



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 6 October 2004

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### COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT BILL

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.10 p.m.): The unfair and inequitable ambulance tax is still impacting people who have to pay it more than once. This legislation ratifies a number of exemptions from the tax, which applies to people's electricity accounts. However, there are still thousands of ordinary Queenslanders being hit with multiple ambulance taxes.

We will not forget that the Beattie Labor government imposed the new tax, breaking its promise not to do so after it mucked up the costings for another promise: free ambulance travel for pensioners. Free ambulance travel for pensioners was supposed to cost only \$20 million but the true cost blew out to more than \$100 million. It was a lovely promise and we were happy to support the policy, but we were lied to about the costings. Labor governments are good at promising things and bad at funding them. We have seen that with the Energex debacle and the Treasurer's performance today where he admitted he had not spoken to the CEO of Energex when he made an announcement for a compensation scheme for people suffering from power failures.

Because of this management failure of the Beattie government in the ambulance system there are now small business people in my area paying the ambulance tax up to 11 times. I suspect that some of the members opposite have the idea that if they have that many power bills they must be wealthy people. There are many businesses that have electricity accounts for individual sites which enable them to operate their businesses; but they do not necessarily have a lot of turnover on those individual sites. This is an inequitable tax; it unfairly hits people. It has no reference to the ability of people to pay just because they have an electricity bill.

The ambulance levy has gone up but the amount being spent on capital infrastructure such as ambulance stations went backwards in the last budget. This ambulance funding needs to be fairer—it must be fairer. These exemptions are still a drop in the bucket. This issue will not go away until it is made fairer.

There seems to be, as you would expect, bipartisan support across this House for the work that our ambulance officers do. We all know that they do a superb job. It is a very trying job, particularly with road trauma. Road trauma is a large proportion of the work in many areas, particularly the Sunshine Coast. Their work has been complicated by the fact that many hospitals are now going into bypass and sending their patients to hospitals further away, not because their most local hospital does not have the skill and the quality of staff to do that work but because they are overstressed and overstretched and have to pass patients on to hospitals further and further away.

I am concerned that this impact has not been factored into the costs that have been put upon the system, and it means that ambulances are going to be on the road for longer and out of the area of care where they need to be to respond to emergencies and to make sure that people are taken in the most timely way to the closest appropriate hospital. This issue is only getting worse and it is of major concern because it impacts upon that net of care that the ambulance services are there to provide.