



Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**


**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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## **EMERGENCY SERVICES REFORM AMENDMENT BILL; STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE BILL; MARINE RESCUE QUEENSLAND BILL; DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

### **Second Reading (Cognate Debate)**

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (6.20 pm): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate of the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill, the State Emergency Service Bill, the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill and the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As the shadow minister for volunteers, on behalf of the LNP I want to thank every single one of the volunteers across Queensland who give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain. Given that Queensland is the most disaster-prone state, we need every one of those volunteers.

I note that a number of submitters to the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill raised concerns in relation to the limited time for consultation on the bill. Limiting time seems to be a bit of a common theme when it comes to this government. There are four bills with about an hour each in terms of time for debate. Some people impacted by these changes have volunteered all their lives in rural fire brigades and marine rescue, yet this Labor government only believes their volunteering future is worth a few hours of debate time. The chaos and crisis of this Labor government extends into this chamber. It just cannot manage the legislative program and then will guillotine debate to cover for its mismanagement. As outlined earlier by the shadow minister, I also note that the LNP will be voting against clause 31.

I want to commend the great work of the many local volunteers in my electorate in the State Emergency Service and the rural fire brigades for the work that they undertake. Often it is the brave volunteers whom Queenslanders rely upon to keep us safe during natural disasters. I want to give a shout-out to the Wallumbilla state emergency and rural fire station volunteers, who also operate a road crash response unit. I am particularly proud of the work that these volunteer members have done to establish the joint emergency services facility in Wallumbilla and what they also do to get the younger generation volunteering in their service.

In their submission to the legislation, the Kogan rural fire brigade raised concerns about the mandating requirements of firefighting and the incident control experience and fire prevention expertise being necessary to reflect the level of command and control. They went on to state that the recent fires in the Tara district saw incident control undertaken by many officers from both fire and rescue and rural fire services. Experience does count, but local knowledge and expertise are far superior. They also raised concerns about rural fire brigades being unincorporated associations and always having to regulate themselves via their management committees regarding membership behaviour. They state that at no time during discussions on the reform was this issue raised.

The new powers in this bill give authority to the commissioner regarding suspension, dismissal and disqualifying persons from holding any office or being an office bearer of a rural fire brigade. The Kogan rural fire brigade believes this is an overstep into its local affairs.

On behalf of all rural fire brigades in my electorate, I ask the minister for an assurance that locally raised funds are preserved for the exclusive use of the brigade to which the donation was made. Many of my rural fire brigade members remember what happened when the Goss Labor government raided the local ambulance committee funds. We do not need to see a repeat of this behaviour by Labor governments. We need to hear in this House the minister's ironclad guarantee that every cent of locally raised funds by the brigade will stay with the local brigade and be easily accessible by these volunteers.

I now turn to the issues raised by local governments. The bill amends the Disaster Management Act to enhance Queensland disaster management arrangements and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Act to expand the Queensland Reconstruction Authority's functions. I bring to the attention of the House comments from the LGAQ in relation to the Disaster Management Regulation 2014. They state that, given the reforms in this bill, it would be advantageous to commence a review of the disaster district boundaries and that such a review would help to ensure that the new arrangements under Queensland Police Service control are strategically aligned and enhance the ability to share resources. That is something that local governments do on a very regular basis during disaster times and disaster recovery. This resource mapping is further amplified by the Far North Queensland district where there are some 14 local government areas supported by one single DDMG. It is arguable that this district has a higher risk in terms of its exposure to natural hazards and has significant numbers of vulnerable people, with the additional overlay of geographic isolation.

The culture of volunteerism must be allowed to continue and flourish across Queensland. The LNP supports any attempt to improve the emergency response of agencies and volunteer groups for regular operations and disaster management. The implementation of this legislation and associated regulations will be a matter on which volunteers will want to see improvement from this Labor government.