



Speech by

## Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 26 February 2003

### AMBULANCE LEVY

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.35 p.m.): It makes me angry that the rust bucket accounting of a Labor government has brought the QAS to a point where there is a \$100 million black hole in its budget. It was disgusting that, only six months after the last budget was brought down, just prior to Christmas we saw a government trying to bring in a new tax to fund an Ambulance Service which it had brought to its knees. Now they are in this parliament wanting to avoid the scrutiny that should be brought to bear on how the financing of the Ambulance Service has been allowed to reach this point. They do not want to have accountability. They want secrecy about how they destroyed the financial standing of the QAS. The debate has become instead how the Ambulance Service should be funded. That is a question that needs to be answered with an appropriate policy framework that includes an audit and the ability of others to make submissions to that process, not secrecy and lies from a government that does not want to tell Queenslanders the truth. We already know that their promise, which was widely applauded, of free ambulance subscriptions for pensioners has blown out. We know they promised a \$21 million price tag. That has blown out to over \$100 million. On the eve of Christmas last year they tried to bring in a new tax, which blew up in their face. Now we see another revision of that.

How fair is this? Some people will be paying multiple bills. But it is obvious from the contemptible way the government has replied to this that it thinks small business are mugs. It thinks they are a soft touch and should bear the cost of a government bungle. The government does not do its homework and does not want to be accountable to the people of Queensland. If those small businesses ran their businesses the way this government has run the QAS, they would have gone broke a long time ago. Yet we see a government that does not want to be brought to account by opening its books, going through an audit process and allowing people to make submissions to that process.

I know of several businesses that will face multiple bills. However, according to this uncaring government, they do not matter. Let us look at the other anomalies. For example, caravan parks might only have one bill yet hundreds of tenants. That is an interesting anomaly, compared with some small businesses that might have additional bills for an airconditioner, for example. I have spoken to some small business proprietors who, although they do not have a large cash flow, have five or six bills. In this parliament yesterday the minister could not answer a question about how many people would be facing multiple bills. He does not know, does not want to know and is totally out of touch with how this is affecting these people. He is not concerned.

I wish to raise another issue that has not been touched on. The Sunshine Coast Energex Rescue Helicopter has a voluntary contribution system through Energex billing. I am most concerned that the new compulsory imposition of the ambulance tax on Energex bills will create pressure on those who currently are voluntarily supporting this wonderful service through their bills. I would like the government to give a commitment that if there is fall off in voluntary subscription rates through Energex bills it will make up the difference. That is a service I would hate to see affected by the mismanagement of this government.

It seems that when there is a black hole in the Ambulance Service the government creates a situation so that it does not have to address in a public forum why it got it so wrong. We believe that the answers to the dilemma of properly funding this well-needed emergency service will not be in the hands

of those who have mucked it up so badly to this point. We must get this into an appropriate policy framework, not policy on the run with the secrecy and deceit of this government. It must be brought into the open. If the Beattie government is serious about good financial management and accountability, why is it running from the opposition's motion? This is a positive motion about finding the appropriate answers to this issue, about revealing what actually went wrong and about getting the appropriate response, because we want to see an emergency service that survives and flourishes. We also have a concern that this policy direction of the government will see a blow-out in the emergency wait times and a further increase in demand on services because of the poor way this issue has been handled by this government.