



**Inquiry into the ACT environment's bushfire preparedness**  
**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**02 April 2024**

**Asked by Ms Jo Clay MLA on 2 April 2024:** Mr Rohan Scott took on notice the following question:

In relation to Shared Services Facility in Weston Creek (Page 5-6 Uncorrected Proof Transcript):

We heard from some concerned western residents about building in the western edge. They were concerned about building there from a bushfire risk, full stop. They also said it was too close to the Murrumbidgee; they said there was no evacuation point. A number of them said that there was shared services facility that was now being put in what had been a bushfire buffer zone after 2003, and that that had to be rezoned, so they were not happy about that.

We spoke to Dr Sally Troy, and she also had a few concerns. She said that we were spreading our resources thinner to protect an expanding western edge, and she said that the planning system did not really have disaster risk mitigation as one of the first things. That came in afterwards, so we were making planning lead decisions that were not properly covering that risk. We spoke to Dr Bartlett, and his was probably the most pithiest evidence. He said:

I also mention the western edge. You asked about that. That bushfire risk assessment was atrocious. It made false assumptions left, right and centre. For instance, it said the major risk would be from a fire burning downhill towards the Murrumbidgee. In 2003 anyone who was here in that year knows that the major risk was from a fire coming from the west and burning angrily uphill.

He said:

Mount Stromlo was a low bushfire risk. Well we saw what happened on Mount Stromlo. It was prepared by people who do not understand bushfire risks.

So I guess we had a number of witnesses who were concerned about encroaching development and the urban perimeter moving out, and that government was not doing appropriate risk managements with those, and appropriate resourcing to go with those to manage bushfire risks.

**Ms Vassarotti:** I cannot make any comment around the planning decisions and the data that goes into the planning decisions. What we can speak to is I think from an operational perspective with Parks and Conservation, you know managing areas of the western edge, potentially how once that comes in, in terms of how that area is managed currently and potentially any changes to management that comes from the more development in that area. Is that a fair thing? Can we speak to that?

**Mr Foley:** There are probably people in a better position to talk about the detailed planning arrangements, certainly from a fire management operational perspective. We get involved in the planning decisions inasmuch as we are there to make sure that the asset protections are in the bushfire management standards that sit under ESA.

One of the—I think planning, and two are actually maintained so that they provide the buffer they are to provide, but at the end of the day, Parks and Conservation is an operational agency and we work within what we consider to be pretty clear standards. In terms of bushfire risk, I think that is an issue that fairly sits—

**MS CLAY:** So if we can hear about the risk assessment, that would be good, the risk comments on that.

**Mr Gentleman:** I might just give an overarching comment first by saying that we have learnt historically that our risk does mainly come from the western edge, so the 03 fire, the 2019-20 fires all begun on the western edge, and that is where we see fuel load as well as breezes and wind coming from that area, so our preparedness does concentrate on the western edge.

Recommendations from the 03 bushfire team make recommendations about preparedness for the western edge, and as you have indicated in your opening statement, there is commentary about future planning for that as we build residential areas towards the western edge as well, but those areas of course are well within the boundary of the ACT and do not go past the river, and the river I think is a good line to draw when we look at bushfire risk, but I will ask Mr Scott to give you some more detail.

**MS CLAY:** And I might direct you to one of the specific things that one of the witnesses said was that there had been a facility put in what was promised after 2003 to be a bushfire buffer zone. Is that something that you can either answer or take on notice?

**Mr Scott:** Do you know what facility they are referring to? It is just a shared services?

**MS CLAY:** Shared services facility, yes. So it would be—you are welcome to take it—Weston Creek residents—you would be welcome to take that on notice and come back to us. That was one of the specifics. So maybe take that bit on notice, that would be great.

**Mr Scott:** Yes, without knowing the exact building, I will take that one on notice. Just following from what the minister has opened with, since the 2003 fires which had a significant impact on the ACT, and I was there on the front line in those days, there has been a significant improvement in our planning, in our looking to that risk management, not only

from the way we now develop those western edge perimeter suburbs. We have got edge roads, we have got bushfire management standards, we have got better building standards that are built to BAL ratings, and we have got better fire modelling now too.

**MINISTER GENTLEMAN:** The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

This facility is yet to be built. The proposed joint ACT Ambulance and Fire & Rescue station to be built on Cotter Road in Duffy has not reached Development Assessment stage. New emergency services facilities are situated in areas that provide the quickest most appropriate response and research is done to consider the site meets community needs. While this area is designated bushfire prone land, the building will be constructed to the standards to allow the best possible protection of occupants during a bushfire. The area (Block 2 Section 58 Duffy) is surrounded by significant changes since the 2003 fire, with the construction of Wright and redevelopment of the old forestry settlement immediately to the west and northwest. While this area may be a bushfire buffer zone, the construction of a joint emergency services facility in this area will not increase the risk but will decrease ambulance and fire response times to the Molonglo Valley developments.

A bushfire buffer zone is usually an area that is managed with low fire fuels to meet requirements set out in management standards. In the ACT we have the ACT Bushfire Management Standards 2023, which outline the requirements within certain management zones, such as, inner asset protection zones. The development of this facility will see new inner asset protection zones established around it, therefore reducing the risk to the facility, and reducing the bushfire risk in the immediate vicinity.

**Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity.**



**Mick Gentleman MLA**

**Minister for Fire and Emergency Services**

**Date:**.....12/14/2024.....