



Speech by

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DANGEROUS GOODS SAFETY MANAGEMENT BILL

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (3.45 p.m.): The Dangerous Goods Safety Management Bill provides authorisation for a scientific advisory service at hazardous materials incidents. I would like to explain to the House in more detail what valuable and necessary work is carried out by this advisory service and how this bill will address a current shortfall in coverage.

The advisory service is known as the RACE service, which is short for Response Advice for Chemical Emergencies. It is coordinated by the CHEM Unit in the Department of Emergency Services; that is, the Chemical Hazards and Emergency Management Unit.

RACE is unique in Australia. It is a specialised scientific advisory service that is used by the emergency services and police at the scenes of serious chemical incidents. The highly trained chemists and chemical engineers assess and advise on how the risks faced by emergency workers and the community can be managed and minimised. Typically, the advice includes protection of public safety, impact of chemical exposure, selection of fire extinguishing agent, management of fire water run-off, atmospheric monitoring, disposal of chemical residues and decontamination of equipment. The hazardous materials emergencies covered by RACE include chemical incidents, fires and—potentially—terrorist incidents involving chemical, biological or radiological weapons.

Since its inception in 1992, RACE personnel have provided 24-hour advice and assistance to the emergency services and police at more than 900 incidents. In Brisbane and surrounding metropolitan areas RACE personnel are full-time officers of the CHEM Unit and Queensland Health Scientific Services. In regional areas the service is provided by a network of approximately 34 volunteers who are employed in local government, tertiary education institutions and the private sector. The CHEM Unit trains and supports these officers.

RACE advisers were originally authorised under the Contaminated Land Act 1991. Since the repeal of that act, they have been authorised on an interim basis under the Environmental Protection Act 1994. Without authorisation, RACE advisers cannot legally exercise the powers of entry and investigation that are fundamental to the task of discerning the nature and extent of risks posed by hazardous materials at an incident. The Dangerous Goods Safety Management Bill will provide full authorisation for all RACE advisers in all aspects of the advisory service, which is not possible under the current provisions of the Environmental Protection Act.

I commend the bill to the House as a major initiative of this government in providing the authorisation that is necessary for the total support of this essential public service. It is another clear illustration that this government is committed to action to protect the people of Queensland.
