



Speech by

**Mr. R. CONNOR**

**MEMBER FOR NERANG**

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Hansard 27 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
Estimates Committee B  
Report**

**Mr CONNOR** (Nerang—LP) (3.42 p.m.): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee B and, more particularly, on the Ambulance Service. A recent decision to remove the ambulance service from Nerang came totally out of the blue. There was no warning. There was no indication that the township of Nerang was to lose a major service until recent comments in the newspaper and the Parliament. In the *Hinterland Sun*, our local newspaper, the following was announced on 22 September—

"The Nerang community is up in arms after learning the town is to lose its ambulance service.

A spokesman for Emergency Services Minister Merri Rose confirmed the service had been asked to vacate the shared facility at Nerang Police Station by Monday week.

Nerang Police require all the space in the new Cotton Street police station and have also taken over all of the old police station."

In the House during the Estimates committee hearing on 6 October, the Minister confirmed this story and said—

"A few weeks ago, with very little notice, the Police advised us that they needed that accommodation"—

and she was referring to the ambulance space at Nerang Police Station—

"... because they wanted to expand their own Service and that accommodation was no longer going to be available for the Queensland Ambulance Service."

Nerang has faced many hardships in recent times with little help from Government. The people of Nerang are simply fed up with being treated like second-class citizens. And then we are told by the Emergency Services Minister, Merri Rose, that the police have evicted the Ambulance Service, and so Nerang loses again.

These statements by the Minister have the Gold Coast police fuming. They maintain that they were only asking what the Ambulance Service's intentions were in relation to the Nerang Police Station because the lease had expired almost 18 months earlier. The police were in the process of establishing a new squad. The police had a number of options available to them to establish and relocate personnel. Moving them to the ambulance section of the new Nerang Police Station was only one of those options.

On the basis of the Minister's statements and the media coverage, needless to say the community and I were angry at the police. How dare they, at the last minute, evict an essential service out of Nerang! It was totally unfair, totally unjustified and totally unacceptable to the people of Nerang. So on the basis of the Minister's statement, I then publicly condemned the police for this action. Yesterday, I publicly apologised to the Police Service, and especially to the inspector in charge at Nerang, Ken Fox, for my public comments. I table a copy of the letter that I sent to Inspector Fox. I had

assumed that what the Minister, Merri Rose, said in the Parliament and in the media was true, but that was not the case.

Yesterday, the Minister showed me the letter from the Assistant Police Commissioner on the Gold Coast, Allan Robert, whom she maintained had evicted the ambulance from the Nerang Police Station. The letter said nothing of the sort. The letter brings to the attention of the Ambulance Service that the formal lease had expired in June 1998, that the police had become aware that the Ambulance Service was reviewing its options in relation to the ambulance facilities, and that this could be timely because the police were considering their options.

The Minister's statement is unequivocal. She maintained in the House—and she has said it repeatedly in the public arena—that the police evicted the ambulance. That is simply not true. The Minister has misled this House, and I intend to refer this matter to Mr Speaker for his consideration. We have the Minister maintaining that the police evicted the Ambulance Service, giving them only a matter of days' notice. We have the police saying that they did not evict the Ambulance Service and were just inquiring as to their intentions. Someone must be lying. But it gets worse. It then became like an episode of Fawlty Towers, with Manuel—Merri Rose—rushing around without a clue of what was going on.

**The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN** (Mr Reeves): Order! The member will refer to other members by their correct titles.

**Mr CONNOR:** The Minister was rushing around without a clue of what was going on. Then we had the comical scene played out in Worongary, where the ambulance officers from Nerang had been relegated to a demountable building not much better than a shed. It was hastily erected beside the currently vacant Worongary Fire Station. The Ambulance Service, an emergency facility servicing the hinterland, has been relegated to not much more than a shack. At the same time, we have a fully functional fire station sitting right beside it—empty, except for a non-operational fire engine. If it was not so important, it would be hilarious. I have little doubt that it would make an excellent episode in an Australian version of Fawlty Towers.

The Emergency Services Minister also maintains that they will be building a new ambulance station at Worongary. Well, if that is the case, why can they not simply use the old fire station until then or let the ambos share it with whomever is going to use it? Even though there is nothing in the Budget documents to indicate that it is true, we have a commitment from the Minister that we will have a new ambulance station in Worongary in 12 months' time. We have to take that commitment with a grain of salt, too. What a joke! The Minister has to understand that the circumstances in the hinterland are such, and the distances so great, that we have to have an effective ambulance service.

Time expired.

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