



**FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (REVIEW) AMENDMENT BILL**  
**8th September 2009**

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (20:08):** Complacency has been a major cause of the devastation from fires that we have seen across Australia and, therefore, I am pleased that the review required in the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005, to be undertaken two years after its commencement, has ensured that all the issues pertaining to fire have been looked at. This subsequent bill has been put in place to, hopefully, improve upon it.

However, just the fact that a review was required to be undertaken ensured that the complacency that occurred after the Tulka fire, and many others in the past, did not mean that more deaths had to occur before the act's effectiveness was assessed. There were 49 recommendations made as a result of this review, many of which did not require legislative changes. It also gave the government the opportunity to make changes that arose from the ministerial review of bushfire management in South Australia and the coronial inquest into the Wangary fires.

Another assessment two years after this act's commencement is, in my view, essential to again look at compliance, as well as at other improvements that may be needed in the prevention and mitigation of fires, and I was disgusted, therefore, when this review was not written into the bill. I ask that the government reconsider its decision, and support the Liberal opposition's amendment to section 149 to ensure that this review will be undertaken in 2012, and/or that we have a permanent committee on fires, as suggested by the member for Davenport in his motion (to which I have already spoken in support).

Fuel load management in particular is still of grave concern to me despite 16 years in this place, being regularly reassured that more burn-offs will be undertaken, as I note is being done again in today's *Advertiser* in an article entitled, 'Mega burn-off drive to reduce bushfire menace'. I note in the article that some burn-offs scheduled for 2008-09 could not be completed and would be done as part of this year's program.

I would like the minister to advise the house why these were not undertaken last year, and will he guarantee that they and the burn-offs scheduled for this year will actually be done? I suspect the lack of trained personnel was, and will be at least part of the reason why adequate burn-offs were not completed. I believe that this was, in part, the reason why the burn-off of Kathia Park on Northside Hill overlooking Port Lincoln was not completed last year, leading to the devastation we saw once again with the fish factories and several houses and sheds burning in very close proximity to the city earlier this year. We were fortunate that the wind did not take this fire into Port Lincoln or we may well have seen devastation in the league of the Victorian fires. I also noted with interest in the article:

The Bushfire Taskforce is expected to provide its report to the state cabinet this week.

I ask the minister whether this is why this bill is being pushed through the lower house tonight: perhaps it is to ensure that nothing that is critical of the government and its actions that may have happened to get into this report is able to be put on the *Hansard* record during this debate. I hope that my question on notice, No. 498 regarding the Wangary fires, will be responded to in *Hansard* before we finish sittings in the lead-up to the election, because this Labor government played politics with the financial support of the federal Liberal government, and its response will hopefully help clarify the federal government's position that was portrayed so poorly by this government at that time.

I was disturbed to read in our Library's Research Paper No. 19 (20 April 2009) by Dr Robert Richardson what the head of the CSIRO's Bushfire Research Unit, Phil Cheney, stated when responding to the recent Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria. The paper states:

Phil Cheney insists that greater emphasis must now be placed on increasing fuel management and prescribed burning interventions. Cheney says that it is 'totally frustrating' to see this advice has largely been ignored despite the fact that it has been a consistent theme since Victoria's devastating Black Friday bushfires of 1939.

Despite 70 years having passed, I read that, of the 1,200 submissions received by the royal commission into the recent Victorian bushfires, 485 dealt with fuel reduction, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and prescribed burning, yet Peter Westmore, in an article in the *News Weekly*, 5 September 2009 asks:

Why then did the royal commission fail to make any recommendations on the issue of fuel reduction burning in preparation for the next fire season, which commences in November 2009?

I have reason to be concerned, particularly for the people who live in the 55,000 square kilometres of my electorate of Flinders on Eyre Peninsula. We have around 80 national and conservation parks in the area. In addition, there are considerable hectares of land that have been acquired by the government under the compulsory freeholding requirements brought in by this government. On top of coastal protection, there are now new coastal conservation requirements that prevent farmers from even changing their farming practices, subdividing or even fencing their freehold land.

Thousands of hectares of land—now government owned—are reverting back to saltbush and coastal shrubbery that is highly flammable. In addition, there are thousands of hectares of SA Water land which used to be grazed by sheep and which is now thickly covered by regrowth and infested by weeds. This SA Water land is required for water catchment, as the supply for the Eyre Peninsula comes from underground basins. Not only is this practice causing a major fire hazard, but it has also significantly decreased the water going into the aquifers, causing the region to now be put on level three water restrictions, despite the Minister for Water Security stating that we would never need them.

This week is Landcare Week, marking 20 years of Landcare Australia but, from today's *Port Lincoln Times*, I quote what has happened under this Labor government to the volunteers who used to happily look after much of the government land on Eyre Peninsula:

Several years ago, there were more than 50 landcare groups on Eyre Peninsula but the landcare movement in South Australia has been in recess for the past few years and many of these groups have folded.

These groups were made up of farmers and others from across the region. With a little help from the government, they undertook projects to control rabbits, foxes and weeds, including highly flammable, prickly acacias and South African boxthorn bushes (they genuinely care for their local environment), along with manning the volunteer fire and emergency services. They know their area well, but they are now disheartened and disillusioned.

The Minister for Environment and Conservation is attempting to renew these Landcare groups with grant funding before the next election. Today, in answer to a Dorothy Dix question, the Minister for Environment and Conservation waxed lyrical about the grant funding he is now providing to help. However, most of these former volunteers are cynical and would say to the minister that it is too little, too late.

This government consults to death but does not listen. Red tape is tying people in knots on their farms, in their businesses and in their volunteer work. The government is trying to re-establish these groups but, while it continues to not listen, I doubt very much that the government will get any enthusiastic response. Typical of the top down response was the closure of all 70 plus schools across the 55,000 square kilometres of Eyre Peninsula on a fire ban day last year, which threw the schools and parents into total confusion. The region had been suffering from prolonged drought and, in many parts of the area, it is doubtful that there would have been enough growth to even burn.

Most farmers put sheep in the home paddock to ensure the house is kept safe, and most of the schools, if not all, have a fire plan. To make this decision at a moment's notice, with no due consideration school by school over such a vast area, was incredible and potentially very dangerous. Fortunately, we did not have a fire on the day, as many of the volunteer services are manned by parents, who would have been tied up ensuring that their children were safe (that is, if they could be contacted). The region has very poor mobile phone coverage in a number of the school districts, with farms, school buses and even some schools having very poor, if any, mobile phone connection.

It is about time that local knowledge and local issues from local people were given credence. City-based decisions would have had a part in causing some of the deaths, through sheer ignorance of the circumstances experienced in country areas. I have included many of these in the many previous speeches I have made in this house about fires, so I will not repeat them again, as they are readily available in *Hansard* and on my website (lizpenfold.com). My colleagues have covered many others, with numerous suggestions of merit that I hope will be taken into account by the current minister and acted upon.

I will use this time to put on the record my response to the personal attack on me on Thursday 16 July this year by the Minister for Transport's puppy dog, the member for Mawson, and his attempt to rewrite history regarding the part the former minister for emergency services played in the nine deaths in the Wangary fire.

**Ms FOX:** I have a small point of order, Mr Acting Speaker. I could be completely wrong on this, Mr Acting Speaker, but is it correct that one cannot refer to another member of parliament as an animal, which I believe the member for Flinders has just done?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Pengilly):** The member for Flinders and not the member for Finniss?

**Ms FOX:** Surprisingly, in this instance, no; you did not do it. Am I correct in that assumption, or is it just nonsense?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I ask the member for Flinders to withdraw that remark.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** Certainly, Mr Acting Speaker; I withdraw the words 'puppy dog'.

**The Hon. M.F. O'Brien interjecting:**

**Mrs PENFOLD:** Yes, I will. Thank goodness I have only 17 sitting days to go. His intimidation was ostensibly in response to my totally unrelated speech on the unworkability of the national road transport reform legislation, the Road Transport (Heavy Vehicle Driver Fatigue) Bill, when I noted the unpleasant statements made by the Minister for Transport a few minutes earlier during debate on the Road Traffic (Miscellaneous) Amendment Bill 2009.

The Minister for Transport's aggressive and intimidating tirade added nothing to the debate on national transport reform, but it illustrated the fact that he is a Labor lawyer who tries to use what he believes, I am sure, to be his superior education and intelligence to put down and belittle people and generally bluff his way through in much the same way as the Treasurer did during question time today. I can assure the minister that the truckies I talk to know much more about the industry than he does, despite his superior attitude.

The Minister for Transport slated the opposition, saying, among a lot of other things, 'Look at you! You have no point, and you have no future.' In my view, it is the minister and his sycophants, such as the member for Mawson, who have no point and no future. They have lost touch with the ordinary decent people that we all represent, the battlers who are out there trying to earn a living, despite unworkable legislation, increasing costs and red tape and an uncaring Labor government.

I now come to the member for Mawson's statements regarding the Wangary fire when he asked me once again to say thank you. I will say thank you for what the Labor government did after the Wangary fire when the minister (the member for Elder) apologises and resigns for not taking action after the Tulka fire that may have prevented the nine deaths at Wangary. When the member for Elder became the minister for emergency services he had all the Tulka reports before him, reports that we were not able to see before the 2006 election.

Despite this and despite the former minister and later the shadow minister for emergency services asking for a bipartisan select committee 'to review bushfire protection', to look at the problems, he did not take action or even speak to the motion. The minister denied that the water bombers that did not get to the Wangary fire in time to help would have made a difference to the outcome.

**The Hon. J.M. Rankine interjecting:**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Pengilly):** Order! If the minister wants to contribute she might want to go to her seat.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** They certainly would have made a difference if they had been there the evening before the major outbreak, as they could have been and should have been. The minister, I understand, was down in the South-East when the Wangary fire occurred, and the few planes we then had went there. Even the local planes belonging to Kevin Warren, based in Port Lincoln, were once again prevented from legally flying, as also happened during the Tulka fire.

It is this minister who failed in his responsibilities and played politics, member for Mawson, not me. It is good to note that the Labor government has now placed not one but two fire bombers in Port Lincoln during the fire season, and for that I am grateful, although I would like to see at least one based at Ceduna, over 400 kilometres away. I am also grateful to the members of the lodge who have provided water tanks across the region to ensure that water is available in times of fire.

After the fire, the member for Elder, who is a Labor lawyer, and the former media man, the member for Mawson, came over like Father Christmases bearing gifts. I called it guilt money, but when asked I was certainly not going to add to the grief of those who had lost family and friends by saying that I thought their lives could have been saved if the minister had acted, and I asked the members of my party (state and federal) to do the same, which they did.

However, when it did come to the time when I could say things more comfortably, I was accused of playing politics by the government, which as is often said, 'Well, they would say that, wouldn't they, to try to silence any criticism.'

**Members interjecting:**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! I ask that the member for Flinders be given the opportunity to complete her speech. If other members wish to speak they may do so after she has completed her speech.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** My staff and I were far too busy dealing with the immediate issues that poured into our office within hours and for months afterwards, and even now, about the fire. We were all traumatised to some extent and I considered counselling for all of us. However, each one attended one of the community counselling sessions and so dealt with our personal issues.

After the most recent fire in Port Lincoln this year, I could not even get the government to allow the prisoners at the Port Lincoln gaol, who did a fantastic job after Wangary, to do the fencing of the pensioners' properties, who had lost everything.

It was not I who played politics when my office helped the government by suggesting changes to make the first anniversary event of the Wangary fire more acceptable to the local community, many of whom intended to boycott it. We also led by example by advising that we would be attending, and I closed the office so that we could all go. It was an important part of the grieving process. My staff were angry when Legislative Councillor Caroline Schaefer and I were subsequently denied (by the head of protocol) a seat in the extensive fenced-off official area. When questioned whether she realised that I was the local member and Caroline an MLC, she responded, yes, but that made no difference. Her actions would not have been undertaken without authorisation from higher up.

My staff fixed the problem by donating their chairs to Caroline and me, which we placed at the back of the enclosure, from where we were able to participate in the subsequent proceedings. Photos would show the head of protocol sitting in the front row in a position usually allocated to the local member. Again, I did not make public this deliberate slight at this function in what, thanks to my office, turned out to be a very good and healing day for all those who attended. The minister's statement that being over in Port Lincoln during the fire was keeping him from his own family—

**Mr PICCOLO:** I rise on a point of order. What is the relevance of what the member is going on about?

**Ms Chapman:** This is the Wangary fires; have you no respect?

**Mr PICCOLO:** No; how she was treated, how is that relevant?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Pengilly):** There is no point of order.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** —did not stir any sympathy with me or anyone else, as others had lost their children, grandchildren, mothers, sons and brothers forever. I have put on the parliamentary record my views on the fires

and what should have been done. I note that the minister handballed the portfolio to probably the least aggressive upper house Labor member as far away as possible and as soon as possible to avoid taking any further responsibility for his lack of action.

I understand that out of court settlements are currently being made in relation to the Wangary fires. Once again, the government and its ministers' actions will avoid scrutiny, as I understand that payouts are dependent on the signing of a secrecy agreement. I do not need to have the minister's sycophant to continue to attack me with the same tired statement that I am ungrateful and should say thank you. I repeat the call for the member for Elder to resign and apologise to the victims of the Wangary fires.

I am still concerned about the fatigue bill, as it is likely to be the cause of accidents, injuries and possibly deaths because it has not been tailored to suit South Australian truck drivers and the huge distances they have to cover without proper infrastructure and facilities. Once again, I am being ignored by this arrogant minister. Perhaps if the member for Mawson put a little work into some real issues, such as this one, and put some pressure on his minister to change this bill, he might become the decent representative he accuses me of not being. I will put my track record alongside his any day as I know I would win by a country mile.

The Labor Party's bullying, ridiculing, belittling and intimidation tactics are orchestrated and ongoing. They are particularly negative and unpleasant when they come from trained lawyers, such as the Attorney-General, the Minister for Transport and media person, the member for Mawson. I believe that they give licence to others, particularly within the Public Service, to do the same to the people in their departments.

These members are using their considerable skills not for the good governance of our state but for deflecting attention from the real issues facing our community. The culture of bullying within our society is not something anyone can condone, and it is certainly not conducive to getting good quality members to enter parliament. I support the bill.

## **PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES (BUSHFIRES COMMITTEE) AMENDMENT BILL**

**19 February 2009 - The Hon. I.F. EVANS (Davenport) (10:35):** Obtained leave and introduced a bill for an act to amend the Parliamentary Committees Act. Read a first time. **The Hon. I.F. EVANS (Davenport) (10:35):** I move: That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill seeks to establish a standing committee of the parliament to deal with bushfires. The intent of this bill is that the standing committee would take effect three months after the next general election. Members will note that in another motion on the *Notice Paper* I have indicated that another committee of the parliament would perform this role between now and the election. I am doing a two-step process to suggest that, first, we have one of the parliamentary committees between now and the next election look at the bushfire issue, and, secondly, after the next election, we have a standing committee.

### **5 March 2009**

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (10:51):** I strongly support the Parliamentary Committees (Bushfires Committee) Amendment Bill. I want to continue to put on the record the issues I am aware of that require scrutiny. The recent fires in Port Lincoln in January this year highlighted the valuable lessons that are finally being learnt, with cooperation between services, better equipment, training and communication making a huge difference this time. The fantastic cooperation between all our emergency services, air support and police resulted in a far better outcome than we might have had with such a fast-moving fire.

However, there still needs to be improvement, as it was obvious that a number of private and public landholders' preparations were substandard. In some instances, native vegetation, open grassland and rubbish on properties were not cleared up and made safe. From my own observations, and numerous contacts with the public since the fire, I have put together some of the issues that might be addressed to make further improvements in fire response across the state.

The following are some issues that should be looked at. In my view, fire prevention preparations could be improved if burning was allowed after 3pm into the evenings, when the wind often drops. It is generally cooler and sometimes even damp, and it is safer to burn. Extra hours for burning, once people have finished work or sport,

may encourage more people to put in the required effort. Currently, there are only limited times when people can burn, and these may not coincide with the safest times.

After fire bans come into force each year, burning off is allowed on suitable days with a permit from an authorised officer. This system, from my experience, is not working well, as authorised officers must be readily available. People are more often able to undertake their fire prevention work on weekends, and burning rubbish depends on weather and winds being suitable, which cannot be forecast in advance. Obtaining a signed permit from the council during working hours days before it may or may not be able to be used is not practical, even if the authorised officer is available to sign it and, in my experience, they are not.

In an interview with the ABC on 15 January 2009, the mayor made the following comments regarding backyard burning in the non-fire danger season, and I understand his questions were mainly taken from the *Port Lincoln Community Guide 2008/09*. He stated:

...backyard burning in the non-fire danger season May to September must be in accordance with the EPA burning policy? What is the EPA burning policy? Where do you get it?

...burn materials using an approved incinerator in your backyard. What is an approved incinerator and where do you get one?

...burning is permitted Monday to Saturday between 10 and 3pm but not allowed on Sundays and public holidays. Now remember, we function on daylight saving, OK so that means between 9 and 2pm. Now any firefighter will tell you in terms of burning off, the best time to burn off is towards the cool of the evening...somewhere to say between 4 to say 7 o'clock in the evening with daylight saving that is 5 until 8pm.

But not allowed on Sundays and public holidays. Now they might be the best days to burn. When are we supposed to clear our blocks? You burn your material in the most appropriate day and time, not according to some bureaucratic rule.

...should your fire smoke it is probably 'illegal' you can be prosecuted by the EPA for your fire smoking, that's how stupid the system is.

Does the information need to be changed and/or should guidelines be altered? I think so. If private citizens do not or will not clean up their holdings, then others must and send landowners the bill. I understand this used to be undertaken by city councils but in recent years it appears not to have been actively enforced. Perhaps an official method to enable the public to draw councils' attention to properties that need fire prevention work would help. A council inspector could then inspect the site and, if they agree, send the owner a warning letter. If the prevention work is not undertaken within a specified time the council, MFS or CFS could be asked to do the work and send the landholder the bill.

Government-owned land—federal, state or local—must not be exempt from rules that apply to the public. Many Housing SA homes were reported to have long grass in front and back yards that would have made it very difficult to save those houses had spot fires occurred, and these could have pulled the fire directly into city housing. It is Housing SA's responsibility to ensure that its properties are maintained by tenants or do it for them and charge for it. I am aware of some large pieces of government-owned grassland within the city which used to be well maintained and burnt off every year but which have not been burned or mown for a number of seasons.

In terms of native vegetation, the Greater City of Port Lincoln bushfire prevention plan must be implemented as soon as possible. The sector that burnt in the most recent fire was the next to be dealt with, but that was too late to help. We have to speed up that process. National parks have improved their fire prevention, equipment and training significantly since Wangary but, again, I understand that they have not done everything in their plan. This could be a time factor with the huge number of parks for which they are responsible, but one would have thought that Kathai Park, which burnt, should have been a priority. (Kathai Park is on Northside Hill overlooking the city of Port Lincoln.) It appears it was not a priority, and that is surprising, as the Port Lincoln city dump is so close, and fires at dumps are renowned.

It is time for another fire truck and crew to be allocated to the city—MFS or CFS. Relying on volunteer CFS crews to travel from other areas of Eyre Peninsula is not ideal, particularly on bad days such as 9 January. Fire trucks from up country are not always immediately available, and there is the very real issue of leaving other areas without adequate protection. The outskirts of the city are being developed, resulting in a larger area and an

increased number of houses to be protected. The Puglisi development alone is 272 blocks on the northern perimeter of the city, and the third stage of the marina has had another 280 blocks recently approved. These two subdivisions will considerably increase the number of properties within the city boundaries.

I am aware of problems relating to the dumping of rubbish, tyres in particular, on the roadside in areas near the dump. Was this an issue for crews when they were fighting the fire? Is it something that needs to be addressed? Sightseers posed a significant problem for residents and fire crews during the recent fire, and after the Wangary fire looting occurred. Should a penalty be introduced for sightseers and looters? There was one reported case of a family's evacuation from their home being prevented by a car blocking their driveway.

The MFS attended a fire at the Incitec Pivot site on Monday 12 January and experienced problems sourcing a water supply to refill their trucks. Was this a problem at this fire? If so, what needs to be done to improve the situation? Expansion of housing will compound the existing deficiencies.

Port Lincoln is very dependent on the power line from Port Augusta. If problems are experienced the diesel generators at the back of Winters Hill can be used.

What arrangements can be put in place to reduce the risk of power failure in the city? The situation with approximately 2,000 tonnes of pilchards being buried on site demonstrates the need for a management plan for the safe disposal of frozen pilchards, etc. A number of years ago a similar situation occurred when tonnes of dead tuna had to be disposed of. It would therefore be a reasonable assumption, because of the location of many of the fishing industry buildings and the nature of the industry, that this type of incident could happen again. A system needs to be put in place to handle imported fish and the disposal of fish to ensure that inappropriate ad hoc measures are not taken. Quarantine issues are a federal responsibility and would need to be taken into consideration. A desktop exercise with members of the fishing industry would be a good way to identify the risks, problems and possible solutions and would be an opportunity to identify any equipment that could be made available in an emergency situation. Emergency management plans could be drafted.

I am pleased that valuable lessons have finally been heeded following the Tulka and Wangary fires, and I particularly note the use of aeroplanes. However, there are still many things that must be addressed. Any changes that are required that are not within the jurisdiction of the city councils, CFS and MFS need to be addressed by the state and federal governments to ensure that any necessary changes to policies, procedures, regulations and laws are made.

A standing committee of this parliament, with the responsibility to investigate what is done and needs to be done, should help to avoid the delays in implementing recommendations that we saw after the Tulka fire and that I believe resulted in the deaths and destruction that we saw from the Wangary fire. I commend the member for Davenport for proposing this bill.

## **BUSHFIRE INQUIRY**

### **4 March 2009**

**The Hon. I.F. EVANS (Davenport) (11:00):** I move:

That the Natural Resources Committee inquire into and report on any proposal, matter or issue concerned with bushfire.

The reason I move this motion is because, as we are well aware, the country through Victoria has been ravaged by bushfire in recent days, and it is still going on. South Australia has had a number of very bad bushfires, which I know the member for Flinders, and others, will wish to comment on. It seems to me that the parliament has this all wrong in relation to bushfire. Parliaments all around Australia tend to wait for a bushfire to occur, express great sorrow and regret about the impact of the bushfire, and then, basically, let the agencies proceed along their merry way, without the parliament having any great oversight of what they are doing and why they are doing it.

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders) (11:30):** I rise to strongly support the bill to have a joint standing committee, whose powers and functions are set out in the Parliamentary Committees Act, to inquire into and report on any proposed matter or issue concerned with bushfires and supported by this interim measure. In February 2001, we saw a fire that burnt in the SA Water reserve, Tulka and the Lincoln National Park, south of Port Lincoln.

At a 'thank you' function at Community House in Port Lincoln, I said that, while the fires had been very traumatic, with a huge loss of property and damage to the environment, fortunately there had been no loss of life.

I went on to say that this was more luck than good management and that next time we could not expect to be so fortunate—and we were not.

Between the inquiry into the fire and the full implementation of the recommendations, the government changed. The Tulka fire generated at least four reports, which were very difficult to obtain. According to the Chief Executive of the Country Fire Service of South Australia, Stuart Ellis, copies would be available upon request. After a number of questions, I received a copy of one of the reports on 7 October 2005, more than four years after the Tulka fire and several months after the Wangary fire. It is shattering to know that, had all the recommendations from the Tulka fire been expeditiously put into place, possibly all the deaths and much of the devastation from the Wangary fire in 2005 could have been avoided or certainly reduced.

The coronial inquiry into the Wangary bushfires took much longer than anyone expected. One of the weaknesses picked up was the same as that identified from fighting the Tulka fire, that is, the problem of communication between crews and officers on the ground, between air crews and ground crews, and between various emergency services organisations, police, local government and private operators.

We have recently experienced yet another fire that threatened to roar into Port Lincoln. While there has been a major improvement in cooperation between the services, poor communication is still an issue that could endanger lives because that weakness has been only partially addressed.

The Coroner's recommendations are silent on what constitutes communication and how it can be delivered. Recommendation 34 proposes that local government plant suitable for use in bushfire fighting be fitted with radios connected to the government radio network. The explanatory comment notes that GRN may not necessarily be the best platform and that a separate task force had been established to put forward options.

It is now four years since the Wangary fire, and local government plant still does not have communication for use in fires—and the recent Port Lincoln fire once again illustrated this lack of communication. There is no indication of how the cost of providing GRN (or whatever form of radio contact is deemed suitable) will be met. Will it be just another cost shift by Labor from state to local government to comply with the recommendations that council plant used in firefighting be fitted with radios?

This is a pertinent time to highlight the lack of mobile phone services in my electorate. A South Australian company called Broadband Anywhere was set to install broadband services across the region, but the Labor state government refused to sign off on the deal, which was to be funded by the commonwealth government. Our mobile phone coverage (or rather the lack of it) causes considerable angst. Last Friday, I travelled the 400 kilometres to Ceduna, returning to Port Lincoln on the Saturday, all without adequate phone coverage. Many of the remote homes, communities, schools and school bus routes do not have mobile phone coverage. Anyone who has had anything at all to do with mobile phones knows the advantage they can be in an emergency.

Mobile phone coverage, as a subsidiary form of communication in the overall management in a large bushfire, is life-saving, yet all Eyre Peninsula schools were closed for a day last week, leaving many children home alone, with possibly only one or no parent, and without adequate communication in case of an emergency.

Recommendation 14 recommends that protocols be developed relating to, among a number of things, appropriate radio contact with private firefighting units. The recommendation has been deemed complete, yet the explanation gives no information on how this will actually work, particularly in the remote areas of Eyre Peninsula. The explanation states that the protocols were used in the December 2007 Kangaroo Island bushfires. Do the protocols work as effectively in hilly terrain such as that burnt in the 2005 Wangary bushfire—terrain also encountered in the Adelaide Hills and in the current Victorian disaster?

Will owners of private units that do not have the required radio communication be barred from fighting alongside their neighbours and friends?

I was amazed that despite the 2003 recommendations from the Tulka fire that HF radios be provided to Kevin Warren's planes so that the pilots could talk to the volunteer services on the ground, in 2005 they still had to compete with the public on the open radio system.

Once again, despite the lack of support from the government and its officers, Kevin Warren and his pilots and planes fought the Wangary fire when officially sanctioned planes were again unavailable until the crisis was

over. It was not an official fire ban day, despite a hot north wind, but unfortunately fires do not abide by the official rules.

Later in 2005, I had a relative of one of the firefighters killed in the Wangary fire contact my office in great distress when he heard the Hon. Pat Conlon say on radio that water bombers were no good.

Incredibly, exactly the same scenario as happened at Wangary played out a few days before the start of the fire ban season in late 2006 and, again, not on a fire ban day. Again, we were fortunate that the fire was controlled, with Kevin Warren's aerial help, with little loss of property and no lives lost. By then, despite having been told that aerial bombers would make no difference, two official planes were to be stationed at the Port Lincoln airport, but the planes were only to be in Port Lincoln on official fire ban days, so they were not there at that time.

Fires do not happen just on fire ban days. There is no recognition in the recommendations, or in any government statements, of the great benefit that a swift response has in controlling a fire and therefore lessening its impact. Local planes can be in the air in a fraction of the time that it takes to get a plane from Adelaide to Port Lincoln.

This initial response can significantly reduce the impact and advance of a fire, especially if followed up by the larger water bombers, as it was in the recent Port Lincoln fire when, as well as the two aerial water bombers now stationed in Port Lincoln, another six planes were quickly brought over, including one large bomber.

Somewhere along the line the government has changed its tune, possibly when it changed its Minister for Emergency Services. We are at last seeing some of the billions of dollars of windfall revenue that this government has been fortunate to receive being put back into safety measures for the state, such as aerial firefighting capacity, which Labor's previous minister for emergency services disparaged.

In regional areas most of our emergency services are operated by volunteers at minimal cost to the government. However, local knowledge, even that of these volunteers, has been disparaged in the past, and it is therefore heartening to see that recommendations 15 to 18 refer to working with, rather than against, local people and their accumulated experience.

A sum of \$580,000, or \$2.317 million over four years, is mentioned in no fewer than nine recommendations to deal with the cost of added staffing and compliance issues, principally when working with landowners and/or occupiers. Is the repetition of this funding meant to suggest that more is being done, and more funding spent, than is actually the case?

Incident management teams are given the responsibility of implementing the recommendations, with a proposal that the position of landowner liaison officer within the team be created. Is this another burden that some volunteer has to shoulder? After all, \$580,000 for training volunteers across the state to fulfil these recommendations can scarcely be described as generous.

I understand that currently there is a government drive to reduce emergency services costs, with the pressure on the volunteers, and with the SES being described as a social club, which I can assure members that they definitely are not

My electorate has the most national parks and reserves of any electorate in the state, with over 40 per cent covered with native vegetation; hence native vegetation is a concern, especially when it comes to fires. Recommendation 33 proposes a 'code of practice for the management of native vegetation to reduce the impact of bushfire'. Perhaps if it had been given some urgency it may have been in place and therefore lessened the December 2007 Kangaroo Island bushfire.

One of the provisions is for wide firebreaks and access roads to provide more effective options for controlling fires. Another, is the use of cold burns over portions of the areas over a period of years so that flammable matter is reduced.

I am struck by the number of times it is suggested in the recommendations that various actions be required of local government. Nowhere is there any mention of added funding for local government to undertake any of these proposals, despite frequent mentions of funding for the state component of proposed actions.

Recommendation 7 is one of these, suggesting that rural councils appoint full-time officers for bushfire prevention. The explanation states that the 2008-09 budget provides funding of \$414,000 over four years for an emergency management officer to be based in SES to work with local government to progress the above approach. If the government was serious about fire prevention it would allocate a similar amount to local governments since LGA compliance costs would be—

**Time expired.**  
*Rest of speech that time did not allow:*  
....at least as much if not more. I understand the Port Lincoln Fire Prevention Officer is also the dog catcher and the traffic officer. This is not good enough but I don't blame Council who have more and more responsibility thrust upon them by this government at greater and greater cost.

I strongly support this motion which will enable the immediate scrutiny of fires and help ensure that identified improvements are made using the existing Natural Resource Management Committee until a Standing Committee can be set up after the next election.

**Ms BREUER (Giles) (11:40):** It is always interesting to speak after the member for Flinders, who must have to work 42 hours a day to get everything done that she says she does. Her speeches are always very well resourced.

## **BUSHFIRE PROTECTION**

**28 May 2003**

**28 May 2003 Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** I commend the member for Mawson (Mr Brokenshire) on this timely motion to review bushfire protection. We are coming towards the end of the bushfire danger period. Therefore, a review at this time will be able to pick up on points where improvements can be made in readiness for the 2003-04 fire danger season. Fires are a part of the natural environment in Australia. Lightning strikes have always caused fires that burn large tracts of scrub. It is important, therefore, to take this aspect of fire prevention into account, along with what can be done to frustrate arsonists and educate to overcome carelessness and ignorance. It is commonsense to plan for such occurrences. It is imperative that we avoid the loss of property that happened in Victoria, the ACT and New South Wales during this past season, and in Tulka, in my electorate, the year before.

My electorate of Flinders has a large number of national and conservation parks covering a diversity of terrain, flora and fauna. We have experienced some devastating fires in the past few years, fortunately without loss of life, although this was more by good luck than good management on some occasions. The severity of the fires and the acreage burnt could have been reduced, I believe, if some more specific management practices had been in place.

One of the first requirements is the need to have a fire break surrounding a national or conservation park, and a break that is of sufficient width to either stop a fire or provide a means of control in adverse conditions—15 metres on three sides and at least 30 metres on the side farthest from the direction of the strong hot summer winds (usually from the north north-east) to prevent often inaccessible park fires burning private property, crops and livestock. I must say that 30 metres is not excessive in sections of national parks, where required, and acknowledgment of the need to clear that distance was given by national parks personnel when they cleared such an area with bulldozers to bare earth after a fire caused by lightning in the Gawler Ranges National Park. This was seen and photographed by the member for Stuart.

In our large parks it is also necessary to have internal fire breaks that can double as access roads. This provides a place from which to operate in the event of a fire so that a fire can be stopped before it burns out the whole of a park area. Controlled burning of selected areas so that the whole park area is subjected to this management practice over a period of some years should be standard procedure. This overcomes the devastation caused when a fire burns out virtually the whole of a park. It enables fauna to escape into safe areas, thus limiting their destruction.

For the nearly 10 years that I have been a member of parliament, I have heard the need for this controlled burning being discussed but never, that I know of, being implemented. Fires know no boundaries. Planning across local government boundaries needs to be cooperative, with some common basics from which to work but which nevertheless allow freedom to accommodate differences. The fire burning season at Ceduna on the west coast of Eyre Peninsula, for example, may well have different dates from the burning season around Mount Gambier in the South-East of the state. The dates in a wet season may well be different from those applying following a dry season or late and early seasons, so some flexibility is necessary.

Government grants should be provided to councils in lieu of the rate revenue not received, and there should be an appreciation of the additional cost of these parks to the council and the local community. I understand that a grant is already provided to the councils that are host to the government pine forests in the South-East. While the fire is raging, decisions must be decisive and actions quick, and everyone involved must know their responsibilities and their limitations. It is essential that bushfire prevention and control be coordinated across local and state government agencies and various emergency fire services, and that the plan must enable the utilisation of available private planes if required at a moment's notice.

Discussions over delineation of boundaries of responsibility, decision making and operational procedures should be undertaken prior to an actual fire. They should not be undertaken during the process of fighting a fire, when disputes have the potential to create delays and to cause dangers that could be avoided. Parks people should be part of the local CFS so that they are properly trained and equipped and used to working in close cooperation with their local community. Local CFS members with parks in their region should be trained especially for fires in parks.

Fires move quickly, with circumstances changing frequently. The emergency radio network is crucial, and I am concerned that it has not been fully rolled out in region six, which covers my electorate. Region six was the last region to be rolled out, and I have heard that some aspects are still not fully operational.

The necessity for public briefings would depend on a number of factors, such as the extent of the fire and the weather conditions at the time. The usefulness of modern technology such as faxes, emails and web sites in getting information out quickly and accurately in remote areas should be investigated and improved if necessary. The ABC Radio received numerous letters and expressions of thanks for the information that it broadcast regularly during the Canberra fires. While radio is a valuable tool, it must be remembered that there are still some spots in the state where radio reception is poor.

I support the necessity to review the Native Vegetation Act 1991 in relation to bushfire prevention and the fighting of fires once a fire has started. When considering hazard reduction, a plan to remove noxious weeds from parks is imperative. Aleppo pines and boxthorns are both highly flammable and difficult to penetrate when fire access is needed. Bridal creeper corms can smoulder for days. They are all increasing rapidly and choking out the native species. It is important to protect native vegetation. Nevertheless, vegetation should not be more important than people. Some decisions have recently elicited the wry comment from a visiting Canadian that in South Australia a bush or tree is of more importance than a person.

I am proud of the lift in funding, facilities and equipment that the Country Fire Service received from our Liberal government through the emergency services levy. I am proud of the CFS, an organisation of volunteers who train in their own time and most often at their own expense to provide a network of safety for our communities. I am proud also of the businesses that support them, and of the paid officers in the MFS and SES who work with them. Bushfires are a permanent part of life. There is nothing to gain and much to lose if they are not properly controlled. I support the motion..