




Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 October 2013

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

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (7.30 pm): It is only natural for me as a rural member to move this motion in the House. I move—

That the Community Safety Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2013, Subordinate Legislation No. 110 of 2013, tabled in the House on 6 August 2013, be disallowed.

This imputes an emergency fire levy on all rural residents right across Queensland. In last year's budget the government announced that it would almost halve funding for rural services right across Queensland. At that time I believed that was one of the greatest attacks on rural Queensland that we have ever seen in Queensland's history bar the forced council amalgamations. As we were heading into probably one of the worst fire seasons in Queensland's history, it was very imprudent of the government to make the decision to cut the fire service almost in half.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Mr Speaker, the member is being misleading and I ask him to withdraw.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Dr Robinson): Order! That is not a point of order.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I find it offensive and I ask him to withdraw. The budget was not almost cut in half.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Minister, I did not hear any inference or personal insinuation to you. That is not a point of order. I call the member for Dalrymple.

**Mr KNUTH:** Then we had the Malone review, which was going to soften and sweeten all rural residents and the rural fire brigade. The member for Mirani travelled over all of Queensland, and I will refer to that later.

We have once again been duded because we have been hit with a rural fire levy. The sad thing about this is that rural residents are already out there fighting fires. They are already out there raising funds. They are always out there putting their time, energy and effort into fighting fires. There are 35,000 volunteers. This is going to kick those 35,000 volunteers in the guts by forcing them to pay a rural fire levy. Those 35,000 volunteers are telling me right now that, if they are not valued, if the government does not need them, they will walk out and let the government put out the fires.

I believe this is a most serious issue. I will read to the House a document about the concerns that exist regarding this Rural Fire Service levy. This is a great impost. As I said, we already have volunteers who in their own time and at their own expense are out there raising funds. They know the area, they have the experience, they know where all the tracks are, they know where the watering points are and they know how to communicate. They are already there. This is why we have moved this motion in the House, because we want to ensure that we have a sustainable rural fire brigade available and on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. An article in the *Tablelands Advertiser* of 18 October titled 'Levy fires up closure fears' states—

THE owner of one of Tableland's premier attractions says a new government levy could force him to close the doors.

Mt Uncle Distillery owner Bruce Watkins said he could be forced to close as a result of the State Government's Emergency Management Fire and Rescue levy, which is due to be implemented on January 1, next year.

Mr Watkins, who has spent 12 years setting up his business, said he was disgusted with the introduction of the new tax and his business simply could not sustain the cost of \$37,536 a year.

'I will not be paying the rural fire levy tax; the only options will be closure or prison,' Mr Watkins told *The Advertiser*.

In terms of distilleries and all workplace health and safety water relief, we have everything in place and it's not a problem; there is a better chance of a car blowing up than our distillery.

...

Mr Watkins said the 'double tax is a money grab for the Government' and will not guarantee a faster response time to his property in the case of a fire.

Here is a person who has provided 12 jobs to a rural community and he is hit with a \$37,000 levy. I know that this person has always been a great supporter of the LNP. I hope that the minister will succumb and implement the recommendations of the Malone review and provide greater support to the rural fire brigade. I hope that he announces it tonight. He has come out with a few sweeteners.

I will read what the rural fire brigade in Charters Towers has said in response to the minister talking about providing protective clothing and a few other nice goodies. It states—

CHARTERS Towers Rural Fire Brigade Association representative Nell Baron has called on the State Government to give local volunteers some respect.

This is not the member for Dalrymple saying this. It will not be the member for Mount Isa who will be saying this. It is the Charters Towers Rural Fire Service that has called on the government to give the volunteers some respect. It states—

The government has reaffirmed its support for Queensland's Rural Fire Service after committing to fully fund the equipment and training needs for the service.

But Mrs Barron said the government is giving the RFBA nothing they don't already get.

Minister for Police and Community Safety Jack Dempsey said the increased funding would include protective clothing, communication equipment and training.

'They've always given us protective clothing,' Mrs Barron said.

'The communications system is supplied but they could supply better.'

'They already offer training.'

Mrs Barron said people don't realise the volunteers have to fundraise to put fuel into their RFBA vehicles because the state government doesn't pay for that.

'They don't supply anything,' she said.

'I haven't seen any area where they're going to increase (funding). They're giving us what they've already been giving us.'

'They're not doing anything different that would make you jump up and down.'

...

Mrs Barron said the fact that the government had taken so long to implement the actions of the review had caused big eruptions throughout Queensland.

I think it has caused big eruptions around Queensland, but the only people who do not know about it is the LNP government. The article continues—

'They (volunteers) need to be treated with respect and I don't believe that's what they're getting,' she said.

'All we want from the government is a fair share and a fair go. We don't want the government to be making it any worse.'

I table these two documents that I have read out.

*Tabled paper:* News article from the *Tablelands Advertiser*, dated Friday, 18 October 2013, titled 'Levy fires up closure fears' [\[3927\]](#).

*Tabled paper:* News article titled 'No fire in extra funding' [\[3928\]](#).

I hope that the minister reads them, and I hope that he implements the recommendations of the Malone review. There have been seven reviews of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service since the integration of urban and rural firefighting operations over 20 years ago. Every review, including the latest review conducted by the member for Mirani, has made the same key recommendations that the management of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service should have greater operational and funding control and a greater role in the command hierarchy of Queensland's emergency services. Unfortunately, every government, including the current government, has rejected these recommendations because the central decision makers in every government over the past 20 years have been urban based, with the majority of influence in cabinet in South-East Queensland.

The latest review is the Malone review, headed up by the member for Mirani. I commend the member for the way in which the review was conducted throughout rural Queensland. The review was comprehensive and extensive. Rural fire services felt they had been heard and that the member for Mirani had been given the authority to ensure the findings of the review would be implemented by the government.

The issues raised by the rural fire services during the review were support for local district staff and a strong call for increased district staff levels to provide support to the network of brigades and fire wardens; supply of adequate and appropriate fire equipment and assets; provision of training that is relevant to the tasks and operations of rural fire management with a focus on practical application; minimise procedural administration encumbrances for volunteers; provide adequate and appropriate insurance, WorkCover and indemnities; remove the philosophical impediments of a state command structure and place decision making at the local rural area level where the risk and responsibility lies; enhance the cost-effectiveness and efficiencies of operational and administrative services, minimising the present waste and delays.

The Malone review made 91 recommendations to improve the position of volunteers and rural fire brigades. The government is more in favour—as perceived by the Rural Fire Service—of the Keelty review than the Malone review, but hopefully the minister will surprise us. Hopefully, he will say tonight that he is more in favour of the Malone review than the Keelty review. The Keelty review contained zero contributions from rural firefighting volunteers, demonstrating the lack of representation that rural residents have on key decisions affecting their communities. The imposition of the emergency management fire and rescue levy is nothing more than another tax to increase consolidated revenue, which is where the money will be going. This is what has rural residents and the rural fire brigade up in arms, because they want the funding and the autonomy to go back to the Rural Fire Service, not hit residents with a \$37,000 bill or a \$2,000 bill when they already put out their own fires, when they already put out their own systems, when the rural fire brigade and other volunteers are already out there fighting those fires in their own time and at their own expense; they are already raising funds. This is something that needs to be addressed tonight.

The 34,000 rural fire volunteers in Queensland were rejoicing when the government announced this review. They did their best to ensure that not only did their contributions point out the problem but they also brought solutions to the table. In my electorate Rural Fire Service volunteers gave up their time and often travelled great distances to attend meetings held by the member for Mirani. This disallowance motion is to reverse the impost on rural Queensland and to acknowledge also the suffering of rural and regional Queensland at present and their concerns about being hit with this impost while they still go out and raise the funds for their service. If the government wants to get rid of the 35,000 volunteers, why does the minister not do this tonight? By not adopting this review and introducing this levy that is what he is telling us. He is kicking those great Rural Fire Service men and women in the guts.

The Malone review recommended a funding model in which any levy collected by local government on behalf of the Rural Fire Service was directly related to the needs of the local rural firefighting units. I will repeat that. The Malone review recommended a funding model in which any levy collected by local governments on behalf of the Rural Fire Service was directly related to the needs of not consolidated revenue—it is not money that is going to pay off the budget—but the local rural firefighting units. The levy that has been put in place by this Community Safety Legislation Amendment Regulation is unsustainable. It is an impost that will cause severe damage to struggling communities with no guaranteed benefits to the rural fire brigades that volunteer to risk their lives protecting their communities from the ravage of the bushfire. We will see another bushfire season, but this is the foundation for years to come. We do not want to kick them in the guts because there are people who are ready to leave now and there are good people who have already left. We might say to you that you are mad, but I have just read out to you the concerns of not Shane Knuth or other members of parliament, but concerns of rural residents. I hope that members can support this disallowance motion.