

Question on Notice

No. 1383

Asked on 26 October 2023

MR S KNUTH ASKED THE MINISTER FOR POLICE AND CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND MINISTER FOR FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (HON M RYAN)

QUESTION:

With reference to me having been contacted by a number of property and business owners who have received rates notices, which include, either for the first time, or contain a significant increase to their existing, Emergency Management Levy (EML). One business EML has increased from \$12,448 per year to \$43,287, placing them at risk of closing their doors—

Will the Minister outline (a) the justification for some recipients receiving a new EML charge and the significant increase to others existing EML charge and (b) what the Minister's office is doing to assist businesses and property owners who are experiencing financial stress because of the increase to the EML charge?

ANSWER:

As outlined in the personal briefing provided to the Member on 12 September 2023, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) does not have the legal authority to waive payment of the Emergency Management Levy (EML), established in its current form in 2014 by the previous LNP Government.

The EML is established under the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990* (the Act) and applies a levy on all properties within levy districts. The EML is QFES' primary source of funding to deliver fire and safety services to Queenslanders. Accordingly, it is important to note that the EML supports the delivery of fire and emergency services throughout Queensland and the efforts of our firefighters to protect life and property.

The calculation value of a property's levy is based on how the property is used, including business operations, gross floor area or land area as well as proximity to QFES' service capacity such as permanent station and number of operational personnel onsite.

Under the Act, local governments are required to administer collection of the levy, generally through local government rate notices.

Schedule 2 of the Fire and Emergency Services Regulation 2011 (the Regulation) provides descriptions of property types and uses to support assessment of the levy value for a property. The Regulation is amended each financial year with property values and district adjustments as new stations are opened or staffing changes occur. The Regulation and Schedule 2 are publicly available and is the source to support both state and local governments in evaluating the levy value to be contributed by a property.

I am advised that QFES undertakes a cyclical audit process to assist local governments in ensuring the levy and prescribed properties are appropriately assessed. The cycle may mean that a local government is not part of an audit for up to six years.

I am advised that the Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) was part of the audit cycle during the 2022-23 financial year, and this process identified that there were discrepancies across a number of properties with the levy invoiced well under the value as defined under the Regulation.

This has better clarified the property evaluation process for CCRC moving forward and neither QFES nor the council will seek retrospective remuneration for the undervalued issued levy notices.

As previously advised to the Member, there are options available to property owners experiencing difficulties due to cost impacts, including increases in the levy, and I encourage owners to make contact with their local council in the first instance to discuss arrangements to alleviate any immediate cost pressures.