

**Question on Notice
No. 1326
Asked on 5 August 2010**

MR MOORHEAD asked the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services (MR ROBERTS)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the 'Prepare Act Survive' program, page 1-118 of the Budget Service Delivery Statements - Will the Minister advise the House what measures are being put in place to ensure Queensland is prepared for this bushfire season?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for his question and commend him for his continued support for emergency services.

2010 Bushfire Preparation

A range of strategies continue to be implemented across the State in preparation for the 2010 bushfire season.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) is closely monitoring seasonal conditions. Data gathering includes satellite imagery and on-ground assessment, which is analysed to identify potential high fire risk areas across the state. This enables the most appropriate mitigation strategies to be implemented in these potential high risk areas. Weather conditions over the next three months, in combination with the changing fuel conditions in grassland and forests, will determine the potential severity of the 2010 fire season.

With regard to aerial operations, QFRS is procuring the services of three water bombing Helitack helicopters for the 2010 bushfire season, from September until late November 2010. In addition, throughout Queensland there is a register of "call when needed" contracted aircraft of various types for air observation or water bombing.

Stockpiles of foam and personal protective equipment have been completed and adequate supplies are held by Rural Operations Area Offices and the Department of Community Safety's Warehouse. Suppliers around the State also have caches of stock that can be provided urgently if required.

Rural fire brigades across the state have been and continue to actively assist private landholders as well as the Department of Environment and Resource Management, the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Rail Limited and AgForce with hazard reduction burns. Local Fire Management Groups are also active in planning and mitigation activities.

Rural fire brigades are assisting property owners to develop and revise their fire management plans and Incident Management Team exercises are underway across the State with Local Action Plans being tested as part of these exercises. Media and community education campaigns are underway around the state.

QFRS Rural Operations, in consultation with rural fire brigades, has identified vehicles that can be relocated to other regions as part of a support force if required.

Volunteer Community Educators

The number of fully qualified rural firefighters has increased, which aids our bushfire preparation. There were 6,500 qualified rural firefighters in June 2008. These numbers have increased to

approximately 10,000 as at 30 June 2010, enhancing the firefighting capacity of the Rural Fire Service in Queensland.

QFRS has also begun appointing and training Volunteer Community Educators (VCEs), a community member who volunteers his or her time to provide bushfire and fire safety information and education such as bushfire action plans, the permit-to-light-fire system and specific rural fire information.

Mitigation and Education Officers

In addition, seven new Mitigation and Education Officers (MEOs) have been appointed as full-time employees of the QFRS, to provide support to the growing number of VCEs, as well as participate in critical community mitigation and education activities. Central to the educational role of both VCEs and MEOs is raising awareness within at-risk communities of the new PAS message.

Rural fire brigades across the state are actively assisting private landholders as well as key agencies such as the Department of Environment and Resource Management, the Department of Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Rail Limited and AgForce with hazard reduction burns. Local Fire Management Groups are also active in planning and conducting mitigation activities.

Local Disaster Management Plans are undergoing review to ensure they reflect the agencies responsible for evacuation activities during a bushfire.

Prepare. Act. Survive

In response to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (the Commission), the new national framework for Scaled Advice and Warnings to the Community was adopted in Queensland on 1 October 2009.

The framework introduced two new categories of Fire Danger Rating ('Severe' and 'Catastrophic') and the 'Prepare. Act. Survive' (PAS) strategy.

The 'Prepare. Act. Survive' strategy includes education on the new categories of Fire Danger Ratings and education about the importance of being prepared for bushfires and making a personal bushfire survival plan.

The emphasis of the PAS message is that preservation of life is the number one priority. This means that on extreme and catastrophic fire danger days, leaving early is the only option for survival, and that on severe fire danger days leaving early is still the safest option.

The 'Prepare. Act. Survive' campaign is being delivered to Queenslanders in preparation for the fire season, through television and radio commercials, media liaison, online advertising, newspaper inserts and brochures.

The campaign was officially launched in Queensland on 6 July 2010 and includes online information to assist people to develop their own Bushfire Survival Plan; a 16 page magazine style publication containing bushfire preparedness and safety information for at risk communities; and a "Safety While Travelling" brochure. This information can be downloaded from the Rural Fire Service (RFS) website (www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au).

Neighbourhood Safer Places

Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSP) have been canvassed in the final report. A NSP is a place of last resort - if bushfire survival plan fails. Areas of highest bushfire risk are a priority for NSP sites and are being identified through bushfire hazard mapping tools.

QFRS has identified around 50 Neighbourhood Safer Places listed on Rural Fire Service website - www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au with more to come. The website will be progressively updated as further sites are identified and approved.

Annual assessments of all NSP sites will occur to ensure compliance. Assessments will be undertaken prior to each fire season. The website detail will be maintained to reflect current approved NSPs to ensure community safety.

As Neighbourhood Safer Places are assessed using strict guidelines and calculations, not every community will have a suitable location or indeed will need one. Many parts of Queensland have sparse populations where NSPs will be of very limited or no value.

Community members are advised that if they live in a bushfire prone area that does not have a designated Neighbourhood Safer Places, they should consider this when making their personal Bushfire Survival Plan.

They should prepare their property to increase its resilience to the impact of bushfire and remember that "leaving early" will always be the safest option.

Warning Systems

Emergency Alert has been trialed and is now operational in Queensland. Delivery of warning messages to mobile phones based on their physical location is being discussed with telecommunications providers at the national level and the Department of Community Safety is monitoring the progress of discussions.

Agreements and protocols are in place with Commercial Radio Australia as well as the ABC for broadcast content and the use of the Standard Emergency Warning System for extremely dangerous bushfires.

QFRS considers its preparations will ensure Queensland is well prepared for this year's bushfire season.