



HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

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13 FEB 2019

BY:

*Speaker's Rooms  
Hobart*

The Hon Michael Ferguson MHA  
Minister for Police and Emergency Services  
5th Floor  
Parliament Square  
Hobart Tasmania 7000

My dear Minister,

Letter from Ms Jan Linehan re Fire and Water issues.

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I refer to my attached letter to Ms Linehan and have attached her letter to me.

There are some points that may need examination, and it would be useful if these could be looked at in due course when the post mortem of the Fire event is conducted by the appropriate people.

Yours sincerely,

The Hon Sue Hickey MHA  
Speaker of the House of Assembly and the member for Clark.

6 February 2019

The Honourable Sue Hickey

sue.hickey@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Ms Hickey,

## Fire and water management for 2019 and the future

I am writing to you about the terrible tragedy of the fires in Southern Tasmania because I know you care deeply about the State and are aware of the implications of the fires and the predictions of no or little rain in the coming weeks. The response from the Tasmanian Fire Services and the many volunteers and affected local communities has been incredible, but there is an ongoing lack of leadership or sense of urgency from the Tasmanian and Federal governments.

The fires have already burnt out nearly 200,000 hectares and we are told that without significant rain they will continue to burn. As you know, the BoM forecast is for negligible rain this summer. Despite this urgent situation, there is little public discussion about how we are going to meet the short term challenges of the bushfires and lack of water, or the longer term issues. We need more visible leadership, as well as consultation with local and international experts, about the best way to protect wilderness areas, while also looking after the safety of affected communities and property.

There is strong community support for more action to protect the southern forests and our World Heritage areas, for example, by bringing in very large amphibious water bombing aircraft and fire fighters from the Northern Hemisphere, and mobilising a broader group of expert fire fighters both locally and from interstate.

Comments reported in the press this week that the fires will soon be under control, there is nothing more to be done, and no more Federal money is needed are particularly worrying. The Tasmanian government should set up an immediate summit and/or a review of how best to deal with the southern fires now, our readiness for other possible fires in wilderness areas this summer, and how best to start to create and implement long-term fire plans. It makes no sense to wait until this crisis has passed before the review.

The Tasmanian government should be asking the Federal government to help us in this exercise and especially to help fund amphibious water bombing interventions and additional firefighting capacity now.

An urgent focus on water management must also become a priority. We need water management plans, including a state wide water saving plan and a review of predicted water usage and dam capacity for power generation. This has to include looking at 2019 water projections for energy generation for Basslink. There are many good models

for community and business engagement around water management, including effective water restrictions, and there would be community support for such measures.

This is all part of a larger discussion about climate change that we need to have. This season will not be an isolated event. Dry lightning strikes and heatwaves like the one we have just had were unheard of before 2000. Climate scientists make the link to climate change and say these events are likely to become more frequent and more severe.

It is not the case there is nothing more we can do now about the current fires in the wilderness areas or that we have to wait until this crisis has passed before looking at the long term issues. We need leadership, transparency and broad community engagement in this crisis. Please let the Premier, responsible ministers and your colleagues at the State and Federal levels know that you believe we need urgent action, starting now.

Yours sincerely,

Jan Linehan