



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Hansard 7 August 2002

AMBULANCE SERVICE SUBSCRIPTIONS, PRIVATE HEALTH FUNDS

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (6.19 p.m.): I second the amendment moved by the minister. This is a government with a proud record of effective community consultation. There can be no doubt that our Minister for Emergency Services is a consultative minister. The government recognises that the QAS subscription scheme is an icon to many in our community. Hence the government has been extremely sensitive to the need to keep the community involved and informed at every stage of the subscription scheme process. This is evidenced by the fact that, immediately following the announcement by the Premier and the minister, the minister hit the road. In three days he visited every ambulance region in Queensland. Since that time, feedback has been sought from all areas of the community, including local ambulance committees, the emergency services advisory committee, community organisations and, most importantly, Queensland ambulance staff.

This is a government that listens to and takes account of the feedback that we receive. From the very start of this process—and I reiterate that this is still only an investigatory process; no decision has been—all stakeholders have been consulted and all have had the opportunity to voice their opinion on this issue. The Ambulance Commissioner, the department's director-general, and other senior QAS staff also met with the local ambulance committee advisory council at their meeting in Roma to consider the subscription scheme proposal. This meeting was attended by representatives from local ambulance committees from every region throughout Queensland. It was an invaluable opportunity to seek further feedback and opinions on the proposal.

Meetings have also been held with local ambulance committees in Mackay. As recently as last Sunday, a Queensland Ambulance Service assistant commissioner was in Rockhampton as part of the ongoing broad program of consultation and information. In fact, my wife, Diane, who is a member of the local ambulance committee in Rockhampton, was in attendance at that meeting. She has certainly not raised any concerns with me about the proposal.

This government is also committed to supporting QAS staff throughout this process. Dedicated staff from the department's human resource team have visited all QAS customer service officers and staff throughout the state to provide them with individual support and assistance. Until the outcome of the tender process is known, the impact on staff is not certain. However, if the scheme closes, the government's employment security policy will apply to staff who currently administer and promote the QAS subscription scheme. This government is working hard to ensure that the concerns of staff and their unions are addressed. It is about consultation; it is about working together.

It is absolutely clear that every effort is being made to address any concerns arising from the subscription scheme process. The results of all of this consultation and ensuing letters and phone calls to the department and to the minister's office have been carefully collated and will be taken into account when the final decision is made. The opinions of Queenslanders on this issue are very important to us—they are very important to all members in this place—and we realise that for many of us, myself included, this is a very emotional issue. We will be following the process with great interest.

This is our Ambulance Service and this is our scheme. It is something unique to Queensland—the Queensland way of life and the Queensland sense of community and service. Therefore, it is important that all stakeholders are aware of the process and the conclusions that will

come out of the process. I congratulate the Minister for Emergency Services on his consultative approach to this and other issues within his portfolio. I have personal experience of the minister's willingness—indeed, determination—to speak to the community. Recently, we made a trip throughout central Queensland. We went to 13 communities and spoke to over 900 representatives from the service—local ambulance committees, local councillors, people who have an interest in the quality of the service that the Queensland Ambulance Service provides. On that occasion, the minister showed me that he was prepared to go out, sit down and talk face to face with those people who consider their Ambulance Service important to them. Because of the quality of the service provided by the Queensland Ambulance Service, it is very highly regarded in the community, it is respected by everybody, and everybody contributes and looks after their own local ambulance.

I personally thank the minister for his commitment to that trip. The feedback as a result of that trip has been very, very positive. I think that it was a great thing for the minister to do and a great thing for the government.

Time expired.
