



Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 16 September 2021

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Firefighters, Safety

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.38 pm): Every day Queenslanders rely on our firefighters to save their homes, their workplaces and even their lives. These brave men and women confront hostile and dangerous environments to protect life and property and, as one former firefighter put it, 'We take risks, but they are calculated risks.' Today, the calculation of those risks is dangerously skewed and at risk are the lives of those very brave men and women we rely on.

On 11 February 1994 two Queensland firefighters perished in what is now known as the Southport Honda fire. The pursuant coronial inquiry found that lack of communication was one of the contributing factors to their deaths and recommended the development of new communications equipment to prevent a similar tragedy. Lessons were learned—but, today, those lessons are being ignored. The QFES Communications Technology Enhancement Committee, or CTE Committee, was formed in partnership between Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and the United Firefighters Union of Queensland to identify, test and implement communications solutions that could increase firefighter safety.

When QFES transitioned to the government wireless network, appropriate equipment was identified. Instead of that equipment being supplied, firefighters were supplied with what the CTE Committee describes as 'significantly less capable equipment' and it is that 'significantly less capable equipment' they are still using today—three years later. In 2018 the CTE Committee identified what they referred to in their report as 'critical safety issues' with that equipment, including partial or even total communications loss. The CTE Committee came to the conclusion that 'these issues must be addressed as an absolute priority.' Even more concerning is that after the CTE Committee completed its report an edited version was produced that completely dismissed the severity of the concerns raised by the CTE Committee. Paragraphs referring to the obligations of QFES under workplace health and safety laws were deleted and paragraphs were added downplaying the need for an urgent safety bulletin to be issued.

I, for one, will not sit back and wait for our firefighters to be seriously injured or lose their lives. A full investigation is needed to get to the bottom of why and how, but more importantly to ensure that the risks faced by Queensland's firefighters are minimised. I table the original unedited CTE Committee reports.

Tabled paper: Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Communications Working Group: Communications Technology Enhancement Committee Report titled 'Interim report: Stage 1-Breathing Apparatus & HAZMAT Communications Solution' [1417](#).

Today I am calling for a parliamentary inquiry through the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee to urgently inquire into this issue. The people that Queenslanders rely on, our hardworking firefighters, deserve better.