



Speech by

Mr S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Sunnybank—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.02 a.m.), by leave: It is fast approaching that time of year when Queensland comes under serious threat of cyclone and associated flooding. Between now and March is the time Queensland usually lives up to its reputation as the most natural disaster-prone State in Australia. The Bureau of Meteorology predicts that Queensland communities may be buffeted by up to seven cyclones this season.

We have already experienced a disastrous start to the year. In the period December to April, north Queensland communities suffered damage from three tropical cyclones: Steve, Tessi and Vaughan. At the same time large areas of northern, western and central parts of Queensland, effectively two-thirds of the State, were inundated by floods. These were costly events and forced Queensland's natural disaster bill for the last financial year to well over the \$102m mark—the highest in 10 years since the Charleville floods. Indeed, over the past 20 years, the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments have jointly allocated approximately \$1 billion of NDRA money for natural disaster relief in Queensland.

But all Queensland communities should be aware that the Commonwealth has changed its guidelines for the release of funding under National Disaster Relief Arrangements. The new arrangement means that the Commonwealth will only release its share of NDRA funding if there is evidence of prior disaster mitigation work undertaken in affected communities.

The Commonwealth's decision has the potential to impact significantly on the level of disaster relief funding available to Queensland and particularly our local governments. The intent is clear: unless local governments put in place disaster mitigation strategies, the Federal Government is threatening under these new arrangements to withdraw disaster relief funding. If the Howard Government suddenly pulls out, that leaves the State Government with a significant expense to pick up.

That is why the Beattie Government has been proactive in assisting local communities throughout Queensland to put in place natural disaster risk assessment and preparedness strategies. This Government, in conjunction with the Commonwealth and local governments, is providing \$3.9m funding this year for local governments and ATSI communities to conduct natural disaster risk management studies. My department has also provided \$500,000 to specific risk assessment studies in Cairns, Mackay and Hervey Bay—cities vulnerable to natural disaster—and the development of disaster risk management manuals to help local communities better plan for disasters. We have also produced a book providing information to people with special needs and their carers about how to prepare for natural disasters.

The Beattie Government believes, however, that there is a case for the Commonwealth and the States to establish a national disaster mitigation fund. Unless the capital pool is there which will actually fund mitigation work to raise roads, new levee banks, railway lines and bridges, then this vital infrastructure will continue to be damaged time and again with no relief to those affected communities.
