



Speech by

**Hon. MERRI ROSE**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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Hansard 24 March 1999

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Natural Disaster Mitigation**

**Hon. M. ROSE** (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.09 a.m.), by leave: The massive damages bill left by Tropical Cyclone Rona and widespread storms and flooding highlights the need for disaster mitigation. The Queensland Government's share of the bill to restore public assets and assist people affected by recent cyclonic weather and flooding was around \$60m before the most recent far-north Queensland floods. The funding comes under Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements that have been activated seven times this financial year for affected communities in the south-east, south-west, gulf, north and far north of the State. The majority of the money will be spent repairing or replacing public assets such as roads and bridges, with other funds allocated for personal hardship, counter-disaster operations and concessional loans to primary producers and small businesses.

While it will be some time before we are able to gauge the full extent of damage to many areas, the total financial loss to affected communities will be astronomical when profit losses, wage losses and insurance payouts are taken into consideration. However, if Cyclone Rona had hit the coast in a different place or on a high tide, the communities of north and far-north Queensland would have experienced devastation on an even greater scale.

The floods that swamped south-east Queensland were the worst in a century in some areas. Some local governments will take months to restore roads and bridges to a reasonable standard. These same areas could flood again next year, or next decade. The big wet also has highlighted the need for an extension of Natural Disaster Relief Arrangement benefits to take in trading assets and public utilities such as water and sewerage and aerodromes, and events such as landslides. I discussed these issues at a recent meeting in Sydney with Federal Finance Minister, John Fahey. There are ways, however, to minimise the amount of damage caused by severe weather.

This Government advocates the establishment of a joint State/Federal mitigation fund to reduce the impact of natural disasters on property and on the lives of Queenslanders. Premier Peter Beattie first proposed the fund in discussions with Prime Minister John Howard and the fund was high on the agenda when I met Mr Fahey. Mitigation work may not be cheap, but neither is rebuilding what will, inevitably, be knocked down again.

By building bridges in places where they will not be washed away or by building levees or flood walls in vulnerable areas, we can minimise the consequences of natural disasters on people and on property. We can also work with local councils to ensure that future development does not occur in flood-prone areas.

This year the Emergency Services budget included \$400,000 for disaster mitigation assessments in Cairns, Mackay and Hervey Bay, and for the implementation of a mitigation strategy for Murweh Shire, which has been devastated by flood in recent years. These assessments will lead to enhanced safety for Queensland communities through an increased level of counter-disaster preparation at the local government level.

The Government recently established a State Mitigation Committee to prioritise natural disaster mitigation needs across the state. However, we cannot implement mitigation strategies without financial assistance from the Federal Government. We may not be able to turn back floodwaters or send cyclones out to sea, but we can be prepared for the worst. Mitigation is an investment in Queensland's future.