




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 30 October 2013

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

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (8.13 pm): In rising to speak to this disallowance motion, I want to acknowledge the assistant minister, Mr Malone, and the minister, because I know that they have been working tirelessly with regard to the Malone review and the 91 recommendations that have been agreed to in principle and have had many mature debates with the Rural Fire Brigades Association to ensure that the outcome for rural firefighters will be a good result.

Mr Knuth interjected.

Mr BENNETT: No, but we still have a way to go, member for Dalrymple. It is great that we have been able to introduce training, equipment and representation with a deputy commissioner. These things are slow in coming but they are being implemented in such a great organisation, the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland. I have done some research and around my electorate there are nearly 80 brigades and nearly 2,000 volunteers. I have taken great joy in visiting at least half a dozen of them in the last couple of months and 10 previous to that, because it is always interesting to hear from the grassroots volunteers about their needs and aspirations.

A wide range of emergency services are delivered across Queensland—from firefighting to rescues, evacuations and resupplies. The equipment and expertise needed for specialist emergency management has grown significantly over time. At the same time, there has been an increasing number of disasters that have significantly impacted on our state. This government recognised the critical need for a sustainable funding base to be established to ensure vital emergency services could continue to be delivered into the future. For this reason, on 1 July 2013 the urban levy was renamed and its purpose broadened to the emergency management fire and rescue levy. The new coverage of the levy comes into effect from 1 January 2014. This means that the levy will apply to all prescribed properties that are outside current fire districts unless an exemption applies.

The levy is assessed and applied by each local council based on the area of the property, or part of the property, and the use of the property. An appeals process is available for property owners who consider that their property has been wrongly assessed, and of course that leads into the valuation issue. Importantly, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has been working with local councils to assist them in implementing the new component of the levy and classifying properties correctly—which is always a nice place to start—and I encourage my local council to continue to work with the government in a mature way to implement the requirements of the new levy. Queensland fire and rescue staff are travelling around the state with the Local Government Association of Queensland to assist in the implementation of the levy. The capacity for local councils to apply a rural fire levy for additional direct support to their local brigades has not been changed. This government has reaffirmed its support for the Queensland Rural Fire Service by committing to fully fund the equipment and training needs of the service. As I mentioned earlier, some of the other recommendations from the Malone review have started to be implemented. This funding will ensure that rural firefighters are equipped to do the best job for Queenslanders, and that is something that we all expect. All

Queenslanders benefit from having well-equipped, well-trained, capable and responsive emergency services.

Over the past decade Queenslanders have suffered a significant number of natural major disasters, and if anyone wants to come to Bundaberg sometime I can certainly show them that. Apart from that, many towns have also suffered throughout the state. Throughout each of these disasters, Queensland's emergency services personnel have provided a first-class response to their respective communities. Expanding the existing urban fire levy to include emergency management is one of the most equitable means of providing the best emergency response possible for Queensland. This levy will ensure that emergency management is placed on a sustainable footing so that the government can continue to deliver as and when it is required.

I take this opportunity to speak on an important issue to not only my electorate of Burnett but also the whole of Queensland, and that is volunteering within the Queensland Rural Fire Service. As I mentioned before, I am extremely proud of the 80 rural fire brigades around my area and the 2,355 volunteers who service the Burnett, Bundaberg and of course the Callide areas. It is a fantastic community focused organisation and this debate should not underestimate our thanks for our hardworking and dedicated volunteers. Rural fire brigades across Queensland service 93 per cent of the state and provide services such as fire mitigation, volunteer training and community education to rural and semirural areas of Queensland. Even outside of rural communities, the Rural Fire Service made a significant contribution to the floods in 2011-12 and 2013 and many fire events such as, as the member for Mirani alluded to earlier, the recent tragic events in New South Wales. This effort is worth mentioning and noting in the House.

It is an organisation that we are all proud of in terms of the positive contributions that it makes to our rural communities. However, the future of the organisation as we know will be based on the strength and the growth of its volunteers. That is why I want to use the time remaining tonight to urge members of my community to consider a rewarding volunteering opportunity with their local rural fire brigade. Being a volunteer in the rural fire brigade is rewarding, not only to the volunteers but also to the communities. Communities across Queensland have come to respect the yellow trucks and I hope that this debate tonight continues to show that we are moving forward. As a volunteer you will learn new and important skills and develop friendships and connections with your brigade that will last a lifetime. It is the spirit of service that bonds volunteer fires, and it should be that spirit of service that attracts new volunteers to the service.

The rural fire brigade in my electorate has many volunteers, but it needs to have more to ensure its growth into the future. Continued growth is important not only to the brigade but also to the wider community. That is why I fully support the recent initiatives taken up by the Malone review. I would like to think that the local brigades and the Rural Fire Brigades Association can continue a mature debate and recruit volunteers and educate the local community about what is important in local fire management. I urge all the residents of the Burnett electorate to consider volunteering for their local fire brigade. Volunteering is a noble cause. Some of the members of this parliament have noble bones in their bodies. Let us continue to have a mature debate about rural fire brigades.

With the fire season soon approaching, we need volunteers. We all know that that is critical. The long-term security of the service hinges on younger residents putting up their hands to be a volunteer. Up at Rosedale last Sunday at the local emergency management meeting it was overwhelming to see that the SES and the rural fire brigade were willing to continue the debates and the conversations with me as their local member on behalf of a wide-ranging, active, volunteer rural fire brigade. I was happy to talk about the Malone review. I was happy to talk about my commitment to their cause.

The Minister for Police is continuing his open-door policy with the Rural Fire Brigades Association. I must say that around home that is much appreciated. Again, I take this opportunity to encourage the younger residents in my region to volunteer. They are best placed to develop the service well in the future. They have the ability to use social media to attract volunteers, to utilise these new avenues of recruitment, to continue to innovate and to make sure that the service is maintained in the long term. In return, the service can provide them with access to much needed skills and services. The opportunities that are available to younger people through the service will assist them for life and will help them develop the region for years to come.

I will finish by saying to the young people in my region and in Bundaberg to log on, call up, do whatever they can to find out about becoming a volunteer in the rural fire brigade. I ask them to take some time to learn what is going to happen in the future to their rural fire bridge and the services that the LNP government will help them provide. The rewards for the volunteers in our community will certainly outweigh any effort in signing up and joining the proud tradition of being a member of a rural fire brigade.