



Speech by

**Hon. MERRI ROSE**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

---

Hansard 9 November 1999

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**State Emergency Service; SES Week**

**Hon. M. ROSE** (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.07 a.m.), by leave: This week is SES Week. Communities across Queensland owe their State Emergency Service volunteers a debt of gratitude. In any 24-hour period in Queensland, around 50 SES volunteers are activated in a range of roles. Queensland's SES volunteers are the best in Australia, because they are exposed to a wide range of natural disasters and incidents and, consequently, are better trained and better prepared to respond to any situation.

Activations for major incidents across the State have increased over the past 12 months. The last storm season was the worst for some time, with widespread flooding in the south-west, south-east, central and northern parts of the State and savage storms in other areas. In recent days, parts of the State have been lashed by early storms, with major crop damage on the Granite Belt. Indications are that we cannot expect the current storm season to be any less devastating than last summer, when Cyclone Rona and a string of storms caused crop and property damage estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars.

Later today, it will give me great pleasure to officially launch SES Week 1999 here at Parliament House. This year's theme is Prevention Pays. It provides us with the opportunity to tackle community apathy and complacency about the risk of cyclones, storms and flooding. We want people to find out how to prepare for disasters to avoid becoming victims. There are simple measures that people can take now to protect themselves against floods and other natural disasters. The Department of Emergency Services and SES are already active in the north of the State. I have just returned from the far north and was impressed by the awareness campaign being conducted there. In the lead-up to the cyclone season, this simple poster that I am holding up says it all.

We cannot afford to be complacent. SES volunteers will again this summer be playing a vital role in preparation for storms and in the clean-up afterwards. All Queenslanders need to recognise the incredible service these men and women provide to their communities. SES Week is an opportunity for us to acknowledge the dedication, commitment and skill of SES volunteers. It is also appropriate that we thank employers around the State who allow the volunteers time off so they can work for others. Without this support, and without the support of local government across Queensland, the SES could not be the highly efficient and effective organisation that it is.

The SES was born in the wake of the devastating 1974 floods out of a need for a better coordinated response to natural disasters and major incidents. Today it boasts 33,000 volunteers. There are over 150 SES local units and more than 340 groups across the State. The value of the organisation is highlighted every time we face a natural disaster or emergency situation. Whether volunteers are responding to a natural disaster such as flood or cyclone—and we have had plenty of experience of that over the past 12 months—or involved in searches for missing persons or other activations, the SES is always there to help.

Never was the worth of the SES more clear than during the recent land search in the Kenilworth area. The search for missing Nambour schoolgirl Jessica Gaudie continued for almost a month, involving 400 individual SES volunteers for more than 15,000 person hours. It was the biggest single land search conducted in Queensland. It was conducted in conditions varying from searing heat to teeming rain. Volunteers slogged their way through heavy forest and rough terrain, dealing with ticks

and leeches and heat exhaustion. The search was physically and emotionally draining. This commitment clearly shows the dedication of our SES volunteers—dedication they exhibit every day.

Over the past year, our volunteers have answered an SOS to tarp roofs in Sydney, helped eradicate Newcastle disease in chickens on the NSW Central Coast, been involved in numerous major searches for missing people and provided disaster support. They support their local communities and other emergency services through traffic control, flood boat rescues, road accident rescues, land search operations and welfare management. They do not join for personal gain. Their only reward is satisfaction that they have been able to help their friends, their mates and their local communities. They deserve acknowledgment.

On behalf of the Government, I thank every SES volunteer and every SES cadet for the work they have done—or will do—for communities across the State.

---