



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (12.42 pm): In speaking to the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010, I welcome any opportunity to congratulate and publicly acknowledge emergency services workers and volunteers for their hard work and selfless dedication. These people rose to the occasion when Cyclone Larry tore through Far North Queensland and, likewise, during many other recent disasters. They have always demonstrated qualities of which we are all proud. It is a credit to the emergency services response team in Queensland that they have been able to coordinate disaster management time and time again coherently and efficiently. These amendments seek to enshrine the current good practice of the SES and state emergency departments in legislation.

The bill implements the recommendations made by the independent review in 2009 and serves to strengthen and support the proven success of existing structures of the Queensland disaster management system. The independent review recommended that the role of the emergency services workers be further defined and sought to facilitate cooperation between all levels of government, emergency services workers and volunteers involved in disaster management. It is good to see that the proposed amendments seek to implement those recommendations. The further definition of state and local government roles in disaster management seeks to resolve inconsistencies and better facilitate cooperation between all levels of government. This should ensure responses are better coordinated and specifically targeted to achieve maximum efficiency in response coordination.

I am very glad that this legislation has come before the House. At times there has not been consistency and coordination between government departments and local governments. This was especially so during the 2008-09 flood when the Burdekin River flowed over the bridge for more than a week. In the communities of Charters Towers and Homestead there was very little food in the supermarkets, in the local shopping centres and in the stores. We had asked Queensland Rail to provide a freight service. I think this is very important. A new company called ARG, which Queensland Rail had bought from Western Australia, took over rail freight services from Townsville to Mount Isa. It then closed down all the freight services as there was no longer a responsibility to provide a freight service. So when we needed a service during a time of emergency, ARG reneged on that. It was not until we got on to the minister—and this was at the end of the week when we were virtually out of food—that we were able to get that freight in. I really believe that this has to be dealt with in the future. I do not want to see Queensland Rail sold. We need a coordinated approach because in times of emergency such as this, when our bridges are impassable and the only access is by rail, we need to get freight in by rail.

The proposed combination of existing districts allows for streamlined access to regional resources which can mean rapid and efficient emergency response at a regional level. I have been advised by senior SES members that this amendment is a significant improvement on the current arrangements, which require the state to arrange resources for emergency response once resources have been exhausted in an affected district.

I would like to emphasise the importance of expediency in the implementation of this legislation. In a few months it will be cyclone season and the proposed amendments will require administration adjustments across all departments and agencies involved in disaster management. The combining of districts will require coordination and communication. The sooner departments are able to act on the new legislation, the more prepared they will be for the cyclone season. The inclusion of Local Government Association representatives is an acknowledgement of the importance of communication with local government when coordinating disaster management, as is the greater role of police in developing a disaster management strategy, as district and state coordinators recognise that police are best placed to assume command and control of disaster events at a state level.

An area identified in the independent review addressed IT systems. It is my understanding that SES 'request for assistance' data is being integrated into local government Guardian software. Does the government have a time line for completion of these upgrades and is any further system development planned to improve communications and data gathering for those involved in disaster management? I bring that to the attention of the House.