

Question on Notice
No. 1510
Asked on 28 November 2023

MR S BENNETT ASKED THE MINISTER FOR POLICE AND CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND MINISTER FOR FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (HON M RYAN) —

QUESTION:

With reference to the recent devastating bushfires across the Burnett and the feedback around delays to backburning activities—

Will the Minister outline (a) what the policy position is around incident control management and permissions to backburn when a bushfire becomes too intense to attack directly and (b) what is preventing Queensland Rural Fire Service First Officers from making that urgent and timely decision and final call to manage all activities on the fire ground?

ANSWER:

I am advised that Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) has a Tactical Directive for backburning and burning out operations due to the risks of introducing additional fire into the landscape, to ensure it doesn't pose further risk to lives and properties.

I am informed that where QFES is the controlling agency for a bushfire, the Incident Controller is responsible for authorising a backburn and makes this operational decision carefully, utilising contemporary predictive services capabilities, Bureau of Meteorology forecasts, local knowledge and information about current and expected environmental conditions. In situations where the Fire Behaviour Index is predicted to be high or above, further approval may be required in line with the Incident Action Plan or Tactical Directive.

The following exemptions to this approval process apply:

- When there is an imminent threat to lives, infrastructure, or assets where back burning is the only viable option for crew protection.
- When crews working in remote areas that have no phone or radio connectivity, where the imminent threat prevents those crews from traveling to establish communications to request approval.

If a decision is made not to undertake backburning due to the risks, alternative firefighting techniques, such as the use of heavy machinery to establish fire breaks or aerial support, may be utilised to manage the bushfire.

An Incident Controller can be a member of a rural fire brigade, such as a First Officer, if the bushfire is within their brigade location or an authorised fire officer under the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990*.