

“ARE YOU BUSH FIRE READY” CAMPAIGN

**832. MR N.W. MORTON to the Minister for Emergency Services:**

Last weekend the minister helped launch this summer’s “Are You Bush Fire Ready” campaign. Will the minister please outline to members why this message of shared responsibility is very important to our community?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS replied:**

I thank the member for Forrestfield for his question. I should start by saying that for more than 40 000 years human beings in Australia have tried to control our natural environment, but not always successfully. Ever since Dorothea Mackellar penned her 1908 poem *My Country* about floods, fire and famine, we have realised that no matter what we do, we will never be able to rid ourselves of the risk of bushfire. Western Australia comprises over 2.5 million square kilometres. Short of bulldozing all of it, there will always be a risk of fire. Our job is to do everything we can to manage that risk, and that is why as a government, we have realised this. Members opposite will see that Western Power, through the Minister for Energy, is doing everything it can to reduce the risk around energy infrastructure. The Department of Parks and Wildlife has taken every opportunity in the periods between rain to undertake hazard reduction burns, and, of course, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services is doing more again this year than was done last year. Once again, more than has ever been done in the history of Western Australia is being done to prepare our response teams, to train and equip our firefighters and to give them all the protection we can to ensure there are as many helicopters and aerial firefighting aircraft available for this fire season.

At the end of the day, it is a shared responsibility. Private landowners need to understand that they have a responsibility to do what they can to reduce the fuel load and therefore the hazard on their properties. This last Sunday, the Minister for Environment, the Minister for Energy and I launched this year’s “Are You Bushfire Ready” campaign. Unfortunately, Ben Roberts-Smith, VC, was unavailable due to the Centenary of Anzac commemorations, so Justin Langer, the cricketer, who knows a thing or two about preparation and teamwork, will spearhead the campaign this year as the “Are You Bushfire Ready” ambassador for Western Australia.

It is a very simple message. People who own the land own the responsibility; therefore, they need to do what they can to reduce it. It is about teamwork. People who live in a peri-urban fringe area with a large bush environment need to do their bit to reduce that fuel load. They should also talk to their neighbours and have a plan so that if a bushfire comes towards them, they do not leave it to the last minute to work out what they will do with their pets and their children and to protect their house and their belongings if they choose to stay and fight. We have kicked off this very simple message again this year because we know from last year’s campaign that it was exceptionally successful. For under \$1 million, we know that a lot of people got the message and started to reduce the fire risk on their property; they did not leave it until the last minute. We want to encourage every single person across the state of Western Australia in bushfire areas to once again do their bit.