



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

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Hansard 2 August 2001

**APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D]**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (12.17 p.m.): I congratulate the Emergency Services Minister on the project titled 'Economic costs of disasters in regional Queensland', which aims to develop a methodology for the assessment of the economic impact of disasters in a regional context. Too often the true economic cost is misjudged, and many intangible and indirect losses go unrecognised. As stated, the project is expected to be completed in November. Tragedy in cities has a relatively easy base from which to count the costs, but in rural and regional areas the costs can sometimes be hidden and this project is very welcome.

Another section of the estimates hearing that was pleasing is the allocation of \$1 million to address SES workers' personal protection. Those men and women risk their lives for communities in numerous ways and it is the government's responsibility to do its best job to keep those volunteers safe. The \$25,000 allocated for overalls, boots, helmets, safety glasses and wet weather jackets, the \$530,000 for communication equipment upgrades, and the \$170,000 for the back order of overalls reflects the high value of our volunteers and the fact that that high value is noted by the government. Recently I read of the enormous number of man-hours involved in volunteer work. The costs would be prohibitive if any government had to pay for that. Therefore, I think \$1 million is a very good deal for the government.

When it comes to equipment, it is hoped that this government will look favourably upon the Wattle Camp Rural Bush Fire Brigade and that a replacement for its old Ford truck will soon be forthcoming. The old Ford has had a long life and served many communities, including Kumbia in my electorate. I am told that it is 31 years old. Many of the Wattle Camp Bush Fire Brigade members believe not only that it is part of the Wattle Camp family but also that it is the most reliable. Recently it was my pleasure to open Wattle Camp's new shed, which the volunteers worked very hard to raise finance to build.

With the ever-increasing reclassification of land as national parks and other forest areas being closed and left unattended, I would like to know what provisions have been made to cope in these areas when the inevitable bushfires start. Many areas in my electorate are quietly building up to be lethal deathtraps for our volunteers. In parts of my electorate, which is only 40 kilometres out of Brisbane, government members can see areas that have been closed and which have become overgrown with lantana, noxious weeds and covered in thick combustible material—natural rubbish. What provisions has the minister made to ensure that when these fires do inevitably start he has done everything in his power to keep these people safe? I would hope the minister has at the very least become familiar with this danger and uses whatever influence he has to acquaint the Minister for Natural Resources with the truth of the stupidity of allowing these conditions to continue.

Many people in rural and regional areas continue to experience problems with the 000 emergency service. The centralisation of this service by Telstra has caused delays that have resulted in unnecessary deaths. I have heard of three in the last month which could have been avoided, and many others which caused extreme distress to the families in need of the QAS when told the ambulance had gone to the wrong place or the wrong road.

The minister has implemented the new regional computer-aided dispatch system known as CAD. I hope it is more reliable than the image the word 'CAD' brings to my mind. Only time will prove

the benefit of this system and whether the current problems are resolved and relegated to being nothing more than memories.

I think all pensioners will continue to appreciate the free Ambulance Service, but I still have grave concerns where ambulance services have been restricted or withdrawn from small rural communities. I recently listened to a QAS official stating long and loud that the Ambulance Service was in crisis. I think the expression he used—though do not quote me—was that it is in its death throes. I have not yet been convinced that it is otherwise, but I do acknowledge the minister's efforts.

I was also very touched to hear the minister officiating over the wedding of the mahogany gliders. Is his next step to become the godparents of their offspring? I am aware that the protection of our unique environment is the pressing challenge of all governments. Yes, the abolition of lead fuels has contributed to a dramatic decrease in lead levels to a point where lead is no longer an environmental hazard. Some 44 out of 46 of our south-east Queensland beaches meet water quality standards. That is something I would like to congratulate the minister on as well. This is good news for our environment as it provides the life support system we all depend on.

I would like to ask Minister Wells about one of the issues raised during estimates: how much exactly does it cost taxpayers to run our state national parks and how is the government going to improve the management of these parks? The government is running a series of businesses and therefore should be able to differentiate between each particular business problem within that business. Why can the government not tell parliament how much it does cost the taxpayer each year to run these series of businesses, the national parks of this state?

Time expired.

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