

Support and Fund our Firefighters

Climate Driven Bushfire Emergency

Queensland and New South Wales are experiencing some of the worst early bushfire seasons in history. The fires have burned a million hectares, destroyed dozens of homes and taken precious lives across the two states. Meanwhile our fire services are overworked and struggling with under-resourcing.

We know that with global warming the fire threat will only get worse. The Bureau of Meteorology has reported that if global carbon pollution continues to increase, the number of extreme fire days could triple by 2050 for eastern and southern Australia. Even if the world substantially decreases pollution, extreme fire days could still increase by up to 50%. In this context Queensland Labor's plan from 2017 to hire 100 new paid firefighters is woefully inadequate.

The Greens will establish a Protecting Queenslanders Levy on all major coal and gas corporations operating in Queensland to fund a massive investment in the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) and the Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ). Big fossil fuel corporations have created this mess and they should pay to help protect Queenslanders from the consequences.

The Greens Would:

- Hire 1,400 new full time equivalent paid firefighters to bring Queensland up to NSW levels of 3,500 firefighters and increase funding for equipment, at a cost of \$390 million over three years.
- Invest an extra \$75 million over three years in the Rural Fire Service. This would include increasing capital grants funding for RFS brigades from \$185,000 to \$5 million every year.
- Create a permanent aerial firefighting fleet in Queensland by investing \$200 million to purchase and operate firefighting aircraft, including large air tankers.
- Invest an extra \$50 million a year in capital funding for fire and emergency services facilities (including more permanent fire stations), fire appliances, communications systems and equipment for the QFES and RFSQ. This would increase the yearly total to \$147 million.
- Invest \$24 million over three years to create 200 new Indigenous Ranger positions to work with the QFES and RFSQ to better support and inform hazard reduction burns and landscape management
- Fund this plan by establishing a "Protecting Queenslanders Levy" of \$1 per tonne royalty premium on coal and \$1 per gigajoule on gas to raise \$345 million per year or \$1 billion over three years.

The total cost of this package is \$890 million over three years.



1400 New and Better Equipped Firefighters

There are currently approximately 2,200 full time paid firefighters in Queensland, compared to 3,500 in NSW. This month, the QFES Assistant Commissioner Tony Johnstone was quoted in the Brisbane Times:

"We've got significant aircraft for Queensland on standby to use. But aircraft don't put fires out, aircraft help contain fires while firefighters get in," he told ABC radio on Tuesday.

He said fatigue management for local crews was an issue and shifts had been shortened while help was being called in.

"We're having a problem with resources. We need to admit that."¹

Our firefighters are overworked and stressed and they need more resources and support.

The Greens would invest \$390 million over three years hiring 1,400 full time paid firefighters to work with our 36,000 volunteer firefighters and more than 2,000 auxiliary firefighters. This would bring the total to 3,600 full time paid firefighters.

This will include an extra \$8 million every year for crucial firefighting equipment, taking the total to \$12 million every year on equipment. According to the 2019/20 Queensland Budget papers the current budget allocation for the purchase of firefighting equipment for QFES is \$4 million.

Equipment includes protective clothing such as fully encapsulated gas suits, portable scientific analysis and detection equipment, and self-contained breathing apparatus. Equipment purchases could also include motorised swiftwater rescue craft, battery powered rescue equipment, accommodation shelters and satellite communications hardware for deployable disaster response.

More Funding for the Rural Fire Service

The Rural Fire Service Queensland is the volunteer arm of the QFES and is made up of 36,000 volunteers, including 2,400 Fire Wardens, who make up approximately 1,400 rural fire brigades. They are crucial to an effective fire service and give up countless hours to fight fires across Queensland.

For this reason the Greens would increase funding to the RFSQ by \$75 million over three years. This will include increasing capital grants funding to rural fire brigades from the Queensland Government from \$185,000 to \$5 million a year to assist with essential firefighting equipment, construction of fire stations, training and other vital items for Queensland brigades and volunteers.

¹ 12 November 2019, *Brisbane Times* Queensland fire chief worried about resources
<https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/queensland-fire-chief-worried-about-resources-2019-11-12-p539si.html>



A World Class Permanent Aerial Firefighting Fleet

Queensland and Australia are woefully under-resourced when it comes to firefighting aircraft. In a letter to Scott Morrison, twenty-three former fire and emergency leaders warned that Australia needed more water-bombers to tackle bigger, faster and hotter bushfires. Former New South Wales Fire and Rescue chief Greg Mullins said:

"People would have seen the images the other day of the Hercules coming in and dropping in 15,000 litres of retardant at Turramurra. I watched that with great interest because I was in charge of the fire there in 1994 where 17 homes were lost. That cut the fire off immediately.

"We're only going to have seven of those [aircraft] this year. I've just come back from California and they had about 30 on one fire."²

For context in 2018 Queensland Labor announced a plan to lease "eight waterbombing planes and helicopters – a more than two-fold increase on the previous fleet," which "would be based in Queensland under an 84-day contract."

Rather than just leasing aircraft, the Greens would invest \$200 million over 3 years to establish a permanent aerial firefighting fleet in Queensland. We would work with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre to ensure this fleet is utilised around Australia when it is not needed in Queensland.

Investing in our Fire Service

The Greens would invest an extra \$50 million a year in further capital funding for fire and emergency services facilities (including more permanent fire stations), fire appliances and information and communications systems and equipment for the QFES and RFS. This would bring total funding for capital expenditure to \$147 million a year and would ensure our paid and volunteer firefighters receive the best quality support and infrastructure. This would also assist in supporting the 1,400 new paid firefighters.

More Indigenous Rangers

For over 60,000 years First Nations people have expertly and successfully managed the land, rivers and forests of this vast continent. Drawing on thousands of years of knowledge will be crucial if we want to properly manage our enormous state and protect it as well as possible from destructive bushfires.

The Greens will invest \$24 million a year to create 200 new Indigenous Ranger positions in Queensland, tripling the total number of Indigenous Rangers from 100 to 300. Part of their role would be working with the QFES and RFSQ to better support hazard reduction burns and broader forest and land management.

²<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-14/former-fire-chief-calls-out-pm-over-refusal-of-meeting/11705330>



Protecting Queenslanders Levy

Currently 75% of QFES revenue comes from the Emergency Management Levy, which is charged to property owners via council rates. This raises \$559 million a year while the State Government provides a further \$103 million.

The Greens believe the big fossil fuel corporations who have created the climate crisis should pay for the consequences of their actions. We know that globally just 100 corporations are responsible for 71% of carbon pollution,³ and just 20 companies are responsible for one third of global carbon pollution.⁴ BHP, one of the mining corporations operating in Queensland, is one of those 20, producing 9.8 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide since 1965.

The Greens will establish a Protecting Queenslanders Levy on all coal and gas corporations operating in Queensland. The Levy will be charged via a royalty premium of \$1 per tonne for coal and \$1 per gigajoule on all gas produced in Queensland. Based 2018 production figures this would raise \$345 million per year.⁵ We know that we must phase out of thermal coal and gas as quickly as possible but in the meantime these corporations should be made to pay for the damage they are doing to the climate and their contribution to the dangerous fire conditions global warming helps create.

³<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors-responsible-71-global-emissions-cdp-study-climate-change>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/09/revealed-20-firms-third-carbon-emissions>

⁵ There were 287 million tonnes of coal and 57.6 million gigajoules of gas produced in 2018

<https://www.data.qld.gov.au/dataset/petroleum-gas-production-and-reserve-statistics>

<https://www.data.qld.gov.au/dataset/annual-coal-statistics>



Costings:

Year	2020 (\$ million)	2021 (\$ million)	2022 (\$ million)	Total (\$ million)
1400 New FTE Career Firefighters*	-\$123	-\$123	-\$123	-\$369
Further capital funding for fire and emergency services facilities and equipment**	-\$50	-\$50	-\$50	-\$150
Triple the equipment budget***	-\$8	-\$8	-\$8	-\$24
Permanent Aerial Firefighting Fleet***	-\$100	-\$50	-\$50	-\$200
Invest in the Rural Fire Service including increasing the capital grants for RFSQ brigades****	-\$25	-\$25	-\$25	-\$75
200 New Indigenous Rangers	-\$24	-\$24	-\$24	-\$72
Protecting Queenslanders Levy: \$1 royalty premium on all coal and gas	\$345	\$345	\$345	\$1,035
Total new funding	-\$330	-\$280	-\$280	-\$890
Net positive budget impact	\$15	\$65	\$65	\$145

*Cost per firefighter (\$263,679) based on the \$29.532 million cost cited for bringing on 100 new frontline firefighters plus 12 support officers

<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/tableOffice/questionsAnswers/2019/1375-2019.pdf> (p2)

** In the 2019/20 Budget the QFES received \$97.7 million for the 2019/20 financial year via the Public Safety Business Agency

*** Current equipment budget is \$4 million in Budget Paper 3,

<https://budget.qld.gov.au/files/3.%20Capital%20outlays%20by%20entity.pdf> p88

**** The 2019/20 Queensland State Budget allocated \$185,000 for capital grants to Rural Fire brigades.

