



Speech by

**JO-ANN MILLER**

**MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA**

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Hansard 26 February 2003

#### **AMBULANCE LEVY**

**Mrs MILLER** (Bundamba—ALP) (6.21 p.m.): I second the amendment. Let there be no misunderstanding: this government is determined to ensure that each and every Queenslanders has access to life-saving ambulance services whenever and wherever they need them. This government is also determined to make sure that the Queensland Ambulance Service is viable well into the future, for generations and generations to come. I know that this is a priority for every government member and, one would have thought, for the opposition, too. But look at them; there are hardly any of them here tonight. This is about the future. The community ambulance cover is about providing a safer Queensland and the kind of community that we all want to live in, a Queensland where all our children, our elderly and our sick have access to world-class ambulance and health care services whenever they need them. We do not want to become a society where people miss out on emergency ambulance care and transport because they cannot afford it. This is why the community ambulance cover is not a user-pays charge. It is a broad based system of raising the necessary revenue to ensure that the QAS can continue to provide the high quality ambulance services that Queenslanders have come to expect, including the good people of the Bundamba electorate who are serviced by the Redbank Ambulance Station.

Let me put this into context. The opposition is calling for an independent inquiry into an issue that this government raised with the community almost two years ago. While the opposition is calling for needless and costly inquiries, this government is getting on with the job of providing real solutions to ensure the ongoing provision of high quality ambulance services to Queenslanders. To delay the implementation of community ambulance cover would only exacerbate a problem that can be solved now. This issue is not about the services provided by the QAS; it is about the QAS subscription scheme. While the scheme served the community well for many years, it now is no longer viable. The facts are that the subscription scheme is not able to generate sufficient income to cover the cost of providing services to subscribers and the cost of administration. Last year, the subscription scheme raised \$54 million, while the cost of servicing subscribers was \$68 million, that is, a deficit of \$14 million. This deficit was projected to grow to \$23 million by 2004-05.

I want to emphasise that these problems were the result of influences outside of the control of the government and the Queensland Ambulance Service. The opposition's proposal for an inquiry is in fact an insult to the dedicated men and women of the Queensland Ambulance Service who work tirelessly to provide ambulance care to our community. The staff of the QAS have in fact done a remarkable job of keeping the subscription scheme going in the face of major difficulties caused by policies implemented by the federal Tory coalition government. The federal government has been more than happy to prop up the multinational private health companies with a 30 per cent rebate on private health insurance premiums; however, it has refused to provide the same assistance to the ambulance subscription scheme, creating an uneven playing field and, in the process, undermining the funding base that ambulance services rely on. This unfair competition has been the major factor in the demise of the QAS subscription scheme which relies on voluntary contributions.

Rather than sit on its hands, undertake another inquiry and waste taxpayers' money, the Beattie government has got on with the job of consulting with the community and fixing the problems facing the QAS. Once again, we work while members opposite whinge. The solution proposed by the government was in fact strongly advocated by the Queensland Local Ambulance Committee Advisory Council in its submission to the government. The Queensland community has always played an enormous role in the

ambulance service, whether that be as a subscriber, a fundraiser or a member of one of the 176 LAC committees throughout the state. These loyal supporters have been the absolute backbone of the service for the past 100 years, and to date this support continues. In fact, for many years my mother was a fundraiser for the Redbank Ambulance Committee and to this day so is Robin, our local Redbank newsagent. I express on behalf of our government a heartfelt thankyou to the hundreds of thousands of people who continued to pay the annual subscription despite its being a voluntary payment. It is clear, however, that the era of subscription is over.

Time expired.