

# **SECOND READING SPEECH**

## **Fire Service Amendment (State wide strategic management of vegetation for the mitigation of bushfires) Bill 2012**

**David O'Byrne**

**Minister for Police and Emergency Management**

**I move – That the Bill now be read for the second time.**

Mr Speaker, the purpose of this amendment Bill is to fulfil the Government's commitment to provide the Tasmanian community with an environment safe from the impact of severe bushfires. As members may recall, in February 2009, and in response to the devastation and tragedy of the 2009 Victorian bushfires, the former Premier, David Bartlett MP, requested the fire agencies to review practices in relation to the prevention and mitigation of bushfires within Tasmania.

This review broadly considered who has responsibility for the coordination of bushfire vegetation fuel management within Tasmania. Particular emphasis and focus was placed in the areas of prevention and mitigation of bushfires in recognition that it is a shared responsibility across many jurisdictions. The areas of reform include:

- The State Fire Management Council will have responsibility for coordinating and managing the activities of Fire Management Area Committees;
- Refinement of the stakeholder representation on Fire Management Area Committees;
- Incorporation of Special Fire Areas into Fire Management Areas;
- The State Fire Management Council will appoint Fire Permit Officers.

This Bill will align the responsibility for the management of bushfire fuels across the State in recognition that it is a shared responsibility across all sectors including the public arena. It will bring together the various stakeholders that manage land use across the State to work together to effectively manage vegetation fuels for the prevention and mitigation of bushfires.

The State Fire Management Council plays a key role in the management of bushfire vegetation fuels within Tasmania. It has representatives from the key land managers and fire agencies within the State including:

- Parks & Wildlife Service
- Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association

- Tasmania Fire Service
- Forestry Tasmania
- Forest Industries Association of Tasmania; and
- Local Government Association of Tasmania

The amendments will provide closer working arrangements between the Council and Fire Management Area Committees in recognition that these two forums are closely aligned with common goals. It will provide clear functions for both the State Fire Management Council and Fire Management Area Committees in relation to preventing and mitigating bushfires.

Mr Speaker, the amendments will allow the Council to declare any part of the State a fire management area and to review the area boundaries to ensure they are most appropriate based on risk and topography. In the interest of good governance the State Fire Management Council will report to the State Fire Commission annually on the activities of the Council and Fire Management Area Committees.

The Bill will provide a focus for Fire Management Area Committees to prepare a fire protection plan for their respective fire management area in order to identify and prioritise bushfire

vegetation risks and to prioritise works to mitigate any perceived risk. Special Fire Areas called up in the current legislation will be incorporated into Fire Management Areas to provide a consistent approach to fire management across the State.

In recognition that fire permit officers perform an integral role in fire management across the State, the State Fire Management Council will appoint these positions in recognition that the Council is better positioned to assess for the appropriate skills, qualifications and experience that will enable a fire permit officer to carry out their duties.

Finally, the amendments will add a clear definition to the terms:

- Fire Management; and
- Fire Protection Plan

Mr Speaker, there are many parts of bushfire safety that must be owner by the individual. For example, landowners must maintain the vegetation on their properties and make sure that they have adequate plans to respond to a bushfire in their area.

Governments can however, assist by providing an environment for key land management stakeholders to work together to achieve a common goal of making the Tasmanian community safe from bushfires. This Bill will assist with this goal.

As a State, we must learn from tragedies such as the 2009 Victorian bushfires and more recently in the Perth Hills in 2011. We know it can happen here in Tasmania, as it did in February 1967. Sometimes disasters cannot be foreseen, however, we can learn from past events to help prevent catastrophes from happening in the future.

Mr Speaker, the Government fully supports the introduction of this Bill.

**I Commend the Bill to the House.**