



Speech by

**Mr T. MALONE**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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Hansard 30 November 1999

### **SUNSHINE COAST SES FUNCTION**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (1.30 p.m.): On Saturday afternoon I attended a barbecue at Booroomba Dam in the Sunshine Coast hinterland for those people who were involved in the recent massive search for three missing women in the area. The search started out as being one for a missing schoolgirl, but was expanded because of circumstances at the time. The bulk of those involved in the function were members of 31 SES groups throughout 13 south-east Queensland shires. They were joined by their families. The function was regarded as a wind down to what was the biggest search of its kind ever held in Queensland.

Few people would realise what a massive undertaking the search was. It involved 1,500 man-days and between 60 and 140 people on any one day. About half of the man-hours were put in by members of four SES groups from the Maroochy Shire. The search lasted 26 days and involved almost 400 people from all parts of the community, including the SES, the Salvation Army, the St John Ambulance and many others. The coordination of the search required a great deal of effort and skill. While there were some unavoidable hiccoughs, the whole exercise highlighted the competence of hundreds of SES personnel and other service providers.

The use of a communications bus, hand-held GPSs and a mobile repeater are examples of the technology that was necessary to make this an effective search, as was the use of helicopters and 15 SES vehicles. There were many examples of the community giving additional support to the search effort. For example, the Maroochy Shire RSL donated a satellite telephone worth over \$4,500.

Although the search itself attracted a great deal of public attention, many aspects of the personal and community effort went unnoticed. I would like to use the time available to me today to highlight the excellent work being done by members of SES groups throughout the State and to stress the problems that we are likely to face in the future if Governments of all persuasions do not face up to their responsibilities in this area.

The search I referred to earlier was a very expensive exercise, but the State bore very little of the cost. Had the SES volunteers been paid, this Government would have been up for a bill of around \$250,000 in wages alone. However, there was no wages bill for the SES members. There was no invoice for the 1,500 man-days spent on the job in an area noted for its very rugged terrain. Those 1,500 days were given freely by community-minded citizens.

I am extremely concerned that, as time goes by, the number of volunteers available to local organisations such as the SES will decline to an alarming level. In recent years we have regularly heard how organisations such as service clubs, P & Cs and other similar bodies have struggled for membership. We have seen sporting bodies fold or come close to folding, mainly because their volunteer pools are drying up. It is often said that part of the reason for that is the threat of litigation that volunteers are exposed to. I do not know the accuracy of the research to back up that statement, but I would not be at all surprised if it was the case.

I do know that SES groups give of their time for weekly training exercises and call-outs for no other reason than to help their communities. They get a great deal of personal satisfaction out of that, but they receive no monetary gain. I wish to stress that it actually costs them quite a deal more than time and effort. For many, it also means money. Many are self-employed but they are prepared to sacrifice part of their income to help where it is necessary.

If we reach the stage where the number of volunteers decreases, we simply could not afford to replace them. It would not be that simple. We could not afford to have a paid reserve of people to take up what is now a volunteer role. In recent years, successive Governments have poured additional funds into the SES in this State. I was disappointed when the Minister ruled out any additional service assistance to local authorities in this year's budget to help this arm of Government provide SES services. The burden is being placed more and more on local government, but nowhere near enough support has been given from the State level. I was very pleased to see the Government flag its intention of obtaining an additional \$1m for SES cadets, which was an initiative of the Borbidge Government. However, nothing was allocated to local government and nowhere near enough was provided to assist volunteers in avenues such as the provision of clothing and equipment.

I know that SES volunteers like to hear their work being recognised and praised. It is easy for us to stand up and heap awards and praise on them.

Time expired.

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