

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## TOO HOT TO HANDLE?

Recent fires on the North West and West Coasts have resulted in significant damage to rural land and bushland but thankfully no loss of life or homes. Whilst some of these fires have been thought to be the work of arsonists or electrical storms, others would appear to be as a result of ineffective vegetation clearance around powerlines.

Murchison MLC Ruth Forrest is concerned that recent greater than average growth has resulted in increased risk of fires and power outages. "The recent spring and early summer rains and temperate weather over winter and spring has resulted in greater than average growth around power lines, increasing the risk of power outages and fires" Ms Forrest said.

Power outages either through brief interruptions to supply or longer interruptions due to fire or significant damage pose many financial and operational problems for farmers and business owners. "Dairy farmers trying to milk or irrigate are frequently frustrated by these interruptions, which according to the Reliability and Network Planning Panel 2005 Reliability Review report 'a significant decrease in overall power system reliability over the previous year', with cost and time management implications" Ms Forrest stated.

A trip anywhere along the North West Coast will display evidence of excessive growth below power lines, a constant source of concern to voluntary members of many of the rural fire brigades who have been involved in the clearing of vegetation in an attempt to reduce the risk, as well as fight fires that do occur.

"The question must be asked whether these increased risks and problems with power supply are greater as a result of the increased growth alone, a shortage of maintenance workers to reduce the problem and/or an inappropriate vegetation clearance policy" Ms Forrest questioned.

Volunteer fire fighter, Trevor Duniam of Sisters Creek, said that due to increased stormy electrical weather, lightning strikes that in previous years did not pose a threat, are now igniting fires and the abundant scrub and growth under powerlines is exasperating the situation. Mr Duniam called for increased maintenance (slashing) under powerlines so as it is not a fire hazard.

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For further information, please phone 0419 879 524.

Trevor Duniam can be contacted on 0409451294.