



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Thursday, 30 March 2006

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Cyclone Larry

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.32 am): Today I have some important information for the communities affected by Tropical Cyclone Larry. Firstly, people who have been unable to return to their homes due to the damage inflicted by Cyclone Larry will soon become the first recipients of funds donated by individual Australians, companies and governments.

The chair of the fund, Terry Mackenroth, is presently in Innisfail meeting with the mayors of Johnstone Shire Council, Cairns City Council, Cardwell Shire Council, Mareeba Shire Council, Herberton Shire Council, Atherton Shire Council and Eacham Shire Council. He is asking each of the mayors to join local subcommittees which will consider applications for assistance from the cyclone relief fund and make recommendations on the distribution of funds. I hope that we will shortly be able to direct residents to our one-stop shops, the council chambers and other locations to collect an application form. This process cannot begin until the local committees are established, but I hope it will be finalised in just a matter of days.

The chairman has recommended—and, as trustees of the fund, the Deputy Premier and I have accepted—that the first round of grants of up to \$2,000 in cash will be available to people whose homes are uninhabitable. Further information about the process and a broader call for applications will be made soon. Today the fund stands at a little over \$10 million, and I want to again thank everyone who has donated. I also want to acknowledge the donation provided by my colleague Clare Martin, the Northern Territory chief minister, whom I spoke to yesterday, and the Darwin City Council who have so generously donated \$250,000 and \$50,000 respectively. I know that many people living in Darwin are still haunted by the impact of Cyclone Tracy, and I thank them for making this donation to the victims of Cyclone Larry.

I also want to announce that on the chairman's recommendation, and with the Prime Minister's agreement, I am changing the name of the relief fund to reflect the national nature of this appeal. It will now be known as the Prime Minister and Premier's Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal. The devastation wreaked by Cyclone Larry on Monday, 20 March is of such severity that only a national effort can rebuild the affected communities. I believe the name change will help reinforce the fact that we need assistance from all Australians at this time.

In another important step, again, upon the advice of the emergency managers, I will be recommending to the Governor in Council today an extension to the disaster situation regulation. Those powers are strong and governments ask for their implementation with caution, but the emergency managers believe an additional week will ensure that they can continue to protect people who may be living or working in unsafe structures. My government first implemented the regulation on the day before Cyclone Larry hit our coast. The experts tell me that this declaration allowing police to enforce a mandatory evacuation of low-lying areas helped save lives during the cyclone's fury. The power to move people away from dangerous situations will under this extension continue in the Innisfail, Cairns and Mareeba disaster districts until 9 April 2006. In other words, we have reduced the area covered by the declaration.

Finally, I would like the House to note General Cosgrove's announcement today that he has formed the Operation Recovery Industry Action Group. The general believes this group will be a great step forward in the recovery for industries and the whole region affected by the cyclone. Their priority will be to ensure that government agencies working with Operation Recovery listen to industry and get the recovery and rebuilding right. The general has asked Geoscience for information and for the industry action group to report back within weeks with detailed information on damage to primary industry. Members of the Operation Recovery Industry Action Group are General Cosgrove, as the chair; Bruce Turner, from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, as the deputy chair; Professor Steve Turton, of James Cook University; Matt Hayne, of Geoscience Australia; Allan Dale, of FNQ NRM Ltd; Eddie Gilbert, from DPI; and Gerard Byrne, from DPI.

Very shortly in a ministerial statement the Attorney-General will announce that from Monday, 3 April people in Tully, Babinda and Innisfail will be able to access free legal advice through Legal Aid Queensland and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. I thank the Attorney-General for putting that together.