



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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STATE COUNTER-DISASTER ORGANISATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (12.51 p.m.), in reply: I thank the Opposition for supporting the Bill. I also thank the member for Hervey Bay for his comments. I recognise his support for volunteer emergency service workers.

The shadow Minister referred to Y2K planning for local governments. The department has been assisting local governments with reviews of plans. In addition, it has been conducting workshops across the State. Existing plans cover the situation well, but some need updating and expansion. No specific requests for funding have actually been received from local governments. I take note of the member's other comments on matters relating to volunteers and rural fires. However, I will confine my comments to the contents of this Bill. I am sure that we will have a debate on some of those other issues.

I again thank honourable members for their support. This Bill is a vital step in ensuring that the safety and protection afforded to Queensland communities continues into the new millennium. Our disaster management system is very sound. In the past it has enabled us to successfully manage many natural disasters and it will continue to do so in the future. However, as I have said, if any of our essential services suffered a major disruption or malfunction, new challenges would be presented. Failures in an essential service could have serious ripple effects on other essential services and infrastructure systems.

The State Counter-Disaster Organisation Act focused on natural disasters, such as cyclones, floods, earthquakes, an epidemic or plague, a fire or an oil spill. The new definition would cover other possibilities, such as dam failures, the collapse of a freeway system, terrorists acts against an electricity distribution system or possible failure in an essential service caused by Y2K problems at the turn of the century. The Bill will give a clearer legal basis to disaster contingency planning undertaken by local governments in disaster-stricken districts. The amendments will extend the current indemnity provisions to apply to response and recovery activities that might be necessary if severe or widespread disruptions to essential services and infrastructure occurs. Further, it will appropriately extend the authority to declare a state of disaster in accordance with the broader amended definition of the term "disaster" in the Act.

We are leaving nothing to chance. When I introduced this Bill, I said that if something goes wrong as the clock ticks over to 2000, the Government will be ready for action. I said then and I say again that we are being extremely cautious and taking out insurance. We have drawn up a contingency plan that we believe will never be necessary. However, we must be prepared. This amendment reinforces the Government's commitment to ensuring the safety of Queenslanders and provides additional support to the communities and the volunteers who protect them. I commend the Bill to the House.
