



Speech by

JO-ANN MILLER

MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT BILL

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (3.24 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the bill. In just a few short years the concept that Australia is immune from terrorist attacks has changed dramatically. September 11, the Bali tragedy, suspected Al-Qaeda links in Australia and the recent event of a suspected terrorist, Willie Brigitte, have changed our appreciation of our place in the world. We are no longer immune from problems that impact on areas outside the Asia-Pacific region. Disaster management legislation that may have met our needs a few years ago is no longer sufficient to meet the demands of our new environment. In this case, the Disaster Management Bill updates legislation that was developed 28 years ago. I commend the minister and the Department of Emergency Services for undertaking a complete and comprehensive review of the State Counter-Disaster Organisation Act 1975—known as the SCDO Act. I would also like to thank the many stakeholders who were involved in that review.

Consultation with stakeholders revealed widespread support to repeal the SCDO Act and to replace it with contemporary legislation for disaster management. Until now, the SCDO Act had not been the subject of a major review, although it has been subject to discussion and minor amendments over a period of at least 10 years. The preparation of this bill represents the outcome of a comprehensive review of the entire act. This legislation still retains many elements of the tried and tested disaster management system, but includes contemporary elements such as a greater focus on mitigation. This bill also complements other legislation to form part of a suite of counter-terrorism arrangements for Queensland. The Disaster Management Bill provides a clear framework for the structures, functions and powers supporting the disaster management system in this state.

Under the proposed arrangements, the bill promotes the continuation of the three-tiered, whole-of-government disaster management arrangements and the partnership between the Commonwealth, state and local governments and indigenous community councils to support SES volunteers. It streamlines the current administrative arrangements by replacing the current state counterdisaster organisation and its executive, the Central Control Group, with a single committee to be known as the State Disaster Management Group. Its chair and members will comprise relevant state government chief executive officers appointed by the Governor in Council.

At the district level, disaster management groups will continue. Currently, there is no requirement for counterdisaster committees at the local level. However, these committees are already in place for all councils. By requiring local disaster management groups to be established, the bill will ensure consistency and appropriate standards across communities and across the state. The bill also entrenches the representation of each local government and indigenous community council on the district disaster management group. It guarantees that councils will participate and contribute to issues impacting on disaster management at the district level.

In my own electorate, I would like to thank the Goodna SES and the Goodna SES cadets for the great job that they do in my area not only in relation to disastrous events but also in assisting with community activities such as the Jacaranda Festival. I would also like to say that the Ipswich City Council certainly plays a vital role in protecting our community. In fact, last Christmas Day, Camira and Springfield were just about wiped out in a very bad storm. We had trees down, trees smashed into cars and electricity lines down. In fact, those two suburbs looked a bit like a war zone.

On Christmas Day I contacted the Minister for Emergency Services. We had a telephone tag all day from Ipswich to Townsville reporting on the damage at Camira and Springfield. I would just like to say that this minister and I are on the job 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year in relation to protecting our community. I would certainly like to thank the minister for his commitment to my community on Christmas Day last year, because it was a great help. My local community was very grateful that I was there on Christmas Day helping them out and trying to assist them in relation to removing debris in their area.

The preparation of the state disaster management plan is also a requirement of this bill. The state disaster management plan will facilitate the expansion of arrangements to incorporate mitigation and prevention functions, particularly those linked to the Natural Disaster Risk Management Studies Program. Roles and responsibilities for functional agencies such as Queensland Transport will be consistent with existing arrangements and implemented within the existing financial resources of relevant agencies.

This bill provides for safer communities through a more effective disaster management system designed to reduce human suffering and losses through improved mitigation, prevention and preparedness, response and recovery arrangements. The bill formalises local government's involvement in disaster management planning. It clarifies responsibilities and provides autonomy at the local level, with local governments playing a major role in developing and approving their own plans.

All these arrangements are critical if we are to effectively minimise the risk to Queensland communities and manage the consequences of any disaster event, whether that event is natural, non-natural or terrorist related. I thank the minister for this bill and particularly for his personal interest in emergency services in my own electorate. I thank the officers of the department for all their assistance in preparing this bill. I commend the bill to the House.