



Speech By  
**Dale Last**


**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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## **PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT**

### **Emergency Services Volunteers**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.26 pm): I want to take this opportunity to pass on my appreciation and that of the opposition for the work that our volunteers have performed this week in the flood affected areas of the state. In large parts of regional Queensland it is volunteers who respond to the floods, fires and traffic accidents. They are the people who assist with search and rescue, and they are the people who respond to cyclones and flooding. Their role is a vital one and one that is getting harder.

According to the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland, in five years we have seen a decrease in volunteer numbers of over 25 per cent. That is over 9,200 volunteers who have left the service. That 9,200 does not include volunteers caught up in this government's blue card debacle.

It will be no surprise to the people of rural and regional Queensland that on a region-by-region basis, it is their areas that have suffered the most from these declines. In the far northern region, the reduction was almost 32 per cent; in the northern region, 24 per cent; and in the south-western region, it was almost 20 per cent.

It is not just the Rural Fire Service that has had their numbers reduced significantly under the watch of this Labor government. Earlier this year the *Sunday Mail* reported that active volunteer numbers in the SES had reduced by over 1,000 and that several SES members attributed the reduction at least in part to 'government red tape'. This decimation of volunteer ranks has not happened overnight.

When it comes to volunteers saving lives in Queensland, this government has historically failed to act and even when they do act, there are delays and what can only be described as glacial progress. Failure of the minister to release the SES review is just one example of that failure to act. To give you an example, the number of volunteers in the SES—that is right, the orange army—has dwindled significantly over recent years to a record low of under 5½ thousand members this year. That should be ringing alarm bells across the state. These are the people we rely on in times of disaster. I have a real fear that their numbers have eroded to the extent that our response to disaster events will be compromised.

Recently, submissions into the KPMG review of the structure of QFES closed. It should come as no surprise to the minister that the LNP will be demanding the public release of that review in a timely manner.

People who volunteer in the Rural Fire Service, the SES and other volunteer-based groups do so to help their community. It is time for this government to address the issues they face and give them surety. Most of all, it is time for this government to give them the respect, the resources and the support that they need to grow their membership base across this state. We certainly need their assistance. We need these members on the ground for the upcoming season, and time is of the essence.