



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (5.06 p.m.): I speak to the Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. While the intention of this bill seems clear in the explanatory notes, I have to say that what is not said is at least as important. This bill will, it seems, change the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and the Queensland Ambulance Service from their current status as separate statutory authorities to simple divisions of the Department of Emergency Services. This is all aimed at improved coordination and effective utilisation of resources in the Emergency Services portfolio and strengthening corporate governance arrangements. In plainer English, it is about shared management and saving money—all, one might say, very laudable indeed.

One might ask: how much does the minister expect to save by these changes and where will these savings come from? The savings must be large to justify altering structures which, generally, are serving Queensland well. Will there be yet more centralisation of management? If so, what assurances can the minister give that the specialised knowledge that is so important to such vital organisations will be retained?

I am concerned about what he is doing to ensure that the depth of corporate knowledge now existing in the QFRA and the QAS is kept. I am sure that all of us in this place have experienced, in our own electorates, the respect with which the community holds these two organisations. So I must ask: at what price will these savings come and will this result in an even more swollen bureaucracy in Brisbane—all under the guise of coordination and effective utilisation of resources? Can the minister assure this House that changes brought about by this legislation will not reduce numbers or increase tasks for QFRA and QAS staff anywhere in Queensland and especially in regional Queensland? Finally, where will the money saved by these changes go? Will it be used to provide the equipment, the facilities, the training and especially the staff who are so vital to both the QFRA and the QAS as they are to the people they protect? Or will it—apart from a nice line in a budget—disappear for all practical purposes?

I cannot help but call to mind the old saying 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. What is 'broke' about these two services after so many years under a Beattie government that these changes are so necessary?
