



NATIONALS for Regional NSW

# Austin Evans MP

MEMBER FOR MURRAY



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### NSW TO INCREASE SENTENCE FOR BUSHFIRE OFFENCE

Member for Murray Austin Evans has today welcomed the NSW Government's proposal to introduce tougher sentences for arsonists as the state continues to be gripped by drought.

Mr Evans said under the new law, anyone caught deliberately starting a bush fire will face a maximum sentence of 21 years imprisonment – up from 14 years.

"We are putting firebugs on notice, if you do the wrong thing, you will face the consequences," Mr Evans said.

"We must all work together to protect Murray from a bush fire disaster, making sure arsonists are held to account for their reckless and dangerous behaviour."

The increased sentence will apply to the offence, set out in section 203E of the Crimes Act, of intentionally causing a fire and being reckless about it spreading on public land or someone else's property.

The cost of disaster relief and recovery following NSW bushfires has risen from \$11.4 million in 2015-2016 to \$23 million in 2016-17.

The Attorney General will also ask the Sentencing Council of NSW to:

- consider if the five-year standard non-parole period for the bushfire offence should be increased; and
- review the maximum penalties for a range of other arson offences, including destroying or damaging properties.

Attorney General Mark Speakman said there is no excuse for putting people's homes, farms, stock and lives at risk, particularly when the drought and hot, dry weather during spring and summer are already a deadly combination.

"Under these conditions, bush fires spread quickly and are hard to stop, so it's important there are harsher penalties in place to deter potential firebugs," Mr Speakman said.

Minister for Police and Emergency Services Troy Grant encouraged residents to be vigilant during the bush fire season.



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"The community often act as our eyes and ears, so if you see any suspicious behaviour and believe someone has started a fire on purpose, it's absolutely vital that you report it to authorities immediately," Mr Grant said.

The NSW Rural Fire Service has more than 150 highly-skilled investigators who work alongside the NSW Police Force to investigate arson. Residents can contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 if they suspect someone has deliberately lit a fire.

ENDS

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