

Cognate Speech

Marine Rescue Queensland Bill

State Emergency Service Bill

Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill

***Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment
Bill***

Sandy Bolton, MP for Noosa

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I rise to make a contribution to this cognate of 4 bills which are to amend our emergency management legislation to implement recommendations from several recent reviews

Noosa has incredible volunteers in emergency and disaster management, and I send my gratitude to everyone from our bush fireys and SES through to our coastguard.

One Bill of the four establishes a new Marine Rescue Queensland (MRQ) based on the amalgamation of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association of Queensland and the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland as recommended in the Bluewater Review.

For years our Noosa Coastguard QF5 had to fuel up and maintain their boats by sizzling sausages, at the same time paying for their own uniforms and membership to save lives which was unfair.

Having advocated for a fairer model since 2018, I welcome changes that have been made, with the team from QF5 not raising any issues with the Bill. However, the Volunteer Coast Guard Association did express concern that it is not implementing a volunteer-centric organisation that they expected from the Government's Marine Rescue Implementation Program and seek the incorporation of a volunteer charter.

The second Bill establishes the State Emergency Services (SES) with its own specific legislation under the police rather than under the Fire and Emergency Services.

Whether coming to our aid during disasters 24/7, ensuring we can host events by managing traffic, or cleaning up after storms, floods and other events, and we need to look after them!

Our local SES had no particular issues with the Bill, however highlighted the disparity between responsibility and pay for regional 'local' controllers, with great geographic variation. This is not dealt with in the Bill however is an important issue which needs to be addressed.

The third Bill then links the SES and MRQ into the QPS, with some concerns with the perceptions created by doing this that there is lack of support for community organisations. The department responded that the Inspector-General of Emergency Management was created to have oversight of the system and will be able to examine these concerns.

The fourth in this cognate is the Disaster Management Bill, which creates the Queensland Fire Department, consisting of Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR) and the Rural Fire Service (RFS). This is the one that raised major concerns.

Since the bill's introduction into Parliament our office has received multiple representations by rural firefighters who expressed their dismay that the Bill does not implement what they were promised.

Some of their issues appear to have been addressed, however 3 requests remain unaddressed.

First, that they will have an independent Commissioner. Second, they will have a separate quarantined budget. Third, local control and decision making remains with the RFS officers and crew when on the ground fighting bush fires.

From submissions received, these are essential to be addressed to avoid alienating our rural fire brigade volunteers across QLD, their families and communities.

Given that Victoria has gone through a similar situation, ultimately they developed two separate entities due to the opposition of their rural fire services. This as they required, as ours are seeking, - autonomy on the ground, as well 'buy in' to the decision making process.

It is for this reason I oppose Clause 31 which combines the two fire services under one Commissioner.

We are in a time where we need to retain our volunteers, not lose them. Across the state many of our not for profit organisation volunteers are aging and facing challenges with attracting the next generation.

They are experiencing the same hardships we are seeing with paid frontliners, including housing and cost of living pressures.

We need to always do more and listening to their concerns is vital.

Statements of Reservations for the Bill raised these matters as well lack of information for volunteers on how the new setup will operate for the transfer of equipment etc. The 'devil in the detail' is always of concern.

Before I finish, debating four bills at once is inappropriate, severely limiting the time available for members to speak on the issues raised and disrespects our democracy and QLDers.

Even though I am supportive of the first three bills, given the concerns raised regarding the Disaster Management Bill, I cannot support that one in its current State.

Thank you to the Minister, the Committees and Secretariats and especially all those who have provided feedback on these bills. Again, our deep gratitude to all of our emergency volunteers for what you do every day. May the changes end the many challenges you previously faced, and the concerns raised be addressed.