



Speech by

Mr S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

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APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Sunnybank—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (2.50 p.m.): The Beattie Labor team went to the 1998 election with a commitment to put Emergency Services on a more secure financial footing. We wanted to ensure that Queensland communities get world-class emergency services delivered in the most professional and efficient manner. For the first time, Emergency Services was made a stand-alone portfolio, and we remain committed to making Queensland a safer community. To achieve this goal, we have in our first term implemented key strategies that focus on improving service delivery and response times by increasing capital works funding to provide more facilities, more vehicles and more staff, and transforming what was previously a response-orientated organisation into a department where fire, ambulance and counter-disaster and rescue services are increasingly focused on prevention and mitigation strategies.

The Beattie Labor Government has honoured these election commitments and continues to deliver for our Queensland communities and our emergency service organisations. We have provided record funding for emergency services, fire, ambulance, the SES and other counter-disaster and rescue services in each of our three Budgets to date. This year we are providing the Department of Emergency Services with a \$479.9m budget—another record. In terms of Government initiative funding, Labor is providing the department with \$106.2m more per year than what the coalition provided in its last Budget in 1997-98. That is an extra \$68.765m a year for ambulance, an extra \$31.9m for fire, and an extra \$5.5m for counter-disaster and rescue services, including the SES.

The additional funding for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority includes a \$25m per year rescue package to revive it from the financial basket case it became under the coalition. Every cent of that money is being spent on new fire stations, vehicles and equipment to support firefighters in the provision of vital fire and rescue services. Record funding has also been plunged into community fire safety and education programs—\$19m last year and more than \$20m this year.

Meanwhile, our investment in the Queensland Ambulance Service is beginning to pay dividends, through improved service delivery and reduced response times. Increased funding of \$68.7m for new initiatives over the past three years has allowed us to provide more ambulance stations, more ambulance officers and paramedics, more vehicles and better communications across Queensland to meet the demands placed on the QAS by a growing and ageing population. Last year the Queensland Ambulance Service not only achieved its response time target of 67% of Code 1 cases responded to in less than 10 minutes; it bettered it. The most recent quarterly figures put Code 1 responses at 68%.

We are also providing more assistance to local communities for natural disaster risk assessments and mitigation strategies to prepare them for natural disasters. We are providing more resources and support for our 85,000 volunteers in the SES rural fire brigades, volunteer marine rescue and coastguard units. We are showing our ongoing commitment to a strong SES by funding more personal protective equipment for volunteers, more support staff and training, more road accident rescue gear and better communications. This year, the SES received special funding of \$1m to support volunteers, improve their safety on the job and improve service delivery to the community. The \$1.5m SES flood boat replacement program continues this year, with funding for around 20 new boats. An additional \$120,000 for personal protective equipment has been included, for a total budget for clothing

and protective equipment of some \$422,000 this year alone. SES volunteers are receiving strong leadership through the Director of the SES, a position abolished by the previous Government.

While I am on that, I noted that the Opposition spokesperson for Emergency Services—who unfortunately is not in the Chamber at the moment to hear this—claimed that we are continuing to downgrade the SES within the Department of Emergency Services. I mentioned during the Estimates hearings that that was not the case at all. In fact, we are boosting the SES and, in particular, stopping the trend that was quite apparent under the previous Government towards the SES being controlled by local government. Of course, the shadow Minister denied that.

I will table for the information of the House—because I did not have it at the time— the newsletter that was published for the SES by the previous Government. It is titled "SES News", and the subheading is "Local government volunteer SES units". If that is not enough, just in case someone suggests that was purely a departmental thing, I have a quote from the former Minister, Mick Veivers, who says in the article on the front page of this particular newsletter—

"This is one of the most activated districts in the State ... Demands on Local Government SES Volunteers are on the rise."

There can be no clearer indication that, under the previous Government, the push was on to devolve responsibility for the SES to local government. It is this Government that stopped that trend.

Time expired.
