



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

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MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (6.30 p.m.): The amendment moved by the Minister must get the full support of members from both sides of this House. Not to do so would be to insult those officers who risk their lives fighting to save the lives and property of Queenslanders.

The Government recognises the valuable contribution being made by members of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority, the vital service that they provide to Queensland communities and their dedication to performing that duty. I recognise their contribution and dedication, whether they are urban-based officers or volunteers of the 1,600 or so rural fire brigades that are registered throughout Queensland.

National Party members, Liberal Party members, One Nation Party members and Independents need to think very carefully about the amendment put forward by the Minister. To vote against the amendment is to question the commitment and dedication of the men and women firefighters right across this State. If members opposite vote against the amendment, they will be sending a signal to those men and women that they do not have confidence in their ability to do a dangerous job. To vote against the amendment is to deliver a kick in the guts to the men and women who volunteer their time and who put their hands into their pockets to provide a service to the community. If members have any understanding at all of urban and rural fire service needs, they will support the amendment moved by the Minister.

As the member for a large rural electorate, I can talk to members of any one of the more than 100 rural bush fire brigades that are scattered throughout central Queensland. I have made representations on behalf of fire brigades for many years and I will continue to do so for as long as I represent that area.

The Opposition can put any spin it likes on this debate but, as a rural-based member, I can tell the House that the Government is committed to backing rural fire services. The Government is committed to providing high-level support to rural fire services with the allocation of a \$3m funding increase over the next three years. The Government has placed special emphasis on increasing the rural fire service budget as a recognition of the sterling job performed by almost 50,000 volunteers throughout Queensland.

A plan to consolidate base funding for the rural fire service took shape when we were in Opposition and now that we are in Government it is being implemented. The Government supports the desire of the rural fire brigades to be an independent division of the QFRA. Members who represent country electorates should understand the passion that rural firefighters feel about that issue.

Under Labor policy, base funding will be consolidated to around \$10m a year. In addition, a further capital injection will be made to improve the safety of volunteers.

Mr Veivers interjected.

Mr PEARCE: The former Minister cannot argue against the amendment before the House tonight, because if he does so he will be condemning rural and urban firefighters. He will show that he does not care about them, even though he says that he does. To vote against the Minister's amendment will clearly demonstrate exactly how he feels.

The Government understands how vital the rural fire service is to so many communities. We are determined to provide it with the best possible resources. We will deliver on our policy to boost funding for the construction of rural fire service stations. I continually meet with members of rural brigades and volunteers who work throughout my electorate, and the need for new stations, vehicles and equipment is a consistent theme of those meetings. We will deliver on our policy to buy land for new stations and to purchase new equipment and safety gear. They deserve the best and they will get it; members opposite should support that. The Government will recognise the invaluable contribution of rural volunteers by providing extra protective clothing and boots.

As a further testament to our commitment, there are plans to deliver up to 100 new vehicles to rural fire brigades throughout Queensland. Twenty-two Mitsubishi Canter medium-attack rural fire trucks worth more than \$53,000 each are already under construction. We are getting on with the job. A further 51 Canter vehicles are planned, along with 23 Mitsubishi Triton light appliances worth more than \$33,000 each. The Goss Government started this program and it received a lot of credit from rural Queensland for doing so. I appreciate the signal from the member for Callide, who obviously supports what I say. He understands what happened. The previous Labor Government started this program and we will continue it.

Time expired.
