




Speech By
Hon. Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

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)

 **Hon. MT RYAN** (Morayfield—ALP) (Minister for Police and Community Safety) (6.32 pm), in reply: I would like to thank all members who made a contribution to the debate on the bills. It is an honour to be involved with our emergency services personnel through various ministerial portfolios since 2016. I know the high regard in which they are all held in the community, and I know that everyone in this place is in agreement about their bravery and dedication to the people of Queensland. These bills are central to supporting those personnel and implementing recommendations made in a number of reviews to improve our emergency services and disaster management arrangements.

I will now address the specific issues raised by members during the debate. This bill will improve our emergency services organisations and lead to a safer community well into the future. A member mentioned Brisbane City Council's concerns about any legal and financial liability that may arise through State Emergency Service members who are employed by local governments. In response, this bill places the responsibility on the Police Commissioner to ensure the proper administration, management and functions of the SES. This includes establishing appropriate mechanisms that allow for the management and discipline, where necessary, for the members of the State Emergency Service.

The power to suspend is limited to suspending the person from duties as a State Emergency Service member. The bill does not prohibit an SES member who is suspended from their duties from continuing to be employed by a local government. Importantly, conditions of employment are ultimately a matter to be determined through existing employee-employer arrangements. The Queensland Police Service has undertaken to consult further with the Brisbane City Council, the Local Government Association of Queensland and other impacted local governments on this matter.

Members also raised a number of operational issues relating to Marine Rescue Queensland. The answers to many of these questions are, as a matter of common sense and practicality, not canvassed within the bill or its explanatory material, but nonetheless have been made available either to the public through the Marine Rescue Queensland information online or to those involved in the transition process.

It was also asked whether there is a contingency plan should the transition or transfer of assets not occur by 1 July. In response to this, the issue is straightforward. Marine rescue organisations that are unable to transition to Marine Rescue Queensland will continue to be supported to deliver marine rescue services under existing arrangements and by service level agreements until they are able to transition. Details about the transition of assets and funds from VMR squadrons or coastguard flotillas to Marine Rescue Queensland have been shared through in-person meetings with the Marine Rescue Implementation Program representatives as well as in the frequently asked questions and information

section in the Marine Rescue Implementation Program newsletters. Coastguard Queensland flotillas and VMR squadrons will join Marine Rescue Queensland as part of the Queensland Police Service from 1 July 2024 in a phased unit transition approach.

As part of the Marine Rescue Vessel Replacement Program, the Marine Rescue Implementation Program has engaged with coastguard flotillas and VMR squadron volunteers to induct and train the crew on new vessels and systems introduced with the delivery of the marine rescue vessel. If for any reason a unit selected in the first phase of transition or a subsequent phase of transition is unable to transition, they will continue to be supported to deliver marine rescue service under existing arrangements.

It was also asked whether there is a plan to ensure marine rescue services are continued in areas where sufficient volunteers do not transition to Marine Rescue Queensland. I can inform the House that the transition of a marine rescue service organisation to Marine Rescue Queensland is not mandatory, although it is expected that these organisations will see the benefits and advantages of transitioning to Marine Rescue Queensland and will do so willingly and eagerly. However, if there is an area where a marine rescue service does not immediately wish to transition then existing marine rescue services can and will continue to operate. This has been the example around Australia where these transitions have taken place.

A member also queried what the cost of upgrades for marine rescue services would be and whether the amount is fully funded. The Queensland government has already committed over \$22 million to replace ageing vessels within volunteer rescue units, with several vessels now delivered and many in the final stages of construction right now. This is in addition to the \$27 million annual ongoing budget, fully funded, for Marine Rescue Queensland. Through this funding under the newly established Marine Rescue Queensland, the Queensland government can better support the ongoing replacement and maintenance of vessels and facilities across the state. This is a substantial uplift on the current funding available to these organisations through the existing service agreements.

Members asked how the boating public would be advised of arrangements in their local areas. Marine Rescue Queensland, as a newly established entity, is set to launch an extensive public awareness campaign. This campaign will target the local communities surrounding transitioned units through digital channels, print media and local events. Volunteers will continue to be engaged via collaborative face-to-face information sessions, online public information sessions, transition workshops and other direct communications.

A member asked when documents about the transition and agreements will be made available to organisations. The transition has a six-phase strategy focusing on aligning Marine Rescue Queensland's core services with the unique needs of each region and its units. The first phase involves a detailed assessment of selected units from each Marine Rescue Queensland region. This is very important to note. Every unit across this large state is different and they operate currently under different conditions and they serve different communities. Some may require more support through transition; some may require less support. To accommodate specific unit requirements, transitions will be customised. If the unit is not comfortable or ready to transition then they will not transition at that time.

A member also asked what vessel logging system will be used. I can inform the House that transition units will initially continue to operate with their existing vessel management systems, with a new comprehensive vessel management system being developed. Once this work is completed, all transitioned and transitioning units will be provided with all of the required support and training for the system prior to it going live.

A member asked how potentially three separate marine rescue organisations will be managed. As previously mentioned, the government is actively working with coastguard flotillas and VMR squadrons and will continue to support those units until the transition is complete.

The impacts of those services joining the Queensland Police Service was also raised. This government has always backed the Queensland Police Service and emergency services, and these reforms are fully funded. It is a massive \$578 million reform package that delivers more than 500 additional FTE to the front line. To be clear, these changes will not take any police officers or staff members away from the front line or from supporting frontline policing.

Finally, I will address the comments from a member who expressed his concerns about powers of entry afforded to Marine Rescue Queensland members under the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill. As I understand it, the member contended there should be no power for a Marine Rescue Queensland member who is trying to resolve a dangerous situation to enter onto any place apart from a vessel. This ignores the circumstance a Marine Rescue Queensland member may find themselves in when performing their duties. The explanatory notes clearly outline where this power may be exercised,

including an example where a member may need to gain urgent access to a jetty to fend off a boat that is moving dangerously close to the jetty and is threatening to cause damage to the structure if the member does not intervene. That is a clear example of where this power could, and should, be used.

I understand that my colleague the Minister for Fire and Disaster Recovery and Minister for Corrective Services has already addressed queries with respect to the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 during her contribution and will address any further matters during consideration in detail.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the personnel who worked in the development of this bill. In particular I would like to mention members of the Queensland Police Service executive: Commissioner—and former special coordinator—Steve Gollschewski, acting assistant commissioners Marcus Hill and John Bosnjak, acting special coordinator Kristyn Miller, SES Chief Officer Mark Armstrong and Marine Rescue Queensland Chief Officer Tony Wulff. I acknowledge members of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services executive: Acting Commissioner Steve Smith, Deputy Commissioner Kevin Walsh and Chief Officer Ben Millington. I acknowledge members of the State Emergency Service: Acting Assistant Commissioner Brian Cox and business reform coordinator Steve Dabinett. I mention members of Marine Rescue Queensland: reform coordinator Greg ‘Ringo’ Ringuet and the whole team from the Marine Rescue Implementation Program. I acknowledge members of the Emergency Services Reform Program: director Greg Obst and senior legal officer Reanna Fogarty. I mention the Queensland Police Service Policy and Performance staff: Inspector John ‘Hendo’ Henderson, principal strategy officer Laura Manley and Senior Sergeant Michelle Barry. I acknowledge QRA staff, including manager Jade McKennarney, principal legislation officer Mahala Butler, staff of the Rural Fire Service and Fire and Emergency Services who worked on these reforms and members of the QFES Independent Review team. I mention staff from QFES, including Carly Osborne, Jane Sprott, Deena Dalton, Joe Meagher and staff from the RIT who have worked hard to implement the changes that these bills will bring.

I would also like to thank the key stakeholders we have worked with for a long time throughout this process, including: Eddie Cowie from SES Volunteer Association, Graham Kingston and the whole team at VMRAQ, Allan Tennent and the team at Coast Guard Brisbane, John Oliver and Tony Cooke from UFUQ, Shaune Toohey and the Together union RFS branch, Ian Pike and the team at the RFBAQ and the Queensland Police Union. Most importantly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank every emergency service worker, volunteer, officer and paid staff member for what they do to keep Queensland safe every day.

I would also like to comment on the history of this moment. It is not too often that governments create new government organisations. We are seeing the creation, for the first time in Queensland history, of Marine Rescue Queensland, a government agency that will be supported, run and staffed by volunteers. We are seeing a transformation of fire services in Queensland with the creation of a Fire Department and, of course, the recognition of State Emergency Service as its own entity hosted by the police department. There is an element of history here. People who have served in these organisations for many years—some of them for many decades—will obviously have a lot of memories about the organisations they have been part of to date. I know they all have a lot of aspiration and excitement for the future because these reforms build an outstanding foundation for better fire and emergency services, both now and well into the future.

The government’s paramount commitment has been to keep our community safe. These bills demonstrate that very commitment. I commend the bill to the House.