



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard 20 October 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Severe Storm Season

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.04 a.m.), by leave: Queensland is facing what is potentially its worst storm and cyclone season for many years. The Bureau of Meteorology has advised that our predicted weather pattern is similar to that of 1974, the year of the disastrous Brisbane flood and a season in which 16 cyclones crossed the coast. One of those cyclones was Wanda, which caused the Brisbane flood and also decimated beaches on the Gold Coast. The beach destruction was caused by massive seas whipped up by a relatively minor storm surge associated with Wanda. Sea levels in some places rose by half a metre and inundated the foreshores.

Every cyclone has an accompanying storm surge. A storm surge occurs when the cyclone crosses the coast. We have been fortunate that those surges rarely cross the coast in populated areas. We have been just as fortunate that when they have crossed it has been at low tide. The consequences of such an event at high tide is frightening. Unless we are prepared, this could be a disastrous summer.

The Meteorology Bureau and the Emergency Services Division of my department agreed on the need to conduct storm awareness campaigns much further south this season. The southernmost centres previously have been the Wide Bay and Mackay areas, but this year the experts say that the effects could be felt in a much wider area.

Statistics worldwide show that prepared and aware communities are the ones that suffer least in natural disasters such as cyclones, floods and severe storms. Complacency is the greatest killer. Heavily populated coastal areas such as the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast are not immune from the ravages of a cyclone's tentacles. After the long years of drought caused by the El Nino effect, Queensland's weather pattern has swing back to the La Nina pattern, which brings greater cyclone activity and corresponding deluges. While this can be good news for our farmers, it means that there is a need for people living in urban coastal areas to make themselves aware of strategies to protect their property and safeguard their families. That may be as simple as cleaning out gutters and pruning tall trees near homes. People should check their backyards for potential missiles such as wheelie bins and kids' swings. Even pot plants and a child's toy can be deadly.

The freak storm that lashed Brisbane, Warwick and the south-east last week, leaving in its wake a massive multimillion-dollar damages bill, showed just how vulnerable we are to the forces of nature. It was a miracle that no-one was killed or seriously injured. The fury uprooted huge trees and plucked branches from trunks and transformed them into missiles. Iron sheeting was ripped from roofs at the height of the storm.

Queensland has one of the most effective disaster management systems in the world. Our distinctive cyclone siren has now been adopted nationally as the standard early warning signal for major disasters. Last week, I officially opened the new State Disaster Coordination Centre at my department's Kedron Park headquarters. This centre will help us direct resources to where they are needed as quickly as possible in the event of major incidents.

A key component of our disaster management system is preparedness. An ounce of calm and commonsense preparation now could save the burden and heartache of major property loss and injury.

My department's Emergency Services Division will work closely with councils to get the message across. A range of brochures is available with helpful information about how to prepare for storms, floods and cyclones. They are as close as local SES units and local councils. We cannot prevent storms, floods and cyclones, but we can and we must be prepared when they hit.
