




Speech By
Kim Richards

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Record of Proceedings, 1 May 2024

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 RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (11.15 am): Our Miles government will always support our emergency frontline personnel. I am very blessed in my electorate of the Redlands to have the mainland and the islands. Volunteer Marine Rescue Victoria Point—Dave, Nev and the whole team—provide an incredible on-water service to our community, keeping Redlanders safe. I am extraordinarily proud to be the patron of the Redland Bay coastguard. They work closely with Volunteer Marine Rescue and do a fantastic job. This bill brings those groups together to provide even more safety for Queenslanders.

As members heard the member for Oodgeroo say, our SES are best in class here in the state of Queensland. Alex Johnson is very well awarded and regarded for his work in the SES. Our entire SES team, both in Redland Bay and the Southern Moreton Bay Island SES group, do a fantastic job. I have five rural fire brigades in my patch. I have the Coochiemudlo Island Rural Fire Brigade, the Karragarra Island Rural Fire Brigade, the Lamb Island Rural Fire Brigade, the Macleay Island Rural Fire Brigade and the Russell Island Rural Fire Brigade. The first officers of those teams are absolutely incredible. I only need to reflect back to last year when we had the house fire on Russell Island. They were the first to attend the site. They arrived in a faster time than you would have had a mainland urban fire team arrive. They were there right the way through. The work that Larry, Kev and that entire team did on that day was nothing short of miraculous. I thank Minister Boyd for coming out with me last month to personally thank, congratulate and award each and every one of those rural fire officers. They do an absolutely fantastic job.

In our electorate we also have the Redlands Coast champions who do a fantastic job in providing support to our rural fire brigades, ambulance officers and police officers when there are emergencies. I do not think we have ever seen the number of natural disasters that occurred in the lead-up to Christmas across this state. The work of our Volunteer Marine Rescue groups, our coastguards, our SES members and our rural fire brigades, whether as a result of Tropical Cyclone Jasper, the severe storms down on the Gold Coast, the flooding events or the sandbagging requirements, is absolutely fantastic. I could not be more proud or privileged to represent that group of people. Our community is extraordinarily blessed to have such incredible emergency response personnel across all of those organisations.

I want to address some of the comments of the opposition members that have occurred throughout this debate. It speaks to the cherrypicking that continually goes on by the opposition. I had the opportunity to be the acting chair for the committee hearing into the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. What I saw firsthand was the level of misinformation that had been spread and used in contributions today and yesterday. It is really disappointing when that is done,

particularly to our rural fireies. In that hearing I had the opportunity to reiterate every member in this chamber's deepest respect for what our rural fireies do for our communities. Nobody in this chamber would disagree with the fact that they do an amazing job.

It was extraordinarily disappointing to see that misinformation circulated. In his opening statement at the hearing, the General Manager of the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland, Justin Choveaux, stated that there had been no consultation. In my very humble opinion that was simply misleading because that was certainly not the case. As members just heard, he repeated the claim when questioned by the member for Theodore and stated that there was no consultation whatsoever. Then, under questioning from both the member for Caloundra and me that day, he admitted that there was consultation. I note the document tabled by the minister last night outlined the deep consultation that had occurred.

An honourable member: He would have known that.

Ms RICHARDS: Absolutely. He would have been fully aware of the consultation because he was part of it. I am happy to table this document again.

Tabled paper: Document, undated, titled 'Reform Implementation Taskforce—Legislation and Reform Program: Stakeholder consult RFBAQ' [726](#).

Members only need refer to it to see the level of consultation that occurred. It is extraordinarily disappointing that that information was put out by Mr Choveaux. The consultation included in-person meetings, phone calls, team meetings, emails and letters. As the member for Maryborough stated, they were up in his patch for consultation. Everybody across the state of Queensland will have been part of that consultation. I do not understand why Mr Choveaux said there was no consultation when it is very clear that there absolutely was consultation. How did the association engage with their volunteers? They are the peak body and it is their job to provide accurate information. I wonder if the misinformation provided to what we know are over 1,400 brigade members circulated deliberately or was it just the result of incompetence. We really have to ask the question because, as we just heard in the member for Theodore's contribution, what he cherry-picked from those contributors was based on the misinformation from the RFBAQ. As the minister said last night, one brigade has labelled the RFBAQ's comments unhelpful. The minister quoted correspondence as follows—

Comments and opinions expressed by the RFBAQ seem to have no basis in data or evidence, leaving many confused and concerned.

It is not right to do that to our rural fireies; it is quite shameful, actually. I echo the minister's calls last night in that advocating to your members and providing them with information is extraordinarily important. That advocacy with peak bodies is extraordinarily important and it should be based on fact not fiction. I would ask opposition members to base their contributions on fact and not on the misinformation that was spread because it is unfair to do that to our amazing rural fireies who absolutely deserve better.

In conclusion, I support these bills. They will bring organisations together and provide better structures and training opportunities. We heard the member for Maryborough talk about the provision of a new boat. I know that in a rural fire sense our teams are very pleased with their appliances. Our coastguard has done an amazing job in securing a brand new vessel that it launched last year, which is fantastic. I know that giving surety around maintenance application, whether that be vessels or fire appliances, and providing that support to our hardworking and dedicated emergency personnel is important. On that note, I thank each and every one of them for their contribution to Queensland and for keeping our community safer. I commend these bills to the House.