

Question on Notice

No. 743

Asked on Tuesday, 15 June 2021

MR S O'CONNOR ASKED THE MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF AND MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND YOUTH AFFAIRS (HON M SCANLON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the permanent fire prohibition at Teewah Beach in Cooloola Recreation Area—

Will the Minister provide the number of bushfires, incidents of injured wildlife, injuries of visitors to the area and the amount of collected non-combustible materials caused by campfires by year for the last five years?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

There have been four bushfires that started from campfires on Teewah Beach in the last five years.

The most significant of these occurred on 8 September 2019, where a fire started at the toe of the dune system as a result of campers' activities. The fire burnt approximately 15,000 hectares and had the potential to further threaten communities in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. The fire caused serious damage to the natural and cultural values of the area and left the coastal region prone to land slips.

Patrolling rangers and members of the public regularly report rubbish left in campfires including glass, cans and plastic. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) receives assistance from volunteer organisations, including the Surfrider Foundation, who conduct bi-annual community clean ups in the Teewah Beach zone. QPWS does not record the quantity of rubbish removed from the area as it is unfortunately an all too frequent undertaking.

QPWS conducted a postfire assessment of the 2019 bushfires with the report recording catastrophic impacts to some national park values. While there were no observed reports of individual animals impacted by recent wildfires at Teewah Beach, intense and frequent wildfires can have devastating impact on the recovery of habitat required for species survival.

There have been many incidents across Queensland including on national park where people have sustained burns from campfires. In 2018, a six-year-old boy sustained severe burns on his feet after running through a campfire at Teewah Beach.

In 2018, Professor Roy Kimble, Director of Burns and Trauma at the Queensland Children's Hospital stated "It's a common misconception that campfires can be properly extinguished with sand or dirt. While the flames may be out, fires extinguished with sand can retain heat up to 100 degrees Celsius for eight hours after the flames are no longer visible."

"It only takes one second of contact with a campfire to acquire very deep burns, but it can take months, if not years, of intensive therapy to reduce scarring and regain mobility in severely burnt limbs."

The fire prohibition at Teewah Beach in the Cooloola Recreation Area includes all fires that are not fully self-contained, such as open campfires, fires in drums and other open containers where the fire can escape or cause ember drift. Gas barbecues are permitted.

Campfires are permitted in the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service provided fire rings at the Poverty Point camping area within the Cooloola Recreation Area and in the Inskip Point Recreation Area in accordance with all local directions.

This measure will increase the safety of campers in the Teewah Beach area.