




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Paramedics, Assaults

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (12.10 pm): Today I rise to discuss with the House the worrying increase in the incidence of assaults on our state's paramedics. Last Wednesday night in this place I stood and spoke on the alcohol fuelled violence bill and the challenges faced by our ambulance professionals who have to deal with intoxicated and drug affected patients, some of whom decide to assault them. As a result of that bill being passed by the Palaszczuk government, I hope to see a reduction in those assaults. The irony is that, on that same night, an officer was assaulted in Townsville. I personally know that paramedic. I have since spoken to him. Remarkably, after the assault he continued to treat the patient. That is the type of paramedics that we have in this state: they are dedicated to the core. There was yet another incident in Cairns over the weekend.

It is no secret that I am passionate about the paramedics of the Queensland Ambulance Service. With over 3,600 front-line staff responding from over 290 locations and having over one million interactions per year, it is indeed a very busy service. From the outset I say that all Queensland Ambulance Service paramedics are the most dedicated and trusted professional people you will ever have the pleasure of meeting. Some of our paramedics volunteer, such as our first responders. Our state's ambos are truly great people. They each have the right to go safely home to their families after their shifts or callouts. Our paramedics are true community champions and, in their thousands, they are there to look after the entire community of Queensland. All paramedics deserve to be treated with the utmost respect by our community.

History shows that the Queensland Ambulance Service—that great service—is the most noble of professions, providing aid to the injured and proudly serving the people of Queensland for nearly 125 years. Our paramedics give comfort to those in need. They are there at the most difficult times of crisis. They witness the most horrid and challenging scenes. They remain calm and go about their clinical roles, quite often in the most difficult and stressful environments, from car accidents to the sides of mountains, from the sea to our homes, our workplaces and, yes, our nightclub precincts. They are there to help all Queenslanders. What I am trying to articulate to the House is that it is a hard job. After 25 years of working in that role, I think I speak with a degree of authority. They should not have to cop abuse and punches or be otherwise assaulted on the job. It disturbs me greatly that we have an increasing trend of this type of assault on the very people who are called to help. There were over 247 assaults in 2014-15 and that number has nearly doubled, because in the past six months there has been nearly the same number of assaults. That is very worrying. If the current trend remains, it will be nearly a 50 per cent increase on the entire previous year.

I congratulate the minister, the Hon. Cameron Dick, for his strong leadership and desire to ensure we as a government are doing all we can to stop the assaults on paramedics. I commend Commissioner Russell Bowles and the senior leadership team of QAS. They are working collaboratively with the United

Voice union. Together they have formed a task force to address this very serious issue. Several recommendations have already started as a result of that task force. Situational awareness and de-escalation strategies form part of the safe training that will see the entire operational workforce of paramedics trained by the end of this year. Importantly, as part of those recommendations a significant public awareness campaign will start shortly to educate and inform the public that our QAS paramedics are not to be treated as punching bags or assaulted on the job, but are to be treated with every bit of respect they deserve. I implore members to support the social media campaigns that have already started, such as the Zero Tolerance and Triple Zero Tolerance campaigns. I know that our government is committed to giving the community a stronger voice by seeking to reinstate the sentencing advisory council, which will provide a valuable tool for the government and the community about sentencing of offenders and the criminal justice system.

Finally, I thank each and every one of our state's paramedics. I acknowledge them for the work that they do. They are ordinary people who do an extraordinary job in our community. I ask that all fellow members of the House, from both sides, join me in simply saying 'thank you'.