

Question on Notice

No. 1744

Asked on Thursday, 15 November 2018

MR N DAMETTO ASKED THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF, MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND MINISTER FOR THE ARTS (HON L ENOCH)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise why conducting an annual burn off of the uninhabited Hinchinbrook Island National Park is necessary, considering several of my constituents living in nearby coastal communities have had their respiratory health issues exacerbated by what is seen as an unnecessary burn off?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

I also note the Honourable Member has raised these concerns directly with the Department of Environment and Science on 8 November 2018.

The use of fire by Traditional Owners has shaped Hinchinbrook Island National Park's landscapes and vegetation communities over thousands of years, and remains critical in maintaining the health and biodiversity of the National Park's ecosystems. Of the 54 different vegetation types on Hinchinbrook Island, 34 require fire for survival and regeneration.

Planned burns on Hinchinbrook Island National Park, a major tourism drawcard for the Hinchinbrook electorate, will reduce risk of wild fire to visitors on the Thorsborne Trail, protect fire-sensitive habitats from wild fire and maintain the cultural values of the Traditional Owners.

The department's planned burn programs are informed by the best and most contemporary science on fire management. Planned burns are carried out across the State to mitigate the severity of future bushfires by reducing the build-up of flammable fuel loads.

Notification processes are in place and implemented when smoke may affect communities.

In 2017-18, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) conducted planned burns over an area of nearly 943,000 hectares. This was the most in five years, and well above the original target of 632,000 hectares.

The recent bushfires in Queensland only emphasise the important role planned burns play in protecting the community and the environment. Without planned burns the extent and intensity of future bushfires will increase compromising safety, natural and cultural values.

The current, and future, safety of the community is the department's primary concern and I thank QPWS for their amazing work, alongside firefighters and volunteers, in combating the recent fires.