

Larger and more complex response and suppression operations, a growing emphasis on centralised command structures, increased use of water-bombing aircraft and more extensive incident and fire ground management have become the norm in high-risk areas. The new legislation continues to provide the powers necessary for government employees and others to participate in responses, and for government employees to determine the appropriate nature and scale of responses to significant fires.

The increasing threat posed by bushfires has led to greater emphasis on planning and mitigation, and the benefits of coordinated actions and regional planning have come into greater focus. In recent years government has implemented a range of programs designed to improved preparedness and mitigation, but most of these have been one-off initiatives that are not encompassed by the existing legislative framework.

The new legislation establishes a planning and mitigation framework across all of the Territory. It focuses on engagement with landowners and is designed to unlock the potential benefits of coordinated and strategic regional planning. It introduces a formal role for regional committees in regional planning and requires that all of the Territory will be supported by a series of regional bushfire management plans. These regional plans are guiding rather than prescriptive, and so do not create burdensome responsibilities for land managers

There is capacity, in circumstances where a significant risk of life or property has been identified, to prescribe mitigation actions in an area or on an individual property. This will only be possible following a detailed risk assessment process involving consultation with affected landowners and other stakeholders. In circumstances where a landowner, through failure to comply with a prescribed plan, continues to present a significant risk to others, it will ultimately be possible to enforce compliance with a prescribed property fire management plan.

The current act provides for the establishment of volunteer bushfire brigades, and the 22 existing brigades provide the bulk of the mitigation and firefighting workforce, especially in the high-risk areas of rural residential development. There are currently over 1000 registered volunteers, including over 250 qualified and highly-skilled active volunteer firefighters.

The new legislation allows volunteers to be appointed as authorised bushfire volunteers. This will create a formal role for volunteer firefighters in the incident management structure and allow volunteers, by participation in the chain of

command, to exercise the powers necessary to take part in a bushfire response.

I am particularly proud that the creation of authorised bushfire volunteers will also confirm the specific protection from civil and criminal liability while undertaking firefighting duties. This is an important step in improving support for our volunteers and ensuring they are adequately protected and not exposed to unacceptable levels of personal liability risk while contributing to this important community service.

The new legislation also provides authorised bushfire volunteers protection against dismissal or loss of employment benefits as a result of absence from work when requested by the Executive Director of Bushfires NT to attend large-scale high-risk wildfires. This is another important addition to the legislation that will ensure our volunteers do not suffer professional or employment loss as a result of their volunteering contribution during critical events.

As part of the rollout of the *Bushfires Management Act*, I will continue to further support our volunteers through the creation of a volunteers consultative committee. I have asked for this committee to have a ministerial advisory role to ensure volunteers have a direct link to the government and that I, as minister, can provide them with appropriate support. The committee will provide advice to Bushfires NT on a variety of volunteer issues, including training, recruitment and retention, volunteer health and safety, vehicle and equipment design and allocation, and appropriate standard operating procedures and policies.

In summary, the *Bushfires Management Act* 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.

Madam Speaker, I commend this bill to honourable members and table the explanatory statement to accompany the bill.

Debate adjourned.

PERSONAL VIOLENCE RESTRAINING ORDERS BILL (Serial 147)

Continued from 3 December 2015.

Ms WALKER (Nhulunbuy): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for bringing the Personal Violence Restraining Orders Bill (Serial 147) before the House. My speech is not particularly