

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY 7TH MAY 2015

**FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (VOLUNTEER CHARTERS)
AMENDMENT BILL**

Second Reading

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:17): I too rise to support my good friend the member for Morphett's amendment bill, which is the Fire and Emergency Services (Volunteer Charters) Amendment Bill 2015. I would just like to acknowledge my colleagues who are members of the CFS: the members for Morphett, Stuart, Finniss, MacKillop and Chaffey. My apologies if I have missed anyone.

Certainly I have been a long-term member of the CFS, the Country Fire Service, and their volunteers. They do great work in this state. Certainly in the time that I have to be away from home, which is obviously quite often in this job, my local CFS unit, the Coomandook CFS, do a fantastic job. They have a 3,000 litre fire truck, a four-wheel drive of course, and also a 9,000 litre tanker sitting in the shed, so we are very well resourced to assist not just in fires and bushfires but also road accidents, where Coonalpyn and Tailem Bend are the lead units. Certainly Coomandook plays its part in either traffic management or other work around incidents on the Dukes Highway especially, where sadly there are too many. I salute all of my colleagues in the whole of the CFS, all 13,000-odd, but especially my friends and colleagues at Coomandook.

My farming property is dissected by both a railway line and a highway, so it is vital to have that protection and to know that those people are there if anything happens. Certainly one thing that has come into use that I really commend is the CFS app. It goes off too many times, I must say, which means there is another callout, one of probably 300,000 callouts annually I think it is, telling you when things are on. It was especially alarming when, on the southern island of Australia, Tasmania, as I was over the Christmas period, the CFS app lit up that there was a fire at Coomandook. Thankfully it was only a small shed fire and they had that out fairly quickly.

Getting back to the issue around having a property dissected by a railway line and a highway, off the highway there is plenty of opportunity for wheel bearings to collapse, whether it be on light trailers or semitrailers. We had one recently in the past few months. Thankfully, because of the close proximity of our property to the CFS shed and volunteers—I was not home at the time—that was contained very quickly and only burnt about 150 metres of fence line and just a little bit of the growth on the property, so I salute the CFS everywhere for what they do.

Where I really take my hat off to all the Country Fire Service volunteers is the teamwork that is displayed. When everyone was called to help in 2007 on Kangaroo Island, in the member for Finnis's electorate, either to fight the fire or mop up the big fire that was there, I went over as a volunteer for a couple of days and it was a massive effort through all the agencies with that incident.

With respect to fires closer to home, when I see the strike teams either come down from northern areas closer to the River Murray or further north or the South-East brigades come up, even when you see a South-East brigade member, the leading figure at this time—and I remember one which was first thing in the morning with a gentleman from Avenue Range. The fire had burnt through some of our property, and I am glad I caught up with him because I think they were about to cut a fence to let a bulldozer through. I said, 'If you do not cut straight through to the scrub and you come down to this other fence line for about half a kilometre, there is a double gate.' In the light of day we managed to effect that.

They do so much great work, and so do our State Emergency Service volunteers, and there is plenty of that work in my electorate. Whether it is in a coastal town like Goolwa, an end-of-the-river town, or in Murray Bridge, there are water rescues, cleaning up after storms. We have had some significant storms over the years, and, talking of storms, even before I got elected, in Karoonda there was a massive storm that tore the place apart, and there was one at Pinnaroo not long after I came to this place.

I was trying to get some extra money to assist the local council, the Southern Mallee District Council, with some of the clean-up costs. I must say that Kevin Foley, former member for Port Adelaide, did not do me too many favours in my time here, but he did me one then. I approached him one day to see about getting the \$70,000 needed for a one-off grant to the local council and, true to his word, he came up with the money. I certainly thanked him the next time I saw him in this chamber. With the hard politics that Labor plays, generally they did not have to do that, so I certainly thought that was a great contribution to a local council.

In regard to this bill, which is to see parliamentary recognition of the South Australian CFS volunteer charter and the SES charter, the CFS clauses include that the parliament recognises that the SA CFS is first and foremost a volunteer based organisation in which volunteer officers and members are supported by employees in a fully integrated manner, and the parliament recognises that the SA CFS volunteer charter is a statement of the commitment of principles that apply to the relationship between the government of South Australia, the commission, SA CFS and volunteer officers and members, and requires that the government of South Australia, the commission and SA CFS recognise, value, respect and promote the contribution of volunteer officers and members to the

wellbeing and safety of the community, and there are some extra clauses there. Certainly in regard to the SES, there are similar clauses that include that:

(1) The Parliament recognises that SASES is first and foremost a volunteer-based organisation, in which volunteer officers and members are supported by employees in a fully integrated manner—

and that—

(2) The Parliament recognises that the SASES Volunteer Charter—

(a) is a statement of the commitment and principles that apply to the relationship between the Government of South Australia, the Commission, the SASES and volunteer officers and members;

and there are some other clauses supporting that.

In regard to the restructure, I think the only genesis in this restructure was just the fact that the current Minister for Emergency Services needed to get his name up in lights because, certainly, my information is he was not first in line for that ministry and someone else was more than pencilled in, but the heavy eraser came out at the last minute and he was given the job and he had better prove himself. He has proved himself to be completely incapable of getting anyone onside. Anyone who has commented on this (whether it was someone from the United Firefighters Union in the MFS or members of the CFS or, certainly the SES) has absolutely no confidence in this minister.

Losing a man like Grant Lupton from the Metropolitan Fire Service and the fire services of this state is a real tragedy. He sat with me at an awards ceremony in Murray Bridge not long before his time was up and he presented some awards to local firefighters, and Riverland firefighters from the seat of Chaffey. We had a very good discussion about where things were going, and he was not a happy man. He was accepting his fate. His fate was determined by other people further up the chain, people who do not recognise the true talents we have in this state and the opportunities we have had.

I think the main thing we want here, and the principle of the Volunteer Charter, is that we do not see what some of us, or most of us (if not all of us, I think, on this side) think is going on with this so-called reform of the emergency services in this state, that is, the minister wants everyone to join the United Firefighters Union. I think that is where he really wants to go. That certainly will not happen. It certainly did not happen when I was back in the shearing shed days and the AWU was trying to get me to buy a ticket. I agree with this bill of the member for Morphett and fully

support it. Let us hope the government gets right behind this bill that supports our many thousands of volunteers in this state.