



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard 15 April 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.03 a.m.), by leave: Queensland is setting the example for others to follow with the inaugural meeting on Tuesday of the State Mitigation Committee. The committee is a partnership between State and local government and will have the important job of identifying and prioritising the State's natural disaster mitigation needs.

The committee will be chaired by Department of Emergency Services Director-General Michael Kinnane, and includes senior representatives from the departments of Communication, Information, Local Government and Planning, Environment and Heritage, Natural Resources, Primary Industries, Main Roads, State Development, Premier and Cabinet, Treasury and Public Works. The Local Government Association of Queensland is represented by Executive Director Greg Hallam, Dalby Town Council Mayor Warwick Geisel and Burdekin Shire Chief Executive Officer Graham Webb.

Changes by the Federal Government to the NDRA guidelines made formation of the mitigation committee an absolute must. Federal Finance Minister John Fahey has the power to veto Commonwealth NDRA contributions if he considers councils have not provided evidence of mitigation.

We all agree on the need for mitigation. Recent cyclones and flooding events highlighted the need for all levels of government to work together to develop effective mitigation strategies to minimise the level of economic, infrastructure and property damage. We must also work together to provide the necessary infrastructure.

The LGAQ commissioned a major report on the guideline changes. It pointed to anomalies in the NDRA and to the need for State and local government to address mitigation in partnership. It recommended the establishment of a State mitigation committee. I was happy to support the recommendation and obtain Cabinet approval for the formation of this committee. Make no mistake: we have a major challenge ahead of us. But I am confident that we can rise to that challenge. The high-power composition of this committee suggests we are off to a flying start. State and local government has a long history of cooperation. I know the committee will produce long-term benefits for Queensland.

Committee members will work together on the methodology to be used by local government to develop their mitigation plans. Their work will ensure that the tens of millions of dollars the State spends each year through the natural disaster relief arrangements and the array of capital works programs is best targeted for the protection of life and property and to ensure the well-being of the community.

The committee will consider ways to "disaster proof" key infrastructure, such as roads and airports, so that communities are not completely isolated during disaster events. If we can minimise disruptions to economic activity we will ensure that business and communities can recover more quickly from disasters.

The big wet this season, as I said, has highlighted the need for something other than a program of rebuilding infrastructure which will be wiped out again in the next flood. Mitigation is not cheap, but neither is rebuilding what inevitably will be knocked down or washed away again. By building bridges in places where they will not be washed away or by fixing key roads and drainage in vulnerable areas, we can minimise the consequences of natural disasters on people, property, the environment and the local economy.

We can also work with local councils to ensure that future development does not occur in flood-prone areas. We need to move now if we are to reap the dividends later on. Establishing the mitigation committee was the first step. Its inaugural meeting was the second. Identification of mitigation needs and formation of mitigation plans will follow. The logical next step is setting up a national mitigation fund to help fund provision of the necessary infrastructure.

I recently headed a deputation, which also included departmental and LGAQ representatives, to lobby Federal Finance Minister John Fahey. Need for the mitigation fund was high on the agenda, as were NDRA guideline changes. I am confident of a positive outcome from the meeting. I am awaiting Mr Fahey's formal response.
