



Speech by

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Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Tsunami Disaster, Papua New Guinea

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—ONP) (Leader of the One Nation Party) (10.13 a.m.): I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in extending my personal condolences and those of One Nation members of this House to the relatives, families and victims of the tragic national disaster which recently claimed so many lives in Papua New Guinea. Members of this House, especially those who go down to the sea in ships, are familiar with the prayers for those lost at sea. Today we pray for those who live on the land, but whom the cruel sea reached out and claimed nevertheless.

The sea has always been a formidable and heartless foe, but in this unfortunate case the cruel sea came a'calling as a cruel visitor. It came to people on the land and claimed thousands of victims in our nearest neighbour to the north—the nearest neighbour to Queensland. Except for an accident of geography, this tragic event could very well have overwhelmed the Gold Coast or a number of other coastal settlements in Queensland. Besides passing this motion of condolence, members of this House might well consider long and carefully how we might soften the blow if such a disaster rolls ashore in Queensland.

Frequently we hear the siren on television when a cyclone threatens and everybody is aware that we spend big money maintaining an emergency rescue network, but how many Queenslanders living near the sea really know what to do and how to do it when a tsunami, a seismic event—a wave—like that which swamped PNG, heads for our shoreline, or worse, hits our shores? That is something to think really long and hard about.

Evidently, the victims in PNG had little or no prior warning, so they had no time to escape that 15-metre wave which smashed the shoreline of that paradise for some 120 square kilometres around the community of Aitape. The papers reported that all that the people heard was the roar—the sound of a jet engine. We know what a jet engine sounds like, but they had no escape when they heard that noise. It was difficult to escape that killer sea wave. We now know the damage: upwards of 1,500 dead, 2,500 missing, some 4,000 survivors requiring help and some 500 survivors still in hospitals such as the Australian and New Zealand field hospital.

The cause was the earthquake which dropped the earth's floor several metres, sending out violent tremors which ended up in giant waves smashing everything when they hit the shore. There are no benefactors from such a disaster, except maybe those who stop to think and learn from the past, such as some of the Japanese communities which set about building barriers against future killer waves, but even these appear insignificant when mankind is faced with a really big sea. Full commendation must be extended to the Australian Defence Forces, missionary societies, and various churches and aid agencies as well as those mentioned by the Premier for the quick response to the needs of the PNG victims and families.

Many brave acts have been recorded, and the ability of humanity to recover from such a terrible tragedy is truly remarkable. I was sad to hear that this disaster has left many orphans, but because of the concept of the extended family in Papua New Guinea these unfortunate people will not remain orphans for long but will be adopted and raised by families who will care for them. That is something from which we in Australia might take some heart. Our prayers go out to those who have survived and who must rebuild their lives while they mourn for their loved ones lost in that cruel sea.

Many of the injuries have been horrific. Medical teams are still there, still working with those victims. Most of the injured have since left hospital and, with continuing care, will be able to return home and rebuild their lives. Again, while our sympathy goes out to the survivors of the PNG tragedy, we must also remember that, on average, Queensland is hit on shore and off shore by a major earthquake measuring 6 or higher on the Richter scale once every 33 years and is hit 25 times every year by an earthquake measuring less than 6.

It is my sincere hope that the Leader of the Opposition, the Independent members of this House and the Premier will also join with One Nation members in our concern to ensure that all necessary defences are ready and available to combat the disaster when a similar wave hits one of our shores. I am pleased to support the motion on behalf of the members of One Nation working for one nation in this House.
