



Speech by

DESLEY SCOTT

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL AND RADIOLOGICAL EMERGENCY POWERS AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (4.49 p.m.): Good government is all about prioritising and preparedness for the future. In the case of this bill—the Chemical, Biological and Radiological Emergency Powers Amendment Bill—it is putting into place legislation which we all hope and pray will never be required. In Australia we have emergency powers and disaster management plans to deal with the effects of severe natural disasters—fire, flood, storm, earthquakes and cyclones. We have highly trained, very brave men and women who accomplish amazing feats when lives and property are threatened.

For as long as I can remember, I have felt safe and protected in our country. We are a peaceful nation supposedly removed from the trouble spots in the world. However, our sense of security has now been shattered. We do not have to look far from our shores to see very troubled nations. In the late eighties I spent two weeks on beautiful Bougainville. Within four months the fragile peace there was shattered and war had broken out. Many of the beautiful, friendly people I had met lost their lives. I visited Port Moresby last year and travelled with police escort. The world has many angry trouble spots. In recent weeks our focus has returned to Bali, where over 80 Australians lost their lives so tragically. The horror of those scenes where people had not travelled to a war zone but to a place of peace and happiness for a holiday shattered forever our naive belief that we are immune from terrorism.

It is important that the people of Queensland understand that our government is prepared for and has measures in place to deal with any emergency involving chemical, biological and radiological substances, be it due to accidental circumstances or an act of terrorism. Very different handling is required of this type of emergency. The recent outbreak of SARS has demonstrated how a virus is able to be spread if unchecked in its early stages. This legislation has been carefully drafted to offer protection while responding to the effect circumstances may have on an individual or, in a catastrophic outbreak, a large number of people. The response to such disasters may involve personnel from police, health and emergency services and in certain cases the assistance of the defence forces, which of course are under Commonwealth jurisdiction.

To make an emergency declaration involving chemical, biological or radiological substances first of all requires an action by an assistant commissioner or above. He must believe that serious risk exists and that containment of the substance or outbreak is vital. Emergency powers may then be exercised by appropriate officers of police, health, ambulance, fire or, in the case of animals, a veterinary officer. Medical examinations, treatment, decontamination, the power to seize and destroy property and require identification details of individuals—the health and safety of the wider population is paramount and may entail the denial of rights of certain individuals if circumstances require such measures.

Once an emergency has been declared, the Minister for Police must be informed and then assume responsibility for either ending or extending the emergency in consultation with the Premier. A period of 24 hours initially may extend to seven days if that is required to protect life or health or even up to 14 days. However, once this period is extended beyond 48 hours, approval must be sought of a Supreme Court judge. An additional safeguard requires the Public Interest Monitor to supervise applications for an extension of detention powers and, finally, matters are required to be reported to parliament.

This legislation strikes a balance but is essentially designed to protect the greater public good. It offers a framework of emergency powers as an insurance against what we all hope will never be

required. I thank our minister for his conscientious stewardship of public safety. To those who have drafted this legislation, thank you for ensuring our state is prepared for any incident caused by anyone with evil intent or a catastrophic event. I commend the bill to the House.