



**LINTON FIREFIGHTERS**  
**11 February 1999**

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** I move:

*That this House sends condolences to the families of the five firefighters who died in the fire at Linton in Victoria on Wednesday 2 December 1998 and commends the good and dangerous work that both volunteer and paid firefighters perform and recognises the risks that they take.*

The untimely deaths of five young men is a sobering reminder to us all of the debt we owe to those who risk their life in protecting private and public property throughout the bushfire season. Fire is a part of the Australian landscape and its dangers are always in the mind of rural people at this time of year. To negate this danger the Country Fire Service was formed. First named the Emergency Fire Service, this organisation of volunteers has been successfully operational for more than 50 years, a tribute to the approach and response to volunteering that is found in rural districts where volunteering is more a way of life than in the metropolitan areas.

Our present Country Fire Service system was initiated in the latter half of the 1940s. An ample supply of mobile fire pumps was available after the Second World War, thus a scheme was proposed to use these throughout the country in peace time for firefighting. The scheme was to be administered by the Police Department, therefore Mr Tom Meaney was transferred from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade to the Police Department to set up and administer the Emergency Fire Service. On Eyre Peninsula, the first brigade was set up at Cummins in 1945 under the leadership of Mr Doug Blacker who was appointed the first organiser for zone six, which is Eyre Peninsula.

It is difficult for people today to appreciate that equipment at that time was scarce and quite often so well used that much of it was on the point of scrap. Nevertheless, perseverance and the recognition of the need for protection against fire led to the development of the Country Fire Service that we have today. For more than half a century most of this State has been protected through the voluntary efforts of people who give their time willingly to train so that they are ready to cope with any emergency, but all the training cannot overcome poor equipment or just bad luck that puts lives in danger. We must give our firefighters the very best equipment and training that we can for them to carry out the dangerous work that they do and the risk they take of necessity. The general public must also take responsibility for ensuring that lives are not put at risk unnecessarily by minimising the risk of fire that is within their control.

At this time of year, when grass is dry and the weather hot and often windy, there are enough natural causes with lightning strikes and sometimes even glass causing fires without people adding to the potential. It is up to all citizens to ensure that grass is cut, trees are lopped, barbecues are conducted safely and cigarettes disposed of carefully. Most people who live on the land have a healthy respect for fire, having experienced it first hand, and I know that most will have firebreaks where needed and many, as always happened at home, will have put the sheep in the house paddock.

Many precautions can be taken to prevent or reduce the damage caused by fire. It would be impossible for any Government to pay for the amount of manpower required to cover this State in the bushfire season. The Liberal Party is a strong supporter of volunteering and of promoting community spirit that encourages members of the public to serve their communities as volunteers. But it is the individual decision of each member of our emergency services to take the risks and responsibility of serving their communities and I thank them. There is always the danger of injury and death. In the case of the five Victorian CFS crew, it is not too dramatic to say that they gave their lives for their community. It is the ultimate sacrifice that anyone can make. I commend this motion to the House.