




Speech By
Hon. Nikki Boyd

MEMBER FOR PINE RIVERS

Record of Proceedings, 30 April 2024

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

 **Hon. N BOYD** (Pine Rivers—ALP) (Minister for Fire and Disaster Recovery and Minister for Corrective Services) (5.02 pm): I rise in support of the emergency services reform bills, including the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I will speak solely to the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. I want to extend my thanks to the Community Support and Services Committee and the Community Safety and Legal Affairs Committee for their thorough consideration.

The independent review of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services considered five options for the future of the department to identify the option that provided the best sustainable outcome. The outcome was that a model involving the fire, rescue and emergency related functions of the Fire and Rescue services and Rural Fire Service remaining within a single organisation would be the strongest long-term model. Importantly, the review report noted—

... the separation of services into standalone agencies would likely increase risks associated with service delivery and coordination of Queensland's activities across these functions.

In line with the review's recommendations, this bill establishes Rural Fire Service Queensland and Queensland Fire and Rescue as separate entities within the Queensland Fire Department. I note that the member for Mirani stated in his statement of reservation that the Rural Fire Service needs to be independent with their own commissioner and own budget and to work collaboratively and cooperatively with QFES. Along with advocating for what has already been identified as unsustainable, the model advanced by the member does not address the concerns raised by volunteers in the review report regarding protections from liability.

For the first time, brigades will be recognised formally as part of Rural Fire Service Queensland, ending years of ambiguity about legal status and volunteer protections. I have spoken to countless volunteers who are eagerly awaiting increased protections—rural fires like Tony, a canefarmer who turned out for a job only to be assaulted by the landowner, pushed to the ground and told to get off the property. Rural volunteers should have proper legal protections when they put themselves in harm's way to protect our community. We are indebted to their service. They should not expect to be assaulted or ordered to leave a fireground by a landowner. They should have better legal protections. This bill and our government will provide them.

It is volunteers like Tony whom this legislation puts first. Our rural fire brigades are at the heart of our local communities and are integral in delivering Queensland's fire and emergency services. We have thousands of volunteers through our local brigades and we value the tremendous contributions they all make. I have had the pleasure of meeting many of these brave individuals as I have travelled across the state during recent natural disasters—be it tropical cyclones, long, raging bushfires or tragic

house fires, like the one we saw some months ago on Russell Island. These are the men and women who are the front line of defence protecting many Queensland communities. Their extraordinary work is essential and valued by all Queenslanders.

I also want to be clear that brigade funds and assets will remain available for local brigades. The state will continue to provide direct funding for appliances, protective equipment, training, insurance and other items for the running of brigades. Money raised and held by brigades from 1 July 2024 will continue to be managed and spent by brigades, as they have done previously. Funds raised by brigades after 1 July 2024 will be expended on the brigade that raised the funds and reserved for local purposes. Brigades will be able to access and spend these funds following delegated approvals in line with government accountability. Appliances will be placed on the RFSQ asset register and recorded as being state owned, which allows these vehicles to be insured and maintained. This is what happens now and will continue on the commencement of this bill.

The Minister for Police and Community Safety has already addressed the important inclusion of an amendment regarding the appointment of a person in charge of operations. Despite what is being said by some, I have repeatedly made clear that yellow trucks need not wait for red trucks to respond to an incident. I note the comments from the members for Scenic Rim and Theodore in their statement of reservation about the number of level 3 incident controllers across the state. Incident controller training is offered to both salaried and volunteer staff. The new RFSQ will have greater opportunity to offer training for a service that will stand ready, trained and capable to defend Queensland communities from fires and other disasters.

Opposition members have also raised concerns about clause 83 of the bill. Clause 83 relates to the amendments to a dictionary definition in the bill. I can only assume that the members' concerns relate to the definitions regarding qualification requirements for appointment. As previously stated, those definitions only apply in relation to requirements for appointments to salaried positions. To suggest that they create confusion demonstrates a clear lack of understanding of the legislation.

Consultation on these reforms started when the independent review into QFES was commissioned by the government in July 2021. As part of that review, KPMG held formal consultations with over 50 representatives from 26 key stakeholder groups across the state's emergency and disaster management sector. I now table for the benefit of the House an outline of various consultations since May last year with the RFBAQ.

Tabled paper: Document, undated, titled 'Reform Implementation Taskforce—Legislation and Reform Program: Stakeholder consult RFBAQ' [713](#).

Rural Fire Service Queensland recently released a survey regarding the future directions of the agency which received over 300 submissions to date. The responses have been very positive, noting that there is still work to do with brigades across the state. I am also aware of correspondence to the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland from local brigades outlining stakeholder dissatisfaction with representation provided by the RFBAQ. One such piece of correspondence states in part—

Recent and ongoing representation of the Rural Fire Service by the RFBAQ has been extremely unhelpful. Comments and opinions expressed by the RFBAQ seem to have no basis in data or evidence, leaving many confused or concerned.

I urge the RFBAQ executive to heed the concerns of the volunteers that they purport to represent and base their advocacy in fact, not fantasy.

This legislation will also establish the Rural Fire Service Advisory Committee which will be the peak advisory body for volunteers to have their voices heard—something I have heard loud and clear during consultation. The Miles government recognises the unique differences and needs of Rural Fire Service Queensland and the Fire and Rescue Service. These two separate entities will work cooperatively under the organisation of the Queensland Fire Department to provide the best response to our community. The bill enables the Fire and Rescue Service to return to being operationally focused—a fire service run by firefighters. The basis of the organisation is command and control.

For a fire and rescue service to be world leading, it needs to have people at all levels with the right technical knowledge to know what equipment and training firefighters need to respond to an ever-changing environment. This is the biggest reform the fire service has seen since the 1990s. This bill will create the role of Chief Fire Officer as a statutory position within the department. The Chief Fire Officer will be responsible to the commissioner on matters relating to service delivery, operational culture, best practice and innovation and research across the fire services. From a recruit to the academy to the commissioner of the service, this bill enhances and embraces a professional organisational structure with a service that invests in its people and our community.

Finally, I will mention amendments in the bill requiring the installation of a working, photoelectric smoke alarm in caravans and motorhomes. The amendments being progressed in the bill form part of broader work to develop options for increased fire safety in vehicles and dwellings being used as accommodation. Further extending the regulatory scheme requires carefully weighing potential public safety benefits with the costs of regulation on individuals, particularly in light of current pressures on housing and accommodation. Prior to introduction I wrote to industrial organisations, the RACQ and Caravanning Queensland advising of the amendments and seeking the assistance of motoring and caravanning organisations. I thank Caravanning Queensland for its contribution through the committee process and the RACQ in expressing support for these amendments. QFES will continue to work with these organisations.

I acknowledge the very valuable feedback that has been provided by stakeholders over a long period of time. A constructive working relationship between stakeholders is essential in moving forward and it is something that we are all committed to. I also acknowledge the tremendous staff we have internally within the Queensland Reconstruction Authority and QFES and the tremendous contribution that Minister Ryan has made in this space. We know as Queenslanders we will continue to face disasters and emergencies. This bill makes critical amendments to support our frontline emergency services in prevention, preparedness, response and recovery now and into an uncertain future. I commend the bill to the House.