

Question on Notice

No. 1946

Asked on Thursday, 28 November 2019

MS S BOLTON ASKED THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF, MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND MINISTER FOR THE ARTS (HON L ENOCH)—

QUESTION:

With reference to widespread fires—

Will the Minister advise whether there are plans to incorporate the knowledge and experience of our First Nations Peoples in fire mitigation measures such as ‘cool burns’ within Queensland’s Protected Areas?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

The Palaszczuk Government has demonstrated a strong commitment to support bushfire management in our national parks and State forests, having allocated an additional \$16 million over four years commencing in 2019-20, and \$2.6 million per year ongoing. This funding is focused on taking practical steps to reduce the risk of bushfire to the neighbouring communities of our protected areas and supporting enhanced collaboration with all partners to encourage a landscape-scale approach to fire management.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) currently works with partners including First Nations groups, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and other State land management agencies to review and prioritise planned burns on the protected area estate and beyond. The focus is to reduce the risk bushfires can pose to life, property, biodiversity and culturally significant sites.

Annually, QPWS undertakes an extensive state-wide fire management program of planned burns on QPWS managed estate. I am pleased to be able to report that this year, in preparation for the fire season, QPWS treated more than 1 million hectares of estate through planned burns - the largest area covered for the last six years and nearly double the annual target of 634,800 hectares.

The QPWS fire program aligns closely with the purpose and intent of traditional burning, to decrease the risk of large, destructive, late season wildfires. That means burning early in the dry season to reduce fuel loads, creating fire breaks in the landscape, and maintaining and protecting habitat for fauna.

First Nations people and their knowledge are increasingly at the forefront of joint efforts to provide landscape wide fire management skills and services to Queensland. First Nations ecological knowledge and practices continue to be critical to the management of country in Queensland, as it has been for thousands of generations.

Traditional burning or ‘cool burning’, is a practice based on ecological knowledge developed over thousands of generations of First Nations people. QPWS is working in partnership with several First Nations groups to conduct planned burns, based on this knowledge. Work is underway to identify further locations where traditional burning programs could be implemented in both protected areas and on country.

In northern Queensland, First Nations people provide important fire mitigation services through savanna burning projects registered with the Clean Energy Regulator. These generate carbon offsets known as Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs). Each ACCU is equivalent to one tonne of carbon dioxide prevented from being released or stored in natural systems. Savanna burning generates these offsets by using the cool burning technique in the early dry season to avoid late season, intense wildfires.

To date, there are 10 First Nations-led, Queensland-based savanna burning projects registered with the Clean Energy Regulator. These projects have avoided the release of more than 800,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases. That is more than 800,000 ACCUs worth an estimated \$9.7 million in revenue to these communities and partners since 2014.

The Palaszczuk Government is investing in a \$500 million Land Restoration Fund that will facilitate a pipeline of land sector, carbon offset projects with environmental, economic, and social co-benefits. This will include seeking to support savanna burning projects.

The Land Restoration Fund is already supporting two First Nations-led pilot projects integrating cultural fire management. Balkanu – Cape York Development Corporation in Cape York and Gidarjil Aboriginal Corporation based in Bundaberg are leading the pilots.

In addition, the Queensland Government is supporting First Nations people to deliver on country fire management activities through grant funding of more than \$11 million per year under the Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger Program. In 2018-19, Indigenous Land and Sea ranger teams reported fire management practices across more than 710,000 hectares of country.