



**INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTERS DAY  
4 May 2005**

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** I understand that today is International Firefighters' Day, and I take the opportunity to thank all those people who have been involved, both past and present, paid and volunteer, who risked their lives to save the lives and property of others. I particularly thank those who have been involved in the recent devastating fires on southern Eyre Peninsula and with great sadness remember Trent Murnane and Neil Richardson died while fighting those fires. I hope that the recently announced inquiry will help to ensure that everyone will be heard and that the same mistakes that were made will never be made again. We thought we had learnt from the Tulka fire, but that fire proved that this is not the case.

The community's response has been amazing, and people are working hard to restore and rebuild homes, farms and shattered lives. As well as the direct impact on residents who tragically lost family members and had their homes and properties destroyed, the bushfire has had a ripple effect on the entire community that is difficult to underestimate. I take this opportunity to thank the state government for its response in helping victims by setting up a single one-stop-shop for advice and referral, and the largely volunteer staff who manned it.

My office was one of the agencies at the front line of helping bushfire victims both in the days immediately following and in the ongoing recovery process. Demand for help has been such that, in addition to the many people who contacted the bushfire recovery centre and the many other agencies, my staff and I have been contacted by hundreds of bushfire victims and others who have sought our help on issues as diverse as feed and transport for surviving livestock, the waiving of stamp duty on replacement homes and vehicles, and referrals for counselling. Many of these constituents have contacted us multiple times and the queries are still coming in

We have also taken a lot of calls from people in other parts of the state and interstate who asked how they could make donations and volunteer help. Some bushfire victims simply wanted to talk to a sympathetic listener, and we have had traumatised people break down in our office. People who come to us for help in these circumstances cannot be fobbed off quickly with a phone number or a pamphlet.

My staff members have done their best to respond with sensitivity and to help in any way they can, but the sudden increase in workload for an office that was already over-stretched has taken its toll on all of us. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work my staff members have undertaken and thank them for their commitment, their caring and the many hours of unpaid work that they have contributed. The 11 January bushfire might have faded from the headlines but the recovery process will take much, much longer, and we are now in a dangerous phase after a traumatic event when the accumulated mental and emotional stress can manifest itself in depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders.

The bushfire has brought to a head the urgent need in my office for more staff—something I have been asking the Treasurer for since May last year—well before the fire. Since that time, I have sent the Treasurer four letters asking for additional funding for staff, together with faxes and telephone calls, and he had not had the courtesy even to acknowledge a single one of them until recently when on 5 April, some 11 months after my initial request, he sent me a three line letter rejecting without explanation my request for more staff. The Flinders electorate office is entitled to only 2.1 full-time equivalent staff members and I pay an extra 1.2 staff members out of my own pocket and, after the fire, even more. Because of the sheer size of the electorate of Flinders, which is roughly the size of Tasmania, I have to run two offices—one full-time at Port Lincoln, and another two days a week at Ceduna, which is four hours' drive away. I understand that the electorates of Stuart and Giles are staffed at the rate of around 2.5 FTE, and although Flinders is not as geographically large as either of these, we have roughly the same number of people at 32 558, according to the most recent census. I have chosen to run two offices rather than one as in Stuart and Giles, to better service my constituents, but this puts

considerable strain on the resources available to me. I would be happy if we could get extra funding for even a 0.3 FTE.