




Speech By
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**COMMUNITY SAFETY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO.1) 2013:
DISALLOWANCE OF STATUTORY INSTRUMENT**

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (8.21 pm): I rise to speak in support of the disallowance of the Community Safety Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2013, subordinate legislation No. 110 of 2013. From 1 January next year the average household in regional Queensland will be hit with a new \$90 tax with the introduction of an emergency management, fire and rescue levy. The average urban household will also be hit with an increase of \$10.80 to the urban fire levy. This is just one of the tax hikes and revenue grabs introduced by the Newman government.

So far under the Newman government taxes have gone up by more than \$1,000 per year for the average family of four. This was after the LNP promised at the election to lower the cost of living by \$250 to \$330 per year. As I said the other day, when it comes to the Premier's election pledge in his contract with Queenslanders to lower the cost of living, the result has been an 'F' for fail. The Newman government's emergency management, fire and rescue levy will raise \$187.6 million over four years. It is part of a set of \$1.2 billion in tax grabs by the Newman government in this year's budget—tax grabs that were not flagged before the last election.

It states in the budget papers that the levy has been introduced to provide funding for emergency management, fire and rescue services. However, on a closer examination of this year's budget papers it is clear that, for this financial year at least, this is not the case. Although the Newman government's new revenue grab will raise an additional \$24 million this financial year, the funding from the Consolidated Fund to emergency management, fire and rescue has been reduced by the same amount compared with the funding for the previous financial year. That means that, although the levy proceeds are going to emergency management, fire and rescue, the funding contribution from the Consolidated Fund for these services is being reduced by the same amount. So let there be no mistake about it: this levy increase is a revenue grab, pure and simple.

The Newman government has left it to local governments to implement this revenue grab. Instructions have been issued to local governments to go out and categorise the prescribed properties that will be charged the levy. Considering that none of this funding is going to additional services and that the Newman government has taken the politically convenient option of leaving the collection to local governments, this can only be seen for what it is: a politically motivated, cynical grab for cash.

This is a tax grab that is not delivering any additional resources for rural fire brigades, which have been asking for more support. It was only when serious fires started up in New South Wales recently and the government saw protests from rural fire brigades right across our state that it started to listen to our rural fire brigades. That was long overdue. To impose a new tax on people living in regional Queensland and to not divert that revenue to fire services in those areas is a cop-out.

It does make me wonder what happened to the 'N' in the LNP. Where are the old National Party members on this issue? I know some of them figured out that they were on a sinking ship and left to join the crossbenches. So we have the 'N', which is fast disappearing. We have the 'L' in which

all that is left is the big 'L' Liberal; there is no longer any small 'l' liberal. That just leaves the 'P', which stands for 'Party'. We all know that, after the last sitting of parliament the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the member for Cairns and others loved to party out on the veranda. But why are those old Nationals not speaking up for their local communities on this issue? Perhaps many of them do not know about this increase, which might be understandable considering that it is yet to come into effect.

I know that many rural fire brigades rely on generous donations from local communities and businesses. This government is imposing a levy that is said to fund rural fire services; however, that is not where the funding is ultimately going. By imposing a levy that claims to fund rural fire services, but does not, this government risks discouraging donations as it makes people think that they are already paying for the service anyway. But they are not.

I urge those members who have large parts of their electorate located outside urban areas to look at this issue closely. In doing so, I am not seeking to score any political points but to point out that it is an upcoming issue of significant community concern for them. Let us not forget that last year this government announced that it would sack 56 Rural Fire Service staff, only to then later pretend that it had never made that announcement. The increase in this tax is even worse for businesses across Queensland. For a small shopping centre, the increase is up to \$445 per year. For a medium-sized guesthouse or hotel, the increase is up to \$1,316 per year. For a tavern or a theatre complex, the increase is up to \$2,150 per year. For a hotel or motel that is four levels, the increase is up to \$3,290 per year. For a brewery, sugar terminal or distillery, the increase is up to \$37,534 per year. For a power station, the increase is up to \$43,026 per year. For a large tourism resort, the increase is up to \$64,542 per year. For a large tertiary education institution, the increase is up to \$107,573 per year. Lastly, for a large casino, which includes accommodation or restaurant facilities, the increase is up to \$179,294 per year.

This Newman government talks a lot about how it serves businesses, but it does not mind slugging them with a tax grab when it suits them. Just as no analysis was done by Treasury on the impact of this government's insurance tax grab on disaster affected families, I am yet to see evidence that any assessment of affordability for businesses and regional Queenslanders was undertaken for this tax hike. Recently, the member for Cairns flagged his support for increasing building heights in North Queensland. That may well be for very good reasons. As set out in the regulation, hotels will be charged the fire levy based on their building height. For a hotel or motel of not more than two levels, the increase is up to \$445 per year. For three levels, the increase is up to \$1,316 per year. For four levels, the increase is up to \$3,290 per year. For five to six levels, the increase is up to \$5,838 per year. For seven to 10 levels, the increase is up to \$20,301 per year. For 11 to 16 levels, the increase is up to \$37,534 per year. For 17 to 25 levels, the increase is up to \$43,026 per year. For more than 25 levels, the increase is up to \$64,542 per year.

These higher buildings in North Queensland would also attract higher levies under the Newman government's new emergency management, fire and rescue levy. Previously, I referred to local governments having to collect this levy on behalf of the state government. I note that today councils across Queensland have said that they do not want to be the tax collectors for the state government. They do not want to have anything to do with this tax collection either. Greg Hallam, the CEO of the LGAQ has said—

Clearly councils would rather not collect money on behalf of the State Government.

I think he was being reserved. Regardless of the collection method, the introduction of this levy by the Newman government would be less objectionable if the money was being directed to rural fire services. But it is not. The budget papers set out that the introduction of the emergency management, fire and rescue levy is nothing more than a revenue grab—a tax grab from a Newman government that from opposition claimed that taxes and charges were out of control, a Newman government that has now increased taxes for the average family of four by more than \$1,000 per year since it was elected and a Newman government that made an election pledge to every Queensland family that it would lower the cost of living by \$250 to \$330 per year. This Newman government has broken its promises on the cost of living and it has broken its promises to business. It is another 'F' for fail. The introduction of the emergency management, fire and rescue levy is just one more example of a broken LNP promise.

I urge this government to not forget about the importance of our rural fire brigades. I am a former auxiliary firefighter. We worked very closely with rural fire brigades in my home town of Gordonvale. I certainly know that they perform an absolutely amazing task and often will not be able to get the support from the urban fire services when they need it.

I have recently met with a range of different people from rural fire services in Far North Queensland. They have been very clear about their absolute disgust at this approach, what the fire

levy is going to do for business and certainly the fact that this Newman government has hung the member for Mirani out to dry. They let him loose on what I thought was quite a reasonable document at the end of the day, agreed to by most of the people in the Rural Fire Service, and guess what? The Keelty review came in right over the top of it and pretended he did not exist.

To introduce a tax like this in regional Queensland and to hoard the money to allocate elsewhere is simply unfair. The people in regional areas deserve better than this from the LNP government. They deserve better from the Newman government that is supposed to, in theory, also represent the 'L', the 'N' and the 'P', not just the 'L' in LNP.