



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard 27 April 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Newcastle Disease Outbreak

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.06 a.m.), by leave: By this afternoon around 350 Queensland emergency services personnel will be at Gosford on the New South Wales central coast helping authorities fight to contain an outbreak of Newcastle disease. New South Wales Emergency Services Minister, Bob Debus, last Friday appealed for help. He told me that New South Wales volunteer resources were stretched to the limit responding to the Sydney hailstorm. Queensland was ready, willing and able to respond. Within hours an advance party of 34 firefighters was on a bus and heading south. They joined the operation on Sunday. While those firefighters were heading south, a second group was being mobilised to join the operation. That group, comprising 115 permanent and auxiliary firefighters, flew out of Brisbane yesterday and is operational today. Around 200 permanent, auxiliary and rural fire volunteers and SES volunteers fly to Sydney this afternoon to join their colleagues. Queensland's contingent on the central coast will then be around 350-strong.

This disease outbreak is serious. That was made clear to me by my New South Wales counterpart, Mr Debus. It is said to be the worst outbreak of exotic disease among animals in Australian history and has the potential to decimate the poultry industry if we do not curtail its spread. Authorities fear the disease could spread beyond the 30 chicken farms now quarantined. Up to two million chickens must be destroyed. There are grave fears that another three million chickens in the surrounding districts may need to be destroyed. An urgent response was vital, and we have delivered.

Queensland is sending firefighters from as far north as Cooktown and south to the Gold Coast. Rural fire volunteers from the north coast and south-east of the State will join 56 SES volunteers from north coast, metropolitan and Darling Downs divisions. New South Wales is grateful for the Queensland assistance. The Queensland contingent will allow the kill rate to be doubled, reducing the chance of the disease spreading beyond the immediate area.

In organising the Queensland response, the QFRA has taken care to ensure that its ability to deliver fire cover has not been diminished. Only off-duty firefighters are being deployed. The rapid response from Queensland shows our counter-disaster system is working. We have been able to mobilise a small "army" and within a very short space of time have personnel on the ground providing vital assistance in New South Wales' time of desperate need. The multi-agency response has been coordinated from the State Counter Disaster Centre at my department's Kedron headquarters. We have been in constant touch with other agencies in both Queensland and New South Wales.

The Queenslanders who have volunteered to help in this operation must be commended for their selfless response. Yet again, it is a shining example of the Queensland spirit of helping others in their time of need. The effort of the full-time, part-time and volunteer firefighters and SES volunteers will not be forgotten.
