



Speech by

Lindy Nelson-Carr

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

Hansard Tuesday, 5 October 2004

COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT BILL

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (5.41 p.m.) It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on this bill. The Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill provides additional exemptions from the community ambulance cover levy, as we have heard this afternoon. Most of these exemptions were announced on 11 November last year and have been operating on an administrative basis since then. When it commenced in July 2003, there were initial conditional exemptions provided for a pensioner's principal place of residence, farming sheds, pumps, Commonwealth, state and local governments, and certain religious and other institutions. Exemptions were also provided to ensure that the levy applied only once to a place of business in a building.

I would like to digress slightly and bring Townsville into this debate and speak about the community ambulance cover scheme in general. It has ensured that the Queensland Ambulance Service has a solid and predictable funding base for the first time in its 112-year history. Every cent that the Queensland Ambulance Service receives from the community ambulance cover levy is spent on Ambulance Service funding. This financial year's record budget for the QAS of \$300.8 million is tangible proof that the CAC is working for all Queenslanders. This latest funding increase means that since 1998 the Beattie Labor government's funding for ambulance services in Queensland has risen by about \$130 million. That is well ahead of the level of inflation.

Legislation such as this, which involves significant change, requires a settling in period and community feedback. That is what members are doing tonight. The fact is that all Queenslanders are now covered by QAS, including those who would never have been covered before, either because they did not take the time to subscribe or because they could not afford the cost. Our paramedics provide more than first aid. As part of their everyday job, they provide life-saving emergency care, prehospital care, and help and comfort to people who are at their most vulnerable and distressed. Further intakes of student paramedics have been undertaken and, currently, the largest student class of paramedics in QAS history is in training. More paramedics will be able to serve the needs of Australia's fast-growing population, maintain emergency response times and improve services to rural and remote communities. QAS is the fourth largest ambulance service in the world and the second busiest.

Because of the community ambulance cover, every Queenslanders, irrespective of where they live, receives world-class hospital care. Townsville has recently received two brand new, fully equipped ambulances at its Hugh Street station. This is where the community ambulance cover levy goes. It funds training, equipment and services for the Queensland community.

I place on record my congratulations to Tiarna Craigie, who won the communications officer of the year during the recent Ambulance Week celebrations. That award was for her efforts in giving life-saving CPR advice to 12-year-old Sean Gagelier in Hughenden when his father collapsed. Sean was named Queensland's young hero of the year.

QAS is more than ambulances and paramedics. It also provides services such as baby capsules and fitting them correctly so that our youngest Queenslanders are safe and sound. It provides first aid and

CPR courses. It is important to know in an emergency situation that a trained professional can talk you through it while help is on the way.

Queensland Ambulance Service paramedics have been educated in the recognition and emergency management of marine stinger incidents since the late 1980s. Via the marine stinger program, paramedics undertake annual skills validation in the management of marine stinger victims, including the administration of box jelly antivenom, if required. The revised marine stinger education package released in 2003 represented a significant revision of the existing program. It ensures that knowledge and clinical practice of QAS paramedics remains up to date with contemporary medical management and that there is delivery of the program via progressive educational methods. The format and content of the training package has been well received by all staff.

The QAS has been fully involved with a number of Queensland agencies—including Queensland Health, universities and surf-lifesaving—in the recent review of management of marine stinger incidents. The 2003 training program contains a large amount of well-researched information. It will continue to be reviewed to ensure that any further developments in marine stinger knowledge are included in future paramedic practices. In conjunction with the Mission Beach Rotary Club and the Cardwell Shire Council, beach vinegar stations have been installed. They include a number of things such as signage for beach goers with more information on 000, first aid instructions, directions to the nearest surf-lifesaving hut and a location numbering system to assist paramedics with the exact location.

QAS has delivered a pilot program for marine stinger education to school students in far-north Queensland. There has been very positive feedback from both students and teachers. The aim of this program is to promote safe beach usage during the marine stinger season via community education. It is hoped to prevent encounters with potentially dangerous sea animals. This is very relevant to Townsville but also to Queensland in general.

I applaud the Beattie government for bringing this levy on board so that people who can afford to pay the levy—those who have many businesses, beach houses or several residences—will pay \$88 towards ensuring that all Queenslanders have a free ambulance service. I commend the bill to the House.