



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**Motions**

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6 February 2020

**NSW BUSHFIRES CONDOLENCE MOTION**

**Ms SONIA HORNER ( Wallsend ) ( 10:38 ):**

The fires devastating our State since August have been nothing short of catastrophic: 25 lives lost, 2,176 homes destroyed, 5,200,000 hectares burnt and untold damage to our natural environment. The smoke, ash and dust have had lingering health impacts. The fires have shown the worst of what nature can throw at us. Thankfully, the Wallsend electorate avoided the worst of the fires. A small fire on the M1 posed a brief danger, but no homes and, more importantly, no lives were lost. But that has not stopped our Wallsend electorate community getting involved. People across the electorate willingly volunteered with the RFS and local brigades to help fight the fires. Loads of service organisations, Rotary, Lions, our local businesses, childcare centres, sporting clubs and the scouts rallied to fundraise. We even had local residents like Harri, aged 7, and Emma, aged 10, collecting fruit, juicing it and selling it on the side of the road to raise money for the fire victims. How sweet they are. We are really grateful to them.

Fire and Rescue Station 337 Minmi, which is based in a historic little former mining town in my electorate, attended strike teams, while still staffing Minmi station. Thankfully for New South Wales, Minmi station had understanding employers who allowed them to undertake the dangerous, unpaid and vital work of fighting these fires. I take this opportunity to personally thank all our private enterprises for their understanding and support by allowing their workers to be available for firefighting.

Captain Evan Dowling and retained firefighter Mick Hodges attended Strike Team Charlie for five days in November, battling blazes around Wauchope, Port Macquarie and Napiac, in the electorates of the member for Myall Lakes and the member for Port Macquarie, who have spoken so eloquently. Retained firefighter Jeremy Ryan from Minmi attended Strike Team Tango from 15 November, joining crews at Wauchope and Port Macquarie. Captain Dowling and Mick Hodges were joined by retained Minmi firefighters Craig Allan, Graham Moore and Andrew Paoletti for Strike Team Mike on 30 November, which was deployed to Raymond Terrace.

Retained firefighter Daryl Howar, also from Minmi, went to Tahmoor as part of Strike Team India on 21 December, and Mick Hodges was there on 22 December. Just before Christmas, Captain Dowling and Craig Allan joined Strike Team Xray at Bulga-Milbrodale, and Captain Dowling, Deputy Captain Royce Pearce and retained firefighter Daryl Howard were back out at Bulga-Milbrodale on 27 December. On 4 January Jeremy Ryan went to Cessnock and Captain Dowling went to Doyalson-Bundanoon. Our local firefighters were everywhere. On 8 January Captain Dowling, Craig Allan and retained firefighter Joel Fisher joined Strike Team Charlie to help defend the Perisher Valley, Guthega and Thredbo. They were involved in protecting the Guthega power station and the hydroelectricity plants—vital New South Wales infrastructure.

My thanks go out to Captain Evan Dowling, Deputy Captain Royce Pearce and all the retained firefighters of Minmi 377, who continued to keep our local community safe while pitching in to help others around the State. The crew from Fire and Rescue Station 454 Tarro, in my electorate, led by Captain Ian Smith and Deputy Captain Scott Pine, also traversed the State, battling blazes on many fronts. Firefighters Brett Mate, Dean Higginbottom, Scott Ford, John Thorne, Jeff Allen, Brodie Verschoor, Gavin Hawes, James Twining, Andrew Webb and Adam Brown were all deployed to strike force teams across New South Wales. Those included strike force teams in Kempsey, Glen Innes, Bucketty, Broke, Wollombi, Central Mangrove, Port Macquarie, Taree and Old Bar. Many of the Tarro crew spent precious time away from their families and friends over the Christmas period. We thank them for their unwavering dedication.

The crew from Fire and Rescue Station 484 Wallsend also traversed the State, with firefighters attending a number of strike force and task force teams. Captain Robert Walker and firefighters Graham Thorpe, George Brown, father and son Rod and Dominic Cavallaro, Daniel Ogle, Al Witenden, Mark Dempsey, Elliott Woolford, Jason Bridge and Kerrin O'Malley all attended strike force teams in Casino, Lismore, Tenterfield, Port Macquarie, Taree, Charmhaven, Central Mangrove, Picton and south-west Sydney. Barry Magor, Steve Kirsopp, Daniel Macaree and Jai Pereira remained behind to help maintain a local presence to cover the Wallsend community. We thank the Wallsend crew for their dedicated service and for making many sacrifices to battle the fires. I thank the brave firefighters at Fire and Rescue NSW stations 357 Lambton and 251 Cardiff who covered all the local stations that had appliances and crews dispatched across the State. Your service ensured that local areas remained safe.

Every day as ash rained down across the electorate, my office was inundated with calls from people wanting to know how they could help those who were more directly impacted and where and what to donate—whether money, clothes or food. I am sure all members of this House join with me in sincerely thanking all of those generous people. The Wallsend electorate never ceases to amaze me. You could not find a more giving, selfless bunch. All year long people have been fundraising or donating for various causes. As Christmas approached and the State burned, they dug deep and gave what they could.

Professor Peter Gibson of the Hunter Medical Research Institute [HMRI] is a respiratory physician, clinical researcher and co-director of the HMRI Viruses, Infections/Immunity, Vaccines and Asthma Research Program. During the fires the ash, smoke and dust have posed difficulties for people who suffer from respiratory illness. Professor Gibson and his team have been working tirelessly to help health authorities coordinate management plans.

We still do not know the full extent of the fire damage. A full accounting must be done of the loss of lives and property and of the damage to the State's irreplaceable biodiversity. We need to know why the fires were so bad and the factors that have contributed to a longer and more dangerous bushfire season. We must be frank about what has happened and what we will do to prevent it from happening again. We will have a chance to do that in coming months. For now, let us be grateful to our volunteers and thankful for the lives and homes that were not lost.