



**Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Bill Debate
Speech by GLEN ELMES
Member for Noosa**

Hansard, 25 November 2008

Mr ELMES (Noosa--LNP) (5.38 pm): I rise to speak on the Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. As the shadow minister said in his presentation, the opposition agrees with the bill's general position. In line with the QAS audit report's recommendations, I would like to make the following points. Part 2, clause 4 talks about encouraging, where possible, the referral of patients who would otherwise go to hospital to be taken to their GP or to other health centres and providers. Obviously this is something that needs to be encouraged. Paramedics need to be given the authority to do this, to be able to make those judgement calls. Also, newcomers in either a suburban station or a regional city or town need to be educated about appropriate addresses of local GPs, seven-day-a-week medical centres and things of that kind. I do not have a problem with paramedics treating patients, but if this is to happen they must be able to continue to receive high-quality training and education. We have already seen that our paramedics and, similarly, our Fire and Rescue Service personnel are under great stress.

In the last sitting of parliament I made a presentation to the parliament where I talked about 12-hour shifts being undertaken by our ambos. I also mentioned the fact that no meal breaks were being given in some instances because of the work they were doing. For all of this, our ambos and our firies are being paid in the vicinity of \$25 an hour. For the work they do, this is a great strain on them personally. They have to make life-and-death decisions, and obviously anything that the government and the minister can do that eases the burden on them is very worthwhile. What concerns me is that, if they are treating people who have called an ambulance to a particular location, what happens if some complication arises after treatment? In an earlier presentation we heard that they were covered, but anything that the minister can say to reassure them that that is the case and that allows them to be able to make those judgement calls I am sure would be appreciated by them.

Another thing that has been put to me at different times by members of the Queensland Ambulance Service is that, if people were taken to hospital, then a situation could come about--I am just adding this in as a point of discussion--where if they were admitted then that would be fine and there would be no charge. But if they were not admitted--and by this I mean not admitted by doctors and specialist personnel at hospitals--then some charge for the QAS presentations and transportation could be made. That is another way of making sure that the number of frivolous calls sending our ambulance officers and paramedics around the place willy-nilly could be brought under some sort of control.

I cannot help agreeing with the recommendations outlined that see a reduction in expenses by phasing out services like baby capsule hire and fitting, community education and training, the CPR for Life program, the Prime Safe Program, mining services, sports and special events services, and other commercial contracts. We have many organisations in Queensland--the St John's Ambulance Service being one--that should be encouraged to take up those roles and ensure more of our highly trained ambulance personnel are available to

do the more important jobs that exist around the state. Something mentioned to me by some ambos whom I come into contact with is that when some of the training does take place it seems to be done with a handout of a book and a DVD, and they are supposed to go home, have a look at those things, come back and be able to put those things into place.

I think there is a great need for more face-to-face education that allows our paramedics to come into contact with highly trained professionals; that allow that interaction on a personal basis; that allows them, in turn, to go out and do their job even better than what they do at the moment.

I notice that clause 6 of the bill seeks to minimise the rising number of false calls to the 000 service, which is to be encouraged. As has been pointed out, the government has already done some work on an advertising campaign that is currently underway. However, I doubt whether there is a man, woman or child in Queensland who does not know instinctively that the 000 service is there for emergencies and nothing else. I absolutely encourage, as does the opposition, the fining of people who make malicious calls, although when looking at the penalty--and my colleague, the member for Ipswich West, was talking about increasing the fine above \$7 thousand--combined with the flurry of increases in fines that seem to be happening at the moment not just regarding the Ambulance Service but across the broad spectrum, I wonder whether some of this has something to do with revenue raising as against something that is worthwhile.

On the other hand, the concern that we are also talking about here is the QAS personnel administering the penalty system. Again, I would like some sort of an assurance that somewhere down the track we do not have similar fines for people who contact their local ambulance station demanding transport to hospital when it is clearly not warranted. I think, as everyone in the parliament does, that our concerns, regardless of which side of the House we come from, lies with the concerns of the front-line operational staff of the QAS and the QFRS.

As I mentioned previously, they are under more than enough stress and strain. We do not have anywhere near enough of them. In many cases, their pay and conditions are well below those of other states and territories. The issuing of fines--as I have touched on before and got a bit of a ragging from some on the other side--I believe is the preserve of the Queensland Police Service. In closing, I heard one of the government members refer to drop-in calls that the minister does at various places around the state. I invite him to come to Noosa at any time and to drop in and talk to our paramedics. I also invite him to look at the deplorable state of the Noosa Heads Fire Station, which has water running down the inside of walls. There are parts of the building that should be condemned.

As I have said, and as the shadow minister said at the outset, the opposition supports this bill. I know that the minister tries very hard to make sure that the money goes into all the parts of the state that it should. I encourage him to spend some time in Noosa and spread a bit of the cheer our way. I commend the bill to the House and congratulate the minister for the steps that he has taken.
