



Speech by


**Chris Foley**

**MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH**

Hansard Tuesday, 14 February 2012

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## **MARYBOROUGH ELECTORATE, RURAL FIRE BRIGADES**

 **Mr FOLEY** (Maryborough—Ind) (10.11 pm): I would like to bring to the attention of the House the plight of rural fire volunteers in my electorate. I met with a group of them about a week and a half ago, and to say that they are quite unhappy would be the understatement of the year.

The rural fire brigades previously existed on a very meagre \$25 per property levy. This was to cover all of their training commitments, the weekends and nights they spend out fighting fires and being called on at any time to participate in strike teams intrastate and interstate. This \$25 levy has now been taken away from them. Despite the fire levy in the Dundowran-Toogoom areas rising from \$25 to \$81 and in the East Booral-Nikenbah area rising from \$25 to \$161, this whole levy is now going to be kept by the Queensland Fire Service and not paid to local volunteers, which is scandalous. This is clearly a case of the government having their cake and eating it too.

I call on the minister to immediately reverse this decision and restore a share of the funding so that rural fire brigades continue to receive the \$25 that they previously received per block. I have called on the minister in parliament before to fully fund the volunteer operations as Queensland is the only state that does not fully fund volunteer fire operations—and that sends a very bad message to people who give of their time selflessly to protect our community. In Queensland there are approximately 2,000 permanent firefighters and 2,500 auxiliaries, but there are 34,000 volunteers, plus about 2,000 fire wardens.

The government could simply not contain fires without the services of the volunteer fire brigade. So it raises the question as to why the Bligh government is robbing the volunteers that it so heavily relies on. Clearly the government needs to take stock of the way it is treating rural fires and give them a much greater degree of autonomy and include them in the planning process of firefighting in Queensland. Most people do not realise that urban firefighting units can only fight fires from designated sealed roads and cannot go off-road and therefore rely on the rural fire brigade to be able to use their off-road four-wheel drive capacity to attend these fires and also to back up the urban units when they are in an area where it is difficult to get water.

I find that the rural fires in my area are doing a brilliant job despite feeling very, very undervalued. I call on the government to redress this imbalance ASAP.