



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Victorian Bushfires**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 13 May 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 13 May 2010  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Broadbent, Russell, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr BROADBENT** (McMillan) (12.28 pm)—I would like to read the poem inspired by the event of the anniversary church service for the Bunyip Ridge bushfire held at Labertouche on 7 February 2010. It is by Gerry Cunningham, who, for members' information, is a brother of former member for McMillan, Barry Cunningham—and very talented he is. It is entitled *Hope*:

The marquee stood in the paddock there

Mid the skeletal trees both green and bare.

The locals gathered in the sunlit air,

And they dared to hope.

The Christian band with its fiddlers two

played a jaunty tune in the morning dew.

They sang their songs and one was new,

And it sang of hope.

A bible reading from John fourteen,

A home for all in a place unseen,

It was hard for some, where they had been,

Yet they cling to hope.

A duet of song spoke for everyman.

A solid place where we all can stand.

Perhaps it will help us to understand,

As we search for hope.

A funny man for the kids came out.

With his many tricks he did sing and shout,

The prodigal son he went on about,

And he spoke of hope.

The member's words were brief but true.

They reminded us of the things we knew.

That the wrath of nature is a bitter brew,

But we should still hope.

The symbolic sunflowers in their shining gold,

A story of regrowth there to be told,

They had grown a flowering sight to behold,

And they told of hope.

A hymn was sung of God's great fidelity,

A denial, it seemed, of our recent reality.

But our strength is restored by the day's communality,

And we continue to hope.

A cuppa together to finish the day,

For the true Aussie spirit was here on display

In far better mind we went on our way,

We were filled with hope.

It was a very, very hard commemorative service to go to. I found myself as I stood to speak wishing I were somewhere else and someone other than the federal member on that day. I had the realisation that, as I felt, so did many of the hundreds of people that were there. They did not come because they wanted to commemorate such a tragic event; they came to support one another. Gerry Cunningham was there with his wife. I said to Gerry, 'Gerry, I know you're a poet of great means. Have you considered putting words to this day?' The church had truly erected a tent in the middle of a paddock. We expected a hundred people to turn up. But suddenly out of the bush and along the roads at Labertouche, cars began to arrive. I noticed two women sitting apart—not wanting to be a part of a church but sitting apart. I realised as I watched them that they were here to support others and not because they wanted to be there, not because they wanted to participate. They did not want to remember what had happened on that fateful day in February, but they came to support all the other people that came to support all the other people. They were feeling exactly as I was: 'What are we doing here? We've got nothing to celebrate. It was a terrible, terrible, terrible day.'

I missed the word 'sunflowers' in this poem—I actually read out 'flowers'. I should have used 'sunflowers' because they used sunflower seeds that had been planted and then taken from the fire and grown. Then they handed out sunflowers to people. I took one home and I planted my sunflower seed and it grew. It was GM-free sunflower, too, I might say.

The day was important, and I said to Gerry, 'Would you put it on paper? Gerry, if you put it on paper, because I know you are capable of doing that—of capturing the moment in a poem—I will read it out in the parliament.' I am fulfilling that promise to Gerry today to read this poem out, but not for Gerry and not for the great contribution the Cunningham family have made to our district; I am reading it out for every person that was there on that day at that church service supporting one another, arm in arm and hand in hand.