



Speech by

**Hon. Pat Purcell**

**MEMBER FOR BULIMBA**

Hansard Wednesday, 1 November 2006

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## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Narangba, Binary Industries Fire**

**Hon. PD PURCELL** (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.04 am): The fire at Binary Industries at the Narangba Industrial Estate in August 2005 was an example of excellent firefighting skills under enormously difficult and dangerous conditions, and the officers and firefighters involved should receive our heartfelt thanks. The response involved 22 appliances and 74 Queensland Fire and Rescue Service personnel. There was exceptional cooperation between the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Ambulance Service, Emergency Management Queensland, the Environmental Protection Agency, Energex, Origin Energy and the Caboolture City Council. I also want to give my heartfelt thanks to the Salvation Army, which set up on the night of the fire and the days after to look after the workers on site. It was a collaborative effort to ensure the safety of staff responding to the emergency and the community and to minimise the environmental impacts.

During the course of the response the scientific unit of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service monitored air quality, with testing revealing only very low levels of airborne contaminants. One firefighter was taken to hospital on the night for treatment for smoke inhalation. Other than that employee, there have been no absences from work as a result of any injuries from the fire. I can advise the House that a letter of complaint was received from a firefighter who was concerned about his exposure to chemicals at the fire.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service commenced an internal investigation into the allegations. The internal investigator provided a draft report that was reviewed and it was determined that the original terms of reference were too narrow; the draft report raised wider issues involving technical and operational complexity and the internal investigator did not have operational experience that qualified him to comment on those issues; organisational policy required the appointment of an external investigator to investigate such a large-scale and complex event; and the draft report did not use accepted investigation methodologies for such a complex event. The draft report was not completed and the recommendations were not accepted.

In accordance with Queensland Fire and Rescue policy, an independent investigator—in this case, a company called Verifact Commercial Investigation—was commissioned in March 2006 to conduct an investigation with wider terms of reference. The person who undertook the investigation for Verifact is a retired inspector of police who is an experienced investigator with an operational service history, an ideal background to investigate this type of incident. Verifact finalised its report in June of this year. The Verifact report contains the following conclusion—

The evidence will show that the welfare and safety of all personnel, the community and the protection of the environment were paramount considerations addressed by management and affirmative actions continued throughout the incident.

I understand that more recently the same firefighter made a formal complaint to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland. My department received advice on 26 October 2006 that Workplace Health and Safety Queensland will not be instituting proceedings arising out of its investigation of the matter. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service accepts that elements of incident management could be improved.

In an uncontrolled emergency environment involving a large number of firefighters, that is not surprising. Of the 19 accepted recommendations in the Verifact report, 10 recommendations have been implemented, with implementation of the remainder underway.

The government has nothing to hide in this matter, but we acknowledge that there is continued interest in this matter. As such, I seek leave to table copies of the following documents: a chronology of events; the January 2006 uncompleted internal report; terms of reference for the Verifact investigation; the Verifact report; and implementation progress of the recommendations from the Verifact report.

Leave granted.

*Tabled paper:* Chronology of the Binary Investigation

*Tabled paper:* Report dated January 2006 titled Narangba Binary Chemical Fire 25 August 2005

*Tabled paper:* Letter dated 22 March 2006 from Ian MacKenzie, Acting Commissioner, Emergency Services, to Dick Turpin, Verifact, regarding Binary chemical fire

*Tabled paper:* Verifact Commercial Investigation report

*Tabled paper:* Document dated 26 October 2006 titled Binary recommendations from Verifact Investigation Implementation progress.