

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Program: 1.7

Question No. AE16/043

Senator McKim asked the following question at the hearing on 9 February 2016:

Senator McKIM: Are you aware of how many fires are currently burning within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area?

Mr Crosweller: Not specifically in the wilderness area. I do not think we have that information available tonight, but we can certainly obtain that with a simple phone call to Tasmania tomorrow morning and come back to you on that question if that is helpful.

Senator McKIM: It would be helpful, and would you also ask how many of those fires are currently actively being managed?

Mr Crosweller: Yes.

Senator McKIM: Because I am trying to paint a picture, and I have to say, with the greatest of respect to everyone involved, that the information flow to the public has not been great around the remote area fires. I am referring specifically here to the fires that are not threatening built assets and private property. It is those wilderness fires, specifically those inside the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, that I am asking about.

Mr Crosweller: We can certainly get more specific information for you. I am aware that there is significant effort being put into those fires in the wilderness area, and I am aware of the sensitivities of the biodiversity. I know for example, from the last statistics I saw, which are probably four or five days old now, that only about two per cent of the wilderness area was in fact impacted by fire.

Senator McKIM: Yes, that is a number that has been made public. Of course, the issue is that there are non-fire-adapted ecological systems that exist nowhere else in the world, except in those very small parts of Tasmania.

Mr Crosweller: Yes.

Senator McKIM: We have already lost some of them.

Mr Crosweller: Yes, that is right.

Senator McKIM: I have not seen official numbers on how many hectares we have lost but I have seen photos and I am going to do some more exploration of that myself next week. But could you provide any further information to the committee as soon as possible?

Mr Crosweller: We will have this confirmed for you, but we understand that between 14,000 and 17,000 hectares of sensitive biodiversity has been impacted by fire out of a total of 30,000 hectares in the wilderness area. The remainder of that 30,000 hectares is, as I understand it, considered non-endangered for the purposes of the fire regime.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

1. As of Monday 22 February 2016, the total number of active fires burning in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is eight (8).
2. As of Monday 22 February 2016, the total number of fires being actively managed in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is eight (8).
3. As of Monday 22 February 2016, the total Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area burnt is 20,424 hectares, which is 1.29% of the total Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.