



DAVID MORRIS MP
Member for Mornington

Question to the Premier – Prescribed Burning

Posted on 5 March 2019

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (12:16): My question is also for the Premier. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission found that prescribed burning was one of the main tools for fire management on public land.

Ms Neville interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister will come to order.

Mr MORRIS: The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) annual report reveals that the amount of planned burning has dropped from 234 614 hectares in 2014–15 to only 64 978 hectares in 2017–18, a reduction of almost 75 per cent on your watch. My question to the Premier is: why has the government put Victorians at risk by failing to fully implement recommendation 56 of the Black Saturday royal commission?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I warn the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (12:17): I thank the member for Mornington for his question, and I reject the assertions in his question. There has been no such failure at all. The member for Mornington and others opposite—in fact all members—would do well, I think, to just pause and think about this for one moment. I can remember going to the township of Lancefield and having to explain, together with the local member and the then minister for the environment, how it is that a controlled burn that occurred in circumstances that were not only in theory unsafe but it got out of hand, and a number of homes were destroyed by the government, in effect, and its agency putting fire into that landscape. If the member for Mornington wants to talk about safety, then surely—

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: Well, you can talk about safety, but the—

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, the question from the shadow minister for the environment was very clear about controlled burns, and I ask you to bring the Premier back to answering that particular question about why the government is not honouring the commitments to the Black Saturday royal commission to have a 5 per cent burn target. The government has clearly failed its own target. If you go to the DELWP annual report, the government has clearly failed its own target, and I ask you to bring the Premier back to

answering that question, please.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of The Nationals has concluded his point of order. There is no point of order. The question to the Premier was quite a broad question.

Mr ANDREWS: The very simple answer to the question is that we will only do controlled burning when it is safe to do so—safe for landholders, safe for those doing the controlled burning. I would commend—

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: Well, given that the member for Mornington is apparently an expert on these matters, I would commend to him the Safer Together document, that framework, following Lancefield, where we were all, I think, well reminded that if you have got significant fuel load, if you have got literally no moisture whatsoever in that landscape, if you have got wind conditions and temperature conditions, all of those, either separately or jointly, are a recipe for disaster if you push ahead blindly with controlled burning, as it would seem the member for Mornington is proposing and advancing.

The advice from fire services, from Emergency Management Victoria and from—

Ms Neville interjected.

Mr ANDREWS: indeed from the Inspector General of Emergency Management, from the Lancefield community, I dare say, and from those who are called upon to conduct this controlled burning is that it can only be done when safe to do so. It is—

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: Well, to be lectured by others about a lack of resources, really—\$66 million cut from the fire services. If those opposite want to play politics with this, then that is fine. It reflects on them, not on any of the policy settings that have been set by this government. We will only do controlled burning when it is safe to do so. That is the advice of our fire services, and that is what common sense tells you ought to be the case, not the alternative, as advanced by the member for Mornington, which is to burn and burn and burn more, regardless of the risks involved.

Ms Allan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House will come to order.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (12:21): Clearly the strategy is working well. Mr Andrew Clarke of Jinks Creek Winery said, after having his winery destroyed by the Bunyip State Park fire:

I've been begging them—
referring to Forest Fire Management Victoria—

for 20 years to burn off the state forest at the back of our place and still to this day it hasn't happened. So the supplementary is—

Ms Neville: That's wrong.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Police and Emergency Services!

Mr MORRIS: So the supplementary is: why haven't the requests of people like Andrew Clarke been acted on so that the risk of out-of-control wildfire is reduced?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (12:22): I do not want to be having through the member for Mornington an argument with a man who has lost his house and his livelihood. I will not do that. I do have to make the point, though, that my advice is that there have been controlled burns in the Bunyip State Forest in 2008, 2012 and 2016. I am also further advised that in relation to the fires that we have dealt with over this last 72-hour period—and again I make the point—there are firefighters on the fireground right now, putting themselves in harm's way. So the member for Mornington can keep asking his questions, and I will keep answering them, but I will never forget the fact that there are people right this minute out there on the fireground.

I would also make the point to the member for Mornington that lightning caused these fires on the weekend. One of the strikes, which was the beginning of one of these fires, was in an area that was control-burned back in 2016. I am happy to have a debate about this. Keep asking questions.