



Speech by

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT BILL

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (4.23 p.m.): The Disaster Management Bill 2003 will assist communities across Queensland to mitigate the potential adverse effects of a disaster or emergency event, to prepare for managing the effects of such an event, and to effectively respond to and recover from a disaster situation or an emergency situation. These disaster and emergency events may occur naturally and would include cyclones, floods, storms or epidemics, or be caused by human acts or omissions such as the failure of an essential service or a terrorist attack.

This bill complements the thrust of the Chemical, Biological and Radiological Emergency Powers Amendment Bill 2003, the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000, and the provisions of the Public Safety Preservation Act 1986. The bill will provide a modern, effective disaster management system and establish frameworks for the management of the State Emergency Service and Emergency Services units to ensure the effective performance of their functions through a comprehensive approach to disaster management during disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery operations.

The volunteer ES units could perform rural fire, SES and ambulance type first-aid functions in rural and remote areas, including indigenous communities. As there are limited human and physical resources in these communities, the volunteer ES units could provide improved service delivery by offering a broader volunteer emergency service well targeted to the specific requirements of the community. This has been happening in a de facto manner in some of the smaller communities for some time. I know that Michael Kinnane, Fiona McKersie, Dave Luxton and Alan Brunner from the Department of Emergency Services have been looking at different models for the optimum effectiveness of these units.

The establishment of the ES units provide local governments with a more cost-effective option for the delivery of emergency service functions. The ES unit concept enables emergency service functions to be delivered through one integrated emergency service unit headed by an ES unit coordinator. The functions of the ES unit would be aligned with existing volunteer SES search and rescue, volunteer Rural Fire Service fire management programs and Queensland Ambulance Service first responder activities. It is important that we recognise the value of the work undertaken by these volunteers. I am pleased to see that SES and ES volunteers are protected from dismissal by an employer as a result of undertaking an authorised response to emergencies. Furthermore, the initiative also broadens the Industrial Relations Act 1999 to protect the employment of honorary ambulance officers, rural fire brigade members, and hazmat advisers. The provision would extend the grounds for unfair dismissal claims to protect these volunteers where they are temporarily absent from work to perform authorised functions in an emergency or disaster situation.

This bill maintains provisions for a level of immunity for the state, other bodies and individuals for acts and omissions undertaken in good faith and without negligent disregard for personal injury or property loss or damage which may be caused. Provisions for compensation for damages incurred in the course of disaster operations are also retained. A declared disaster officer may exercise a power to remove, dismantle, demolish or destroy a building or other structure in the declared area only with the written approval of a relevant district disaster coordinator—a DDC. An authorisation to exercise declared disaster powers for a disaster situation may be general in application or limited to a particular class of ambulance officer, fire officer, health officer or other person or may be given to be used only in specific

circumstances. It may be given orally or in writing. Clause 75(4) states that this does not invalidate the authorisation or anything done under the authorisation.

An independent cost-benefit analysis in accordance with the public benefit test was undertaken. The cost-benefit analysis concluded that all policy proposals contained in the bill will have positive impacts for the state government, councils, the Commonwealth government, state government agencies, the SES and the community. The analysis acknowledged that local disaster management groups are required in the bill and, as such, would cause incremental costs to councils if they did not exist. However, as these committees are already in place, there are no actual costs to be identified from this policy.

This bill will benefit all Queenslanders by providing for a modern, efficient, effective and community safety oriented emergency and disaster management system. It will enable a significant coordinated multiagency response to help the community recover from extraordinary events. I commend the bill to the House.