



Speech By  
**Hon. Mark Ryan**


**MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD**

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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)**

 **Hon. MT RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (Minister for Police and Community Safety) (4.33 pm): I move—

That the bills now be a read a second time.

As outlined in my introductory speech, these bills address recommendations from the Independent Review of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services by KPMG and the review of Queensland's disaster management arrangements undertaken by the Inspector-General Emergency Management. These reviews considered the effectiveness and efficiency of Queensland's emergency services and disaster management arrangements and made a range of administrative and legislative recommendations for reform. These bills will make those amendments required to meet those recommendations.

On 15 March 2024, the Community Support and Services Committee tabled its report on its examination of the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill 2023, the State Emergency Service Bill 2023 and the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023. The Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee considered the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 and tabled its report on this bill on 19 April 2024. These committees have recommended that each bill be passed.

While I will outline matters relating to all these bills, my colleague Minister Boyd will go into further detail on matters that relate to her portfolio area during her contribution and respond to matters relating to the Queensland Fire Department during consideration in detail. In relation to the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill, the Community Support and Services Committee made a further recommendation—

... encourages the Queensland Police Service's Reform Implementation Taskforce to undertake public education and information sessions to effectively engage and inform State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland volunteers as part of the implementation of the emergency service and disaster management reforms.

I table the government response to the committee report which addresses this recommendation.

*Tabled paper:* Community Support and Services Committee: Report No. 42, 57th Parliament—Marine Rescue Queensland Bill 2023, government response [712](#).

I believe that the successful implementation of the emergency services and disaster management reforms within these bills depends on properly engaging our volunteers within the State Emergency Service and our volunteer marine rescue organisations.

To date, the Police and Emergency Service Reform Implementation Taskforce has delivered more than 280 engagement activities with these volunteers and staff transitioning to the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland. This engagement has included more than 100 visits to marine rescue units, meetings with volunteers and responses to question and answer forums. A Marine Rescue Queensland implementation working group has been established to assist with the transition of existing volunteer marine rescue services to Marine Rescue Queensland by providing assistance with the planning and delivery of this project and supporting volunteers.

There have been more than 180 engagements with State Emergency Service volunteers and staff transitioning to the Queensland Police Service, including face-to-face visits, presentations at town halls around Queensland and online question and answer sessions which have been recorded and are available on the State Emergency Service forgov website. In addition, information packs and engagement material has been provided to State Emergency Service and marine rescue units to share with members and the public, who have also been encouraged to visit the forgov website to subscribe also to a regular e-news update.

The Reform Implementation Taskforce has acknowledged the importance of ongoing engagement through increasing its education campaigns as these emergency management reforms come nearer to completion. The Reform Implementation Taskforce intends to undertake a targeted communications campaign tailored to inform our volunteers and the public generally.

In recognition of Marine Rescue Queensland being a newly established community marine service, an extensive public awareness campaign is planned for coastal locations and with boating enthusiasts to provide advice about Marine Rescue Queensland, whom to contact in an emergency and how to stay safe when on the water. The Reform Implementation Taskforce will continue engaging with volunteers through face-to-face and online public information sessions, transition workshops and other direct communications.

Similarly, engagement with volunteers within the State Emergency Service will also continue, with the Reform Implementation Taskforce planning face-to-face unit visits, online sessions and information packages. Additionally, a roadshow of planned visits to all seven regions across the state has commenced with the aim of ensuring direct engagement with State Emergency Service staff and volunteers within each State Emergency Service unit. Further, the Queensland Police Service is collaborating with Volunteering Queensland, a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to support and advocacy for volunteers, to develop a volunteerism strategy. These strategies will be designed to promote the way the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland volunteers are continually engaged and recruited.

I will now take this opportunity to thank these committees for their support of these bills and the officials from the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, the Queensland Reconstruction Authority, the Queensland Police Service and those other agencies that have made themselves available and assisted the committees in their consideration of these bills. I also acknowledge and thank the wide range of individuals and organisations that submitted to both of these committees or participated in the development of these bills. In particular, I acknowledge the members of the State Emergency Service, the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association, the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association Queensland, the Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management, the Local Government Association of Queensland, Volunteers Queensland and volunteer organisations like the SESVA and the SES VCC and relevant trade unions that participated in consultation during the development of these bills.

I would also like to acknowledge, of course, the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland, the Maroochy South Group of Rural Fire Brigades, Dayboro & District Rural Fire Brigade, Mr Fergus Adrian AFSM, the United Firefighters Union Queensland and Caravanning Queensland, among others. All of these organisations have contributed to the development of these bills and obviously the scrutiny of these bills. They have done it in their own time. I think we should all acknowledge that that is a big contribution and we are grateful for their contribution.

I will also take this opportunity to foreshadow that amendments to the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will be moved to better reflect role eligibility for scientific officers, remove a reference to QFES and remove a redundant provision in the new section 104RO regarding smoke alarms.

We must recognise that our emergency services volunteers provide an invaluable service to our community. Their worth should not be undervalued or understated. Put simply, the State Emergency Service, rural fire brigades and volunteer marine rescue organisations would cease to exist without the hard work and effort of volunteers. Time and time again our emergency services volunteers would come

to the aid of their fellow Queenslanders, usually when their assistance is most greatly needed. I am proud of these fantastic and committed Queenslanders who donate their time and expertise to support our emergency services response and emergency services agencies and the community more broadly. Their service should be acknowledged and applauded.

It is often not acknowledged enough that at the heart of emergency service volunteerism is the Queensland spirit of being able to help your mate when your mate needs it most. That is epitomised, of course, in every single one of those volunteers who contributes to emergency services responses.

My admiration for our emergency service personnel grows when I consider the challenges they willingly face. The impacts of recent severe weather seasons have been significant. It began with an early start to the fire season, which impacted communities right across the state, and was closely followed in December by Tropical Cyclone Jasper, the severe thunderstorms in South-East Queensland over the Christmas period, and then Tropical Cyclone Kirrily in late January. Sadly, throughout these significant events seven Queenslanders lost their lives. Of course I join all members in once again expressing our deepest sympathy to the families and friends of all those impacted by these natural disaster tragedies, including the first responders, the emergency service volunteers, who are often confronted by those tragedies just because they are there to help.

It is sobering that the disaster season Queensland has just endured is not particularly unusual. Furthermore, there is no sign that the frequency of these disaster events will diminish, and there is the prospect that climate change will cause further disasters to be more regular and more severe. We have learned from decades of experience that the scale and impact of these disaster events can only be faced with a strong network of experts in disaster management working together through the community with the four phases of disaster management of prevention, preparation, response and recovery.

This government, after considering the independent reviews conducted into the delivery of our emergency services and our disaster management arrangements, is undertaking crucial reforms supported by additional funding—record funding—to ensure that our emergency services agencies can perform the best they can. These bills reach that objective by making legislative reforms in two distinct stages.

The first stage will establish the State Emergency Service in a standalone act through the State Emergency Service Bill 2023; it will also establish Marine Rescue Queensland in a standalone act through the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill 2023; it will place Marine Rescue Queensland and SES within the Queensland Police Service department through the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023; and it will formally establish the State Disaster Management Group within the Disaster Management Act 2003 through the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023. The second stage of legislative reforms—the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024—will restructure Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and will make improvements to Queensland's disaster management arrangements and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority.

In considering the first stage of reforms, a fundamental change made by this legislation is the integration of Marine Rescue Queensland and the State Emergency Service as separate entities hosted by the Queensland Police Service. This is a substantial change that needs to be made without diminishing the delivery of emergency services. Unnecessary legislative amendments could potentially cause disruption to these agencies, affecting their ability to perform their essential functions.

Consequently, amendments in these bills are limited to those necessary to allow Marine Rescue Queensland and the State Emergency Service to operate effectively within the Queensland Police Service. This will be achieved through deeming Marine Rescue Queensland and State Emergency Service members as QPS members. This brings clear benefits, including: the provision of consistent governance and command structures; IT systems with consistent security settings and frameworks; streamlined information-sharing processes; and the reduction of duplicated processes or procedures.

Importantly—and this is important to the volunteers—this measure ensures civil liability protections that currently apply to the State Emergency Service and its members will continue and will extend to Marine Rescue Queensland and its members. This will be achieved by affording the same civil liability protections that exist for current QPS members to Marine Rescue Queensland and State Emergency Service members. Additionally, these bills authorise the commissioner to provide legal representation on behalf of an MRQ or SES member who was acting in the execution of their duty for an action, claim, demand or offence brought against them.

These bills will also address a concern raised in the SES review *Sustaining the SES—Partnering for change* by Campbell Darby. This review contended that there was a degree of ambiguity in the command and control of the State Emergency Service exacerbated by poorly defined command chains. Further, there were no formal processes such as directives, delegations or formalised and legislated

positions to provide appropriate support and oversight of local controllers of State Emergency Service units. The State Emergency Service Bill will create a hierarchy that operates at a state, regional and local level to ensure appropriate command and control of the State Emergency Service.

The State Emergency Service Bill will maintain the functions of the local controller of a State Emergency Service unit. At regional level, this bill provides for a State Emergency Service commander who will maintain oversight of a number of State Emergency Service units and can provide support to an individual unit through organising the supply of resources from outside the unit. At a state level, the bill will provide for the State Emergency Service chief officer who will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the State Emergency Service. Overarching this hierarchy, the Police Commissioner has ultimate responsibility for the State Emergency Service and may provide guidance to State Emergency Service members through codes of practice and issuing directions.

A similar hierarchical structure will also be established for Marine Rescue Queensland. The Marine Rescue Queensland Bill will introduce roles similar to those within the State Emergency Service. For example, the new role of Marine Rescue Queensland unit commander can be seen to be the equivalent of a local controller of a State Emergency Service unit. Similarly, the new Marine Rescue Queensland coordinator is similar to a State Emergency Service commander. Finally, the Marine Rescue Queensland chief officer may be considered to be the equivalent of the State Emergency Service chief officer, as both roles carry the obligation to ensure the everyday operation of their respective organisation is conducted efficiently and effectively.

Further legislative reforms made by the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will amend the Disaster Management Act 2003 and Queensland Reconstruction Authority Act 2011 by strengthening the operations of Queensland's disaster management arrangements and the ability of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to manage the delivery of its functions more efficiently.

These will be achieved by: recognising the role of the Queensland Disaster Management Committee as the paramount body providing strategic leadership during significant events and disaster operations; formally establishing the role of the State Recovery Policy and Planning Coordinator and providing for the appointment of the chief executive of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to that role; ensuring consideration of improvement of the resilience of a community across the four phases of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery when planning disaster management as part of the guiding principles under the Disaster Management Act and defining what resilience is; expanding the functions of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to include the coordination of the development and implementation of whole-of-government policies for carrying out risk assessments for potential disasters; specifying the Queensland Reconstruction Authority will administer, coordinate and distribute financial assistance for communities to mitigate against, recover from or improve resilience to disasters; and addressing issues for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority about the delegation of functions and establishing a quorum.

The amendments to the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990 set out in this bill will ensure the legislation provides the appropriate operational, administrative and management framework to support and enhance the effective delivery of fire and emergency services across the state now and into the future. In December 1864 the Great Fire of Brisbane swept through the heart of what we know as the CBD, destroying businesses and residences in the block bordering Albert, Queen, George and Elizabeth streets and focusing attention on the need to establish a permanent fire service in the colony. Since that time, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and its predecessors, with support from volunteer rural fire brigades, has developed a longstanding and proud history of serving and working alongside Queensland communities. When established, the new Queensland Fire Department will form the latest chapter in the evolution of the provision of these services with a renewed and sharpened focus on the hazard of fire.

Importantly, this bill establishes the Rural Fire Service Queensland, or RFSQ, as a service separate to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, or QFR, and will provide for the membership of the Fire and Rescue Service and the Rural Fire Service, with membership of the Rural Fire Service being inclusive of rural fire brigades and rural fire brigade members. Consideration has been given to conclusions made within the independent review report, which stated—

The option of creating additional or separate agencies entirely ... can be quickly ruled out, both in terms of the assessment against the design principles and simply from a logic perspective given the identified fiscal challenges that already exist. Adding additional costs by creating a new agency ... or duplicating functions ... across multiple entities is not a realistic option.

Consequently, this bill will establish Rural Fire Service Queensland as a separate service from Queensland Fire and Rescue, but as recommended these services will both be housed within the Queensland Fire Department. This is critical to ensure the continued and sustainable delivery of fire services that meet the needs of all Queenslanders.

Further, establishing Rural Fire Service Queensland by incorporating brigades and their volunteer members as a service within the Queensland Fire Department will address any ambiguity about the roles and legal status of brigades and reduce concerns about brigade members being exposed to personal liability when performing functions on behalf of the brigade. In addition, as part of this government's ongoing commitment to strengthen service delivery, this bill will establish the statutory role of the Chief Fire Officer. The Chief Fire Officer will be responsible for providing advice to the fire commissioner on matters relating to service delivery, operational culture, best practice and innovation, and research across the fire services.

Persons seeking appointment as commissioner, chief fire officer, deputy commissioner Queensland Fire and Rescue or other executive or senior roles in Queensland Fire and Rescue will be required to possess professional firefighting experience, incident control expertise and fire prevention expertise. A chief officer and deputy chief officer of Rural Fire Service Queensland must have rural firefighting experience, rural incident control expertise or rural fire prevention expertise. Mandatory qualifications for appointment have been included in this legislation to ensure the safety of members and the community. Including job-specific employment obligations in legislation is not novel, particularly where the statute relates to public health and safety. Relevant professional experience and expertise required for appointment are to have been gained in Queensland Fire and Rescue or an equivalent fire and rescue service in Australia or New Zealand to ensure an appointee will have relevant experience, thereby enhancing the safety of firefighters and the community.

These reforms are about ensuring the safety of our first responders and the Queensland communities they serve. To this end, these amendments will ensure that these operational, mandatory qualifications, skills and experiences are given primacy of consideration in the recruitment of firefighters over any other factors going to the suitability of a particular candidate.

The Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will also address an ongoing issue about the powers that may be exercised by officers who are present at the scene of an incident. The delivery of Queensland's Fire and Emergency Services is based on specified persons exercising the powers of an authorised fire officer. Persons who can exercise these powers include, in certain circumstances, a first officer of a brigade and, where the first officer is unavailable, the next senior officer. On occasions, however, a first officer or next senior officer may not be available; for example, due to personal or work reasons or if they are impacted by an event themselves and are unable to assist in response operations. In these circumstances there is no other person at the scene with the authority to direct brigade members to lawfully exercise the powers they require to control and extinguish fires. This has implications for the chain of command and, importantly, for volunteers who may be acting in good faith on behalf of their community but without the protection of the law if something goes wrong.

This bill addresses this issue by allowing for the commissioner or a delegate to appoint a person in charge of operations for controlling and extinguishing a fire or controlling another incident if the commissioner considers it appropriate and necessary. It is expected that an appointment of a person in charge would likely be a first officer from a neighbouring brigade area or an authorised fire officer from the locality where the fire is occurring. Such an appointment may be written or oral and for the duration of an event or for a stated or indefinite period. In practice, it is expected that this power will be delegated to someone at an appropriate level to ensure timely appointments, reflecting that while the commissioner of the Queensland Fire Department will have overall control and command of the fire services, arrangements will continue to be locally led, district coordinated and state supported.

This is an important reform that addresses a gap in the powers for controlling and extinguishing fires and the protection of rural fire brigade volunteers. In totality, these legislative reforms represent an important component part of a larger reform agenda. To deliver these reforms the government established the Reform Implementation Taskforce, comprised of disaster management experts and practitioners to implement the range of necessary changes. These changes include machinery-of-government changes, developing new policies and procedures and negotiating and preparing service agreements and grant allocations.

Considerable milestones have already been met. The Queensland Police Service has restructured itself by establishing the Emergency Management and Coordination Command, which will be dedicated to supporting these reforms. This command has been allocated 80 new full-time-equivalent positions and includes personnel who have already made the transition from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. This brings together a larger knowledge base and range of expertise to disaster and emergency management.

It was also my pleasure to announce on 26 January this year the appointment of Mr Tony Wulff as the first Chief Officer of Marine Rescue Queensland and Mr Mark Armstrong as the first dedicated State Emergency Service Chief Officer. Both of these officers have impressive leadership skills and experiences and have already commenced reform work within the Emergency Management and Coordination Command prior to assuming operational command of their respective organisations.

This government has supported the work of the RIT through committing to a total funding package of almost \$600 million over five years, with ongoing funding. This will see a substantial uplift in these emergency services agencies, particularly an uplift for the SES which will bring its annual budget to \$60 million a year and an annual budget for Marine Rescue Queensland of \$27 million. This also includes extra full-time-equivalent staff and will see the SES full-time-equivalent staff grow to over 200.

I want to take this opportunity to express my greatest thanks to our dedicated emergency services personnel past, present and future—the thousands of staff, officers and volunteers who risk their lives to keep their community safe. I proudly emphasise that our emergency services personnel and our disaster management arrangements are world class. However, we must be continually vigilant to any opportunities to improve our emergency services organisations and ensure that they are properly resourced and structured to act efficiently and effectively.

This government acknowledges that its paramount responsibility is the safety of our communities and our people. We take that obligation seriously and we recognise the importance of our emergency services agencies performing the best that they can. I believe that these bills will meet this objective through providing support to our emergency services personnel and organising our emergency services agencies so that they can focus on providing their valuable and vital service to the people of Queensland. I commend the bills to the House and I encourage all members to support them.