Gary Higgins  
Minister for Land Resource Management  

We didn't start the fire...  

21 April 2016  

...and the Territory Government has introduced legislation to ensure Territorians, and our unique environment, is well protected from the ever constant threat of bushfires.  

The Bushfires Management Bill, introduced in Parliament today to repeal and replace 36 year old legislation, was developed through extensive consultation with Territory landholders, members of the Bushfires Council and Regional Bushfires Committees, and our hardworking Bushfire Brigade volunteers.  

“The Bushfires Management Act (when the Bill is passed) will continue the best aspects of its preceding legislation, strengthen support for volunteers and other stakeholders, and provide a comprehensive planning and mitigation framework uniquely suited to the land and bushfire management requirements of the Northern Territory,” Land Resource Management Minister Gary Higgins said.  

“It is important legislation which applies to fire management outside of the major urban centres of the Northern Territory – 99 percent of our land mass including pastoral land, parks and reserves, vacant crown land, land held by Aboriginal Land Trusts, land used for other agricultural purposes and, importantly, significant areas of industrial and rural residential development on the outskirts of the major centres.  

“It is underpinned by the principle that fire management is the responsibility of the land owner, and that a role for government in bushfire response only exists when a land owners is unable to control a fire that poses a threat to that property or neighbouring properties.”  

Among the key elements of the legislation:  

- Provides a planning framework that supports ongoing annual regional planning and also provides for special measures to be taken in response to unusually high fire danger situations.  
- Creates the new category Authorised Bushfire Volunteer which will provide recognition and authorisation for volunteer firefighters.  
- Recognises the importance of fire in the environment and allows for its use as a land management tool in both traditional and contemporary land management approaches.
Continues the important role of the Bushfires Council to advise the Minister on measures to be taken to prevent and control bushfires, and strengthens the role of regional bushfires committees in regional planning.

“I am particularly proud that the creation of authorised bushfire volunteers will also confirm the specific protection from civil and criminal liability for volunteers while undertaking firefighting duties,” Mr Higgins said.

“As part of the rollout of the Bushfires Management Act, I will continue to further support our volunteers through the strengthening of the newly created Volunteers Consultative Committee.

“I have asked for this committee to have a ministerial advisory role to ensure volunteers have a direct link to government.”

The review of the legislation began in 2014 and included extensive consultation with stakeholders including 38 meetings, public forums, a discussion paper and a recommendations paper. Both papers were sent directly to more than 250 stakeholders and 31 written submissions were received.

“When I became the Minister I took the opportunity to further the consultation and in my capacity as Local Member I met with senior representatives from the 13 Volunteer Bushfire Brigades that operate in the Daly electorate, and made the draft Bill available for public comment prior to finalisation,” Mr Higgins said. “I wanted to hear their views about local fire management priorities and the development of this Bill.

“All the feedback on the legislation has been extensive, informative and astute – it has been a thorough process which has taken into account as much of the feedback as possible.

“I believe we have brought in legislation which is good in its intent and strong in its effectiveness.”

Media Contact:

Lorelei Fong Lim, 0400 165 7