



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard 27 April 1999

GOVERNMENT ELECTION PROMISES

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (6.40 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment moved by the Premier. For members opposite to seek to condemn this Government for anything is an absolute joke. For those opposite to stand on that side of the House and criticise us for turning around the disastrous mess in which they left the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority is mind boggling. I find it incredible that they have even put their heads up on this issue. I can give those opposite an absolute guarantee: every time they put their heads up on this issue I will keep lopping them off.

During the Opposition's time in Government it sat on its hands, crossed its fingers and hoped its problems would go away. We had the three wise monkeys—and they are all in the Chamber—the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Caloundra and the former Minister, the member for Southport. It was a case of hear no deficit, see no deficit, speak no deficit.

Three separate reviews of the fire service highlighted the need for action. Two of those reviews occurred whilst the coalition was in Government. What did those opposite do about it? Nothing! The Leader of the Opposition and his emergency services spokesman go to great pains to claim that they left the QFRA trust fund in the black. I understand their embarrassment. I understand why the Leader of the Opposition is so embarrassed at the appalling way in which the coalition managed the QFRA trust fund. Those opposite keep on clinging to the unbelievable claim that they left the trust fund \$18m in the black—enough to run the fire service.

Do those opposite know how much it costs to run the service each year? It costs over \$200m a year. Those opposite left the fund \$18m in the black. Heavens above! The service has been allocated \$209m in the 1998-99 financial year. We had the Staib review, the Masters report and the PricewaterhouseCoopers report. All of those inquiries reported that the fire service needed additional funding or it would go broke.

But the Opposition Leader, with his \$18m, boasted that the fire service was okay. This has to be the most pathetic attempt at denial of the facts that this House has witnessed in a long time. It was left to this Government to repair the damage.

Cabinet has approved a financial rescue package for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority that will help protect communities across the State. It will also ensure the future financial security of our fire service. After considering a range of options to boost the level of funding, this Government opted for a 27c a week levy increase—less than the cost of a local phone call or a postage stamp. The fire and community safety levy rises from \$98 an urban household to \$112. That increase will allow a \$25.5m annual injection of additional funds into the QFRA. Every cent will go to improving fire services to Queensland communities—every single cent. The alternative to the minor increase was to sack firefighters, close fire stations and compromise on equipment and training, which is exactly what those opposite were going to do. We would have no part of such a scenario. We will not compromise the safety of Queenslanders, which is what the Opposition was doing.

This package will ensure that an improved standard of fire cover is delivered and that the QFRA is properly funded into the 21st century. We will expand fire safety, education and prevention programs and focus on the full range of rescue services, from road accident to building collapse and swift water rescues, as well as respond to chemical spills and incidents involving toxic materials. The funding injection will allow the QFRA to significantly boost its ability to protect communities during fires, rescues and other emergencies.

The levy increase is transparent. Even those opposite can see where the money is going—back into our fire services. It is going back into protecting Queenslanders in communities across the State. It is going back into protecting our firefighters. Yet Mr Borbidge again twists the truth. He says that there are rumours that the money will be siphoned off for other purposes. Wrong, wrong, wrong!

This Government has put the fire service on a secure financial footing. None of the carping or whingeing or false history from the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues can change that fact. The need to boost funding to the QFRA has been recommended in three separate reviews.

Time expired.
