



Speech by

Mr N. ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard 8 November 2001

EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (5.36 p.m.): A number of non-government members have used the old adage: if it ain't broke, don't fix it. That is a fine principle which I have used in argument many times. But there is also a more modern-day adage which talks about the need for continuous improvement. In an ever-changing world where there are increasing demands on services and there is a need for greater efficiencies and greater coordination between services, the principle of the need for continuous improvement is one that applies in this particular instance.

The purpose of this bill has been outlined by a number of members. Essentially, it is to change the status of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and the Queensland Ambulance Service from statutory authorities to divisions of the Department of Emergency Services. It also includes a name change for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. That is consistent with its role as a deliverer of a significant service within the community. It is also consistent with name changes that have been given to other significant services in the community in recent years—the more notable ones being the police force, which is now referred to as the Police Service, and the former QATB, which is now referred to as the Queensland Ambulance Service. In my view, those changes should lead to greater efficiencies within and across the services and help to create a culture which is focused on a more coordinated emergency service team effort throughout the Emergency Services Department.

A number of assurances need to be reiterated in this debate. I have spoken about these changes with local fire service officers. The assurances given by the minister have been mentioned, but I will go through them again. There will be no change to entitlements. There will be no effect on the day-to-day roles, responsibilities and functions of ambulance officers or Fire and Rescue Service officers. The fire and ambulance commissioners will still be at the helm in terms of operational decisions on a day-to-day basis. And the fire levies which are collected through rates notices—in Brisbane in particular through a special fire service levy—will be paid, as before, into the fire service fund.

One issue which was raised with me by local fire service officers is addressed in the bill. There is a very strong view amongst serving Fire and Rescue Service personnel that, as a requirement for appointment to that position, the head of the fire service should have operational fire experience. Of course, the bill retains that very important position. It is a sound principle, and that is why it has been retained in this bill.

In common with many other members, I take this opportunity to praise the work of my local fire and rescue officers and my local ambulance officers. I also wish to mention the magnificent role played by my local Northgate ambulance committee.

Ms Liddy Clark: Hear, hear!

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: I share them with the member for Clayfield. I have no fire stations in my electorate. Until a couple of years ago the Nundah fire station was located in my electorate, but it was amalgamated with the Hendra Fire Station. There is now a new fire station in the electorate of the member for Clayfield. The Hendra station services my electorate, along with the Taigum station in the Sandgate electorate and the Chermside station. From time to time I have contact with officers from all three stations.

Again, I wish to recognise the professionalism of those officers. They perform a difficult and dangerous role, responding to all sorts of emergencies within the community and making a great contribution to the safety of our local community. Generally, it is not widely acknowledged in the community that fire and rescue officers actually do more than just fight fires. Rescue operations are a significant part of their role. In recent years, in particular, there has been a greater emphasis on formalising the training of officers involved in rescue functions.

Another important role of those officers is the education of the community on fire safety matters, in particular, young people and schoolchildren. I regularly come across fire safety officers in my local community—at local schools, at community events or at fetes—who are putting on displays or discussing with young people the ways in which fire safety can be improved, particularly in the home. For instance, over the last few weeks I have come across fire officers at the Boondall scouts, at the St Pius school fete and at the Zillmere State School when that school launched its very exciting new school song *Aim High*.

Another important initiative in my electorate—in fact, it extends across a number of local north-side electorates—is a competition sponsored by the Boondall Lions Club in which local schoolchildren produce a fire safety poster. It is an annual competition which creates a lot of interest from local schoolchildren. I thank the Boondall Lions and the local fire service for their sponsorship and support of that event.

With respect to ambulance services, the Northgate Ambulance Station is situated in my electorate at Fraser Road, Northgate. That station services the electorate of Clayfield, which is ably represented by the member for Clayfield, Liddy Clark. The new fire station that has been built this year was opened by the former minister but we are pleased and proud to have had the current minister visit the station recently for afternoon tea, and that was very well received.

Mr Reynolds: A great day.

Mr ROBERTS: It was a great day and the local ambulance committee very much appreciated the minister's attendance. It was a great boost to their confidence and a recognition of the worth of their contributions. The government contributed \$877,000 towards the construction of the new Northgate Ambulance Station. It is a very modern facility and meets the highest standards in terms of enabling service delivery. We are very grateful to the government for that funding.

The local ambulance committee is ably led by its executive and particularly by the president, Norah Bennett, who is an icon in terms of volunteering and making a contribution to the community in my electorate and that of the member for Clayfield, Liddy Clark. Norah Bennett has made significant contributions through voluntary work in this International Year of the Volunteer and deserves all the recognition she has received. I also acknowledge the contributions of the secretary, Dea Weston, the treasurer, Dave Harrison, and the vice-president, Frank Lunt, and the other committee members who make a significant contribution to the operation of that station. The LAC has made a number of contributions to the new station by way of furnishings and a good deal of training equipment, and we gratefully acknowledge the contributions they have made.

The ambulance station is staffed by a number of professional officers. I acknowledge particularly the professionalism and dedication of the officer in charge, John Downes, who has been a part of the team there for a number of years. As with fire fighters, the work of ambulance officers often involves deeply traumatic situations which require a great deal of personal strength, compassion and determination. All members commend our local ambulance officers and our fire service officers for the magnificent job they do in providing those very necessary services to our community. We will give them as much support as we can in our capacities as local members as long as we are in this House. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.
