

Question on Notice
No. 690
Asked on 13 April 2010

MR SHINE asked the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services (Mr ROBERTS)—

QUESTION:

With reference to rural fire vehicles and their replacement program—

Will the Minister expand on this initiative and explain how it improves the fighting capability of our rural fire volunteers, especially in the Darling Downs region?

ANSWER:

The Bligh Government has a proud history of supporting our hardworking Rural Fire Service volunteers. Over the past five years this Government has increased funding for the Rural Fire Service by 66 per cent, from \$17.8 million in 2004-05 to \$29.6 million in 2009-10.

This financial year the Government will provide \$4.5 million for 34 new or replacement appliances. This includes the first six of 14 specialised appliances that have at least a 3,000 litre water carrying capacity and will be fitted with essential communications and firefighting equipment, as part of the Government's 'Support Our Heroes' 2009 election commitment initiative.

The majority of the 34 appliances are expected to be delivered to rural fire brigades across Queensland by mid 2010. Rural fire brigades in the Toowoomba area will receive two light appliances and two medium appliances as part of the 2009-2010 build allocation.

The Rural Operations appliance fleet has undergone great improvements over the last five years. The total number of vehicles has increased by 71 from 876 on 30 June 2003 to 947 on 15 March 2010. The age of the vehicle fleet has decreased dramatically - on 30 June 2003, there were 147 appliances over 20 years of age. This figure had decreased to 10 as at 15 March 2010. The number of slip-on units has also significantly increased by 1,248 units over the last five years. At 30 June 2003 there were 1,130. By 15 March 2010, the number had increased to 2,378 slip-on units.

A key priority this financial year is to continue the Rural Appliance Modernisation Program to ensure that modern equipment is available to volunteers. The appliance build program this financial year provides an opportunity to retire and replace vehicles 20 years old and to replace appliances not considered economically viable to repair.

It should be noted however, that throughout Queensland, a small number of brigades have asked to retain their vehicles as they have low kilometres, low usage, operate efficiently and have been well maintained. These requests are reviewed on a case by case basis and Safety Certificates are obtained each year for all these vehicles.

The Rural Appliance Modernisation Program ensures that appliances provided in each financial year have the latest technological enhancements which as a consequence, assist to improve volunteer efficiency. Since the 2008-2009 build, appliances have an improved design which includes additional locker storage space and improved operational function. Dual cab medium appliances, which allow additional personnel to be transported, have been included as part of the standard appliance build since 2008-2009.

In addition, the 'Support Our Heroes' 2009 election commitment initiative has resulted in retrofitting Rural Fire Service appliances with heat reflective curtains and petrol driven pumps have been replaced with diesel driven pumps, which enhances volunteer safety.

Rural fire brigades in the Toowoomba area (which covers Dalby, Crows Nest, Oakey, Toowoomba, Pittsworth, Millmerran, Clifton, Allora, Warwick, Inglewood, Stanthorpe, Ballandean and Texas) currently have a total of 90 appliances, comprised of 25 light appliances, 64 medium appliances and 1 heavy appliance. The Rural Operations appliance build over the last five financial years has resulted in rural fire brigades in the Toowoomba area receiving 3 additional vehicles in 2004-2005, 14 in 2005-2006, 3 in 2006-2007, 7 in 2007-2008 and 5 in 2008-2009.

The Bligh Government is determined to continue to equip rural volunteers with the best vehicles and equipment to enhance their ability to undertake their duties in the safest and most efficient manner possible.