



Speech by

Neil Roberts

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard Tuesday, 31 August 2004

COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1) 2004

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (4.25 p.m.): I rise to oppose the disallowance motion. Before speaking to the motion, I want to make a few comments about the extraordinary attack on Mark Bucknall that took place in this parliament this morning. I have known Mark Bucknall personally for about 15 years, and I know Mark to be a man of utmost integrity and decency. The opposition this morning engaged in an outrageous and disgraceful attack—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order! Member for Nudgee, this is not relevant to the disallowance motion. I ask you to proceed with your contribution.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: It is not relevant, and I respect that. If the opposition wanted to do the decent thing, it would publicly apologise to him for that disgraceful attack.

The community ambulance cover scheme was introduced on 1 July to provide a secure funding source for ambulance services in Queensland. Under the scheme the community ambulance cover levy applies to most electricity accounts in Queensland and, as is well known, is collected through the electricity retailers. There are many accounts which are exempt. Since the implementation of the scheme the government has provided exemptions to around 500,000 accounts across Queensland.

Under the scheme, all Queensland residents have been automatically covered for ambulance services not just within Queensland but also across Australia. That is a significant benefit for all Queenslanders which did not previously exist. Of course, the benefits applied only to those people who subscribed to the previous scheme. That is not something which is widely acknowledged as a significant benefit that has arisen out of this particular scheme.

As I understand it, the National Party opposition has said that it will abolish the community ambulance cover scheme, but it has not said how it would fund the services in the ambulance sector and make up for the \$100 million-plus shortfall in ambulance funding. I recall very clearly the Staib report of 1996 which suggested that an additional \$32 million was required to properly fund the Ambulance Service. In the two and a half years the opposition was in power it did not provide that necessary funding. It took our government coming to power to provide a scheme which adequately funds this service, something the National Party was not able to do when it was in government.

Under the Community Ambulance Cover Act the levy applies to a range of different electricity accounts. The levy was imposed at a rate of \$88 per annum for the 2003-04 year. The levy is applied on a daily basis, and the rate for 2003-04 was 24.044c per day. To ensure that the Community Ambulance Cover Act continues to achieve its objective of funding ambulance services in Queensland, the act does make provision for the annual and daily levy to be increased each financial year. This increase is consistent with government policy whereby most levies and charges are adjusted in line with the CPI each year.

The Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Regulation (No. 1) of 2004 increased the annual levy to \$90.20 and the daily levy to 24.712c per day. The annual levy increased by the percentage increase

in the CPI over the 12 months to March 2004, which was 2.5 per cent, and the daily levy is worked out from the annual levy.

The increase in the daily levy is actually 2.78 per cent, which is slightly higher than the CPI for the 12 months. This is because the daily levy is worked out by dividing the annual levy by the number of days in the year. As 2003 was a leap year, the daily levy for the 2003-04 financial year was consequently a little lower. Importantly, however, the annual levy for 2004-05 has increased only by the CPI increase over the past 12 months. For the 2004-05 financial year, the levy is estimated to raise around \$104 million, and this amount will be used along with additional contributions from consolidated revenue funding to fully fund the enhanced ambulance services delivered by the government under the community ambulance scheme. I oppose the opposition's motion.