



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**CONDOLENCES**

**Victorian Bushfire Victims**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 9 February 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 9 February 2009  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** King, Catherine, MP

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**Question No.**

**Ms KING** (Ballarat) (3.27 pm)—It is fitting that our nation's parliament, the one place in which all of Australia is represented, sends a message of condolence for the terrible loss of life and property that occurred over the weekend in Victoria. I think we are all in a state of shock as the overwhelming reality of what occurred sinks in; such terrible devastation, such terrible loss of life, such pain for many—and it is not over yet. Words cannot express the grief, loss, fear and sheer terror that the people who have been in the front of these fires have experienced. The thoughts and prayers of this parliament are with those who have lost their families and those who are yet to find out their fate. Some 126 have been confirmed dead and, heartbreakingly, some of them were very young children. We grieve for every one of them.

From the people of Ballarat, we grieve for all those affected, but I particularly want to send a strong message of support to the people of Bendigo. Sometimes we have a healthy rivalry, but in this we are your neighbours and we will do everything we can to assist you. I want to also send a message to our emergency services, including their volunteers, who are working tirelessly in the midst of this tragedy. CFA Region 15 firefighters from my own electorate, like all firefighters from our state, have been tackling these ferocious fires over the last three days. Nine strike teams from my district are currently supporting the fight against the Maiden Gully, Redesdale, Kilmore East and Bunyip fires. These strike teams include some 250 firefighters, and the local DSE have also contributed some 100 people to the efforts. This number is replicated across the state by CFA volunteers and also by the metropolitan fire brigade and the DSE. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of interstate brigades.

As a CFA volunteer not able to be on active duty at present, I know the loss of life will be felt keenly by all members. I know how hard you have fought to protect people and their homes in the face of what has been an overwhelming fire. I know that, because of the loss of life, morale will be pretty low. But I want to send a strong message from this parliament to our CFA volunteers: thank God you were there. How much worse would it have been had you not been? Thank God you were there.

I also want to acknowledge other personnel who were at staging areas across the state, feeding and supporting firefighters and devastated communities: the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and our many other welfare organisations, medical staff across Victoria's hospitals dealing with terrible burns and the members of Victoria Police who will be critical in helping communities recover and in catching the perpetrators of this terrible act. I also thank the families, many of them anxiously waiting at home, and employers of emergency service volunteers for supporting the men and women and their efforts.

Many people want to know what they can do to help, and of most practical assistance today is donating blood through the Red Cross and donating money to the Victorian bushfire relief fund. I asked the Region 15 brigade what message they wanted to get out today and, overwhelmingly, they want this parliament and the people listening to this broadcast to know that many fires are still out of control and that the potential for dangerous fires in other areas, including my own, still exists and will continue for some time, especially in the absence of significant rainfall. People need to be vigilant, ensure their bushfire plans are in place and recognise that this fire season has a long way to run yet.

Even once the final embers have been extinguished, the effects of these fires will long continue. Communities, families and friends will mourn for loved ones lost. Those who have seen their homes destroyed will be faced with the task of re-establishing their lives. Entire communities will take some time to rebuild. Firefighters who have been face to face with the fires and the devastating loss of life will continue to grieve and deal with the devastation they have witnessed. On behalf of the people of my electorate I offer my condolences, but more importantly we offer our support as people make their way through this crisis and slowly rebuild their lives. The thoughts of this parliament are with all Victorians today.