



Speech by

Rosa Lee Long

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard Thursday, 25 May 2006

CYCLONE MONICA

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (9.20 pm): This morning we heard from General Cosgrove about the efficiency of the Cyclone Larry disaster relief effort. I must say that the swiftness of the Premier and Prime Minister in visiting our area within a few days of the disaster is to be applauded. A month later, and further up north, another cyclone, Cyclone Monica, crossed the coastline with less intensity but with far more rain attached.

This caused major flooding throughout the cape. It caused much more damage than has been seen in living memory. Grazing homesteads were flooded, hundreds of kilometres of fence lines were destroyed and hundreds of cattle have been washed away and drowned. There is just one major bitumen road in the cape and it goes only as far as Cooktown. The rest are dirt and gravel, including the other major route to Weipa. Every one of these roads has suffered major damage and for the past month none have been trafficable. They are only now starting to dry out and road repairs are just beginning.

The cape is the size of Victoria. One can only imagine the huge problem the Cook Shire Council has on its hands. I am sure this council will need some special bridging funds to help its cash flow as it waits for natural disaster funding to come through. Tourism has been badly affected due to the state of the roads, and that will continue for some time yet.

A transport company based in Mareeba which conducts 100 per cent of its business in the cape has had its business affected due to the road conditions. It employs 12 people but has not been able to move a single truck for over a month.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

Ms LEE LONG: Thank you very much, member for Cook. It is unlikely to be able to conduct its normal business for some months to come. However, the desperate circumstances facing cape businesses and operators do not appear to have been recognised yet by this state government. The packages available to Cyclone Larry's victims would go a long way to helping those affected by Cyclone Monica, from grants and concessional loans to Newstart assistance and Centrelink payments. They are all desperately needed.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Cook, allow the member to make her address to the parliament without these interruptions.

Ms LEE LONG: I will quote from a letter I have received from a grazier. He describes the situation this way—

Fence lines have been destroyed by the fast moving flood waters. This involves many kilometres of fencing, used to control stock and protect ecologically sensitive areas. A huge physical effort and cost will be involved in rebuilding these fences. It will take a long time to complete and rebuild and I doubt that many people will be able to meet this unexpected huge cost for fencing materials and labour. Cattle herds have been thrown into chaos, the cattle were either swept away and drowned in the floodwaters or swam to the available high ground. The flood waters enabled crocodiles to move away from their normal habitats and attack cattle, particularly calves and smaller or weakened stock. It will take many months to find the remainder of these herds, sort out branded cattle and get back to a breeding cycle.

He summed it up this way—

Without government assistance, recovery will be impossible.

It is important that the hardship now facing those in the cape is not forgotten or brushed aside as being a normal event. I call on the Beattie government to help all those in the cape affected by the devastation.