



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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QUEENSLAND AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.15 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Every Queenslanders is dismayed at what has happened to our once infallible, world-class Ambulance Service. Under consecutive conservative governments, the Queensland Ambulance Service was well managed and met the needs of patients for emergency care. Even the former Labor Premier Wayne Goss was able to manage the Ambulance Service, but not Premier Beattie. This is without excuse. Premier Beattie became the first Queensland Premier in history to be unable to manage the Ambulance Service and the first Premier to introduce an ambulance tax on the public because he claimed that the government could no longer afford to prop up the Queensland Ambulance Service owing to too many people not contributing or subscribing to the Ambulance Service. After much protest from many sectors of the community to what was an unfair new tax, the Premier stated that it was the only way to fix the Ambulance Service and to create a better, well-funded Ambulance Service. But after six years of turmoil, the question must be asked on behalf of so many Queenslanders: why is our Ambulance Service in such a deplorable state when it was promised so much financial relief?

Many incidents have been raised in this House as examples of how overworked and understaffed ambulance officers try to deliver a valuable service. Following a controversial roster reform that does not work, and which has been proved to not work, Charters Towers now has no night-time Ambulance Service. The ambulance station was closed by this government between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am, despite servicing an area the size of Tasmania, which stretches past Pentland in the west, Greenvale to the north—which is 207 kilometres from the station—Reid River and Ravenswood in the east and Belyando Crossing, which is 200 kilometres south. These roster changes were never supported by the community nor the Ambulance Service officers at Charters Towers.

Never before—for as long as anyone can remember—has Charters Towers not had a night-time Ambulance Service. This is the first time that Charters Towers does not have a night-time Ambulance Service. This is the year 2007. The government is closing down our night-time services. We now have local ambulance officers who finish a 10-hour shift and who are then called out at all hours of the morning to travel up to 440-kilometre round trips and who are then expected to have their wits about them to attend to accident victims and to save lives.

On 1 July, a Charters Towers man was left to bleed for 13 minutes on the main street before the ambulance arrived. The man was knocked unconscious in Gill Street in an unprovoked attack just before 1.30 am—a time when the ambulance station at Charters Towers was closed. This incident occurred on the same street as that which the ambulance station is located. Usually the paramedics would be dispatched and would attend the scene within minutes, which could mean the difference between life or death. Yet the station was closed. What type of service is this? Emergency services is about having staff available ready to attend accident victims in the fastest and safest time frames.

On Saturday, 18 August at 12.30 pm a Charters Towers man was badly injured and nearly lost his leg in a machinery accident. To this day he is still in hospital. Owing to fatigue and the lack of staff as a result of the unwanted roster system, it had taken 18 minutes before only one paramedic turned up. As the paramedic was alone, the auxiliary fire and rescue service was called before the paramedic was able to

assist the accident victim. The Townsville rescue helicopter was called, but it was busy. So the Mackay rescue service delivered the man to Townsville Hospital at 4.35 pm—four hours later.

The Beattie government must listen to the paramedics and throw out the roster system and identify the solutions to the current ambulance crisis. Otherwise the Ambulance Service will end up becoming a greater catastrophe than the health crisis. It will reach the point at which the fire and rescue services will be delivering babies in the back of fire trucks. The government's spin doctors must recognise that no matter how much spiel and spin they use to cover up the facts, families are being traumatised by a now malfunctioning Ambulance Service.

It is unquestionable that ambulance officers and paramedics are leaving in droves. The new roster system has failed dismally since the Beattie government introduced it in 2002, and it has caused mass exodus, low morale, high fatigue levels and longer response times. Our local ambulance officers do a wonderful job. However, they have been hamstrung by the Beattie government's mismanagement, bullying and intimidation. That is why Queenslanders deserve an independent inquiry to investigate the reasons for the current ambulance crisis and to ensure that the ambulance tax paid by every Queenslanders provides a world-class, responsive, value-for-money Ambulance Service as promised by Peter Beattie.