

DEBATES (HANSARD) SPEECHES

Goudie, Sandra: Questions for Oral Answer — Questions to Ministers

[Volume:641;Page:11486]

9. SANDRA GOUDIE (National—Coromandel) to the Minister of Internal Affairs: Does he stand by his statement in announcing proposals to change the Fire Service funding system that: “The proposals represent a new way forward that will meet New Zealand’s needs for the next 30 years and beyond;”, if so, why?

Hon CHRIS CARTER (Minister of Conservation) on behalf of the Minister of Internal Affairs: Yes; because a long list of problems have been raised and acknowledged, since the review of the legislation began in 2004. Most of those who are required to work within the current legislative framework acknowledge its shortcomings. This process is about expanding coverage, and

ensuring that those who are benefiting from the service are making an appropriate contribution.

Sandra Goudie: Can the Minister confirm that he declined my Official Information Act request for details about how much this new structure will cost, on the basis that “the information does not exist”; if so, on what does he base his claim that these proposals will meet New Zealand’s needs for the next 30 years?

Hon CHRIS CARTER: I cannot confirm that, but I can confirm that officials report that the total cost that we currently pay for the Fire Service levy, of about \$290 million, should not increase under the new structure but that it will be broadened to cover those who are not already paying a levy. So it is about extending the service and making everybody contribute to it; it is not about increasing costs.

Lindsay Tisch: What message does he have for Fonterra, which stated in its submission that the proposals were “flawed and inequitable”; and what message does he have for the Insurance Brokers Association of New Zealand, which stated that the Minister’s proposals would shift the burden “to weigh more heavily on responsible businesses”; and is this what he had in mind when he said that these proposals would “meet New Zealand’s needs for the next 30 years and beyond”?

Hon CHRIS CARTER: What I can confirm is that this document was put out as a discussion document. Submissions were called on it, and, as every member of this House knows, whatever we put out for discussion, inevitably draws a range of different opinions.

Peter Brown: Will the Minister acknowledge there are some serious reservations in regard to the fire and rescue services proposal, which basically revolve around the lack of full analysis of the service, and therefore the likely unfairness of the funding regime, and the problems associated with free-riders; and if the Minister is aware of these concerns, will he advise the House as to whether they will be addressed; if not, how in the dickens can his plan last for 30 years?

Hon CHRIS CARTER: I can confirm there have been strong points of view both for and against these proposed changes. I can also confirm that submissions have closed and they sit with my colleague the Minister of Internal Affairs, who will be making an announcement in due course.

Sandra Goudie: Does he agree with rudimentary costings published in the *National Business Review* newspaper of 27 July, which suggest levy cost increases of more than 2,100 percent for the Department of Corrections, and 1,950 percent for district health boards; and how can he disagree with these estimates, given his own admission that costings have not been done?

Hon CHRIS CARTER: In the 5 years that I have been privileged to be a Minister, I have agreed with very little I have ever read in the *National Business Review*.

Sandra Goudie: I seek leave to table a letter from the office of the Hon Rick Barker in response to my Official Information Act request.

CONTENT PROVIDER



House of Representatives

INFORMATION

Date:
4 September 2007

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- Document, by leave, laid on the Table of the House.

Sandra Goudie: I seek leave to table a press release made by the Hon Rick Barker pointing out that the proposals represent a new way forward.

Madam SPEAKER: Leave is sought to table that document. Is there any objection? Yes, there is objection.