



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Thursday, 8 June 2006

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## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Cyclone Larry, Relief Appeal

**Hon. PD BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.51 am): I want to advise the House that donations to the Tropical Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal have exceeded my target of \$20 million. Over 55,000 donations have been made from across the country, and 143 of these have been in excess of \$10,000 each. I want to thank the Australian public and so many in the business community for digging deep and giving generously to help Queenslanders in need. Appeal distribution committee chairman, the Hon. Terry Mackenroth, yesterday provided me with a progress report on the distribution of funds from the appeal. Phase 1 payments of up to \$2,000 for households left uninhabitable by Cyclone Larry have been approved for 923 applicants. The bulk of applicants have now been assessed and the remaining payments are expected within the next fortnight. I seek leave to incorporate the rest of that ministerial statement, together with the latest overview—report No. 11—from General Peter Cosgrove dated 6 June.

Leave granted.

Assessments have been carried out by 7 local sub-committees in the worst affected shires, and their recommendations have been checked to ensure people lodging several applications are not double paid. Regrettably there have been some instances of dishonest applications.

Obviously these checks add time to the distribution process, but are essential to ensure assistance is directed to the people in greatest need and I thank applicants for their patience.

The second round of Appeal assistance was advertised on 10 May and it will help with structural repairs of owner-occupied residences.

Round Two applications are available from one-stop-shops run by the Department of Communities, as well as Council Offices and through my website.

This assistance is aimed at helping people suffering financial hardship who have a limited capacity to recover, and eligibility will be subject to an income and asset test, but will not be restricted by insurance status.

This means those under-insured people previously ineligible for aid under the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements can now apply through the Appeal Fund.

Mr Mackenroth advises the Distribution Committee will determine the level of assistance to be made available once all applications have been received and the extent of demand known.

The closing date for applications is 12 June 2006.

In the meantime, the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing has agreed that QBuild will help assess the damaged residences, and assessments start this week.

The Distribution Committee is currently considering the next round of assistance to be made available.

I am advised there may currently be limitations imposed on the distribution of the Fund by the Commonwealth Income Tax Assessment Act 1997.

My Department is liaising with the Australian Taxation Office to determine the scope of disbursements that the Distribution Committee can consider.

Again, I thank all those who have given generously and donated their money to help rebuild the lives of those people in the Cyclone-affected area.

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OPERATION RECOVERY TASK FORCE  
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6 June 2006

Our Ref: ORTF

OVERVIEW REPORT 11

Dear Premier

I have the honour to present my eleventh overview report on the recovery operation in Far North Queensland. In the report I will comment on some aspects of a meeting conducted recently with a major insurer, which should provide some insight into the likely progress of repair of houses in the disaster area.

The last week has been characterized by clear, warm weather, perfect for all forms of outdoor work. As was the case last week, many farmers are busy in their fields. In the thousands of houses requiring repair, the situation is somewhat different: most insurance companies are yet to make a start in substantive repair work. While there might be as many as 400 tradesmen and women active in the disaster area, I am concerned that with time passing by, the prospect of having all damaged dwellings repaired to a weatherproof state by the next wet season, is under threat. I conclude this because of the time needed to process repair plans to a point where work might start, followed then by a possible dearth of building trades men and women. My particular concern is for the morale of all those people who find themselves entering the next the wet season still with tarpaulins as their only protection against the elements, including a possible cyclone.

With this one reservation, albeit important, I am impressed by the work plan outlined by one of the major insurers, as briefed to me today. In this plan significant resources have been devoted to the unavoidably complex preparation for higher levels of repair work, to reduce time and the burden on policy holders. In this regard the insurance company has engaged a major company with great experience in construction and project management to conduct all major repair and rebuild tasks arising from the cyclone. Of over 7½ thousand claims, the insurance company has finalized nearly 2½ thousand. The 'major damage' (approximately 1000) and 'total loss' houses (approximately 60) sit within the nearly 2500 home claims. I am pleased to report that the insurance company is taking a most proactive approach to client relationships, having appointed an overall manager for Cyclone Larry response by the company, a senior and experienced assessor as the company's Community Engagement Officer and seven case managers working solely on Cyclone Larry claims. Equally the project management company will retain seven regionally based project managers in the disaster area while work is in progress. I hope other insurers display this level of organization and commitment, and that all insurers move quickly to bring their work forces to bear on the rebuilding task.

On the industry side, with the present harvest of sugar cane on the Atherton Tablelands and the imminent cane harvest on the coastal plain, the pattern of primary industry has a normal look to it, until you remember that the sugar harvest will produce a significantly reduced yield and that smaller crop industries such as tropical fruits will not harvest for some years. On the secondary and tertiary industry fronts, the stimulus provided by the work associated with recovery has provided a good boost in many cases, although some niche areas are in the doldrums because of cyclone damage or knock-on effects.

In the area of social welfare, the staff of the Departments of Communities and Health continue to provide excellent support to the population of the disaster area. In particular the counsellors and clinicians focusing on mental health support have been active and the results of their work, by definition unseen, will be most therapeutic.

In conclusion, as in my last report the major future need is the perception and the reality of intensive rebuilding effort on the many damaged dwellings in the area of the Far North hard struck by Cyclone Larry. This effort remains a main focus for the Operation Recovery Task Force.

Yours Sincerely,

General Peter Cosgrove AC MC (Retd)  
Head  
Operation Recovery Task Force.