




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR THEODORE

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EMERGENCY SERVICES REFORM AMENDMENT BILL; STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE BILL; MARINE RESCUE QUEENSLAND BILL; DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading (Cognate Debate)

 **Mr BOOTHMAN** (Theodore—LNP) (11.05 am): I rise to make a contribution to the cognate debate of the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023, the State Emergency Service Bill, the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill and the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Our volunteers are the heart and soul of our community and are the bond that keeps us altogether. The Christmas Eve storm which hit the northern Gold Coast, the Logan City area and the Scenic Rim caused extensive devastation for many residents, local homes and local businesses and caused many roads to become impassable. It was these volunteers—neighbours, locals—who sprang into action. They cleared driveways and roadways, and these efforts were enabled due to coordination between the rural fire brigades and the SES, of which I used to be a member for quite a long time. Therefore, when it comes to these organisations, they certainly deserve our respect.

What I find completely unacceptable in terms of what transpired with this legislation is that these individuals and organisations, especially the rural fire brigades with the disaster management bill, only had one week to make a submission to the committee's inquiry into the legislation. However, I do thank the chair of the committee, the member for Toohey, for allowing late submissions to be submitted. Such a short time frame shows the complete disdain that the Labor Party has for our rural fire brigades. During the committee's hearings individuals from these brigades spoke time and time again about the issues they have with training and the lack of training availability. According to the chair of the Dayboro and District Rural Fire Brigade, Mr O'Sullivan, these training courses are few and far between. This was backed up by Mr Kemp, the group officer of Maroochy South Rural Fire Brigades Group, who said—

The minimum skills are what you can get when you first join ... That generally takes two to three months. Then you have to wait two years before you can go to your FAS ...

that is, firefighter advanced skills. He continued—

Then, correct me if I am wrong, it is another two years before you can do crew leader. Then you can step out and become officers. At the moment, we are looking at six years for a volunteer to be able to get that training.

When we look at the structure of the courses set up under AIIMS, one of the concerns that these rural fire brigade members have is the slowness with which courses are available to them. If there is no availability for courses for these individuals, it becomes a disincentive for those individuals to stay in those brigades. Whatever the government may spruik in this House today, it is incredibly important that these courses are made available to ensure that these individuals stay incentivised to be in those brigades, because at the moment those courses, as they said—and it is not just these individuals saying it but other brigades also—are few and far between.

I ask the minister how many level 2 incident controller courses in the last month were made available to the volunteer brigades? I am not talking about paid staff but volunteer brigades and I am not talking about level 2 officer courses but incident controller courses. We have some fantastic incident controllers who are volunteers, such as Jim Besgrove near Townsville. When Cyclone Jasper came across the coast at Townsville, he was the incident controller taking control of the situation. He is a volunteer. We need to ensure that these individuals get access to the same courses that are made available to the paid staff. This bill does nothing to alleviate their fears in relation to that issue. During the committee hearings the commissioner informed the committee that currently there are nine individuals being trained as level 3 incident controllers. My question to the minister is: how many of those level 3 controllers are volunteers? It would be very interesting to hear that number.

Another concern that we put forward was in relation to clause 83. Brigades are concerned about what clause 83 would mean in areas where they do not have paid fire brigade staff members. There are rural areas in Queensland that rely on those rural fire brigades. Clause 83 states there are two types of incident controllers, a rural fire brigade one and a person with incident control expertise. What does that mean for rural fire brigade areas that do not have paid staff to cover them? Queensland is a very large state. What will happen in those situations?

Another issue that regularly came up in the committee process was what happens when an officer in charge of operations, normally the first officer, is unavailable. It could have been clearly written in this legislation that if the first officer is not available that the next officer should take charge—the second officer, third officer, et cetera. That could have easily alleviated their concerns.

Another issue of concern in this legislation is what is going to happen to the brigade's money. It is going to be transferred under delegation to the department to look after. Our brigades currently use their own financial institutions and they have the ability to put funds into term deposits or interest bearing accounts so they can accrue some interest on those funds which they can then use to buy anything they need for their brigade. It makes it easier when they need to move money back and forth. It must be remembered that these funds come from sausage sizzles and other events set up by the brigade. Many rural fire brigades have family open days. Funds used for those family open days are from fundraisers the brigades have conducted. They are concerned about what will happen if government decides to rescind the delegation of those funds because it is not in the legislation. They want protection for the hard work they have done in their community.

Finally, I would like to talk about smoke alarms in caravans. The legislation states that at the point of sale caravans are required to have smoke alarms. However, caravans on sites all over Queensland that are not sold will not be required to have them. That is a complete oversight. That needs to be corrected for the safety of the people living in those caravans. The government needs to correct that.

The LNP will be voting against a clause within the legislation. This legislation does not give rural fire brigade members the honour that they deserve. Giving the different brigades one week to look over and understand this legislation, along with the confusion that was created in the community, is completely unacceptable for hardworking volunteers who put their lives on the line protecting our houses, protecting our farms and protecting our communities.