



Speech by

## Hon. Jack Dempsey

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard Wednesday, 12 September 2012

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### MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

#### Fire and Rescue Service

 **Hon. JM DEMPSEY** (Bundaberg—LNP) (Minister for Police and Community Safety) (2.15 pm): As all members of this House know, we are heading into one of our most challenging bushfire seasons. Today I want to assure Queenslanders that the state is ready to meet that challenge. Let me assure the House that the necessary reforms of rural fire operations will not reduce this state's readiness for the bushfire season. The changes are timed to take effect after the current fire season, resulting in a streamlined process whilst a review of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is conducted.

Tough decisions have had to be made by this government to bring Queensland back from debt and decline. That means that we have looked at structures across-the-board in an effort to identify how we can do things better and more efficiently. Our rural firefighters have told us that they are tied up in red tape and bureaucracy, which makes it difficult to carry out their roles efficiently. We have sought to re-empower our local volunteers and brigades by removing a layer of bureaucracy between the volunteers and head office. People with intimate knowledge of the area in which they live have told this government that they are tired of being overruled by bureaucrats from Brisbane. Rural fire volunteers know their areas and are the ones who are able to make the most appropriate decisions when it comes to fighting fires in their local community. The new regional structure will change from the current seven regions to three zones: northern, central and southern. It will see the loss of 56 support and administrative positions out of a total of 117. But let me stress that the new structure will continue to provide training and operational and administrative support to our 35,000 rural fire volunteers.

Rural fire is not immune from the changes and efficiencies that have reached into all areas of government. I can assure honourable members that we will work through these changes with the rural fire leadership to ensure that we provide an effective and flexible volunteer service. I know these changes are challenging, but they will not impact on our capacity to protect all Queenslanders. In fact, these efficiencies enable \$45.6 million to be directed to fire and rescue facilities and urban and rural appliances throughout the whole of the state. This will include new and replacement fire stations for a number of suburbs, 21 new urban fire appliances and 24 new rural fire appliances. This shows that we continue to support the important work that Queensland urban, auxiliary and rural firefighters perform by equipping them with the trucks and equipment they need to continue to protect Queensland communities across this fine state.

Let me stress my support for the hardworking members of the Rural Fire Service. The work they perform is invaluable. This government will reduce the bureaucracy and red tape and will empower local brigades. We will work closely with them to ensure that they are able to carry out their duties to the highest possible standard.