



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

International Volunteers Day

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (9.49 a.m.), by leave: Sunday marked an important day for tens of thousands of Queenslanders. It was International Volunteers Day. The vastness of our State and the relative isolation of a large number of Queensland communities mean volunteering has always played, and will always play, a crucial role in our daily lives. Since colonial times, communities have drawn on their own resources to ensure provision of vital services and for protection in times of drought, bushfire and flood. While today we have more sophisticated ways of providing essential services and dealing with such things as the tyranny of distance and natural disasters, one thing can never be replaced by machinery or technology—the human spirit. Our volunteers have that in abundance.

Today, volunteers are an integral part of a wide range of community services. Sporting bodies, the arts, the tourism industry, conservation and environmental bodies, educational institutions and my own portfolio, Emergency Services, all rely on volunteer support. Across the State more than 33,000 SES volunteers carry out a wide range of tasks for their community from traffic control, to land searches, counter disaster operations, road accident and other rescues. Meanwhile, Queensland's 45,000 rural volunteer firefighters protect 90% of the State's land mass from fire. The Department of Emergency Services also calls on thousands of other volunteers with skills in a range of areas.

More than 6,600 active volunteer surf-lifesavers do a magnificent job patrolling Queensland's beaches. They have saved in excess of 71,000 lives over the past 60-odd years. Then there are the blue water guardians—the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard and the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association, each boasting around 1,500 active members. There are also 392 honorary ambulance officers at work in remote communities around the State. They are trained to provide first response emergency care until an ambulance arrives or the patient is evacuated. The CHEM Unit has 34 volunteer scientists and chemical experts on hand across the State to provide advice and assistance during chemical emergencies.

Each year, emergency services volunteers spend hundreds of thousands of hours involved with operations and many more hours in training. This year has been particularly hectic for volunteers. Their activities provide some insight into just how valuable they are to communities. The year 1999 started with volunteers working side by side with their communities to help clean up after severe flooding across much of the State and Cyclone Rona in the north. Then they lent a hand during two New South Wales operations when their southern colleagues could not cope—in Gosford to help eradicate the highly contagious Newcastle disease and then in Sydney after the city was lashed by a destructive hailstorm.

Back in Queensland, hundreds more SES volunteers spent thousands of hours with two heartbreaking searches—for nine-year-old Keyra Steinhardt in Rockhampton and Nambour teenager Jessica Gaudie around Kenilworth. More recently, rural volunteer firefighters have had to contend with a spate of bushfires, many of them deliberately lit. The culprits showed callous disregard for the safety of those who fight the flames.

The year 2001, as International Year of the Volunteer, provides a wonderful opportunity to promote the work of volunteers. My department is developing initiatives for 2001, along with representatives of emergency service volunteer organisations, local government and community groups. They will be focusing on boosting the number of volunteers in Queensland, attracting young

people to volunteer organisations and gaining recognition for volunteers. However, recognition is rarely the driving force for the men and women who sacrifice their own time for others; they do it for the satisfaction of helping their communities.

I would like to make special mention of some individuals who are even more behind the scenes than the volunteers themselves: their families. Volunteers could not do their job without the support and understanding of their loved ones. Employers who generously allow their staff members time off work to battle bushfires or floods or to join a land search also deserve special thanks. Finally, I would like to thank every volunteer in Queensland for their dedication, energy and selflessness.
