



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT BILL

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (4.41 p.m.): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Disaster Management Bill, which updates 28-year-old legislation to provide Queensland with the most modern disaster management legislation anywhere in Australia. This legislation will provide a clearer framework for the structures, functions and powers supporting the disaster management system in Queensland. Improved disaster management legislation will help minimise the impact of natural disasters which are estimated to have cost Queensland \$7.9 billion between 1967 and 1999.

The legislation provides the framework for the operation of Queensland's whole of government arrangements, including disaster management, which incorporates mitigation, prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. It recognises the true partnership arrangements between state and local governments and the involvement of a variety of agencies, including Police, Health, Public Works, Primary Industries, Families and other agencies such as the Red Cross, which plays a vital role in disaster response.

Mr Pitt interjected.

Dr LESLEY CLARK: I take that interjection from the member for Mulgrave. We could not do without them. His wife, Linda, does an excellent job in her role with Red Cross and should be commended for it.

The legislation also recognises the changed security environment and the requirement for contemporary arrangements to manage the consequences of any event, including a terrorist attack, by providing a new definition of 'disaster' which incorporates natural events and human acts. The legislation ensures further recognition for SES volunteers and, in particular, provides strong employment protection for our volunteers.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the volunteers in the Barron River SES units at Machans Beach, Yorkey's Knob, Holloways Beach, Trinity Beach and Kuranda. Indeed, all SES volunteers wherever they serve deserve our gratitude for their commitment to their local communities in time of need. The Barron River SES units are now equipped with radios, flood boats and vehicles, thanks to the support of state and local government and the hard work of the volunteers themselves.

However, those SES members exchanged flood boats for ambulances when they participated in a joint emergency services exercise held last week in Cairns to test our preparedness for a Bali style terrorist attack on a local night club involving an explosion and a fire. The exercise involved police, the Fire and Rescue Service, the Queensland Ambulance Service, SES and Cairns Base Hospital staff, with members of the community playing the role of victims and bystanders. I accepted the invitation to participate as a victim in the nightclub to experience first-hand the response of our emergency services, and I must say that I found it a very interesting experience. It was very realistic in terms of my role as someone with a severely broken leg, complete with all of the make-up one might expect to make it realistic. I put my heart and soul into the job with lots of moaning and groaning and 'enjoyed' being rescued from the building by a fireman.

There has been a debrief of that exercise. It is not the detailed one just yet, but the initial debrief made it clear that we performed extremely well. All services have taken away some lessons to see how they could improve performance for the future, particularly focusing on improved

communications. But there were senior Brisbane personnel who observed the exercise, and I am pleased to say they commented that it was as good or better than any exercise they had seen across the state. I would like to congratulate all of the personnel involved and thank my fellow victims for also supporting this important exercise.

While it is important to be prepared for every eventuality, the real threats to far-north Queensland remain natural rather than terrorist events, in particular floods and cyclones. The last cyclone that caused any real damage to the Cairns region was Cyclone Steve in 2001. However, I think we are aware from the most recent forecast from the Met Bureau that we can expect to experience cyclones in far-north Queensland this year and we do need to be prepared.

In this regard, I would like to draw to the attention of the House and relevant ministers, particularly Emergency Services Minister, Mike Reynolds, the concerns that have been put to me by Jon Nott, the associate professor in geomorphology and natural hazards at James Cook University in Cairns. His concern is that the state and local governments in Queensland presently do not consider the full range of processes operating and impacting upon sandy coasts during tropical cyclones. Because of this, residential and tourist developments are being allowed to occur in locations exposed to potentially very dangerous conditions. That would include areas of my electorate on the Marlin Coast.

Dr Nott's solution to these problems is relatively simple but it could be very difficult to implement. I would like to quote from a copy of a letter that he sent me in relation to this to set out in some detail his assessment of the situation. I would like to read this extract into the *Hansard* record—

My research, and that of the United States Geological Survey and the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States of America, shows that future coastal developments can be located safely if set back distances from the shore are increased by approximately 100-200 metres and/or these developments are constructed on unfilled land that lies at or above the elevation of the 1 in 100 year storm tide plus wave action and wave run-up. In Cairns, for example, this means that the minimum habitable floor level for future developments would be raised from the presently adopted 3.5 metres ADH to 5 metres ADH. If such a policy were adopted for Cairns, new residential and tourist developments would be free from any wave erosion during the 1 in 100 year event.

At present many coastal developments are exceptionally prone to severe erosion and structural impact during this frequency event. Given that, in Australia, insurance policies rarely cover damage from the encroachment of the ocean onto the land, a simple policy change by the Queensland Government could help protect families and visitors, and their investments, from potentially huge economic losses in the future due to the impact of tropical cyclones. Such policy changes would also reduce future government expenditure on disaster relief. There is little that can be done about developments that already exist in dangerous coastal locations. However, with current knowledge we can protect families and investors from the impacts of future events.

It is clear from the contribution of Dr Nott that we need to have another look at this situation because no doubt we do need to do all we possibly can both to save lives and look at the economic implications of such events. So I have passed on this letter to Minister Reynolds for his consideration and advice, and I look forward to having further discussions with him. Clearly, this matter involves the local government and the EPA. It is not just a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services.

In conclusion, Queensland's disaster management system must be capable of dealing with the changing circumstances in which we live. This bill will ensure that the valuable work of many thousands of emergency volunteers is supported and that people living in isolated communities are protected by efficient and effective local emergency and disaster services. The Department of Emergency Services has worked with state and local government agencies and the community to deliver this new legislation.

Given the collaborative whole-of-government approach of the bill, its focus on safety and its provisions for a clear framework for contemporary disaster management structures, functions and powers, the bill again demonstrates the Beattie government's commitment to safer and more supportive communities. I commend the minister and all his staff for their excellent work in preparing this legislation. I commend it to the House.