

### **BUSHFIRE RELIEF**

Ms FOX (Bright) (17:09): The tragedy of the Victorian bushfires has affected every Australian, albeit in different ways. Words cannot express the extent to which those living in the fire-afflicted communities have been affected. Many members of the house have spoken this afternoon in a very moving manner about their own experiences and their own condolences.

Like so many of us, on that Sunday, when I found out what had happened, I felt very helpless and I felt that, even though I could donate money, I wanted to do something more. So, on the Monday after that Black Saturday, I sent an email to 100 friends and colleagues—on both sides of the house, outside this house, everywhere—asking them to donate children's books so that I could pack them up and send them to families and schools in the afflicted communities in the weeks to come.

With the help of journalists at the ABC and FIVEaa, I went on air and I asked for book donations. The result was absolutely overwhelming and continues to be so, and I stand here today because I need to say thank you, and I am going to have to say that word so many times.

At the Bright electorate office, we have received thousands of books where I thought that, if we were lucky, we would receive 50 or 60. People from all over South Australia have donated books. They have driven huge distances just to drop off one box of books, motivated by the desire to do their part. Our very small office is ceiling-high with books, dust and a lot of goodwill. Collecting these books and being the holding space for these people's generous donations has been a very small role in the great scheme of things, and I stand here today because I need to thank so many people and organisations who have helped along the way and made this possible.

Firstly, I must thank those who donated the books. Thank you for giving items that were part and parcel of your childhood memories or of your own child's past. Thank you to those people who went out and bought new books even when some could barely afford to do so. There are so many hundreds of people who gave books to us that I would never have the time to list them, but I thank you. Thank you for giving. Thanks for waiting in your homes for us to get around to picking them up. Thanks for driving them in.

Secondly, I would particularly like to thank Amanda Blair of FIVEaa, her producer, Monique Bowley, and Sarah Lucas. Between them, and with the help of Channel 7, they organised a fleet of vehicles to take many of these goods directly to those most afflicted by the fires. Their good hearts and their extraordinary energy resulted in an amazing grass-roots humanitarian effort that is still ongoing today at the Wayville Showgrounds.

I cannot fail to mention the two companies who donated book packs, allowing us to pack these books in an orderly and efficient manner. Ian Hunter of Grace Brothers Removalists and Lisa Camec of U-Store-It's Ashford branch were very generous, and we could not have moved all these books without them.

I would like to thank my own staff members, Matt and Areti, who put their professional and personal lives on hold, driving many hundreds of kilometres to pick up books, packing books at all hours, not eating much, and working above and beyond the call of duty, all the while maintaining their roles in the office working with and for our constituents.

Thank you to the volunteers who came to the office to sort, clean and pack the books: Jenny Cook, Simone McDonald, Phil and Joe Giles. Thank you to John Oliver who put his views about politics and politicians to one side for a great cause and who drove around the suburbs picking up so many of these books. Thank you to the schools: Highgate Junior Primary, St Peter's Collegiate, Loreto College, Craigburn Primary School, Braeview Primary, Murray Bridge South Primary School. These schools put together huge numbers of books from teachers, students and parents. I believe there are a number of other schools who are still collecting, so a big thank you to all of them as well.

Thank you to community groups such as the Campbelltown Rotary Group and the Camden Park Community Centre, thank you for the rapid response and for the goods that you gave. I would like to thank my mother who did not realise it, but who put the idea into my head. She

also went out and bought dozens of copies of her own books and donated them, which was very kind.

I suspect that in all of this there is someone somewhere whom I have failed to thank and, if that is the case, I am sorry for it. However, you can see that there were so many people who responded to this very small appeal that it has been impossible to thank them all. Hopefully, the moments of joy and respite that these books will bring to children and libraries who have lost everything in the fires will be consolation and gratitude enough.