

**Question on Notice
No. 88
Asked on 4 March 2014**

MR KATTER asked the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services (MR DEMPSEY)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the Emergency Management and Fire Rescue Levy on miners and farmers in the remote Einasleigh and Forsayth regions —

Will the Minister reconsider the apportionment of these charges as unique cases involving this relatively small category of tenure holders?

ANSWER:

Over the past few years Queensland has endured numerous floods, fires and cyclones. Those who have experienced these disasters know they can happen anywhere, anytime and our emergency services need to be in the best position to help the communities that are affected. That is why the Queensland Government is committed to revitalising our frontline emergency services.

Despite our history of natural disasters, the former Labor Government failed to implement any meaningful disaster response plan, except to borrow money, contributing to \$80 billion of state debt. It is for this reason the Queensland Government has developed a sustainable funding model through the Emergency Management and Fire Rescue Levy (EMFRL), to ensure our emergency services remain among the best in the world.

From 1 January 2014, the levy was extended to all Queensland properties to ensure a more equitable funding base was provided for our emergency services. A new class, Class E, was created to capture districts that were not part of levy classes A-D. Property owners in this category pay the lowest levy contribution. Those who hold a Commonwealth pension card are also eligible for a 20% discount on their levy contribution.

During times of trouble, Queenslanders all rely on our emergency services; whether they are volunteer marine rescue or swift water rescue crews, emergency helicopters, disaster recovery teams or other emergency services. Our emergency staff and volunteers play a vital role in our community.

The Government has been listening to community concerns regarding the levy to ensure it is fair to all property owners, whilst providing the funding needed to deliver first class emergency services across Queensland.

As a result, from 1 July 2014, community organisations within Class E will be able to apply to their local council for an exemption from the levy. These organisations may include community halls, libraries, country showgrounds and churches, to name a few. Those deemed exempt will also be eligible to claim a refund for the previous payment, backdated to January 1, 2014.

The Queensland Government also recognises that our primary producers are unique and their farm lands often consist of several contiguous parcels of land. For that reason, we included the provision to treat contiguous parcels of bona-fide primary production land as a single parcel attracting only one levy.

Furthermore, where councils are delaying rates payment in recognition of areas that are suffering from drought, if councils are delaying rates, the Government is also offering a delay of the levy being collected.

The *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990* does not exempt prescribed properties being used as mining claims or leases. However, those who are holders of a mining claim or lease where the land is vacant, without permanent structures and not being used for the extraction of material from the ground - for example small scale mining - can submit a Statutory Declaration to Council, explaining that the land is vacant. The council may amend the category of the property and the levy applicable to vacant land will apply.

This past week demonstrates that Queenslanders everywhere experience extreme weather conditions. Rural and regional areas are going from drought conditions to deluge in a matter of hours, and flash flooding has occurred in a number of areas.

The Government remains committed to having the best emergency services in Australia, so that Queenslanders can get the response they need when it matters most.