

Queensland Ambulance Service, Personnel

Mr MALONE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Ambulance officers have resorted to stop-work action today in protest at the appalling work conditions they are subjected to on a daily basis. As a supposed advocate of workers rights, when will the minister acknowledge the difficulties faced by ambulance officers and commit to providing additional paramedics and resources to cope with the growing demand?

Mr PURCELL: I thank the member for the question. I do not suppose to be a workers advocate; I always have been and always will be a workers advocate. I think a lot of people on this side of the House think a lot about workers. They are probably in this place to see if they can make workers' lot in life better than it was under previous governments when I was a union official. I can assure members that conditions have changed a lot.

I thank the member for the question. Today there is a stop-work meeting called by the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union to report back to its Queensland Ambulance Service employees. During the lunch meetings, the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union have agreed that all emergency cases will be responded to by Queensland Ambulance Service paramedics. I repeat: union officials have given an assurances that members at the meetings will respond to emergencies.

I can assure the House that the Queensland Ambulance Service is committed to looking after its hardworking and dedicated employees. I take this opportunity to thank those employees. I have spent the last 12 weeks meeting as many emergency service employees as I possibly can throughout Queensland—in the west, far west, far north and everywhere I could possibly get to in that time. I thank them for their frank and open discussions, their willingness to come and talk with me and officers from our department. I particularly acknowledge the paramedics of Queensland. I know how hardworking they are and how hardworking they continue to be. We have the hardest working paramedics in Australia and the most dedicated paramedics in Australia.

We are also very lucky to have had the largest injection of paramedics ever in the history of Queensland. I thank the Premier and the previous minister for that injection. In the remaining 18 months of the four years during which that injection is to occur, we will be introducing 350 more paramedics into Queensland. They will be extra paramedics.

It is a reality that we are greater consumers of ambulance services now than ever before. We are becoming older and our population is growing. Therefore, our ambulance services are called on more than ever before in the history of Queensland. Our paramedics are better trained than they have ever been. They have come a long way, from being stretcher bearers whose job it was to put people in an ambulance and get them to hospital as quickly as possible. These days, if a person has an event in front of a paramedic in Queensland that person has a 75 per cent chance of surviving. We get patients to hospital in the best possible medical condition.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Kalpowar Station

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (11.30 am), by leave: Today I have received a letter from the principal legal officer of the Cape York Land Council. I want to share it with the House because it deals with the Kalpowar matter to which I referred yesterday in a ministerial statement. It is addressed to me. It states—

Kalpowar state land dealings

Cape York Land Council acts on behalf of the traditional owners and native title holders of the Kalpowar aggregation, including the area known as Pandanus Park.

The Land Council is instructed that the traditional owners and native title holders are prepared to discuss arrangements for the veteran's ongoing access to and use of that land on the basis that the discussions will be between the indigenous parties and veterans, and with a view to the arrangements being in place at the time the land tenure arrangements are settled with the Queensland Government.

Yours sincerely

Libby Bunyan

The significance of this, in a sense, is that it is a breakthrough. Previously the Cape York Land Council was wanting the Queensland government to finalise tenure arrangements for Kalpowar between themselves and the environment movement prior to negotiations commencing over access arrangements for Vietnam veterans to the Pandanus block on Kalpowar. This letter is significant in that the land council has now agreed to negotiate with the Vietnam veterans prior to the final tenure arrangements for the property being announced by the Queensland government.

This is a significant gesture of goodwill on the part of the traditional owners and I believe it should be received as such by the Vietnam veterans. I want to thank the traditional owners for that. It is most

certainly endorsed by the Queensland government. I have consulted with the local member for Cook, Jason O'Brien, in relation to it and he supports it. I extend my appreciation to the Cape York Land Council and traditional owners for this gesture. The Queensland government stands ready to assist and facilitate these negotiations.

PUBLIC HEALTH BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 25 October (see p. 3492).

Hon. NITA CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (11.32 am): In supporting the Public Health Bill 2005, I think it is clear that the Beattie government is committed to promoting a healthier Queensland. Central to this commitment is the provision of effective public health services throughout the state, and this should be evident to everyone following yesterday's announcements in the mini budget.

This Public Health Bill marks another major reform to public health legislation in the state and will replace most of the outdated 1937 Health Act. It will provide a strong framework for the management of public health issues into the future for dealing with public health risks, minimising the spread of contagious conditions, infection control in health facilities, child protection, health information management and responding to public health emergencies.

The bill also, for the first time, introduces comprehensive provisions to establish public health inquiries. The bill takes a proactive approach to the prevention and control of health risks associated with particular pests such as mosquitos. It gives the chief executive of Queensland Health the capacity to establish an environmental health event register and to monitor the health effects of a particular event, such as a chemical fire. It provides for the mandatory notification of child abuse or neglect, which requires a doctor or registered nurse to notify their concern to the Department of Child Safety. In this bill local government's ability to respond to the dispersal of certain hazardous substances at places other than workplaces has been strengthened. Another key issue is minimising and controlling the outbreak of diseases in child-care centres and in schools.

Government responsibility for public health had its origins in early 19th century Britain when the pioneer in environmental health, Edwin Chadwick, made the case for government regulation of matters directly related to public health to reduce the incidence and spread of infectious conditions such as smallpox, tuberculosis and typhoid fever prevalent in the high density urban environment that had developed with the industrial revolution. His work helped provide the foundation of the first British Public Health Act widely seen as the starting point for environmental health policy in Westminster systems. In Australia public health legislation based on the British model dates back to the New South Wales Quarantine Act of 1832.

Public health, as we understand it today, focuses on issues directly related to the health of the population and includes psychological, social and physical elements. Environmental health is a key component of public health, providing the basic infrastructure on which all human health is built. The discipline of environmental health addresses emerging health risks arising from the pressures placed on the environment from human development, such as waste disposal and water usage.

This Public Health Bill 2005 before the House allows for action to be taken in Queensland to control public health risks, and the provisions will replace the nuisance provisions in the Health Act of 1937 relative to an animal, structure, substance or other thing that is, or is likely to become, a breeding ground or harbourage for designated pests such as mice, rats or mosquitos; and will include issues that are hazardous to human health and likely to contribute to disease in humans such as designated pests, water supplies, waste removal or dispersal of a pesticide, herbicide, solvent or other chemical at a place other than a workplace.

Local governments in Australia have always had a primary role in maintaining public health standards in the local government area. The public health functions that are typically the responsibility of local governments include the provision of a safe potable water supply; removal, treatment and management of solid and liquid waste; mosquito control; control of vermin; control of nuisances including animals, dust, noise and overgrown lots; smoke and fumes; safety of noxious and hazardous goods; prevention of infectious diseases; management of sharps; management of recreational water, including public pools and spas; street cleaning; immunisation; control of mass events; public health planning and promotion; environmental pollution response and clean-up; and protecting health in disasters and emergencies.

In 2000 Queensland Health's Public Health Services, the Local Government Association of Queensland and local governments of Queensland themselves developed a public health partnership protocol in relation to the provision of public health services to the population of Queensland. The assistance provided by Queensland Health and the Department of Industrial Relations to better enable local government officers to respond to asbestos related complaints demonstrates this government's