




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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**PUBLIC SAFETY BUSINESS AGENCY BILL**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.02 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Public Safety Business Agency Bill 2014. A review was undertaken of much of our emergency services and community safety functions. Earlier we heard the member for Rockhampton talk about that Keelty review. During his speech he said many things that I found difficult to understand. Mr Keelty has a great deal of experience and expertise in this area. He looked very closely at how we are currently functioning at a state level with our emergency services and made recommendations. I think that those recommendations are sound and the minister has taken them on board. The report contained 127 recommendations, 87 of which applied directly to the minister's portfolio of Police, Fire and Emergency Services. In introducing this bill, the minister is looking to adopt those recommendations so that the people of Queensland can be better served.

During the election campaign the LNP made the commitment that we would restore front-line services and make Queensland one of the safest places to raise a family. This report moves towards achieving both of those commitments by making recommendations so that we can do that in an efficient and effective way. The principal points of the Keelty report were that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service be merged with Emergency Management Queensland to form a new department named Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.

Back in 2011 Toowoomba experienced a weather event that stretched our emergency services and stretched the communication capabilities of the police. That event highlighted the fact that the coordination of several services was difficult with the structure that existed at that time. Unfortunately, people in Toowoomba lost their lives because they did not necessarily get through to the right agency at the right time. So to suggest that we should carry on doing what happened in the past, which was what the member for Rockhampton put forward, highlights that the opposition does not understand what we are trying to achieve. We are trying to improve the delivery of front-line services. We are trying to improve communication. We are trying to improve the effectiveness of front-line services in Queensland so that the people who live here can bring up their families knowing that, when emergency services are required, they can call on them and those services will be dispatched in an effective and efficient way.

The setting up of the Public Safety Business Agency achieves some of those objectives. Ultimately, we will take officers out of back rooms and away from functions that are not core to the job that they signed on to do. Police officers signed on to provide services to the community so that they can make the community safe. Sitting a police officer in a room answering a telephone—although an important function—is not necessarily a key function of a police officer. If someone can take down the details of a matter and punch them through to an appropriate front-line officer who is out there on the beat, on the street, in the community in an efficient and effective way, then I absolutely support the minister in setting up such a service that can do that. I sure that there are people in the Police Service who at the moment are looking after the asset management of buildings and other things who, when they signed up to be police officer, did not imagine that they would be doing that. They would have

imagined that they would be out there investigating crimes and providing services to the community to make them safer. I think that by allowing our sworn officers the opportunity to be able to go out there and offer these services directly to the community not only delivers on our promise to restore our front-line services effectively and efficiently but also the community is grateful to see them.

I have spoken to many officers who have started interacting with some of the new communication devices that are now available to them, such as the iPad technology, which is allowing them to stay out in the community, on the beat, providing the services at the coalface and doing it in an efficient and effective way. If we have other experts in the Public Service who have clerical skills or skills in asset management, or skills relating to the other functions that this business agency will provide, then we should have a suitable place in this agency for those people as well. That is exactly what this system sets up.

Ultimately, this bill will provide more efficient and effective front-line services to be available to the people of Queensland. It will do it in a way such that people who signed on to be a fireman and involved in that service delivery to Queensland can focus on the job that they thought that they were signing on for and not on the management of buildings or answering telephones. I think that the establishment of the business agency is a great step forward for the department. I think that it will provide the delivery of services in an efficient manner that will allow the front line to do the job that we all expect them to do.

When something goes wrong, what do we want? We want to make sure that people arrive at the scene of an accident, let us say, in an efficient and effective way and that they can get on and do the job in a coordinated fashion. When a disaster happens, emergency services can be stretched. As I say, Toowoomba has seen what happens when emergency services are stretched.

Having experts who are trained in the delivery of the various parts of that service coordinated effectively by a business agency I think will be a good outcome. Creating the Office of the Inspector-General of Emergency Management will ultimately have a good outcome in terms of coordinating the management in that area. I think the business agency itself will be able to coordinate the things that are currently being done by sworn officers which means they are taken off the front-line. We have seen our front-line service personnel start to swell. Last week in Toowoomba six first-year constables arrived. A few weeks before that there were 10 new constables. We can see that this minister is working hard to deliver on our commitment at the 2012 election to restore front-line services. We can see front-line services not only swelling with new recruits but also a re-tasking of officers back to the front line. This is just another step in providing an efficient and effective service so that Queensland is the safest place to raise a family in Australia. I support the minister in bringing this bill into the House. I look forward to its implementation and I commend it and the minister for bringing it forward.