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MEDIA RELEASE

BUSHFIRES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2020

For immediate circulation

On Tuesday 17 November, Rev Fred Nile MLC spoke in favour of Bushfire Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 before the NSW Legislative Council. His speech appears below, extracted from the parliamentary *Hansard*.

BUSHFIRES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2020

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE (23:15:12): On behalf of the Christian Democratic Party, I support the Bushfires Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. By way of introduction, I congratulate the NSW Rural Fire Service and the Fire and Rescue NSW brigades for their tremendous, heroic efforts in response to those horrific bushfires, putting their own lives at risk to be of service to our community. I thank God for each one of those members, both male and female, who served so bravely in the interests of our State. I am pleased to support this bill, which will amend the Rural Fires Act 1997 and other legislation in response to the final report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, dated 31 July 2020. This is the advice that we have received from the Minister. I know that other members have been critical of how detailed this bill is in responding to that report; that is something that the House will have to make its own judgement about.

The bill will amend the Rural Fires Act 1997 to enable the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service to designate groups of persons as "industry brigades" for the purposes of the Act and enable regulations under the Act to be made to further provision with respect to these industry brigades. I know that some other members have already been critical of

that concept, but I assume that the Minister and the Government had consultations with the Rural Fire Service over that provision and that it is something that it supports. I am very pleased with the provision in the bill that will expand the membership of the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee so that it includes a person appointed on the recommendation of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, and also to make other amendments in that area concerning the committee's membership. Whether one such member is sufficient is in question, but at least it is a beginning.

The bill also enables the commissioner to audit bushfire management plans generally, including their content, rather than only the implementation of the bushfire risk management plans. I believe that those are positive aspects of this legislation. The bill will empower the hazard management officers to serve bushfire hazard reduction notices to public authorities. The public authorities will be able to object to and apply against a notice in the same way as other owners and occupiers of land. The bill also provides a penalty of 100 penalty units for noncompliance with bushfire hazard reduction notices by a corporation or public authority. The bill will provide that if a public authority receives a written complaint about a bushfire hazard on its land then the authority must refer it to the commissioner, even though the complaint should properly have been made directly to the commissioner or to a relevant local authority. The bill will apply the same procedures and remedial action to public authorities as currently applies to other owners or occupiers of land. It will prevent bushfire management plans from excluding land from provisions requiring an adjoining owner to repair or to restore a dividing fence damaged or destroyed by bushfire. There are many other practical aspects of this legislation that we fully support.

It is difficult to have perfect legislation, but at least we do have a bill before the House. Some members want to reject it, which would only expand the vacuum that it is filling. The bill amends the Government Sector Finance Legislation (Repeal and Amendment) Act 2018, the Local Land Services Act 2013, the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974, the Rural Fires Regulation 2013 and the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989. This legislation covers a multitude of practical aspects in the fight to prevent the kind of damage that occurred in the huge bushfires that went through New South Wales. Hopefully and prayerfully, this bill will reduce any future damage and threats to human life and to wildlife of the kind that occurred during those bushfires. The Christian Democratic Party supports the bill.

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