



Speech by

**Ted Malone**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

Hansard Thursday, 10 August 2006

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL (ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D)**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (12.32 pm): It is a pleasure to speak on Estimates Committee D in relation to Emergency Services. Firstly, I turn to the comments of the member for Mundingburra about the attendance of a National Party person on the panel during the afternoon session, when the estimates of the Department of Emergency Services were examined. My colleague the member for Beaudesert represented the National Party when the committee examined ATSIC issues. I assure the House that I can represent my party and ask questions on emergency services. I did not need the service of another National Party person on that panel to present questions on emergency services.

From the outset, it was a pleasure to be on this committee again and to be a part of the process. However, I certainly have some reservations about a lot of aspects of the process. I have always supported and will always support the hard work of emergency services people on the ground, both full-time employees and those people who give up their time and money to work as volunteers in this magnificent service. Volunteers work on rural fire brigades, local ambulance committees and so on, and they make our communities safer. For example, the Rural Fire Service controls 92 per cent of our state. That represents a huge workforce that receives very little recompense from the government.

I am not totally satisfied with a couple of the issues that I raised during the estimates committee. Firstly, I refer to emergency services accommodation that has been built in recent times. More and more relocatable buildings and Titan sheds are being built in rural communities. I wonder how that would work if they tried to do it in urban communities. It is almost as if those in the rural communities are becoming second-class citizens, even though this is happening in communities that are not that far outside the capital cities. In Mackay, a major ambulance facility was relocated into a relocatable building and a Titan shed. I am not saying that those buildings are not serviceable or functional, but in terms of government buildings they leave a lot to be desired.

The community ambulance tax is totally unfair, because some people have pay it more than once. Some have to pay it up to 15 or 20 times. An issue that was highlighted in the estimates committee is that local ambulance committees have to fundraise in their communities through chook raffles and the like, and they apply to the gaming machine fund to buy very essential equipment such as defibrillators. On the other hand, the director's reserve provides quite considerable amounts of money to pay for things such as the \$41,000 basketball court at Cowan, and there are similar examples. It seems incongruous when we have an unfair community ambulance cover and local ambulance committees being forced to raise funds within their committees, and on the bureaucratic side large amounts of money are being spent on what I believe to be inappropriate infrastructure which should not be a part of the core expenditure of Emergency Services.

The issue of WorkCover for volunteers, particularly in the fire service, has to be addressed in a more fair dinkum way. Self-employed people do fight fires and, obviously, sometimes they have accidents. Effectively, they are not properly covered under WorkCover. For example, they do not receive funding for operations. Indeed, throughout Queensland there have been cases where volunteer firefighters have lost their businesses, simply because they were unable to support themselves following an accident.

Time expired.