




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 7 March 2024

ADJOURNMENT

Rural Firefighters

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (6.11 pm): Tonight I want to shine a light on various issues that have been raised with me, particularly around rural fires. They need support and resources. These volunteers are responsible for looking after 93 per cent of our vast state. They are the ones who come running when the bushfire is bearing down on them. If the state government does not pay attention, I fear—and this is what I am hearing from these dedicated volunteers—that we may see further attrition of our volunteers.

I have an update on the national service medals issue that was raised in the House previously. We know 3,000 nominations were put forward for these medals back in 2019. It took two years for this to go to the Governor-General in Canberra. We have had an update from the Governor-General's office that they expect to start processing a number of these nominations. I find it really disturbing that it has taken nearly five years for these medals to be awarded. Whatever level of government is responsible, it certainly is not good enough.

Another snub I have raised in the House before relates to the hardworking volunteers and their need for a dress uniform. The Rural Fire Brigade Queensland have been calling for this dress uniform for many years, and multiple requests still have not been responded to. Our volunteers attend events like Remembrance Day, awards ceremonies and funerals. Considering their support, I think the least our community could do is give them a clean pair of boots and a clean uniform. They say it is embarrassing when urbans are presented well, all dressed up and looking professional and then our rural fires have to turn up sometimes, in their own words, looking like Brown's cows in these worn uniforms. It is unthinkable that they can be on a fireground fighting a fire and then be expected to use that same uniform for a more formal event. It is an embarrassment. I give another shout-out tonight to those men and women who should at least qualify for that. In Childers they have been fighting for even a jacket to be worn in winter. That still has not been forthcoming.

Another issue I have raised this week relates to maintenance issues, not only in Childers but at the Wyllie Street station as well. There have been reports of mould and buildings and rooms not being suitable for occupancy. Calls to fix the long list of safety, maintenance and mould issues in the Childers fire station have gone unanswered for nearly two years. In their own words, 412 is a disaster and if the public knew how bad the equipment was they would be horrified. I have been hearing of their issues with the equipment and drying cabinets for nearly two years as well as the phone and internet connections that were struck by lightning. They are still struggling to get them right. We heard today from the member for Burdekin about the communication issues. This continues to be a problem for the area around Bundaberg and Burnett as well.

There are reports of serious mould problems at Wyllie Street—and I take this opportunity to give a shout-out to them for the Women's Day event that will be held tomorrow at the Wyllie Street station. We look forward to that but we want to make sure they are given a safe workplace. It is unfortunate that we only get three minutes to talk about rural fires, but we do thank them for the work they do.