



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard 27 August 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.21 a.m.), by leave: Queensland's Fire and Rescue Authority is a financial basket case. The independent report by Price Waterhouse Coopers on the state of the QFRA's finances has shown the situation to be even worse than I expected. It shows the trust fund will be \$118m in the red within 6 years. That is the legacy of the previous Government. The report is a shocking indictment on my predecessor, the member for Southport, and the former Government. Listen to what the report says—

"A continuation of the QFRA's operations on the current basis will lead to reduced effectiveness and insolvency."

"Insolvency"! Queensland's fire service is going broke. This report tells us that if we do not do something now then our fire brigades, and our firefighters, will not—will not—be able to protect our communities to the standard Queenslanders have a right to expect. And what else does the report say? It says—

"... there is little evidence to suggest that action has been taken to rectify the major financial issues."

It says—

"Political issues have stalled action that should have been taken by the Board."

This report details a financial and accountability no-man's-land between the board and the previous Minister and Government. It outlines a complete lack of resolve to deal with the financial mess that is the QFRA trust fund. This mess has occurred because the former Minister, the Nero of Southport, fiddled while the fire service was burning. The former Minister, now forgotten and forlorn on the Opposition backbench, was playing Russian roulette with our communities, mortgaging the financial future and viability of the fire service.

With their unfunded 1995 election promises on additional firefighters, with their refusal to make adequate provision to fund the current enterprise agreement, with their refusal to fund the recommendations of the Staib review—which the board went about blithely implementing without worrying where the money was coming from—the coalition demonstrated a breathtaking level of financial irresponsibility. It is now my task to clean up this mess, and that is exactly what I am doing. I am currently negotiating a financial rescue package with the Premier and the Treasurer.

Let me reassure Queenslanders that, despite the havoc wreaked on our fire service by the thoughtless and reckless actions of the previous Government, the safety of our communities will not be compromised. The fire service will be kept in the black. It will be pulled back from the brink of bankruptcy, and it will continue to deliver an efficient, timely and professional fire and rescue service to Queensland. I will return the QFRA to a sound financial footing without it costing firefighters' jobs or adversely impacting on the QFRA's operational capacity.
