Council managed reserves between January and October 2009. The majority were carried out between June and August 2009.

The only burn which was not completed due to safety and environmental issues was a minor hazard reduction burn at Apple Tree Flat. It was being conducted to reduce fuel along the roadside in a 50 metre wide by 300 metre long strip of moist sclerophyll forest. In order to conduct the hazard reduction activity safely, the burn needed to be conducted as a cool burn with a prescribed flame height of less than one metre. The burn was extinguished after flame heights over four metres were observed.

Estimated fuel loads in the areas vary according to the type of vegetation. Grassland on grazing properties will vary between zero and a few tonnes per hectare depending on grazing activity. The fuel levels in the dry sclerophyll forests will vary between a few tonnes and over 20 tonnes per hectare, depending on when they were last reduced. There is also a significant amount of moist and wet sclerophyll forest with varying fuel loads and areas of rainforest generally resistant to fire.