



The Honourable Craig Crawford MP
Minister for Fire and Emergency Services and
Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

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Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
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Dear Mr Laurie *NEIL,*

Thank you for your letter dated 23 April 2020 about petition number 3286-20 received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly about the Queensland Government's management of the recent fire season.

The cooperation of our Queensland community and the work of our emergency services personnel in dealing with the very challenging conditions of the 2019 Queensland bushfire season was crucial. While any of the impacts of the bushfires are unfortunate, I am pleased to confirm that no lives were lost in Queensland in managing bushfires in 2019, including no volunteers.

Successful bushfire management requires collaboration between multiple partners including landowners, emergency service agencies and the general community. In relation to the preparation work for bushfires, landowners and land managers have a substantial responsibility for important preventative measures such as reducing fuel loads through hazard reduction burns or slashing. Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) plays an important leadership and coordination role, especially through the network of Area Fire Management Groups. Preparation activities can occur year-round including during Operation Cool Burn which precedes the fire season and focuses on mitigation activities that protect the most at risk communities.

A review of the September 2019 bushfires in Queensland was conducted by the Inspector General Emergency Management which is available at <https://www.igem.qld.gov.au/queensland-bushfires-review-2019-20>.

The review found that Queensland's disaster management arrangements have proven to be responsive and scalable, providing a strong and accountable framework to respond to the challenges Queensland has faced during recent natural disasters. These arrangements are based on partnerships between the community and groups at the local, district, state and federal levels, with local level capability forming the frontline of disaster management. The review identified that preparedness activities were generally done well and that pre-season exercises provided substantial benefits in familiarising agencies with response coordination, communication and information arrangements.

Although large parts of Queensland were gripped by drought last year, I understand there was a substantial amount of preparation work on State land. In preparation for the 2019 fire season, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service conducted planned burns over more than one million hectares.

To conduct hazard reduction burns, landholders and land managers can obtain fire permits from a local fire warden and can be applied for verbally or in writing. There are over 2000 fire wardens across the state most of whom are volunteers from local communities. The key consideration in this assessment is whether the fire can be safely managed and contained within the area proposed and if a permit is issued it will stipulate conditions to achieve this. A fire warden will not issue a permit if they assess the planned fire cannot be undertaken safely, including when conditions are particularly hazardous such as during a local fire ban or State of Fire Emergency declaration.

Where landholders need to clear vegetation to create a firebreak or a fire management line further detailed guidance and information is available at <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/management/vegetation/disasters/fire>. Landholders who wish to seek further advice on clearing firebreaks can call an experienced officer from the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy "VegHub". QFES currently has a staff member embedded in this VegHub to address any fire permit related questions so that landowners can get advice on these permits at the same time. The VegHub can be contacted on phone number 135 VEG (135 834) or email vegetation@dnrme.qld.gov.au.

In relation to having an independent specialist group to manage bushfires as indicated above, bushfires do not recognise tenure boundaries and their management will continue to involve many partners, including landowners, land managers and our emergency services. In Queensland, QFES is a dedicated emergency services agency which can call upon the extensive capabilities of its Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue Service and State Emergency Service in leading and coordinating bushfire management. QFES will continue to build and improve its bushfire management capability in the future, including continuing to work with similar emergency services within Australia and internationally.

I trust this information is helpful to you. Should you wish to discuss this matter in more detail, please contact Mr Peter Clarke, Chief of Staff on telephone (07) 3008 3700.

Thank you for raising this matter.

Yours sincerely



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20/5/2020