



Speech by

**Ted Malone**

**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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## **QUEENSLAND AMBULANCE SERVICE**

**Mr MALONE** (Mirani—NPA) (12.02 pm): Sadly the mismanagement of the services of Queensland is not confined to water, health, education, electricity, roads and public transport. Under the Beattie government our emergency services have been seriously mismanaged and none more so than the once proud and efficient Queensland Ambulance Service, which is now teetering on the edge of meltdown. They are not my words but the words of front-line paramedics who have been forced to plead with the Beattie government for more staff and more vehicles before lives are lost.

How have we got to this pathetic state of affairs with our Queensland Ambulance Service—a service which we rely on to provide emergency medical assistance to accident and critical illness victims? How has this happened? All of us recall the Premier's promise when he introduced the ambulance tax. He promised Queensland the world's best ambulance service and he dismissed legitimate concerns about the unfairness of the tax and the fact that some Queenslanders would have to pay this tax two, three, up to five times or more.

At the time Mr Beattie pushed through his tax the QAS was in trouble. Staff were rightly complaining about a shortage of paramedics and vehicles which was resulting in declining levels of service where ambulance response times were blowing out and people dialling triple 0 were left on hold; staff were stressed out, they feared harassment and bullying if they spoke out; sick leave and resignations were high and morale was low. But the Premier rushed through his ambulance tax to manage the crisis to give his government the wherewithal to deliver to Queenslanders—in his words—the world's best ambulance service.

It is nearly four years since the ambulance tax took effect on 1 July 2003. What has been the result? Why, after Mr Beattie's tax which raised nearly \$450 million, is our Ambulance Service in meltdown? Why are staff still complaining about a lack of resources? Why are staff being bullied to work up to 20 hours straight and instructed to hit 'at scene' buttons when they are nowhere near to falsify response time logs? Why are student paramedics regularly left in charge of large stations in high demand areas? Why are major Brisbane ambulance stations regularly closed and left unmanned at night and in particular over weekends? Why has there been a 10 per cent blow-out in sick leave in the past two years and why do 77 per cent of staff say they are taking more sick and stress leave than ever? Why are ambulances with more than 500,000 kilometres on the clock still on the road? Why are complaints of Labor cronyism in QAS management worse than ever? Why are staff threatened with \$3,000 fines for speaking out about the roster system? Why have the minister and the Premier been in denial?

On the threat of industrial action, the Premier has attempted to brush these issues aside, telling us things will happen in the budget and to 'watch this space'—his usual style: spin over substance. We have heard all the promises before when our money has been taken and things simply get worse. The Premier and his minister have had four years to sort out this mess. They have failed the hardworking QAS staff and they have failed the people of Queensland.

We need an open and independent inquiry into the management of the Queensland Ambulance Service. This issue is far too important to be left to Mr Beattie and the current minister who have done nothing but ignore the many serious complaints of the hardworking staff, patients and their families.

I call on the Beattie government to immediately appoint a qualified and respected person to conduct an open and independent inquiry into the management of QAS where all staff are afforded full whistleblower cover so that the inquiry can hear all legitimate concerns and where staff can be assured of protection from bullying and harassment. This inquiry needs to be a matter of urgency. This is a life and death issue and is far too important to be again swept under the table by the Premier.