



Speech by

JOHN ENGLISH

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Hansard 13 November 2003

DISASTER MANAGEMENT BILL

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (4.53 p.m.): There are many challenges that face our society today. There are the natural disasters that many members have spoken about—fire, flood, famine and drought. Unfortunately, since September 11 we have seen the increasing threat posed by terrorism and other man-made type disasters.

To help the state and our society battle these threats, there are a range of community based organisations and volunteers that assist and back up a number of state government agencies such as the police, the fire service and the Ambulance Service. There are many volunteer groups that assist our society in that battle.

I am very proud that in my electorate there is a wide range of these volunteer community emergency groups to assist. On each of the islands in my electorate there is a rural fire brigade unit. There is the Coochiemudlo Island Rural Fire Service, the Macleay Island Rural Fire Service and the fantastic Lamb Island Rural Fire Service. I was proud to open up a new shed that had been constructed over there. Whilst being very proud to undertake that duty on the day, I also acknowledge the efforts of the previous member in getting the funding for that shed. There is also the Russell Island Rural Fire Brigade. Bob Curry and his team do a great job over there. Of course, the diminutive island of Karragarra also has its own dedicated band of volunteers to fight fires on that island.

I have recently acquired a couple of 1,000-litre containers that I am trying to get over to the island fire brigades. I hope that there are no fires on the islands this summer, but the donation of these two 1,000-litre containers may assist in their firefighting ability if, in the worst case, they do have a fire over there. I am trying to coordinate that at the moment.

There is a permanent professional Queensland ambulance officer based on Russell Island, but the other four islands are all serviced by auxiliary ambulance officers or volunteer first responders. I would like to compliment the Minister for Emergency Services on bringing in the first responder program, because I know that the small communities on the bay islands in my electorate have benefited greatly from the introduction of these first responder programs.

A lot of this bill is devoted to changes to the State Emergency Service. In the Redlands we have an extremely active, professional and diligent State Emergency Service organisation led by the coordinator of the Redlands SES, Gary Suite, and the deputy coordinator, Bob Howlett. I must also mention local controller Gary Soutar, who recently in the local media urged all residents to get ready for the upcoming storm season. In the article Gary makes suggestions about how people can prepare and try to minimise the level of damage that could occur in the forthcoming storm season. Gary and the many other volunteers, such as Jenny Bird, contribute a lot of time and effort in training and equipping themselves with the skills to assist our community. Their efforts should be recognised.

I am glad that this bill attempts to streamline this organisation, particularly in relation to its management structure, to maximise its output and effectiveness. As other members have mentioned, it also deals with protecting the jobs of volunteers whilst they are undertaking volunteer emergency duties. This is a great step forward in showing these volunteers that the government truly values their time.

I want to comment briefly on a remark made by the member for Lockyer. During his speech he asked that the government give consideration to legislating to allow the military to assist in disaster intervention. As he is a former member of the Queensland Police Service, I am surprised he is not

aware that there is legislation currently that allows the military to assist state agencies in natural disaster and counterterrorist situations. These powers are regularly exercised. This lack of knowledge on the part of the member for Lockyer disappoints me, but I suppose it should not surprise me.

I would like to compliment the honourable minister and his department for bringing this bill before the House. Anything this government can do to increase the attractiveness of volunteer work to the community is to be commended. I commend the bill to the House.