



Speech by

Hon. Pat Purcell

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

Hansard Thursday, 8 February 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

North Queensland Floods; Moggill Electorate, First Responder Group

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (9.52 am): I am pleased to advise the House that ex-Tropical Cyclone Nelson was yesterday downgraded to a tropical low and has now dissipated and that the new tropical low that has formed off Cairns is expected to track away from the coast. Predictions for its intensity have diminished overnight and the cyclone watch between Cardwell and Mackay has been cancelled. Further heavy rain is not anticipated to impact on east coast communities and no further tropical cyclone advice will be issued for this system. I can hear a collective sigh of relief from the people in the north, thankful that the rain is going to dissipate.

Over the past week we have seen localised flooding in many areas, including Ingham, Giru, Mackay, Bowen, Mornington Island, Innisfail and many other smaller communities. There has been a significant amount of work done by our emergency services and I commend them for their efforts. Over 320 SES volunteers working within communities north of Mackay have been activated in support of the flooding operations lasting over the past week and 20 Emergency Services personnel have also been deployed into communities to help coordinate the response and relief efforts. I would also like to thank local councils across the affected areas for their close cooperation with my department. Local and district disaster management groups have been active in flood-affected areas protecting their communities.

I also note that western Queensland and some gulf communities have already been dealing with flooding over recent weeks. In the far west, communities such as Boulia, Bedourie and Birdsville are used to being cut off and take these floods in their stride. Many of those communities, in addition to other remote towns in the gulf region, such as Burketown, have already been resupplied and they will continue to be while they remain isolated. Burketown has been isolated for five or six weeks.

I would also like to touch on another issue. I was a little surprised to read an article in this week's *Westside News* in which the member for Moggill calls for a first responder group to be established in his electorate. It is not that I disagree with the idea. In fact, I suggested it to him when we had a one-on-one briefing on ambulance services in his electorate late last year. At that time the member for Moggill expressed his support for the idea and agreed to work with me and the Queensland Ambulance Service to progress it further in coming months.

I can also put an end to the mystery behind the 'exclusive' figures that Dr Flegg had somehow obtained and released to the *Westside News* last week. They are figures that were specially prepared for my meeting with the member for Moggill and given to him late last year, which is why I was disappointed to see them misconstrued in the way in which they have been. As I have said consistently, response times for individual suburbs are not an accurate indicator of performance when viewed in isolation. Other factors such as case load numbers also need to be taken into account.

The Moggill electorate includes large semirural suburbs with relatively low population densities and case loads and it poses its own challenges for QAS service delivery. However, it is an area that could be well suited to a first responder group, which is why the QAS is currently moving towards establishing one.

This first stage in setting up a group includes putting funding in place—and that has already been approved—and meeting with key stakeholders, such as the local police and the nearest local ambulance committee, which happens to be in Centenary. That process is underway.

Members of the House know that response times across Queensland are constantly monitored by our operational experts—the Queensland Ambulance Service—and it is the operational experts who take that information into account when allocating resources across the state. I would also like to take the opportunity to commend the member for Ashgrove for her representations on this issue. She is a strong advocate on behalf of the people of Brisbane's west. She gets on with the job without the grandstanding. I would like to continue to work with both the member for Ashgrove and the member for Moggill on this important issue.