



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 29 October 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Natural Disaster Relief, Gold Coast

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (10.09 a.m.): I would like to commend all those services and organisations, including Q-Build, involved in helping Gold Coast residents whose homes were damaged by Sunday's severe hailstorm. The speedy and coordinated response will, I am sure, help in the recovery. That team effort is obvious at the storm damage help centre, which opened at the Tugun Community Centre at 9 a.m. yesterday.

Eight Department of Families' officers have been working alongside staff from the community centre, Lifeline, Centrelink, the Gold Coast City Council and a representative from the insurance industry. Fifty people visited the centre yesterday; many were visibly upset. Being forced out of your home because it is uninhabitable is naturally distressing and some people are now staying with family and friends or have booked into a motel. Our officers will help them work through any accommodation needs with the Gold Coast District Combined Disaster Committee and the Local Counter-Disaster Committee.

Almost all of the storm victims who were seen yesterday needed urgent financial assistance, which my department is providing under the joint Commonwealth and state natural disaster relief arrangements. My colleague the Minister for Emergency Services, Mike Reynolds, signed off on that yesterday. Individuals can access immediate payments of up to \$150 and families up to \$700. So far we have paid about \$4,000 to help people buy necessities such as food, clothing and medication. We expect that figure to escalate as people become aware of the support we are offering. Further financial help is also available under certain circumstances.

The Department of Families can help with the replacement of essential home contents and repairs to property when insurance does not cover the loss. Individuals could receive up to \$1,400 for household contents and \$8,800 for repairs, while couples or families who qualify can receive up to \$4,300 for contents and \$11,800 for repairs. Those payments are means tested based on income and assets. Each case will be considered on its merits.

The centre will operate for as long as there is a demand for assistance. During working hours it is taking calls to the disaster recovery freecall number. Already there have been 25 calls. After hours the number will be diverted to Crisis Care. I understand about 15 people who telephoned the centre through the disaster recovery number have not been able to come in, so our officers are planning to visit them today.

It is too early to provide an accurate figure on the number of people who need financial help or how much the storm will cost those people, although it is estimated private properties across south-east Queensland sustained more than \$8 million worth of damage.