

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
WEDNESDAY 06TH JULY 2016

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE: PINERY BUSHFIRES

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:21): I rise to speak on the Pinery fire regional fact-finding report by the Natural Resources Committee and commend the committee not only for looking at the aftermath of the devastating Pinery fire but also for inviting other members of parliament, both state and federal, to go along. I was certainly very impressed to have the opportunity to see firsthand the carnage that had occurred, even though this was four months after the event, as well as the attempts people were making to reduce drift and soil erosion.

Sadly there were two fatalities and five counts of severe, critical injury. There were about 500 buildings lost on the day, along with approximately 200 vehicles, about half of which were farm equipment, including a lot of headers, which can be valued up to \$900,000 per item these days and which can be very expensive just to insure, even if you have a 1 per cent insurance cost on those machines. After the fire, I saw some stunning pictures on news feeds and that kind of thing of harvesters just burned to the ground, tyres gone, chaser bin tractors and their bins just steel rims where the tyres once were, burnt out cabs. There is a lot of plastic in tractors these days and that goes up really quickly. Obviously it was a horrific time for everyone.

Tragically, there were many thousands of heads of livestock lost that day, as well as approximately 22,500 hectares of crops—around 50,000 acres in the old language—with an estimated loss of 60,000 tonnes of yield of grain, 33,000 tonnes of hay and 50,000 tonnes of straw. This was a truly significant fire, as anyone would know who saw the YouTube clips of people travelling through the smoke. Two deaths were two too many, but I am stunned that we did not lose any more people that day. It would have been absolutely terrifying to have been out on the roads; with modern technology nowadays we are brought face to face with all the dramas of life as they happen.

It was an incredible effort by the CFS, the farm firefighters and our Air Tractor firefighting planes to stop it where they did. You have to understand that this fire almost got to Gawler. In fact, it crossed the Sturt Highway and, as scary as it was, that would have been a terrible situation to be in. It took everything in its path and, because of the scale of this fire on a front of many kilometres, it was hard work for the firefighters.

I must comment on Richard and Nancy Bubner at Wasleys who lost a significant amount of their property and a lot of buildings around the house. Richard was in Wasleys that day. He was not out there and could not get back until the fire passed. Because he was calling his wife, Nancy, on the phone to see what was happening, he feared the worst, but she had done a magnificent job, filling gutters, filling what she could with water and making sure that she did what she could. Having such a well-manicured garden and some lawn space and that kind of thing helped her.

The speed and ferocity of the fire meant that it just blew straight over the house so quickly that she could come outside and then tidy up spots where the fire had perhaps caught an eave of the house or something close to the house. They could not save the sheds, of course, but it was a magnificent job and, obviously, the CFS were there pretty quickly and assisted them. Thankfully for Richard, when he got out there Nancy was well and truly alive. She was not just alive: she had essentially saved the family home. They are both to be congratulated, as are the emergency services involved in that part of the situation.

I also mention Richard Konzag from Mallala. I know Richard quite well and I am glad his comments were put in the report. I appreciate that. I think it is good for the committee to be so forthcoming and they are to be commended. In terms of everything they do as farm firefighters and working with the CFS, as the report states:

...Mr Konzag praised CFS efforts but suggested the Emergency Services Levy needed improvement, saying it 'is not working. People cannot get refunded for equipment purchased...We are out there breaking our ass and literally saving peoples' lives and then we get another letter that rates are going up another \$200.'

He is exactly right. People are out there saving land, saving livestock and saving people's lives and, from what we have seen in the history of this government and what we will see moving forward with the state Labor government in every bushfire of this kind there will be many people—mainly Liberal voters, I presume—who will be putting their butts on the line, as Mr Konzag indicated, saving lives, saving livestock and saving buildings, saving the insurance industry and saving this state government from costs, only for them to say, 'Oh, thanks for that. Here's another bill.'

As Richard indicated in the report, he can almost live with the \$200, but he says it hits you in the head because of the psychological impact of the fact that it is not taking into account the work you did in fighting that fire. There are many hundreds and thousands of farm firefighters involved. I also want to talk about meeting the Angus family, Peter and Paul Angus, who are, I think, in the seat of Goyder.

Mr Griffiths: Yes, just north of Mallala.

Mr PEDERICK: Just north of Mallala. What an inspiring story from the Angus family. Paul, who is the father, was doing his best to save the prize livestock and, despite the fire rearing up behind him, he just got on with the job because that is what you do as a farmer. He was doing his best to save his special stud stock and other stock to get on with the job.

I have mentioned in this place before how Peter caught up with one of his uncles who had about 1,000 litres of water left on a ute, or it might have been half a tank, but he managed to somehow get through the roadblock, he got out there, and they saved the house. We all saw how the house had been severely scorched on a couple of sides, it had caught around under the eaves, and if he had not got there that house would have been gone as well.

Mr Griffiths: The pergola was burnt.

Mr PEDERICK: Yes, the pergola had gone. So, I commend the Angus family. The drift is terrible in some of that lighter country on their farm. The level of drift is so light in that country that you cannot manage it with some of the techniques they had to use on some of the heavier country, like going back to tillage, which has been a bit of an off word in many farming areas these days because of no till, or direct drilling. But people were finding that if they did some tillage lines, tens of metres apart, perhaps 30 or 40 metres apart, whatever they wanted to do, and criss-crossed their country, they could save that country from further erosion. When you have that fine sand, once it gets going, if you till it you are only going to make matters worse, if nothing else.

I would like to commend everyone for what they had to do to fight the fire on the day of the Pinery fire. It was very sad and distressing to see two lives lost and five people critically hurt, but I commend the people for seeing that there was not any worse damage. There are always lessons to be learnt from this and I certainly commend the committee for going out and having a look at the results of the Pinery fire. It is a salutary lesson to everyone in this house and to the whole state. It is certainly

appreciated that other members could accompany the committee on this trip, and I congratulate the committee on their report.