



Speech by

**Michael Crandon**

**MEMBER FOR COOMERA**

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## **DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr CRANDON** (Coomera—LNP) (9.17 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010. I note that the bill refers to the functions of the chief executive. The chief executive is required to ensure that persons performing functions under the act in relation to disaster operations are appropriately trained. The Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland and the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard need to get support in this crucial area. Both of those organisations are required to work in conjunction with the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Ambulance Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Maritime Safety Queensland and the State Emergency Service. They provide an emergency first-response service and also provide a safety radio network. Furthermore, they are part of the disaster operations as defined in the act where activated by EMQ.

The issue of training is crucial to these organisations. Recently some funding has been made available for some training for each of these worthy groups. I believe it is around \$135,000 each for the coming year. They need a new funding model to ensure their ongoing viability. This really is the important point.

These organisations are constantly struggling to find the finances to go on and struggling to attract new members to their organisation so they can continue their good work as volunteer organisations. People quite often enjoy the time they spend out on the boats doing safety work and getting people off sand banks and so on, but they are constantly reminded that it is an extremely costly organisation to run and an extremely costly organisation to provide training for.

It is so important to ensure that these organisations which operate according to the counterdisaster management plan have appropriate training and are able to bring their people up to speed so that they are ready, willing and able to act if there is a disaster. We are talking about all sorts of disasters. We might be talking about bushfires or cyclone activity up and down the coast.

I am talking here about two organisations, one of which comprises 25 groups and the other which comprises 22 groups. We are talking about 47 groups. On average there are something like 100 volunteers in each group. We are talking about a big proportion of the volunteer groups in our country. They take care of the coastline for us.

If we look at what happened along the coastline last year, we see that it was a terrible year for deaths and injury. We had the highest number of deaths on the water ever recorded. In 2009 we lost 20 people to drownings or incidents that occurred on the sea. We are not talking about the high seas. Sometimes things happen out in the big seas but quite often we are talking about people who just went out to do a bit of boating for the weekend and had an accident and someone died.

We can compare that with the number of people who die on our roads every year. There are thousands of people involved in accidents who suffer injury. We can relate that situation to our waters as

well. If 20 people have died on the seas we can only imagine that many more were seriously injured. Members of the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association and the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard are out there in all weather and all conditions. We are not talking about them just being out there in the sunshine. We are talking about them being out there in the cold weather and in the middle of the night.

I remember being told the story of a fellow who tried to jump between two boats. He missed the second boat and bumped his head. The next thing he was in the water and died. He lost his life last year. He was one of the 20 I spoke of. These guys are out there doing their job in the middle of the night at times. They are first responders. They are out there providing first aid in the first instance to those in the boating fraternity. This is all about their training. It is all about preparing them for a major disaster that might occur anywhere along the Queensland coast or indeed inland. They can be called on at any time to assist with an inland disaster situation. They can be called on at any time to do their share on behalf of the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association.

I have looked at the VMR models in other parts of Australia. I went to Perth to do this. I was very impressed with the funding model for Western Australia. I spent some time there. I thank the people there for the effort they put in. I visited two of their—

**Mr Bleijie:** They're good people.

**Mr CRANDON:** They are terrific people. I take that interjection. They put in a big effort to run me through their processes and their boat replacement program. They were very impressive. There is a few million dollars involved. But let us make a comparison with here. Over there we are talking about \$6.4 million in funding. For the two organisations on this side of Australia we are talking about a couple of million dollars in funding. There is a vast difference in funding between the two states.

Under the model in Western Australian they are fully trained. They are up to the mark as far as their training is concerned. I make the point again that training is extremely important because they operate under the counterdisaster management plan. Funding is essential to ensure that on an ongoing basis we not only train the people who are there but also attract new members. When we attract those new members it is not a matter of just bringing them on and making them the big promise of going out and spending some time on the boats. It is extremely important that we ensure that they have the training they need.

**Mr Rickuss:** We should support our volunteers

**Mr CRANDON:** I take that interjection from the member for Lockyer. We have to support our volunteers. I note that there are 34,000 members of the rural fire brigade. The training of those folk is essential to ensure that they are safe and properly trained when they go out to fight a fire or get involved in rescue operations. Their work is not just about fighting fires; they are out on the sides of our roads assisting people at car accident scenes. Quite often they are first responders.

In this case we are not talking about disaster management on a big scale. We are not talking about an organisation that is out trying to assist people in a cyclone situation or in a major bushfire situation. Nevertheless, we are talking about situations where people have suffered serious injury or died. Coming back to the VMR and the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, those people are in exactly the same situation. Let me give the House a little bit of information. I have looked at the VMR, as I have said, but I have gone a bit deeper into where they are coming under pressure. We have 240,000 registered boats in Queensland. To put that in perspective, that is more boats than in any other state of Australia.

Some 662,000 Queenslanders hold a recreational licence. Let me put that in perspective: that is 117,000 more licences than just five years ago. Some 662,000 Queenslanders hold recreational licences, up 117,000. That sort of growth in the number of licences is simply putting more and more pressure on the Australian Coast Guard and VMR in this state. Therefore, it is so important that we ensure that the funding is there so that they are ready, willing and able to be part of that counterdisaster management plan if and when it comes to their shores. I urge the government to fully review the funding model for VMR and Australian Coast Guard and indeed consider bringing both groups into the same legislative framework as the SES.