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MEDIA RELEASE

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FIRE BUG CRACKDOWN: STANDARD NON-PAROLE PERIOD ALMOST DOUBLES

In a further crackdown on dangerous bushfire bugs, the standard non-parole period for convicted arsonists is set to increase from five years to nine years to help protect lives and property.

Attorney General Mark Speakman and Minister for Police and Emergency Services David Elliott said the Government would introduce an amendment to implement the recommendation of the Sentencing Council to help ensure those who commit bushfire offences spend more time behind bars.

“With another hot and dry summer around the corner, it is important there are strong laws in place to protect farmers and communities who are already struggling because of the drought,” Mr Speakman.

“The tougher standard non-parole period builds on the Government’s introduction of a tougher penalty for the bushfire offence, which increased the maximum penalty from 14 to 21 years in November last year.”

In 2018, Mr Speakman asked the Sentencing Council to review the standard non-parole period.

As a result of the review, the *Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999* will be amended to increase the standard non-parole period for the bushfire offence under section 203E of the *Crimes Act 1900*. The offence applies to the charge of intentionally causing a fire and being reckless about it spreading on public land or someone else’s property.

Minister Elliott said one act of stupidity could bring a community to its knees.

“My message to would-be firebugs is to stop and think about the children and families who could be killed or injured and the huge economic and emotional toll of being homeless and having to rebuild properties and farms from scratch,” he said.

“There is no excuse for starting a bushfire, which is why the longer standard non-parole period, on top of tougher maximum sentences, reflects the seriousness of the crime.”

NSW Rural Fire Service Acting Commissioner Rob Rogers welcomed the latest reforms and called on the community to report suspicious behaviour.

“NSW firefighters already have a difficult and dangerous job responding to emergencies and keeping the community safe, let alone having to put their lives on the line because some reckless person deliberately started a fire,” he said.

“The prolonged drought means there is an increased risk of fires. It is important people remain vigilant and report any suspicious behaviour so offenders are caught.”

As part of its review, the Sentencing Council received submissions from stakeholders including the Law Society of NSW, Legal Aid NSW, NSW Police Force, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Rural Fire Service Association.

The majority of stakeholders agreed the bushfire offence’s standard non-parole period should be increased.