



Speech by

Mr S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

Hansard 19 October 2000

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Urban Fire Crews

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Sunnybank—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.16 a.m.), by leave: Recently, claims have been made in the media that staffing levels of Queensland's urban fire crews are dangerously low because the fire authority cannot guarantee internationally recognised minimum crew levels for fire appliances. I can assure honourable members and all Queenslanders that the opposite is, in fact, the case. Official data from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority shows that, even with unexpected staff absences, we are achieving almost 100% success in meeting internationally recognised crewing levels.

The international benchmark for minimum crewing of fire appliances is one officer plus three firefighters per vehicle. One plus three, however, is not provided for or maintained in all States in Australia. In Queensland, the QFRA currently rosters its staff to provide a crew of one officer and three firefighters for every first response fire vehicle in at least 63 permanently staffed urban fire stations in Queensland. This staffing arrangement was implemented on 1 July following a successful six-month trial of one plus three crewing conducted in conjunction with the union.

The QFRA currently operates approximately 4,380 shifts per month on first response appliances at urban fire stations throughout Queensland. QFRA data shows that in July all but eight of those 4,380 shifts were crewed at the one plus three level—a 99.82% success rate. In August, all but 10 of the 4,380 shifts were crewed at the one plus three level—a 99.77% success rate. Even during September, when unexpected staff absences affected 56 of the 4,380 shifts, the QFRA was still able to achieve a 98.72% level of one plus three crewing. Overall, during the first three months of this financial year, the QFRA has achieved one plus three crewing levels on 99.4% of nearly 13,000 urban fire shifts.

To describe this nearly 100% success record as "dangerously low staffing levels" is a gross exaggeration and to suggest that we are not delivering on our promises is incorrect. The Beattie Government was elected with a commitment to improve funding, resources and staff right across Queensland's emergency services, and we have delivered. When we were elected in 1998, we found a fire service that was rapidly going broke. We have turned that around and are delivering staff and resources for the QFRA that have never been seen before in Queensland.

Over the past two years, an additional \$52m plus has been invested in more staff, more fire appliances, better pay and conditions, and new and refurbished fire stations. It is, of course, desirable that we achieve a 100% success rate on minimum crew sizes. However, this will be achieved only with the cooperation of the union as discussions continue.
