

CORRIGIN–BRUCE ROCK BUSHFIRE — *FEBRUARY FIRESTORM: VOICES FROM THE SMOKE*

Statement

HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [8.50 pm]: I rise to make a brief contribution about an event I attended last Friday in Corrigin. It has been little over 18 months since the 6 February fire that ripped through the Corrigin and Bruce Rock shires. A wonderful group of women, led by the amazing Val Downing, have put together a picture storybook of the experiences and stories from that horrible day. The Corrigin community gathered last Friday to launch the book. There were some nervous people around in the room before the event because they had ordered 300 books and they were nervous that they would not get through half of them. There was a queue 30 metres long after the book was launched, and by half past eight that night, all 300 books were gone. It was a really important event for that community to continue the healing process that is ongoing in Corrigin, and there was a bit of raw emotion that night, I have to say, from the shire president, Des Hickey, who saw his entire farm burn as those two fires that approached Corrigin ripped through his entire property. He was faced with: do I look after my own farm and do what I can or do I do what I have to do and try to keep the community safe? He was just one of literally hundreds of people who were put in that position.

I spoke to Val about the task, and I should mention the other members of her team. Sue Courboules, Val Downing, Jackie Jones, Jenny Pitman and Kellie Bell were the drivers behind this project. I have to say that it is often a group of women in a country town who do projects like this. They knocked on doors and twisted arms and reached out to people and said, “You have to tell us the story now while it’s still fresh”, and they got it down. There were a few members of the community who said that it was just too raw at the moment and maybe down the track, but at the moment they could not. However, the memories they collected will be a wonderful resource for that community in decades to come as they look back at the most significant day in Corrigin’s history.

One of the stories mentioned that night got a bit of media attention at the time with a wonderful line I think from Stephen Bell, but I am not sure. It told how someone who was about to watch their house and sheds burn describe a group of “mad bastards” coming out of the smoke on the back of a ute who put the place out, and then charged off to do the next one. That was just one of a number of those sorts of stories that occurred on that awful day.

It was great to see the Corrigin community come together. It is a very strong, resilient community. It has needed to be. Significant work still needs to be done to put those farms, properties and that community back together. Led by people like Des Hickey and Natalie Manton, who is the CEO, and the other volunteers and community members who have rallied to the cause, I am sure they will get there. It was a real privilege to attend that event. The book is called *February Firestorm: Voices from the Smoke*. It is a very apt name for that publication. Congratulations to the Corrigin community.

House adjourned at 8.54 pm
