



Speech by

STEVEN RODGERS

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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EMERGENCY SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr RODGERS (Burdekin—ALP) (4.20 p.m.): I am pleased to rise today in support of the Emergency Services Amendment Bill before the House. Contrary to the member for Mirani's apparent opposition to the bill, I believe this bill will improve the coordination and the effective utilisation of resources within the Emergency Services portfolio across the state. The legislation will correct the corporate governance anomalies and failings within the current legislation through the streamlining of decision-making, accountability and reporting processes. The extensive community consultation and input will be preserved through the maintenance of the Emergency Services Advisory Council, the Rural Fire Council, local ambulance committees and the Ambulance Commissioner's local ambulance committee reference group. Under the legislation proposed by the minister, there will be increased transparency in the decision-making and accountability processes of both services. There will be more involvement across the agency in identifying smarter ways to provide vital services to the people of Queensland.

The community members in my electorate expect the services to be responsive to their needs. We need to strengthen the manner in which the services are sympathetic to community needs and concerns and their ability to be responsive to and not encumbered by bureaucratic and cumbersome decision-making processes in their dealings with their local community. The \$115 million in additional funding provided by the government over the last three years has gone towards ensuring that the services are responsive to the community. This has meant that the services are better equipped, better trained and more prepared to support their communities. The total budget for the department now stands at a little over \$500 million and the members of the local community want to know that that money is being spent wisely and in line with the principles I was elected upon.

The department has achieved a doubling in the number of survivors from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest since 1995, improved response times to code 1 emergencies, a 30 per cent increase in the percentage of Queensland homes with smoke alarms and a response rate of 90 per cent of all aeromedical responses in 20 minutes. All of the department's performance targets have been achieved or exceeded in the 2000-01 financial year—a truly remarkable achievement.

I have noticed that recently there is a lot more prevention work; public education nights and emergency awareness seminars are being held in various centres, including Ayr, Home Hill and Giru in my electorate. The minister, his department and all involved are to be congratulated for those initiatives as they are the types of programs the community has been requesting for some time. This is being responsive and delivering services in a manner that the community is comfortable with.

I am pleased to note that the Emergency Services Department is committed to the government's policy on employment security. In these times of increasing bankruptcies, downsizing and rationalisation, it is heartening to know that the department will not be shedding jobs as a result of those changes. This policy clearly sets out the direction to be taken on employment security and major organisational change. The policy clearly affirms the government's commitment to job security for permanent employees and minimises the impact on employees generally during organisational change. The policy broadly states that no permanent employee will be forced into unemployment as a result of organisational change. That is a very important matter. The department is also committed to placing long-term temporary employees into permanent employment positions wherever possible.

It was good to see the honourable minister out and about explaining the changes to staff and clearly demonstrating that he wants a department that is proactive and able to service the community's needs and meet its expectations in times of crisis. He may be able to visit other centres in my electorate at a later time and I extend an invitation to him to do so at his earliest convenience.

Service responsiveness and consultation are at odds with what occurred under the previous coalition government, and laying the foundations for future development has been endorsed by Emergency Services members I have spoken to in my electorate. The bill will not affect the roles, responsibilities or functions of operational firefighters or ambulance officers and there will be no change to their entitlements. The fire and ambulance officers will remain as public sector employees under their own separate and specific acts. Fire and ambulance commissioners will still retain responsibility for operational decisions. There will be no change to the current section of the Fire and Rescue Authority Act that guarantees that the head of the fire service must have operational fire fighting experience.

The staff of the Queensland Ambulance Service and of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will find that the bill does not result in any changes to their jobs and will deliver more resources where they are needed—at the front line. Those changes will ensure the department is committed to responding to the needs of Queenslanders right across the state. I support this bill and the changes that it stands for.
