




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Police Communications Centres

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.45 pm): In 2016 the Queensland Police Service's Violent Confrontations Review found that 'good communication is still the cornerstone of contemporary policing'. One can imagine the alarm that greeted us and has flowed through our communities to find out that the police communications centres in Gladstone, Mackay and Rockhampton are being earmarked for closure. Let me repeat that: the police communications centres in those three localities are closing. They are closing those three communications centres and moving the comms centre up to Townsville. What does that equate to: 11 operators in Gladstone, 11 in Mackay, 22 in Rockhampton, plus their respective OCs—that is, 47 staff in total.

It begs the question: what happens to those staff who are employed in those communications centres? Are they without a job? Are they being offered a transfer? Do they have to relocate their families to Townsville or to Brisbane—to the nearest communications centre? More importantly, when one thinks about how important those communications centres are, and we are talking life and death, when you are on the end of a radio and you are proceeding code 1 or 2 because someone's life is in imminent danger, you need to know that that communications operator on the other end of the phone knows what they are talking about, that they know the local area and that they are giving you good advice because in those situations time is critical.

A few weeks ago there was a trial of running all the calls for service through the Townsville communications centre. It was a dismal flop. They had to resort to phoning police officers to pass on jobs. It just goes to show the alarm within the community that has come about over these proposed closures and the potential to put the lives of not only police officers but also members of our communities in danger. It also begs the question: if you combine the health crisis at Gladstone and Mackay with the impending closure of the communications centres in those towns, has this government abandoned those communities? What sort of message is this government sending to the communities of Gladstone and Mackay when one looks at the health issues and now the closure of police communications centres in those localities?

It is a recipe for disaster. Those communities have a right to be up in arms. They have a right to be questioning the minister about why these centres are closing and why they are taking that local content out. To run the communications centre from Townsville will increase their area from the Northern Territory border down through Longreach to Birdsville and Blackall and over to Rockhampton. If one pictures that area on a map, over half of Queensland will now be run out of one centre. We do not know whether extra staff are going to be provided in Townsville. We do not know how it will work.

The minister needs to come clean about how that will work. The minister needs to give an assurance, not only to the chamber but also to broader Queensland, about how that will work and whether the systems and the processes are in place to manage it.

I want to talk about police numbers because this minister is very good at dancing around the issue of police numbers. We hear the terminology 'approved' strength and 'actual' strength. I will give a simple example of what we are talking about. If my motor vehicle has an approved carrying capacity of five but my wife and two children are using it then its actual capacity is three. The same principle applies to policing. If a police station has an approved strength of 50 but the number of officers actually on deck and available to do policing duties is 30 then that is the number we need to be working with. You cannot send a police number to do a job; you have to send a police officer—a real person. That is the number that we are interested in because on this side of the House we understand the difference between approved and actual. On this side of the House we understand the difference between division, district and region. Those are the numbers that matter to Queenslanders. This minister needs to come into this place and give an assurance that those are the numbers that he will talk to.