

**Legislative Council**  
**Hansard**  
**Tuesday 19 May 2026**

*[excerpt...]*

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

**MOTION**

**Climate Council and Emergency Leaders for Climate Action Report: When Cities Burn**

[4.46 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Mr President, I'm very pleased to rise to support this motion and thank the member for Hobart for bringing it. I also take the opportunity - it's the first time I've spoken substantially today - and I want to congratulate the new member for Huon and welcome her to our Chamber and congratulate the member for Rosevears on her re-election and being here with us still.

I thank the member for Hobart, as I said, for bringing this important matter to our House for discussion, providing us this opportunity to contribute to a necessary debate that should be very active and very ongoing at all times in terms of climate change impact and what we need to be doing to mitigate and reduce risk. I won't be making an extensive contribution, because I do note the member for Hobart has stated the case very clearly and other members have made, I believe, very worthwhile contributions that I've appreciated listening to. However, as part of the greater Hobart region does overlap with my electorate of Nelson, I also considered the When Cities Burn report closely. It's highly relevant.

We know that the risk of bushfires crossing over from the bush into urban areas is very real. It's not hypothetical for many Tasmanians who recall the devastation of the 1967 fires and the devastation that they left in their wake. The Tasman Peninsula still bears the scars of the 2013 inferno, which impacted approximately 40,000 hectares, homes, businesses, public infrastructure, not to mention, as others have said, the catastrophic effects that it has on wildlife and native flora. But, as this motion highlights, bushfires are no longer limited to the bush. Even if we wanted to avoid facing the warnings that have escalated across the nation over recent decades, those warnings have been thrown into sharp relief by the January report When Cities Burn: Could the Los Angeles Fires Happen Here? that was released by the Climate Council and the Emergency Leaders for Climate Action. What a worthwhile report. The report is particularly pertinent to the electorate of Nelson because, as clause 4 of the motion put before us points out, Hobart's one of the nation's most fire-exposed cities with steep terrains experiencing strong winds and heavy fuels hemmed in by wet and dry forests on Kunanyi/Mount Wellington.

Mount Nelson in fact forms part of the foothills of Kunanyi/Mt Wellington with a well-established direct peri-urban interface between scrub, bush, homes, local businesses and Hobart College also in that area. To some degree, Mount Nelson is a microcosm of the larger scale presented by the greater Hobart area and also in the Nelson electorate, which stretches down into Longley, Leslie Vale and into the Neika areas. Also, those western and southern aspects of the Nelson electorate are prime examples of risky peri-urban areas.

It was with great recognition and no small degree of alarm, Mr President, that

I considered the Hobart snapshot on page 34 of the When Cities Burn report and the identified problematic characteristic which I immediately recognised, and here were the aspects of the characteristics that were there. Firstly, descriptions of drying natural environment, reduced rainfall, warming temperature contributing to longer fire seasons, something we recognise. Secondly, the increased housing and urban sprawl, constantly pushing into flammable bush and grasslands, increasing the potential for deaths and destruction. It's too readily recognisable. Thirdly, data detailing stronger and more erratic winds, which we can also all identify in our area, and, lastly, the geographical features such as steep slopes and few roads weaving along those steep slopes is immediately recognisable particularly in some of our foothill areas of Kunanyi/Mount Wellington.

It's no surprise the report identifies this, and I quote:

Outer urban areas near Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Hobart, Adelaide and Perth feature hilly or mountainous terrain with ridgetop residential developments surrounded by bush and grassland.

Or that the report specifically includes Hobart in a list of Australian cities which, and I quote:

Could be faced with a catastrophe like that in Los Angeles as climate-fuelled extreme weather conditions continue to change and intensify.

It's quite alarming. The report identifies residential structures built within 700 metres of bushland are far more likely to be destroyed in a fire, especially when built within close proximity to each other. I live in such a residence, and I think many of us here might do so. In this context, the government cannot ignore the implications that in fact, with our close to 33 per cent increase in population between 2001 to 2024 - I think that's a national figure - living on the city's urban fringe, expansion in that urban fringe area puts us, particularly those living in older housing stock, at risk of serious fire damage as well as fatality in the event of a bushfire.

That makes extremely pertinent the call in clause 6 of the motion before us for the government to invest in retrofitting existing homes to bushfire standards. And that's a large task. It's a very important but very large task when you think about what proportion of our community live in such dwellings?

The When Cities Burn report finding that Hobart shares, and I quote, 'characteristics that made the LA fires so destructive', should provide sufficient motivation for our concerted and far-reaching action and that needs to be led by government action. However, in case that's not considered sufficient cause, the motion before us calls and the government to undertake two specific sets of actions. We know climate pollution is not just an outcome of serious bushfire events but also contributes to the conditions which cause and exacerbate those catastrophic fire events. Government must prioritise as a matter of public policy imperative reforms which seriously tackle and reduce climate pollution as outlined in clause 6 of the motion. It is essential action. It is responsible action.

Clause 7 of the motion calls on the Tasmanian government to prioritise an evacuation plan, and I'm pleased to support the member for Rumney's amendment that extends that not just for greater Hobart but for all relevant areas within the state at risk and to work with emergency services to ensure they are properly resourced, and that's really key. My goodness, we rely so heavily on our emergency services and so much of our bushfire response is volunteer driven in this state. People step up in those situations, but governments have to make sure they have their back and that they've resourced them properly and that they've supported them to be

able to be at the ready and able to do that important work that we rely on from them.

As recent research tells us, including the When Cities Burn report, the increasing severity of catastrophic bushfire events means there's a reduction in people staying to defend their properties, who seek to leave instead. Combined with increased populations living in these areas, it means that more people attempting to leave in a hurry, and usually on a limited road network, can cause pretty intense problems. Additionally, as the When Cities Burn report states on point 5, and I quote this -

There is no way to safely or effectively fight pyro-convective events like those experienced in Canberra 2003, Black Saturday 2009 and the Black Summer bushfires. Aircraft must be grounded and efforts to protect properties temporarily abandoned.

Basically, these fires are no longer fightable. As the report continued -

Fires on this scale are considered beyond the limits of any fire service to control.

This makes a coherent evacuation plan absolutely critical, imperative. This is reiterated in a 2022 published research paper, 'Neighbourhood bushfire hazard, community risk perception and preparedness in peri-urban Hobart, Australia', which found, and I quote, 'Global climate projections suggest that drier landscapes and longer fire seasons will lead to a 20 to 50 per cent increase in extreme bushfire events. (Bowman et al 2017) this is not a threat that state fire management authorities can handle alone.'

Further, it's not enough to have a greater Hobart evacuation plan, which looks wonderful on paper. The community needs to know about it. They need to be familiar with it and feel confident that they can follow it in a stressful, frightening emergency situation. Being stuck in slow-moving traffic on the Southern Outlet, for example, is not where people want to find themselves when trying to evacuate. It risks preventing emergency vehicles getting to where they're needed, while also preventing people from making a smooth escape. We need reliable and timely early alert systems; clear communication channels, appropriate for the community's potentially diverse needs; readily identified emergency shelter sites for people and their animals; as well as safe and clearly defined evacuation routes. Hence, Tasmania must prioritise investing in improved 'Emergency service and Land Management capacity at the urban fringe of our cities and major regional centres, so growing populations are better protected for what's to come.' That was recommended by the 'When Cities Burn' report.

This isn't a matter of if we take these actions, but instead it's a matter of when and how fast can we deliver these essential outcomes. We must heed this evidence-based research and recommendations. I commend this motion and on behalf of all Tasmanians living in the electorate of Nelson, I will certainly be voting in support of the motion.