



# Trish Doyle MP

## Member for Blue Mountains



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### New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

#### Bushfire Season

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I am pleased that the Government has brought to the attention of the House an important matter for today's public interest debate and to hear Government members' gratitude for the efforts of our firefighters and emergency services workers.

But as is often the case, I am concerned that Government members have come into the Chamber and said something quick and easy in support of our community but then have walked out, put their ministerial hats back on and refused to adequately fund essential public services that people rely upon, particularly those living in the bush who are facing a severe drought and a bad bushfire season.

I pay tribute to our emergency services workers, including the professional firefighters and the army of volunteers in the Rural Fire Service [RFS]. I acknowledge the ancillary work and support of other service agencies during these crises, including police, paramedics, the National Park and Wildlife Service, State Forests, the Volunteer Rescue Association and the State Emergency Service, who also swing in to support the community during these catastrophes.

We should recognise too that volunteer firefighting crews from across the State are being despatched to fires in Queensland and northern New South Wales. Locally, my Blue Mountains RFS crews have been heading up and back to the north of our State to help with efforts to contain the bushfires near Tenterfield, Yamba and Armidale. I also note that in addition to the catastrophe unfolding in the north of our State, areas in the Central West are grappling with fire incidences. Thankfully a fire out near Lithgow was brought under control.

Our devoted and hardworking professional firefighters and volunteers can only serve and assist our communities as well as they themselves are served and assisted by the State Government. It would therefore be remiss of me to gloss over the fact that in the recent budget the New South Wales Government cut nearly \$13 million from the operational budget – that's bureaucratic longhand for staffing allocations – of Fire and Rescue NSW.

This is an attack on the frontline capacity of our professional firefighters, despite an assurance from the Minister during budget estimates that frontline firefighters were immune from his Government's relentless attacks on public sector workers.

We know the Government will have to reduce the safe and effective crewing numbers on firefighting appliances in order to meet its multimillion dollar budget cuts. The Government also has cut nearly \$27 million from the operational budget of the Rural Fire Service and almost \$80 million from the capital budgets of Fire and Rescue NSW and the Rural Fire Service combined.

That will have an impact on the front line.

The Government claims it is "cutting the fat" from these public service agencies but in my estimation it is hacking away at the muscle of our firefighting and emergency services.

These fires are starting earlier each year and we are fast running out of water in many rural towns. The RFS brigades are being told to engage in dry firefighting techniques to save crucial water reserves across rural New South Wales.

Unfortunately, it is the very representatives who deny the science of climate change who also represent areas of our State that are bearing the brunt of the most catastrophic impacts of climate change.

There is a very real cost and a very human face to the policies and decisions that the Government makes in this Parliament or across the road in its ministerial suites on Martin Place. We should not kid ourselves that we operate in a vacuum. Our rivers and dams are running dry because of a deadly combination of the Government's mismanagement and the effects of human-induced climate change. We need to better equip and better plan for a bushfire season that will continue to begin earlier or will become more unpredictable or will be interrupted by other extreme weather events.

In order to do so we need public services like Fire and Rescue NSW and the Rural Fire Service to be adequately funded and not have their budgets cut. We need to be assured there will be adequate frontline staff to respond to multiple bushfire emergencies across our State while also ensuring there are equipment and facilities available for these people to do their jobs.

I take this opportunity to call on the Minister and The Nationals members in this place to stand up for their rural and regional communities, to demand better services for the bush and to reverse the funding cuts that this Government has pushed through to the emergency services agencies it claims to support.

I thank and honour our mighty firefighters.