




Speech By
Hon. Craig Crawford

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 13 November 2018

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Hon. CD CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (Minister for Fire and Emergency Services) (4.17 pm): I thank the House for the opportunity to deliver my second address-in-reply in the Queensland parliament. I want to begin by recognising the traditional owners of this land and pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. I want to congratulate the member for Mulgrave on attaining the high office of Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Queensland parliament. I thank him for his support and guidance as part of the Far North Queensland Labor team.

I want to congratulate all returning members from all sides of this House and welcome new members to this special place. All of us have stories of how we came to be here and what made us run for politics. Whilst those beliefs, reasons and ideologies will differ greatly between members, we must remember that, whilst this House is where those ideologies clash, this is democracy and it has existed for many generations before us exactly the same. We must respect and value our democratic rights and preserve these for future MPs who enter this place.

I want to thank and mention my two new fellow parliamentary colleagues from the Far North. I congratulate the member for Cairns, Michael Healy, on being elected to this House, as well as the member for Cook, Cynthia Lui. As has been mentioned a number of times, she is the first Torres Strait Islander elected to any parliament in this country.

I was delighted to get the call-up by the Premier to join the cabinet for the 56th Parliament and even more delighted to get allocated the portfolio of Fire and Emergency Services. Ever since joining the Country Fire Authority in Victoria as a young fellow, I have had a special regard for the firefighting family worldwide. I served 20 years in many ranks. It is this service that put me on track to be in this House today.

Since being sworn in in December last year, it has been a busy period of time for my department. Storms, cyclones, wind, rain and floods hammered various parts of Queensland for months. As a ministry, we had to mobilise fast to be abreast of the unfolding events. As a minister, I had to fulfil my role to ensure that our staff and our volunteers were able to deliver the services effectively.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services is made up of tens of thousands of staff members and volunteers. It is a combination of many years of service and development from a number of areas ranging from civil defence that we see nowadays as the SES, farmers bounding together to fight fires on each other's land that we now see as the Rural Fire Service, and urban firefighting dating back to the brass and copper days of the London Fire Brigade that we now see as the modern-day Fire and Rescue Service. Wherever the origins, what we have now in Queensland is a modern-day, world-class Fire and Emergency Service.

I want to recognise our people. I want to recognise our career firefighters: thousands of full-time firefighters working in fire and rescue stations in Queensland, mostly on 10/14 shifts—two 10-hour day shifts followed by two 14-hour night shifts. They respond to thousands of calls a year. They are on shift

while you are asleep. They cut you free from car accidents. They pull you free from raging floodwaters. They check inner-city alarms that activate. They enter buildings on fire when everyone else is running out. It is a dangerous job. Firefighters around the world die on the job.

Firefighting has a very low attrition rate. In fact, in Queensland only 1.1 per cent of career firefighters leave QFES every year, many of them due to retirement and very few of them because they do not like the job anymore. Many staff stay employed for over 30 years. For many of our people on 10/14 shifts, four-on four-off or on A, B, C or D shifts at any station, one officer and three firefighters on a pumper is their life; it is their family; it is their friends.

I want to recognise their union, the United Firefighters Union—steeped in tradition, strong in their representation and straight in their aim. I also want to recognise the Retired Firefighters Association Queensland, a strong and committed group of ex-firefighters who still have a passion for the welfare of their own as well as the welfare of firefighters nearing or entering retirement.

Queensland Fire and Rescue also has over 2,000 auxiliary firefighters who crew our urban stations in support of staffed appliances or sometimes without. They support the Rural Fire Service and the State Emergency Service. Our auxiliaries are required to attend incidents and train regularly. We set a very high standard; we expect a very high standard. In return, we retain those firefighters by paying them for their time to respond and train.

I want to recognise our volunteers from across the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Service, our marine rescue environment—which is undergoing a review at the moment—and our surf lifesaving families as well: tens of thousands of volunteers, thousands upon thousands of hours. For them, duty calls. It is training; it is rain, wind and smoke. It does not stop. As a parliament we are forever in their debt. Recent fire threats and current storm season in Queensland show us that our crews, staff and volunteers will be out there for many months yet to come.

Turning to my campaign, I want to recognise my campaign manager, Carolyn MacDonald, who did an outstanding job on the Barron River campaign up against a strong campaign from the ALP but also a strong campaign from other areas including One Nation and the Greens. It is great to see that Carolyn has gone on to lead the federal Labor campaign in Leichhardt as well. I am sure she will do outstandingly well there.

I want to thank our branch members for the tireless work they do. Many members in this House rise and speak about branch members. I think we are all on the same page in recognising the people who give up their time to help us get elected into this place irrespective of the colour of the shirt they wear.

I want to thank the union members in Cairns who rallied behind my campaign and other campaigns. Particularly, I want to thank United Voice, the general secretary, Gary Bullock, and all of the staff and volunteers from across the massive UV movement—an amazing family and an amazing number of friends.

I also want to thank my wife, Rosie. I know a number of members in this House have thanked their wife. I think everyone values their partner. Whilst I do disagree often with what the member for Kawana says in this House, I want to recognise the opening remarks he made this afternoon in his address-in-reply when he talked about our partners representing us at events; he was bang on the mark with respect to that. I probably could not say it better myself. To my wife, Rosie, I say I love you very much. Thank you so much for your time. I look forward to our amazing future. On that, I also need to put on record that I still owe my wife a Vietnam holiday that I had to cancel due to being sworn in as a minister. It is on record now so she can collect.

I also want to recognise my EOs up in Barron River and also my ministerial staff, who put in a huge amount of time down here. As I said earlier in my speech, when we started the Fire and Emergency Services ministerial office it was literally in the middle of a time when Queensland was getting pounded from all sides. We had to very quickly tool up to combat what was ahead of us.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*. I can advise that the Speaker has reviewed and approved the contents of my speech for incorporation and an electronic version has been made available to Hansard.

Leave granted.

As the State member for Barron River, I am delighted this Government is delivering for people across the Far North.

In this year's Budget, we committed \$253.3 million for road infrastructure in 2018-19 for Far North Queensland as part of another record investment—for the third year in a row.

After my strong advocacy, I am particularly excited this budget committed funds to begin construction of the \$152 million Smithfield Bypass—delivering on yet another of our commitments in the region and ensuring we provide the infrastructure that will service our growing communities well into the future.

Our Budget committed \$17.5 million to begin work on the project to construct bypass route continuity on the Captain Cook Highway between Yorkeys Knob Road Roundabout and McGregor Road Roundabout. This project is 100 per cent funded by the Palaszczuk Government.

I am proud to be part of a government that is supporting our key industries by investing in Cairns and the Far North in areas that truly matter to local residents.

We continue to boost the local economy, create jobs and inspire confidence, building on the work that has been done since 2015 to support this region.

Since the 2015 election, the Palaszczuk Government has improved frontline health and education services in Far North Queensland by employing an additional 143 doctors, 364 nurses, 182 teachers and 86 teacher aides.

Our 2018-19 Budget committed \$10 million to renew Tropical North Learning Academy—Smithfield State High School and Trinity Beach State School over four years starting in 2018-19, and \$109,000 to refurbish Block 7 home economics at Kuranda District State College.

More than \$26 million is allocated to support job-creating maintenance and minor infrastructure works across local councils in Far North Queensland as part of the Works for Queensland program.

As someone who appreciates just why the Great Barrier Reef is such a priority for this government, I applaud the \$6.3 million commitment in 2018-2019 to achieve this government's targets for uptake of best management practices by farmers in pursuit of Great Barrier Reef water quality targets.

This is another important step for the 69,000 people who rely on the reef for their livelihood and it is important for the range of industries it supports, from tourism to commercial fishing, that inject \$6 billion into our regional economies.

The Palaszczuk Government has been, and will always continue to be, committed to doing everything we can to ensure the safety of Queenslanders.

That's why we handed down a record \$702 million 2018 Budget investment for Queensland Fire and Emergency Services—promising to deliver jobs and upgraded frontline services, facilities and equipment.

Nowhere in Australia is more at the mercy of natural disasters than Queensland, which is why we have the best emergency services teams in the world and why the Palaszczuk Government is committed to maintaining their lofty standards.

Queensland is growing, and the operational response of our emergency services needs to grow with it.

QFES provides a vital frontline service to Queensland communities and it is important we show our support, allowing our emergency services to continue their great work within their local communities.

Our record funding commitment in 2018-19, including budgeted staffing for more than 3300 full-time equivalent (FTE) personnel—delivers on the Palaszczuk Government's commitment to enhancing community safety right across the State, well into the future.

We have committed \$29.5 million over four years to provide 100 frontline firefighters and 12 extra fire communications officers—ensuring communities continue receiving quality services. This delivers on an election promise made by the Premier.

I've already announced the first deployment of 25 of these new firefighters—with QFES allocating eleven to the North Coast Region, five to the South Western Region, and one in Cairns in Far Northern Region.

Another eight will be posted to the Northern Region when they finish recruit training in December.

We are investing \$82.3 million this financial year into fire and emergency services facilities, vehicles, information and communications systems and equipment.

Our budget allocated \$7.6 million in 2018-19 to the commencement and delivery of new auxiliary Fire and Rescue stations in Childers, Rathdowney, Richmond, El Arish, Esk, Gracemere, Kilkivan, Wooroolin and Yarraman.

Gracemere will receive funding for a \$2.1 million state-of-the-art station, recognising Central Queensland's increasing demand for services.

Building modern facilities means the community can feel at ease knowing our fire and emergency services are properly equipped and ready to respond at a moment's notice.

The new station will assist the critical work of first responders, ensuring they have both the capacity and capability to support Gracemere's current population and further expected growth.

A further \$2.5 million will ensure Fire and Rescue stations in Loganlea, Mount Ommaney and West Logan receive appropriate upgrades in 2018-19.

Replacing or upgrading ageing facilities will improve response times, deliver enhanced services and support community growth.

Planning is also underway for the construction of a multimillion-dollar auxiliary fire and rescue station at Yarrabilba in coming years.

The 2018-2019 Budget also includes more than \$1 million of the \$3 million committed during the election campaign towards the commencement of a new QFES complex in Maleny that will accommodate the local Rural Fire Service (RFS), State Emergency Service (SES) and Auxiliary Fire and Rescue Service.

About \$2.7 million has been allocated in 2018-19 to the commencement or completion of joint RFS and SES facilities in Howard, Horn Island and Mount Isa.

Cairns and Rockhampton will receive \$3 million worth of upgrades to their communication centres in 2018-19, boosting the ability of the regions to respond to life-threatening incidents.

This investment will help build on the first-class work already being undertaken by emergency services personnel to combat the threat of severe weather events in the state's far north.

Community safety is also a priority in Weipa, with \$400,000 allocated next financial year for the commencement of a \$1.2 million Emergency and Disaster Centre.

We've also committed \$44.3 million in 2018-19 for the replacement and delivery of 180 new urban and rural fire appliances.

New cutting-edge vehicles will soon be rolling out the doors of new fire and rescue stations under this important initiative to boost the operational capacity of firefighters state wide.

The projected delivery of 61 new Fire and Rescue vehicles, as well as 119 Rural Fire Service vehicles, will go a long way in bolstering firefighting efforts across the state.

The 180 new appliances due this financial year are on top of the more than 100 already delivered under the government's Capital Works program for 2017-18.

That will be a total of more than 280 over two financial years, and even better the appliances are being completed locally, through Queensland-based companies.

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to building a safer, stronger Queensland and supports our fire and emergency services personnel and volunteers as they go about their important work of keeping Queenslanders safe.

Our firefighters often work under demanding conditions and we ask a lot of them, so it is only right they have adequate resources to perform their lifesaving work.