



Speech by

Hon. Judy Spence

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard Thursday, 12 February 2009

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Emergency Response Times

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport) (6.03 pm): I was asked this morning by the Leader of the Opposition: 'Are people dying due to your department's inability to properly manage and answer 000 emergency calls?' The Leader of the Opposition also tabled an email about an incident which allegedly occurred on 26 January.

In relation to the handling of 000 calls, all these calls are answered by Telstra call centres in the first instance. These centres are in either Melbourne or Sydney. The call is then redirected to the appropriate emergency service. People requiring police assistance are directed to their closest Police Communications Centre. I referred the tabled documents to the Queensland Police Service for advice on the matter and they continue to investigate it. The alleged document indicates that a Sydney operator called the Brisbane Police Communications Centre and it went unanswered for over eight minutes. Urgent enquiries are being made in relation to this claim. During this period, it has been identified that the answering of some calls were delayed. The call delays on Australia Day were also exacerbated by a fault in the call-handling system. This fault has since been fixed.

The preliminary analysis indicates that the Police Communications Centre in Brisbane received over 1,100 calls to 000 on Monday, 26 January 2009, Australia Day. Of these, approximately 300 phone calls to 000 were received between 7 pm and 9 pm. Unfortunately, on this day there were some delays and the causes have been fixed. Overall, I am advised that records at the Brisbane Police Communications Centre show that the average call delay for 000 calls over the past six weeks is 11 seconds. The response times are by and large very good.

During December 2008, the Police Communications Centre in Brisbane received approximately 16,000 telephone calls to 000. Of these, only approximately four per cent related to time critical or serious injury/threatening incidents where community or officer safety is a significant issue—that is, code 1 or 2. I repeat: only four per cent.

Non-emergency calls received by police on the 000 number have included calls from someone's taxi driver who refused to wind up their window, calls seeking advice on how long to roast a chicken in the oven and calls to even order a taxi. One male whose mobile phone was out of credit and was late to meet his girlfriend rang 000 asking someone to call his girlfriend for him. People also ring about minor non-injury traffic crashes which could simply be handled by drivers exchanging details. I say to the general public that, if a 000 call is not warranted, you are encouraged to call your local police station.