



Speech by

Peta-Kaye Croft

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

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COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (3.27 p.m.): I rise in support of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. During 2002 the state government conducted a review into the Queensland Ambulance Service subscription scheme. The review was needed due to a range of factors which were combining to put a considerable strain on the scheme as it operated then.

Increased costs for medical equipment and training, an ageing and growing population, the decline in bulk-billing, the reduction of 24-hour emergency facilities and increased private health fund membership were all contributing factors.

The federal government refused to extend the 30 per cent health insurance rebate to the QAS subscription scheme and so its policies of favouring the private health insurance industry, while at the same time running down bulk-billing, have led to declining subscriptions while demand for the Ambulance Service continues to rise.

The Queensland Ambulance Service enjoys a 95 per cent satisfaction rating. Many Queenslanders are rightly proud of the quality and dedication of our paramedics. I know that the officers at the Runaway Bay station do a fantastic job providing caring, efficient and effective service to the residents of Broadwater.

In order to maintain a world-class service standard at the QAS it was necessary to secure a predictable, long-term funding source. The Queensland community ambulance cover scheme has ensured the Queensland Ambulance Service has a solid and predictable funding base for the first time in its 112-year history.

The government introduced the Community Ambulance Cover Act 2003 to enable an ambulance levy to be applied. The levy applies to electricity sale arrangements including standard contracts, power card arrangements and on-supply arrangements. As the levy is collected by electricity retailers, as agents for the Commissioner of State Revenue, and the electricity accounts issued by them include a statement of levy, which is the liability for each sale arrangement, the government recognised at the time of implementation that a number of exemptions were necessary.

The exemptions initially announced were for pensioners, principal place of residence, farming sheds and pumps, Commonwealth, state and local governments and religious and other institutions. Further to the implementation of the scheme and the provision of these exemptions, the Beattie government announced a range of other exemptions in November 2003. The announcement followed consultation with some concerned groups.

Those exemptions applied to stand-alone electricity accounts for hot water systems and public park facilities such as barbecues, picnic shelters and walkways. There was also an exemption announced for common property electricity accounts of buildings such as retirement villages, home units, attached townhouses, flats, shopping centres, offices and industrial buildings where the levy or an exemption already applied to each occupied unit, shop or office. It also applied to stand-alone electricity accounts for security lighting where the levy or an exemption already applied to the premises. An exemption also applied to stand-alone electricity accounts for certain equipment required by a person because of a

medical condition. This bill provides for those exemptions and is therefore retrospective. Further exemptions are also announced in the bill.

Every cent the QAS receives from the Queensland ambulance cover scheme is spent on Ambulance Service funding. This financial year's record budget for the QAS of \$300.8 million is tangible proof the Queensland community ambulance cover is working for all Queenslanders. Such a solid budget enables the Queensland Ambulance Service to continue to deliver world-class patient care to all Queenslanders.

In April this year the Minister for Emergency Services travelled to the Gold Coast to hand the keys to a brand new ambulance vehicle to the officers at the Runaway Bay ambulance station. This new vehicle has meant that our paramedics are now better equipped to provide vital ambulance services to this area. Our Gold Coast paramedics play a vital role and deserve praise for their dedication and commitment to emergency health care in our region.

Recently, local Gold Coast ambulance officers turned out to display their skills and resources at the annual emergency services day in the park. The residents and dignitaries who turned out were impressed by the skill, dedication and compassion that the officers displayed during accident demonstration. This is where the ambulance works together with the fire brigade and police on an accident scene. They rescue a victim out of a crashed car. They work in front of an audience—the audience being the residents. They were able to see how well they work together and the fantastic job they do. I take this opportunity to congratulate Alan Gant who received a long service award from the minister on the day.

Some members opposite have made comments to the effect that we should go back to the good old days of the QATB system with its separate boards and separate funding. I remember too well how the Ambulance Service struggled to raise funds through chook raffles, chocolate wheels and similar fundraising drives. The local ambulance committees also did a huge amount of tireless fundraising during those dark days and we cannot thank them enough for their efforts.

The Beattie government values its hardworking paramedics. They are the most trusted professionals out there. The government is committed to the community ambulance cover as the fairest way to give security and ongoing excellent ambulance services. I am pleased that the Treasurer has considered the extra exemptions. I commend the bill to the House.