



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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MOTION OF CONDOLENCE

Tsunami Disaster, Papua New Guinea

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (10.22 a.m.): The parliamentary Liberal Party joins with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in expressing our sympathy to the victims of the tragic tidal wave which struck with devastation in Papua New Guinea on 17 July. Perhaps more than any other natural disaster in our recent history, the tidal wave which hit the villages of the West Sepik Province has had a profound impact on the people of Australia, and Queensland in particular.

Papua New Guinea is not only our closest neighbour; it has historic links with Queensland as well as a people-to-people association in areas such as education, sport and business and investment. Over the last decade, successive Governments have recognised the importance of that association and potential benefits it offers both Queensland and Papua New Guinea.

The Government's response to this great tragedy has the full support of the Opposition, and is a measure not only of the concern we all have for the victims of the tidal wave, but of the genuine friendship and bonds between Queensland and Papua New Guinea. The enormity of this tragedy is difficult to comprehend—2,000 men, women and children confirmed dead, up to 2,000 more unaccounted for and some 10,000 who are being looked after in care centres, all of whom will have to be resettled away from the disaster area. Long after the immediate relief efforts are completed, the 10,000 surviving victims of the tidal wave are going to need assistance. Many of these victims are children who are either orphaned or who have lost one of their parents, as well as sisters or brothers.

I mentioned that we have strong education links with Papua New Guinea. This year, over 1,000 Papua New Guineans are attending Government and non-Government schools in Queensland, many under the Australian Government funded scholarship scheme which has operated since 1989. Unfortunately, this scheme is being phased out and no more scholarships are to be awarded by the Australian Government. I suggest to the Premier and the Government that Queensland could provide tangible, ongoing assistance to the victims of this tragedy by using some of the proceeds of the fund raising campaign sponsored by the Government to provide school scholarships to some of the victims of the tidal wave—scholarships which would enable them to attend high schools here in Queensland. I am sure such a scheme would enjoy the support of the Government of Papua New Guinea and would be genuinely appreciated by young victims who today must be wondering what the future holds for them. In this way, we can help make that future a little brighter and a little more certain.

The Australian contribution to the relief effort in the West Sepik deserves the highest praise. We can all be proud of the compassion and commitment shown by the Defence Force medical team and the efforts of church and community groups and businesses in helping the victims of this tragedy so promptly and generously. Our sympathy goes to the victims, as do our best wishes, as they confront a very difficult future. We can help make that future brighter and secure even in the face of the tragedy they have endured at nature's hands. The Liberal Party joins me in supporting the motion moved by the Premier.
