




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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ADJOURNMENT

Burnett Electorate, Fire and Emergency Services

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (8.36 pm): I welcome the recent independent review into emergency services. It is a huge relief to finally see help coming our way. It was a good announcement—thank you, Minister—for rural fires, SES, Volunteer Marine Rescue volunteers and, of course, Surf Life Saving volunteers. For years we have been calling for rural fires, the VMR and SES volunteers to get more support, more funding and better communications. They have been operating on sausage-sizzle and raffle budgets and spending their weekends raising money to save lives.

The Emergency Management Levy was originally designed to fund important and necessary services for Queenslanders, but it has not been all that it could be. The levy was established in 2014 to ensure a more sustainable funding base for emergency services, but it fast became the primary source of funding for the QFES department. Despite seeing a funding increase from \$391 million to \$630 million in the last budget, the combined Volunteer Marine Rescue funding was only 1.6 per cent of that. As I said, today's announced reform is very welcome. The total revenue from EML should have gone a lot further. Even though, through the levy, the revenue has increased by hundreds of millions of dollars, there was no real new money. As it was originally set out, the LNP wanted that money to go to those organisations. The EML made up a whopping 74 per cent of the department's total operating income. The recent review was scathing, highlighting deficiencies in the current system, resulting in a complete overhaul.

I cannot thank enough our local SES and VMR volunteers and Rural Fire Brigade members who, for a long time, fought alongside us for their fair share of resources. A huge thank you must go to the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland General Manager, Justin Choveaux, who has been a huge advocate. Although time will not allow me to name all the rural fire brigades in my electorate—there are some 38 of them—I do want to thank Judy Ferrari from Wartburg, David Ross from Woodgate, John Dean from South Kolan and all the volunteers from across the region.

Wendy Gearside from Woodgate first responders has been advocating hard for her community and I thank her. Thanks go to Luke Harding and Kieran Galey from the Bundaberg SES for doing so much for our community. Another big thanks must go to Volunteer Marine Rescue's Rod Studholme and Graham Kingston, state manager Keith Williams and, of course, Josie Meng and the crew at VMR Round Hill. There are many more people who volunteer their time to keep us safe in the Burnett and Bundaberg region. You are our unsung heroes. On behalf of our community, I thank you for all you do.

It has been great to finally see common-sense prevail with the recent review, thanks to people power, perseverance and the dedication of our emergency services personnel. I look forward to working to ensure more resources and funding are delivered for the Burnett. There are still many issues around

appliances, the chain of command and communications. I thank the minister for hearing us on all of the issues raised by stakeholders. I think we are already much better placed. I look forward to finding solutions to many of the issues.

I want to acknowledge all the wonderful emergency services personal in Bundaberg. I look forward to attending the annual Brian Prince Awards to be held on 25 November. The awards are run by Rotary. They are the Bundaberg region's very own awards and are awarded in remembrance of an outstanding Rotarian and paramedic, Brian Prince. I give a shout-out to Laurel and David Prince and Brant Duff for organising such a great event.