



Speech by

**Hon. MERRI ROSE**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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Hansard 9 March 1999

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Cyclone Rona**

**Hon. M. ROSE** (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (9.57 a.m.), by leave: Queenslanders in the south-east, south-west and far north of the State continue to mop up in the wake of widespread flooding and Cyclone Rona. I spent a great deal of time inspecting damage at Kilcoy, Esk, Toogoolawah, Caboolture, Gympie, the Sunshine Coast, Maryborough, Cairns, Innisfail, Ingham, the Daintree, Mossman and Tully.

I was overwhelmed by the response from emergency service workers and volunteers and local residents to those communities hit by flooding and cyclonic weather. From sandbagging, to mopping up, to risking their own lives to save others, these men and women excelled. The cooperation between all arms of emergency services, local government and local residents was absolutely magnificent. Both the preparation and clean-up was a real team effort, involving thousands of SES volunteers, firefighters, police officers, ambulance officers, surf lifesavers, helicopter rescue crews and local residents. Everywhere I went people were full of good humour and cheer despite the tragedy and devastation surrounding them. It made me proud to be a Queenslanders.

Many stories of incredible bravery and sacrifice have emerged from the muddy waters of the floods. There was the surf lifesaving helicopter crew who, incredibly, flew under powerlines to pluck a man from raging floodwaters. There were the SES volunteers who risked their lives to tie down two tankers full of ammonia which floodwaters threatened to sweep away outside of Gympie. There were the volunteer, auxiliary and permanent firefighters who, on their days off, came from Hervey Bay, Maryborough, Tewantin, Caloundra and other places in between to assist with the clean-up in Gympie and Maryborough. Then there were the rural volunteers who helped the clean-up in other towns. There were those who knew their own homes were in danger of flooding but still put others first.

It is impossible to single out particular people for praise—every person involved is a hero in their own way and each deserves our gratitude. Without them, things would have been a great deal worse. Both the Governor-General of Australia, Sir William Deane, and the Governor of Queensland, Major General Peter Arnison, have written to this Government expressing their admiration for the bravery and commitment displayed by these men and women.

Emergency services were well prepared for both the floods and Cyclone Rona, and counter disaster operations went according to plan. The credit for this rests squarely with the people on the ground who worked around the clock to minimise damage and ensure people were out of danger. We cannot forget, however, that six people lost their lives as a result of flooding in south-east Queensland. There were many other close calls and amazing rescues. The great tragedy is that many of these deaths could have been avoided.

I cannot stress enough the need for all Queenslanders to exercise extreme care during floods, cyclones and storms. Parents must keep a watchful eye on adventurous children who may see flooded creeks and streams as a playground. Motorists should not attempt to cross waterways or flooded causeways and roads during heavy rain. People who do not heed the warnings are gambling with their lives and the lives of their rescuers.

While the worst is now over and people have started to pick up the pieces, it is vital that we do not become lulled into a false sense of security. The cyclone season is far from over. The Bureau of Meteorology has warned that there may be more severe weather in store. Not even heavily populated

areas like the Gold and Sunshine Coasts are immune from the ravages of cyclonic forces, including storm surges. Every Queenslander needs to do their bit to prepare for cyclones and storms by cleaning debris from around their homes, clearing gutters and storm drains, or preparing an evacuation or action plan. Prepared and aware communities suffer the least in natural disasters. As we have seen recently, an ounce of calm and commonsense preparation now could save the burden and heartache of major property loss and injury in the future.

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