



Speech by

**Mr T. MALONE**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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Hansard 2 August 2001

**APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D]**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (11.56 a.m.): In joining the debate with respect to Estimates Committee D, firstly I congratulate all those involved—the chairman, the staff and certainly the ministers—on the way in which they answered questions. Quite frankly, in terms of the shadow portfolio that I hold in relation to emergency services, I believe that the government and the opposition really need to work together to make sure that the delivery is up to scratch.

I have submitted a statement of reservation in terms of Estimates Committee D with respect to emergency services. It was not so much that we were disappointed with the answers but more to highlight some of the issues that we raised in terms of the estimates committee process.

One of my real concerns relates to the emergency helicopter rescue service and the community providers. As the minister would well know, when Tom Burns set up the organisation quite a number of years ago, the funding level was \$300,000 a year. When Mick Veivers took over that portfolio for the coalition government, that funding level went to \$600,000. Since that time, periodically there have been CPI increases. But in terms of a real funding increase, there has not been a substantial increase.

In the last year or so, of course, we have seen the devaluation of the Australian dollar. Most of the helicopter parts are sourced from America. And with the amount of fuel that they use, the costs of operation to the community providers have escalated quite significantly, and most of them are feeling the pinch. I raise this issue because these services are called upon almost on a daily basis.

According to an article in today's *Daily Mercury*, the Mackay newspaper, a rescue helicopter did two rescues yesterday. I can assure the House that the community based rescue helicopter in Mackay is well regarded and is doing a magnificent job, as all of them are right across Queensland. This issue was raised at the estimates committee, and the minister gave an indication that he would review the budget allocation for the rescue helicopters in a mid-year budget review. I urge the minister to take that on board. I think it would be money well spent.

I understand that service contracts are to be signed later in the year. There is now an opportunity to look at reasonable funding for the community helicopters. Another issue that we raised with the minister was the fact that, in the old service contracts, there was not really provision for the community helicopters themselves to undertake a safety audit. I have been assured that in the new contract that will be the case. I am concerned about safety in relation to community helicopters. As the House would know, there have been a number of accidents.

In terms of the Queensland Ambulance Service, we have some concerns in regard to inadequate equipment and stress-related issues. There are still many officers in charge of smaller ambulance stations working up to 100 days straight. I believe that that is part and parcel of the stress that is being placed on a number of officers. Certainly, my office is continuing to receive calls on a regular basis about this issue from members of the Ambulance Service and those who have retired from the Ambulance Service. I understand the minister has indicated that the number of people in the Ambulance Service who are on stress leave is not a huge issue, that there are not a large number of people on stress leave. But one member on stress leave is one too many. Certainly there seems to be a need for some extra resources in that area.

In terms of the 29 vehicles that were taken off the road, the opposition is reasonably happy with the situation. I have had a conversation with a number of the engineers in charge of looking at the problem. The problem with the pitman arm on the new vehicles seems to be being overcome and we look forward to having those vehicles back in service as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, the budget indicated that there would be only one extra staff member in the QAS for this year. I do not really think that that is sufficient, and that is part and parcel of our statement of reservation. The extra provision of staff and equipment for both CHOGM and the Goodwill Games is of concern to us. We are concerned that they will increase stress levels out in the field, particularly in terms of the QAS.

In terms of the rural fire brigades, the replacement of veteran vehicles is an issue. My understanding is that there is close—

Time expired.

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