



Speech By  
**Robert Skelton**


**MEMBER FOR NICKLIN**

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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)**

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (4.19 pm): Queensland is Australia's most disaster-prone state, having faced nearly 90 significant natural disasters and weather events over the past decade. Research indicates that the financial toll on the Australian economy due to those disasters is expected to grow from \$38 billion annually in 2021 to at least \$73 billion a year by 2060. The substantial impact of natural disasters on Queensland underscores how critical it is that our emergency services are performing optimally. To that end, various organisational frameworks have been developed at the local, state and federal levels to address the four phases of Queensland's emergency management and disaster response system: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

The Queensland disaster management arrangements operate on a tiered structure as outlined in the Disaster Management Act, facilitating a progressive scale up of support and aid to affected communities. Disaster management groups are established at the local district and state levels and are entrusted with planning, organising, coordinating and executing measures to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster events. Those groups receive backing from coordination centres operating at corresponding levels and tasked with harmonising information, resources and services that are vital for disaster operations.

At the grassroots level, local governments bear the primary responsibility for disaster management through the implementation of their local disaster management plans, overseen by their respective local disaster management groups. If a local group lacks the capacity to handle the disaster and needs additional resources, it can seek support from disaster management groups at the district or state levels.

These bills are the result of two reviews into the efficiency and effectiveness of Queensland's emergency management system: one commissioned by our government back in 2021, and one delivered by the Inspector-General of Emergency Management last year. Queensland is set to reform its legislative framework concerning emergency services and disaster management in a phased approach. These bills are the first stage and will implement the legislative changes that are needed to restructure emergency service arrangements. This will be achieved by: one, establishing Marine Rescue Queensland as a statewide marine rescue service through the Marine Rescue Queensland Bill 2023; two, establishing the State Emergency Service through the State Emergency Service Bill 2023; three, bringing MRQ and the SES under the jurisdiction of the Queensland Police Service via the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023, which will enact administrative and consequential amendments to facilitate that integration; and, four, formally instituting the State Disaster Management Group, the SDM group, within the Disaster Management Act through the Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023.

Acknowledging the vital contribution of SES and marine rescue volunteers to the effectiveness of these services, the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue Queensland bills will establish the SES and MRQ as separate entities with their own acts. This is to underscore the significance of each organisation and to establish a clear framework outlining their purposes, functions, command structures and member roles.

The Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill makes a number of amendments to various bills. These include: amendments to the Civil Liability Regulation 2014, preserving current civil liability protections for the SES as an organisation and its members, as well as expanding those protections to the new MRQ and its members; amendments to the Disaster Management Act 2003 to formally establish the State Disaster Management Group within the act, as recommended by the Inspector-General of Emergency Management; consequential amendments to the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990 to accommodate the relocation of the SES and the realignment of our disaster management arrangements; and amendments to the Police Service administration Act 1990 to incorporate Marine Rescue Queensland and the State Emergency Service into the Queensland Police Service. These amendments ensure the QPS commissioner can deliver consistent governance and command structures for those personnel, streamlining the delivery of these critical services.

The SES bill will achieve its objectives by establishing the SES through the new State Emergency Service Act. The bill expands the functions of the SES to better reflect the services that the SES provides, or may be expected to provide, for the community. These functions include: to perform rescue or similar operations in an emergency situation, including the helping of injured persons; to protect persons, property or the environment from danger or potential danger associated with a situation; to perform search operations in an emergency or similar situation; to perform response activities in severe weather events; and to perform other activities to help communities or other entities prepare for or respond to, recover from and enhance resilience from an event or disaster.

Command and control within the SES will be achieved through the appointment of an SES chief officer, SES commanders and SES local controllers. Those roles are designed to ensure appropriate management of the SES is achieved at a state, regional and local level. The new MRQ Act will establish MRQ, which will be a dedicated marine rescue service for Queensland, in addition to providing other marine services to government entities and the community. The MRQ membership will consist of the MRQ chief officer, MRQ employees and MRQ volunteers. Consistent with recommendations from the independent review report, the bill provides the QPS commissioner with functions that will assist in the administration of MRQ and will ensure that MRQ is strategically aligned with other emergency services agencies. Command and control within the MRQ will be achieved through the appointment of an MRQ chief officer, MRQ coordinators and MRQ unit commanders. Just as with the SES, those roles are designated to facilitate the appropriate management of MRQ in a tiered system. The fire services will be similarly amalgamated to the Queensland Fire Department with the RFB and the QFES existing as separate entities under one chain of command.

In conclusion, as the state most affected by natural disasters, it is critical that Queensland's disaster management system continues to be efficient, flexible and responsive into the future. This is especially the case in this era of climate change. These bills are the first step in a process of reform that will strengthen Queensland's emergency response capability and streamline the delivery of these services. Pertinent to these bills is the fact that the Miles Labor government has strengthened the laws around protection and compensation for volunteers in line with career services. In addition, the bills pull in government funding so that those organisations do not have to rely on fundraising as they have in the past.

Collectively, in my region, I would like to thank the RFB units from Belli Park, Bli Bli and districts, Image Flat Cooloolabin, Kenilworth, Kiel Mountain, Kureelipa, Mapleton, Maroochy, Obi Obi, Palmwoods, West Woombye, Yandina North Arm and Valdora Yandina Creek. In the SES I have Kenilworth, Nambour and districts, and Noosa. I also have ancillary firefighters in Cooroy. I want to thank all of the units on the Sunshine Coast and Noosa. Obviously, I do not have any VMRs or coastguards under Marine Queensland, but I thank all of the units across the Sunshine Coast and Noosa. I know that they protect not only us but also the rest of Queensland. I particularly give a big shout-out to all of the volunteers from my RFB and SES units who participated in Anzac Day commemorations. They did a wonderful job of keeping us all safe by making sure the streets were barricaded off whilst the rest of the citizens of our great region enjoyed the commemorations.