

**HANSARD**  
**24 NOVEMBER 2011**  
**MARGARET RIVER BUSHFIRES — PRESCRIBED BURNS**

*Standing Orders Suspension — Motion*

**DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton)** [12.04 pm]: I would like to make a few comments on this. First, I, like the other speakers, wish good luck to the volunteers and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority and Department of Environment and Conservation people fighting the fires. I also give my condolences to the people affected in not only Margaret River but the wider area. I also note that leavers' week is coming up. Leavers in their thousands are planning to go down to that area. We have to concentrate on getting the fire under control and defeated before they go down. Indeed, in some perverse way it could have been a lot worse. I condemn the attempt by members opposite to politicise this issue at this time. We should have our Minister for Emergency Services and Minister for Environment addressing the issues out there where life and limb are under threat.

Several members interjected.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** Instead the opposition has them in here. The Minister for Environment answered a legitimate question and gave members an update—fully reasonable. The questions asked were basically trying to assess the nature of the burn and other activities, which cannot be done now because we do not have the facts. As the Minister for Agriculture and Food said, and as members opposite know because they put them in place, there is a rigorous, vetted process for controlling a prescribed burn. First, there is a plan by the Conservation Commission. Then a program for prescribed burning is ticked off by the Conservation Commission. Then there is a rigorous check process that is gone through. That is obviously what DEC did. It might have got out of hand, but we have to wait for the results to assess it. We will come to it. The priority for us now, if members opposite really care about the damage done at Margaret River, is to allow the people in charge, including the ministers, to address the issue at hand—that is, to address the fires and threat to life and livelihood—rather than for the opposition to make cheap political points. I might add, when I came to this house, my first speech was indeed about the need to address the build-up of fire —

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Collie—Preston and Minister for Agriculture and Food, I stood on my feet before and made this comment but I will make it again. I have given the call to the member for Riverton. I have not given the call to either of you to engage in conversation. I formally call both of you to order for the first time today.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** When I first came to this house, my first speech, other than my maiden speech, was about WA's bushfire threat. That was the subject of my response to the Premier's Statement in March 2009. I asked members to imagine a huge bushfire, such as this one, in the Leeuwin—Naturaliste area in the South West at the height of the summer holidays. Thousands of holiday-makers and local residents would try to evacuate along narrow roads, which we are seeing. I raise that because the data showed an extreme level of burnable material in that area. There is also a lack of access roads, a huge build-up of houses and a large number of people who are not familiar with forest fire conditions. That is what we have. When we came to government, we had this issue at hand. I raised it and the then Minister for Environment responded properly. She committed to reviewing, expanding and meeting the controlled burning targets. Clearly, something has gone amiss. We will get to that once we have put out the fire. I urge members opposite to remember that the high level build-up of burnable material from which we now suffer occurred on their watch. They will be held accountable for it.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I gave most of you an opportunity to pull up in your comments. Member for Albany, I formally call you to order for the first time today. I think that everybody in here recognises the sensitivity of the issue with which we are dealing. I hope that you do. I do not know whether you have completed your comments, member for Riverton.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** Sit down, you are a disgrace!

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Armadale, I formally call you to order for the second time today.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** In the meantime, I suggest that we allow things to cool off and allow the ministers to get on and do their duty to address the emergency we face. Then we will come back to this house to address the results.