




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2023

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Bluewater Rural Fire Service, Emergency Vehicle

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.26 pm): When our emergency services respond to an emergency every minute counts. As several of my colleagues and I know, driving in emergency services vehicles under lights and sirens in an emergency situation is demanding. The drivers of those vehicles rely strongly on their colleagues, on other vehicles and on their equipment to arrive safely and as quickly as possible. In 2002 the Bluewater Rural Fire Service took delivery of an Isuzu NPS 300. I table the specifications of that vehicle, noting in particular the front axle rated capacity of 2,600 kilograms. Herein lies the problem that has been ongoing since 2019.

Tabled paper: Document, undated, titled 'NPS 250/300 4x4' [1161](#).

Today the Bluewater Rural Fire Service vehicle, known as Bluewater 51, is off the road. That is right—a vehicle that is essential in protecting lives and property cannot be used. Despite the best efforts of the first and second officers there is no solution on the horizon. As it stands today, Bluewater 51, if fully crewed and filled with water, would exceed the capacity of the front axle. In layman's terms, that means the vehicle is unsafe for use on the road, let alone to respond to an emergency.

It is the responsibility of Queensland drivers to ensure their vehicle is safe and in a roadworthy condition. The same concept applies to drivers of emergency vehicles. Failing to do so puts the driver at risk of fines and possibly prosecution in a court of law. In the event of an accident, driving an unsafe vehicle can also make a driver liable to civil proceedings. As a result, the members of the Bluewater Rural Fire Service have taken Bluewater 51 off the road. In their fight to have that vehicle modified, the members of the Bluewater Rural Fire Service have learned that only some of the Isuzu NP 300s across the state have been upgraded. That is right, we are not talking about just one rural fire service appliance. There are six in North Queensland and possibly more spread throughout the state. Given the fact that these vehicles could be operating all throughout Queensland, it is extremely concerning that no-one seems to know which vehicles have been upgraded and therefore which vehicles pose a danger to rural fire service volunteers and other road users. This issue has been repeatedly raised by members of the Bluewater Rural Fire Service, but to date they have no clarity. Modifications to reduce the weight were suggested. Reducing the amount of equipment was suggested and, heaven forbid, reducing the number of crew members was also suggested.

Thankfully, the Bluewater Rural Fire Service members have put their safety, the safety of other road users and their ability to respond to an emergency as their highest priority. I commend them for that. Four years of uncertainty for them and other brigades throughout the state must come to an end. We are talking about volunteers putting themselves in harm's way to protect other Queenslanders and the best that this government can do is expect them to use 21-year-old vehicles that may or may not be safe and that may or may not even be legal to drive on Queensland roads.

It is a blight on this government that this issue has not been addressed. It is a blight on this government that no-one can confirm which vehicles have been modified and which have not. Most of all, it is a blight on this government that volunteers are expected to put themselves and others at risk based on assumptions and incomplete records. The LNP recognise the importance of the Rural Fire Service and we recognise the crucial role that Rural Fire Service volunteers perform throughout large parts of Queensland. When responding to an emergency they face uncertainty, but they should not face uncertainty from government. I for one will not sit back and wait for our volunteers or another road user to be seriously injured or to lose their life due to defective vehicles.

Today I have written to the chair of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee requesting that the committee urgently enquires into this issue and time is of the essence. It is the least that we can do and it is the very least that the brave volunteers of the Bluewater Rural Fire Service and others like them throughout the state deserve. They deserve to be driving around in vehicles that are safe, that are compliant and that meet the needs of Queenslanders. It is a blight on this minister that this has been allowed to fester for so long. Today they need to step up to the plate and resolve this issue as a priority.