



Speech by

GRANT MUSGROVE

MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD

Hansard 17 September 1998

MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr MUSGROVE (Springwood—ALP) (6.20 p.m.): I am pleased to hear that, in common with the former Minister, the Minister also received a plaque. I am sure that she did not cry, because she knew that she was taking action to save the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

The Opposition's motion is an absolute joke. The Minister did not attack the board; she quoted from the independent audit of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority, which contained some criticism of the board. How can a Minister be condemned for quoting something that is written in black and white?

It is to the credit of the Minister, Merri Rose, that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority will be able to improve its service to the people. In recent times, Queensland's firefighters have been in turmoil because of constant reviews and changes to the service. Under this Government, there will be stability. Both the urban and rural firefighters will be able to concentrate on their job of protecting life and property. The Labor Government will give them the tools with which to do that job. This Government is committed to properly funding the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

The Minister has directed her department to prepare a strategy to resolve the long-term problems facing the fire service. Labor will recognise the contribution of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and its many thousands of permanent, part-time and voluntary staff. Firefighters are held in high regard by the communities in which they live, and so they should be. They are untiring workers both on and off duty. Queenslanders are fortunate to have thousands of such dedicated professionals and volunteers.

This morning, the members opposite proved that they are an absolute joke. Since arriving in this place, the lack of positive contribution to public policy formation and debate by the Opposition has surprised me. Earlier today, I was most surprised to hear how little the former Minister for Emergency Services, who I note has been dumped on the backbench, seemed to know about the fire service and the problems that he, in fact, created. He seems completely oblivious to the fact that the QFRA is facing a financial crisis. All that he can say in his defence is, "It'll be right, mate, this financial year." However, he conveniently steers well clear of talking about the future. He talks about the Masters report, which states that the fire service would be \$35m in the red.

Internal estimates by the Department of Emergency Services confirm that the Masters projections were conservative. The audit commissioned by the Honourable Minister shows clearly that the potential debt was \$118m. The former Minister should be called "Mushroom Mick". He must have been kept in his own littler corner in the dark, or else he is not telling the House all that he knows about the financial state of the fire service.

This Government is looking to the future. We will make it a rosy future, and that pun is unintended. We will ensure the QFRA's long-term viability; not like the Opposition, which left the fire service shuddering towards financial oblivion. The QFRA deserves better. Firefighters need to know that we will look after them. They would have been absolutely delighted to see what we delivered in this week's Budget. Those benefits will be spread right throughout the State so that all of Queensland benefits. This is a Government for all Queenslanders.
