

BUSHFIRE ARSON

16 October 2007

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I refer the minister to my question of 27 September this year concerning sentencing for arson offences. Since I asked that question, I have taken a close look at the Office of Crime Statistics and reporting data concerning arsonists who start bushfires. I remind the chamber of the government's strong rhetoric in 2002 (as I mentioned in my explanation on 27 September) when it promised to get tough on bushfire arsonists. Despite there being some three reporting years since this 'get tough' regime began, the crime statistics have separate statistical lines for arson to cars, arson to schools, arson to warehouses or factories, arson to homes, and arson to shops, but there is no statistical line for bushfire arson. Another bushfire season is upon us, and scientists are telling us that this state will have more, not fewer, bushfires. So, the need to deter bushfire arsonists is greater than ever.

My questions are directed to getting to the bottom of how many people have received punishment or have been gaoled for bushfire arson since 2002. Frankly, it would seem from the crime statistic reports that no-one has stood before the courts charged with starting a bushfire and been sent to prison, as was clearly implied by the tough stance taken by the government in 2002. My questions are: 1. How many offenders have been given terms of imprisonment for lighting bushfires since 1 January 2003? 2. Will the government instruct the Office of Crime Statistics and Reporting, and the relevant reporting agencies, to operate a separate reporting line for bushfire arson in future crime statistical reports?

The Hon. P. HOLLOWAY (Minister for Police, Minister for Mineral Resources Development, Minister for Urban Development and Planning):

I will refer that question to the Attorney-General to see what statistical information we can provide and, if it is possible to separate that information into the future, I think it is a request that deserves serious consideration. I will refer it to the Attorney for his attention.