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COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr A Tantari MP—Acting Chair
Mr SA Bennett MP
Mr MC Berkman MP
Ms CL Lui MP
Dr MA Robinson MP
Mr RCJ Skelton MP

Staff present:

Ms L Pretty—Committee Secretary
Dr A Lilley—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRY INTO THE EMERGENCY SERVICES REFORM AMENDMENT BILL 2023, THE STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE BILL 2023 AND THE MARINE RESCUE QUEENSLAND BILL 2023

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 12 February 2024

Brisbane

MONDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2024

The committee met at 11.30 am.

ACTING CHAIR: I declare open this public briefing for the committee's inquiry into the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023, the State Emergency Service Bill 2023 and the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill 2023. My name is Adrian Tantari. I am the member for Hervey Bay and the acting chair of this committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands, winds and waters we all share. With me here today are the deputy chair, Mr Stephen Bennett MP, member for Burnett; the member for Maiwar, Mr Michael Berkman MP; the member for Cook, Ms Cynthia Lui MP; the member for Oodgeroo, Dr Mark Robinson MP; and the member for Nicklin, Mr Rob Skelton MP.

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COX, Mr Brian, Acting Assistant Commissioner, State Emergency Service

HENDERSON, Mr John, Inspector, Policy and Performance Division, Queensland Police Service

HILL, Mr Marcus, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Reform Implementation Taskforce, Disaster and Emergency Management, Queensland Police Service

OBST, Mr Greg, Director, Legal, Police and Emergency Services Reform Program, Queensland Police Service

RINGUET, Mr Greg, Business Reform Coordinator, Marine Rescue Queensland

ACTING CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to brief the committee on each bill after which committee members will no doubt have some questions for you.

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to brief the committee in relation to the emergency services reform amendment package. This package comprises three bills; namely, the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023, the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill 2023 and the State Emergency Service Bill 2023. These bills are the first tranche of reforms to Queensland's disaster management and emergency services arrangements. I understand that the committee has been provided with departmental written briefings to complement the bills, the explanatory notes and the statements of compatibility. I appreciate the time constraints the committee faces in this briefing. Consequently, I do not intend to comment about each amendment in these bills. Instead, I will expand on specific amendments where I can value-add by indicating how they will benefit our emergency services and the Queensland community.

With me today are a number of officials who are also available to assist the committee. I would like to introduce Acting Assistant Commissioner Brian Cox of the State Emergency Service and Business Reform Coordinator Greg Ringuet of Marine Rescue Queensland who are available to provide information about the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland respectively. Additionally, I am joined by Director Greg Obst of legal services, Reform Implementation

Taskforce and Inspector John Henderson of the Policy and Performance Division, QPS, who may provide technical information about the bills currently under consideration by the committee. As the assistant commissioner of the Reform Implementation Taskforce, I am responsible for leading reforms to disaster and emergency management.

Queensland is prone to natural hazards and disasters. Our state is also disproportionately affected by the consequences of those disasters, with the total economic costs projected to be \$18.3 billion per annum by 2050. In fact, as I appear here today Queensland has already experienced an early fire season, with wildfires impacting many communities, livelihoods and the environment across the state. This was followed in December 2023 by Tropical Cyclone Jasper, which affected vast areas of Far North Queensland, and then severe thunderstorms in South-East Queensland, in particular the Gold Coast Hinterland, which caused significant damage and, tragically, the loss of life. Then, on 25 January 2024, Tropical Cyclone Kirrily made landfall near Townsville as a category 2 system and later degenerated into a tropical low causing flooding over North-West Queensland.

In reflecting on these events, I will offer the following facts, not to provide a definitive summary of what has occurred but to illustrate the consequences of these events to our communities and the challenges that our emergency services face when responding to them. Of paramount concern was the loss of the lives of seven Queenslanders who were killed in association with these weather events. This terrible outcome can only be described as heartbreaking, and the loss experienced by these victim's families is unimaginable. More generally, it was projected that it would cost more than \$2 billion to recover from Tropical Cyclone Jasper and the storms at the Gold Coast. Those storms alone damaged more than 3,200 structures, including roads and bridges. Nearly 1,000 homes across the Gold Coast, Logan and the Scenic Rim were damaged, including 145 severely damaged houses and 10 houses being completely destroyed.

The peak impact of this weather event saw 130,000 homes without electricity. The extensive damage to our electrical network, through fallen power poles and downed power lines, resulted in about 3,900 homes still awaiting to be reconnected after 11 days had passed. Tropical Cyclone Kirrily has compounded the damage bill for our state. Fortunately, there were no reports of loss of life or serious injury from this event, but the costs to the community will be considerable as this event caused electrical power outages to about 66,000 consumers at its peak and wreaked damage across a wide area. The strain on our emergency services during this period was profound. For example, the SES alone has received over 6,000 calls for assistance since Christmas. Unfortunately, there is no indication that the frequency of disaster events will diminish, and changes in our environment through climate change will increase the severity of disaster events.

Our experiences over the decades have taught us the scale and impact of natural hazard and disaster events requires a strong network of disaster management experts, all of whom play a critical role in partnering with communities to prevent, prepare, respond to and recover from disasters. We must be responsive to ensure our state's emergency service providers are equipped with the resources and organisational structures needed to keep Queenslanders safe in times of disaster and emergency, now and in the future. Between 2018 and 2021 the Queensland government commissioned multiple independent reviews of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and its associated volunteer services, all of which have a role in response to natural hazards and disasters. Reviews conducted by Campbell Darby examined the SES in the *SES review: sustaining the SES—partnering for change* and marine rescue services in the *Review into volunteer marine rescue organisations in Queensland*. KPMG also considered the delivery of emergency services in the *Independent review of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services*. The Inspector-General of Emergency Management has also conducted a review titled *Review of Queensland's disaster management arrangements*.

Ultimately, every review examined the effectiveness and efficiency of disaster and emergency services to ensure long-term sustainability for the state. The reviews have made many recommendations addressing the disaster and emergency service function, structure, culture, funding and sustainability. The recommendations aimed to modernise service delivery arrangements, focus resources and simplify operational structures. The recommendations relevant to this package included expanding the Queensland Police Service to include the State Emergency Service and the new Marine Rescue Queensland drawn from the volunteer marine rescue services of the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland and the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard.

Following the reviews, the government announced a wideranging reform agenda. The implementation of emergency services reform will require the successful completion of many tasks, including machinery of government changes and policy development including the negotiation and preparation of service agreements and grants allocations. The emergency services reform

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amendment package provides the legislative framework for the first tranche of reform which will establish the State Emergency Service in a standalone act through the State Emergency Service Bill 2023; establish Marine Rescue Queensland in a standalone act through the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill 2023; align Marine Rescue Queensland and the State Emergency Service under the control of the QPS through the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023, which will make the necessary administrative amendments for this to occur; and formally establish the State Disaster Management Group within the Disaster Management Act 2003 through the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill.

The reforms will see a significant uplift of almost 500 full-time emergency services personnel, with \$578 million invested in disaster and emergency services over five years. To deliver those reforms the government established the Reform Implementation Taskforce—a multi-agency taskforce which I currently represent and comprising disaster management experts and practitioners from across government. Our job is to implement the machinery of government changes and 26 decisions mandated by government through the uplift in personnel and budgets and the transition of functions and staff across three main agencies: the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Fire and Emergency Service and Queensland Reconstruction Authority. Additionally, in July last year the government accepted, in principle, 10 recommendations with 28 separate subsets made by the IGM review of disaster management.

The task force commenced in January 2023 and we plan to complete these reforms by 1 July 2024, which involves building capability and capacity, delivering change and seeking the progression of two separate legislation packages through parliament. During this implementation, all relevant agencies have committed to ensuring there is no degradation of service throughout the disaster season. Emergency services has always been a world that the QPS has been heavily involved with, particularly as first responders during events. The QPS has a longstanding and proud history of working with the State Emergency Service and marine rescue volunteer organisations. However, in some respects we are entering a new period where the volunteer organisations of the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland will become part of the Queensland Police Service. Both organisations, whilst becoming part of the QPS, will retain their own identity. The State Emergency Service has always operated on a partnership model—a partnership between local councils and the state government. This shared responsibility will remain as the partnership is highly effective in the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery in disasters and emergencies, thereby strengthening and supporting communities for the future. Marine rescue volunteers already work hand-in-hand with the Queensland Police Service to deliver and support search and rescue capability. The Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland and the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard will come together to become Marine Rescue Queensland.

The reforms will bring almost 8,000 volunteers under the police umbrella as well as staff members. This will require the development of additional capability and capacity within the organisation. Of utmost importance to the Queensland Police Service is supporting emergency service members so that they can, in turn, support Queenslanders when they need it the most.

Considerable milestones have already been met. The Minister for Police and Community Safety announced on 26 January 2024 that the first chief officer for the State Emergency Service would be Mr Mark Armstrong and that the first Marine Rescue Queensland chief officer would be Mr Tony Wulff. Both chief officers are assisting with the reform work currently underway before officially assuming operational command. These reforms will lead to benefits for our partners and their communities as the better integration and collaboration of our emergency services organisations will lead to improved disaster management capabilities.

I will take the opportunity to comment on the following aspects of this reform package. These bills will provide various protections for State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland members by providing them with: civil liability protections; the suspension of Marine Rescue Queensland and State Emergency Service volunteers and members employed by local government; and the introduction of an offence to deter offenders from assaulting or obstructing emergency service personnel. The package also introduces an offence provision to protect confidential information entrusted to the organisations and their members.

In relation to civil liability protections, exposing Marine Rescue Queensland and State Emergency Service members to civil liabilities would be unfair and may lead to a reduction in volunteer participation, which would have a substantial impact on Marine Rescue Queensland and the State Emergency Service as organisations. The package will maintain the existing civil liability protections for State Emergency Service members and will extend them to Marine Rescue Queensland members.

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The current protection under section 153C of the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990 will continue to apply to the State Emergency Service. The only difference is that the package takes this provision out of that act and places it directly into the State Emergency Service Bill. The package also duplicates the provision and inserts it in the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill to extend the protection to Marine Rescue Queensland members. Additionally, Marine Rescue Queensland and State Emergency Service members, including volunteers, will be afforded the same protections as Queensland Police Service staff members under section 10.5 of the Police Service Administration Act 1990. This means that these members do not incur civil liability for engaging in their official capacity. Instead, liability will attach to the Crown.

The Civil Liability Act 2003 and Civil Liability Regulation 2014 provide protections to prescribed entities and their personnel. These entities include the State Emergency Service, the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association Queensland and the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association. The legislative reforms will maintain this framework for the State Emergency Service and existing marine rescue entities and will expand upon it to include Marine Rescue Queensland members. I can confirm that the amendments made by these reforms will not denigrate the civil liability protections currently enjoyed by both organisations. These protections will continue to apply to these organisations.

The emergency services reform amendment package will address a longstanding challenge faced by volunteer organisations. It is critical that the good reputation of emergency service organisations such as the State Emergency Service is upheld. This can only occur if there are appropriate discipline mechanisms for its members. Although there is a discipline framework under the Public Sector Act 2022 for State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland members employed by the state government, this act does not apply to Marine Rescue Queensland and State Emergency Service volunteers and State Emergency Service members who are employed by a local government.

In instances where there is an allegation of wrongdoing by a volunteer, often there is no other recourse available than to revoke a volunteer's appointment or to do nothing. Amendments will be made that will allow the commissioner to suspend a Marine Rescue Queensland, a State Emergency Service volunteer or a State Emergency Service member employed by a local government if the commissioner reasonably believes that the person would, if they had been subject to the Public Service Act, be liable to be disciplined or the proper and efficient management of Marine Rescue Queensland or State Emergency Service would have been prejudiced if the person were not suspended. This suspension should not be interpreted to be a punishment, rather it is a mechanism to allow a matter to be properly investigated so that matter can be appropriately resolved.

This benefits Marine Rescue Queensland and the State Emergency Service through protecting these organisations' reputation as well as the affected individual who is afforded the opportunity to have an allegation comprehensively investigated. To ensure fairness, the commissioner must consider all reasonable alternatives such as alternative duties or a change in the location from where the person performs duties before suspending a Marine Rescue Queensland or State Emergency Service member. This allows a person the prospect of continuing to contribute to their organisation while the matter is being investigated. Finally, to minimise the disruption that may be caused through the suspension of a volunteer, the commissioner will be statutorily obliged to ensure that the matter is investigated promptly so that there can be a resolution of the matter in the shortest timeframe possible.

The proposed amendments will also protect confidential information held by Marine Rescue Queensland and the State Emergency Service. The reality is that these organisations interact with members of the public in circumstances where they are vulnerable. These amendments outline that a Marine Rescue Queensland or State Emergency Service member may use confidential information to the extent the use is required or permitted under this act or any act or to perform the person's functions under this act or another act or with the consent of the person to whom the information relates if the information would normally be made available to any member of the public on request or in compliance with the lawful process requiring production of documents or giving of evidence before a court or tribunal or if the use is otherwise required or permitted under another law.

To reflect the harm that can be caused by the unlawful use or disclosure of confidential information, the amendments will introduce an offence that carries a maximum penalty of 100 penalty units or two years imprisonment. The amendments in the emergency services reform amendment package will also formally establish the State Disaster Management Group within the Disaster Management Act as recommended by the IGEM review. Incorporating the establishment of the State Disaster Management Group by the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill will ensure this

new and critical disaster management committee, designed to support rapid and flexible preparation and coordination of the state's resources in the lead up to a disaster event, is well placed to be formally established in legislation in early 2024.

The State Disaster Management Group will support the Queensland Disaster Management Committee by providing strategic oversight and flexible, agile leadership early in a disaster event cycle and acting as a precursor prior to the convening of the Queensland Disaster Management Committee, and will also be available to provide advice or recommendations on disaster management strategies and policies to the Queensland Disaster Management Committee. Limiting the membership of the State Disaster Management Group to include only the core ministers, departmental officials and holders of statutory positions responsible for disaster management in Queensland allows the State Disaster Management Group to be convened on short notice to ensure it is highly responsive to any emerging disasters or similar events.

To support the emergency services functions moving to the Queensland Police Service, the Emergency Management and Coordination Command has been established. This command was established following the allocation of 80 new full-time positions, with 46 of those positions being filled by personnel who transitioned from the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service. The remaining positions have been the subject of a recruitment process.

Although this command is in its infancy, its personnel have a large knowledge base, expertise and strong existing relationships within communities. The command brings together personnel who already worked together under different leadership structures, enabling better coordination and alignment of services and a boost to the capability and communication between all levels of government. This command will support emergency and disaster management operations when events occur, whether this be from a local, district or state level response, to ensure the Queensland community is kept safe and is supported in their recovery.

Queensland's emergency services are based on community collaboration to deliver coordinated, cooperative and integrated outcomes. Whilst the Queensland Police Service will have an expanded role in control and command, the arrangements will continue to be locally led, district coordinated and state supported. I believe that everyone has a role and a shared responsibility to ensure Queensland is a disaster resilient state. Through our expanding role, the Queensland Police Service will continue to build strategic partnerships across all entities to improve emergency services through supporting governance, promoting clear roles and responsibilities and demonstrating true collaboration. Communities will remain at the forefront of disaster impacts and the importance of supporting communities to prevent, prepare for, respond to, recover from and become more resilient to disasters is essential. My colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions the committee has in relation to these bills.

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, Acting Assistant Commissioner. Given we are dealing with three bills, can members state before they ask their question whether their questions is a general question across the three bills or whether it relates to a specific bill so we can assist the witnesses.

Mr BENNETT: Thank you very much for the comprehensive briefing. Thank you all for the work you do in our community. I refer to clauses 17 and 22 which allow the provision of police officers to work with associations. I would like some examples, specifically in terms of marine rescue. Recent floods over a decade have been problematic for marine rescue and coast guards in relation to trying to protect yachties or boats that escape moorings. There are examples where those have been restrictive. You mentioned civil liberties a lot in your presentation. I am just trying to flesh out the benefits to those volunteer organisations with the capacity for police to be more heavily involved.

Assistant Commissioner Hill: A lot of what both organisations do now they have been doing for years. These bills will provide the relevant protections and authority, I suppose, for them to do some of those activities. Firstly, if you look at their powers of entry—perhaps a vessel has been adrift for years and they have gained entry to that vessel to secure it—the bill will provide them protections and legislative capacity to do that. They have worked very well with the Water Police, and that relationship will continue. The way that Marine Rescue is being set up is that their individual regions will be aligned to the search and rescue boundaries so that the existing relationships with the police are further strengthened because they will work within those boundaries with the people that they are used to working for. That does not mean that they are restricted to those boundaries; it is just their normal operating area. There is capacity to bring them out further. Bringing them under the police umbrella provides greater levels of support so that the operational aspects are more aligned and can be more closely aligned as they work together.

Mr Ringuet: In their role at the moment, the Water Police work hand in glove with the volunteers. At the moment, if it is a search and rescue incident, the QPS has the lead, and that is the way it currently works. I think what you are referring to is more in that self-deployed and local level—a runaway yacht—where it might not be a search and rescue incident but just a navigation hazard. At the moment, the legislation that comes into play provides marvellous protection for the volunteers to be able to enter on to the vessel. They may even have to force a door to get to something to be able to steer the vessel. Currently, there are no protections for them or civil liability protections; it is very much nearly a common law sort of process. The parts of the act will bring those protections in and will provide those protections for the volunteers, which is most important. I emphasise that it is all locally led at a local level. If it is not the biggest event but just a navigational hazard, it still is up to the local unit commanders to deploy and resolve the situation.

Ms LUI: My question is in relation to all three bills. The explanatory notes for each of the bills detail the estimated cost of implementation of this reform package as \$578 million and, as you stated, for the next five years from 2023-24 and ongoing funding of \$142 million per annum. Can you advise how this significant funding is distributed across QPS, Marine Rescue Queensland and the SES?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Out of the package the SES were provided a budget uplift which brings their annual budget to \$60 million ongoing. With regard to Marine Rescue Queensland, being a new entity, when the entity is created on 1 July this year it will have \$27 million and 35 full-time positions to provide support to those volunteers. The process where the volunteer organisations will be brought on will be a staged process, so it is not like we hit 1 July and everybody is onboarded, so it is important that the groups that are not onboarded immediately still have surety of their funding arrangements. Currently those groups operate under a grants program that is funded through government. Those grants will continue to support those units that have not transitioned across. Once July this year commences there will be \$27 million and 35 FTE to support Marine Rescue Queensland, but those individual groups that are yet to transition will still have funding to make sure that there is a continuity of service and there is no degradation of capability or capacity.

Dr ROBINSON: Gentlemen, I have a couple of questions with a Marine Rescue focus. Just teasing further out about the funding distributed across the various entities and the focus on the VMR, can we get some information on the breakdown per region or even per squadron? Obviously you have some sort of reason you come to those totals and I am assuming you are taking on board very real operational costs locally. For example, in my area we have several VMRs—Raby Bay, Dunwich, Victoria Point to the south and Redland Bay to the north—so there is a lot of interest in how that will work locally and regionally in the Redlands, and I am sure every region would be interested. Maybe you could take that on notice if you cannot answer now.

Mr Ringuet: No, definitely. Whilst I could not give you exact figures on those, what is key to the program in implementing and what is key to the volunteers is that local funds that have been raised locally stay local and local assets stay local under the control of their units. When we look at funding they are all DGR status organisations, so they currently have to report what their costs are on an annual basis. The program has gone back and sought access to those records and approached the units individually to see what it costs to run the business on a day-to-day basis. That is what those figures are based on and that is how the distribution will go out. Also, government has a commitment to building vessels—a capital investment program as well—that runs to \$22.38 million over the following years to replace ageing vessels in the fleet. Admittedly, some of those vessels that the volunteers have are getting a bit long in the tooth, so we are already looking into that and have a vessel replacement program and vessels are already being delivered to certain areas. Yes, we do have some vision, but because it is not a MoG—because we do not have those volunteer units under our umbrella yet—of course we have to ask the units individually as to what their costings look like if we cannot get it from their DGR status records. Whilst I could not give you a full breakdown, basically we are looking at what it costs to run the business, to fund it and work it from there.

Dr ROBINSON: Is it possible to get what you have in terms of breakdown per region or what you do have? I accept that this is an in-progress thing.

Mr Ringuet: Yes, it is.

Dr ROBINSON: I understand that.

Mr Ringuet: Yes. I would have to take that on notice and get some figures for you.

Dr ROBINSON: That would be wonderful if you could. You made some comment just before about individual groups yet to—you did not use the term ‘come on board’ but—

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Transition.

Dr ROBINSON: Yes, transition. Can you help me understand why they are not ready to go? This has been a process for a good few years. I am not sure why they are just not really at a point where we are bringing in legislation and we are bringing in funding packages. Why are they not all ready to go in terms of Marine Rescue?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Firstly, it is not mandated that every organisation must join Marine Rescue Queensland. It is a voluntary approach. Obviously through the negotiations that are currently underway we are encouraging all of the 46 groups to come across, so I suppose that is the first reason—it is not mandated—and then to bring the groups across is a massive change for the volunteers and also for the organisation. To make sure that they are change ready and that the change process does not impact too heavily on the volunteers—bearing in mind that volunteerism across the country has experienced a decline, so we are very keen to make sure that everything we do supports the volunteers and their way forward—it is quite a complex process that we need to go through to understand each unit, because not every unit is the same. That is the reason it is a staged approach.

Mr SKELTON: My question relates to the State Emergency Service Bill. Could you give me a percentage of state and local employees and volunteers who currently make-up the State Emergency Service?

Assistant Commissioner Cox: In terms of volunteer numbers, we have just over 5,000 volunteers at the moment. We currently have a baseline of existing staff of 114 which we are building to 159. We have been given funding approval. We are recruiting currently another 30 positions this financial year which will be in place by the end of this year and another 30 for next financial year, which will bring our grand total up to 219 full-time staff FTE that will support those volunteers.

Mr BERKMAN: I appreciate your time here this afternoon. Turning to the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill and specifically the transfer of a lot of responsibility to QPS as the lead agency, can you just give us a bit of a snapshot of what the ongoing responsibilities of QFES will be? What does that look like from a QFES perspective once QPS takes on those roles?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Once those groups transition across, essentially QFES, which goes back to the QFES review, will be a predominantly firefighting response organisation. That will be their sole focus through the rural and the urban units.

Mr BERKMAN: Okay, so it is that simple.

Assistant Commissioner Hill: That simple, yes.

Mr BERKMAN: That clarifies it very well; thank you. Just turning back to the question around funding that the member for Cook asked before, I am curious to know to what extent does the funding that is currently allocated and forecast take into account the projected increase in natural disasters that we are anticipating as a consequence of climate change, and alongside that I guess for the purpose of disaster resilience planning and funding?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Out of the program as well, when we are talking about disaster resilience, the Queensland Reconstruction Authority also received an uplift. They received an uplift of an additional 30 FTE to support their ongoing role, and they are bringing some functions in the resilience area across from Fire. For example, the If It's Flooded Forget It program transitions across to QRA. With their 30 FTE, they also received an additional \$4 million in funding to support that. As to what the future holds, obviously the budgets will be indexed as we go on and I suppose the first year of operation is going to be a really good sense check, particularly with Marine Rescue given that the organisation does not exist at the moment, so we need to fully understand how that \$27 million is going to be expended. At the moment, we are confident that that amount is sufficient, and likewise for the SES. With the uplift that they received in staff—so a total of 105 additional personnel and then their \$60 million uplift—the information we have at the moment suggests that that will be sufficient to do the majority of the work that needs to be done. Obviously with budgets things change, and that will be a matter that we will take to the budget process each year or for midyear reviews.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you. Just for clarity, the bills do not provide for any additional processes to double-check or reaffirm the sufficiency of those budget allocations; that will just proceed through the regular budget process?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Yes.

ACTING CHAIR: Assistant Commissioner, my question is in relation to consultation on the bills. Through the consultation you spoke with a number of stakeholder groups. Was the feedback generally supportive? Did the feedback lead to any amendments to the bills prior to their introduction?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Certainly from our perspective the feedback was positive. We received a number of submissions that outlined the positivity of the bills. From the feedback there have been no changes to the bill or no amendments to the bill that we deemed necessary, but, as I said, overall it was quite positive. With regard to some of the feedback through consultation, a lot of that will be dealt with in policy to make sure that those positions are clearly articulated, but, no, we were quite pleased with the feedback.

Mr BENNETT: There has been a lot of talk about uplift and the restructuring of departments and yet it is going to be what it is going to be, but I am just curious: is there anything on the horizon we could expect in that the Kedron facility had some disaster management concepts 10 or 12 years ago when it was built. As far as the QPS and the fire service, is there an expected large-scale renovation or remodelling process, or are you going to try to use the existing assets as they are?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: The aim at the moment is to use existing assets, so with the Emergency Management Coordination Command—the new command that was established within QPS—they currently sit out at Kedron in the State Disaster Coordination Centre. Room has been freed up there. The SES already have a footprint at Kedron and with QFES space is tight, but QFES are working on a plan and they will decamp some of their corporate areas. At the moment Kedron will use the existing space but we are also looking to supplement that. Given the uplift that Rural Fire Service has received, State Emergency Service received and Marine Rescue Queensland, they all have a regional presence as well, so part of our program is to look at accommodation needs throughout the state and also what existing accommodation we have in the south-east corner and what addition we might need, but at this stage Kedron will be used in its current form.

Mr BENNETT: I was going to ask about regionally because I guess—and this may be a policy position, so if I am out of order I will retract—going forward we do need to be looking at what future assets for QPS, QFES and others look like when we do capital works construction programs into the regions in particular for that capacity. Maybe I have just made a statement and I will leave it at that. Thank you.

Ms LUI: Assistant Commissioner Hill, you spoke before about aligning or collaborating the three services to better coordinate alliance services and capabilities. I take you back to the recent natural disaster event that occurred in Far North Queensland around Jasper and the impact to some of my communities in the electorate of Cook. I guess what I am trying to understand here today is how would this then enhance the capabilities to limit confusion within the communities, because my electorate is so vast and diverse and we had different areas in Cook that were severely impacted and there was some confusion around roles and responsibilities. Could you speak to some of the mechanisms that would address confusion moving forward?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: Certainly. Moving forward you will have the disaster management response which will essentially sit within the QPS. You will have the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue, so all three entities that support our disaster management response will sit within the one department which allows for consistency of policy and procedure. Even during activations, there can be a greater coordination of those than how they currently operate and where they are currently placed. I think that is probably the main advantage that will come out of the one agency—you are not dealing with multiple agencies—and then I think some of the changes that are coming with the Disaster Management Act will also enhance them. I do not know if Brian has anything he wanted to add.

Assistant Commissioner Cox: On top of that, we are supporting on the ground new capabilities within the SES such as the community engagement officers who will go towards that educational aspect and support, working very closely with the police at both the local disaster management group and the local disaster coordination centre level to the district level as well and then up to the state level. Having that single conduit will assist in that clear communication and information being passed out through a single department rather than multiple departments. I think that will assist in the clarity and the consistency of the messaging going up and down the disaster management arrangements.

Dr ROBINSON: I have some more questions with regard to Marine Rescue. I refer to the Blue Water Review that led to this reform and the costs of the Blue Water Review. I note that there are costings that go back to the reform package of 2023-24 and then budget projections beyond. Does any of that funding include the cost of the Blue Water Review, which I think has been going for several years? It maybe goes back about four years. Do we know what it has cost to date, and what was the precursor or what led to this?

Mr Ringuet: Yes, I would be able to get you those figures. It is a bit like the breakdown within the various 46 units that we would have. There would be a cost. The program has ramped up over time so costs would have increased over time. I would be able to get you those figures.

Dr ROBINSON: Could I have those figures on an annual basis, if that is possible? On each budget year, what was the cost of that review and a total? If that is achievable it would be wonderful. In terms of the interface with Canberra, I had heard that there were some challenges through the Blue Water Review and potentially with the reform going forward. Can you speak to some of the problems or some of the issues raised by stakeholders from Canberra? Clearly I am on the Queensland side here but I want to ensure that, as we work constructively and interface with federal departments, we can continue to do this effectively. Are there any concerns or challenges being faced?

Mr Ringuet: That is a very good question for the committee to explore. There are two volunteer organisations in Queensland, one of them being the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association, which is a nationally incorporated association based in Canberra. There is a state committee, a state board and a state president but they report to a national board. At the moment, in negotiations in relation to the transition, we have to deal with the national board. Currently, the national board has a position on things. We are currently in the negotiations phase. I prefer not to discuss with you what those negotiations entail, but there are some complexities around that. With the Volunteer Marine Rescue having about 21 of those 46 units, they are all individually incorporated in Queensland so we have negotiations individually with the presidents and the state council for the transition process to occur.

It is two different approaches for both organisations to discuss the transition. We are working hand in glove with the national board and the state. In fact, all of our early transition staff includes the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard units at this stage and we will continue to work with them until we get a decision from the national board in relation to transition.

Assistant Commissioner Hill: The member's question may have been around AMSA.

Dr ROBINSON: Yes, in part. That is very helpful to the committee. If there is anything further to it, please continue.

Mr Ringuet: For search and rescue arrangements, the national coordinator is AMSA. We are working hand in glove with AMSA as well in relation to this transition. What particularly relates to AMSA is the registration of vessels and the licensing of people to operate vessels. There are two parts for a volunteer organisation. One is a full commercial ticket and commercial registration of vessels but this is a much bigger process. AMSA offers, for marine volunteers, an exemption 24 which is the standard that is still mapped against national competencies for the operation of vessels and the registration of vessels, but it is an easier path than the commercial. That is regulated by both organisations. When it comes under one umbrella, we can get that standardisation across standards of training and operation of vessels and that will provide comfort to the Commonwealth as well in relation to the administration of that legislation.

Dr ROBINSON: Going back to the first area, is there any potential that this could end up with two different groups on two different pages and we do not progress this? I commend everyone involved in the process. It has not been an easy process and I am not negative about it. I am positive about the process. We have supported it. However, I am a bit concerned if there is margin for state and different entities to say, 'We're not in agreement yet.' You have budget projections and personnel that we are looking to recruit and make FTEs. When does this lock in so we have certainty?

Mr Ringuet: Can I say that the outcome of the review around standardisation of policy procedures, practices and equipment is what sells it to the volunteers. The reviews also state that spending the majority of their time, in some instances, raising funds rather than the operation of search and rescue is where the benefit will be. Government funding of the core process releases it so they can undertake their role. The sentiment that I experience amongst the volunteer groups and the majority of executives is very positive towards the transition. On views of one group versus another from the state or national level, yes, there are different sentiments from both.

Dr ROBINSON: I will leave it there, thank you.

Mr SKELTON: On the SES Bill, I note the enduring relationship between the SES and local governments including MOUs with the state government for the funding, training and administration of SES units. Can you advise how the new arrangements proposed by the bill will affect that relationship, especially in regard to SES members employed by local government?

Assistant Commissioner Cox: The current arrangements with the memorandums of understanding that we have with the majority of local governments talk about a shared partnership relationship where we provide training, doctrine, support procedures and some of the equipment that

we purchase that we gift to local governments that then maintain that equipment and support that equipment and provide facilities for SES and Marine Rescue. The MOU talks about what we do as a partnership, what the state provides and what local government provides in terms of making sure that we maintain our SES capabilities on the ground. Those agreements also talk about the functions that we want local government to provide. Local government talks about their hazards and their risks and they say, 'Here is what we want SES to do: flood boat operations, vertical rescue'—and whatever. We provide that support to them through training, doctrine, equipment and procedures to support that on the ground.

Moving forward, we are just doing a lift and shift in this particular phase. The bill does not change those MOUs. In the bill we talk about the arrangements that can be entered into by the state or the commissioner with local government. That still remains extant. We still have that partnership around having those discussions on the ground and what each local government—and there are 75 local governments that have SES units—need specifically for their communities. We tailor that MOU specifically for each local government to support them. There is no intention of changing that. The lift and shift that we have at the moment within the old act to the new act keeps those arrangements in place, to have those negotiations on the ground to support local communities. Does that answer the question?

Mr SKELTON: Yes, thank you.

Mr BERKMAN: You have already touched to some extent on how the move of Marine Rescue and SES personnel into the Queensland police as members of staff means they will be subject to the Police Service Administration Act and the explanatory notes list some of the obligations that will apply under those arrangements. Can you outline more generally how similar or different those obligations are for staff once they have made that move to the QPS?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: I might defer to John to talk about specifics, but there was quite a deliberate intention there to limit some of the impact that act has on the volunteer cohort. We will go through the specifics.

Mr Henderson: I think we can actually refer, when we are dealing with that issue, to some notes we have provided previously. In essence, the concept of having our volunteers deemed to be staff members under the Police Service Administration Act actually allows those volunteers to appreciate some benefits. The first benefit deals with the civil liability protections that are under section 10.5 of the Police Service Administration Act. There are a few various other benefits that will accrue as well as a consequence under the civil liability head. For writing reports, there is a civil liability protection that is given to staff members that will also accrue to volunteers. There will be certain exemptions where QPS staff members would normally be expected to comply with the PSAA that our volunteers will not be required to adhere to. For example, the QPS has an alcohol and drug regime that allows for breath testing of staff members and police if they are involved in a critical incident when they are involved in a critical area. That component of the PSAA will apply to staff members, basically, of the SES or MAQ, so state employees, who are working in potentially those critical areas. They will still have to apply to the PSAA regime but it will not apply to MAQ volunteers or to SES volunteers. We are not changing the status quo in relation to what you would expect of a volunteer by deeming them to have QPS staff member status. I will take a moment to think of a few others. We have a fair list to go through here, unfortunately.

I think one of the crucial components that is associated with this is, as a consequence of deeming volunteers as staff members, they will have to abide by confidentiality provisions that apply to information that is held by their respective agencies so that offence provision will apply to them. I think we have covered off on most of the range of potential impacts with applying them across to the PSAA as staff members. However, if I have not covered off on all of those aspects I will take that question on notice and add to it, if that is to your satisfaction.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you.

Mr BENNETT: This is an assumption but I guess it is also a question: with all the uplift and the reallocation of resources, can the community have confidence that things like communications at an operational level are adequate as we transfer? There is an assumption that it is all very compatible but you can never take anything for granted. Can you make a quick comment on communications and the capacity of the disaster management staff particularly to be rolled out effectively?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: The overriding consideration of all the reform process is that there is no degradation of service so the community will not notice a change. When you are talking about communications, if anything there will be an increase in capacity. Part of the increase includes bringing 14 FTEs with some funding to provide dispatch and monitoring services for the State

Emergency Service. At the moment, that is not a capability that exists in the form that it will. Obviously, as the Government Wireless Network or GWN rolls out, there is some work being done within the SES.

Mr BENNETT: How does that talk to northern New South Wales? Are they compatible?

Assistant Commissioner Hill: No. There is capacity to have localised talk groups but, within the state of Queensland, I suppose, the biggest enhancement of communications that we can certainly see is through that dispatch and monitoring process. There is capacity to monitor what we call duress alarms. On the Government Wireless Network, there is capacity to press a button if you are in distress and that provides capability for that individual to be located. That network, through the dispatch and monitoring process, will apply to our SES volunteers where the GWN has been rolled out. I will ask Brian to add to that.

Assistant Commissioner Cox: It is a good question. What we are doing is upgrading some of the radio communications right now for the SES, especially in the GWN footprint, that is, South-East Queensland and the northern areas. That will give us better talk groups so we can speak to each other and speak directly to police as well. The monitoring team, known as the Watch Desk, will be enhanced as said. They will be able to monitor where we are and our communications as well as a bit of a backup.

In terms of interoperability with other states and territories, the way we do that arrangement locally is that we will share and we will have a team member liaise with them when they go out. That communication will be done through one of our members with them rather than just having them all on different networks, so they can still talk to each other through that conduit that we will establish with them as part of the liaison team, if that makes sense.

CHAIR: That concludes the briefing. I thank everyone who has participated today. I thank our Hansard reporters. A transcript of the proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. Two questions were taken on notice. Can you please forward your responses to those two questions by Tuesday, 20 February? The first was the breakdown of funding by region; is that correct?

Dr ROBINSON: Region and squadron, if possible.

CHAIR: The second one was about the funding costs of the Blue Water Review on an annual basis, if possible; is that correct?

Mr BERKMAN: I think it was really if there was anything further around that.

Mr Henderson: I can elaborate on that, member. It is actually at pages 13 and 14 of the explanatory notes for the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill.

CHAIR: Responses are required by Tuesday, 20 February so that we can include them in our deliberations. I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 12.31 pm.