



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard Tuesday, 25 November 2008

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

South-East Queensland Storms, Damage

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier) (9.36 am): It has been a very challenging time for south-east Queenslanders and people throughout the state. On Sunday, 16 November severe storms swept through Brisbane and the south-east of the state. This terrifying force of nature cut a swathe through suburbs to the west of Brisbane, from the north to the south. Suburbs of The Gap, Keperra, Ferny Hills and Arana Hills took the brunt of the weather. Homes lost their roofs, trees fell and property was destroyed. I visited the area early on Monday morning and, like Queenslanders watching on their television screens, I was shocked by what I saw. This storm has caused damage to over 4,000 homes, with many now classed as unlivable. Family homes have been totally devastated. The storms claimed their first life when a young man died in floodwaters in a drain system in Chermside on that Sunday. Nature had taken a terrible toll, but more was still to come.

Storms and heavy rain came on Wednesday night, battering the Ipswich, Brisbane and Toowoomba areas. By the morning of Thursday, 20 November, Gatton alone had reported up to 250 millimetres of rain. The storms claimed a second life—a woman who died when the car she was travelling in was swept away by floodwaters at a crossing on Laidley Creek. Flooding has occurred across Ipswich, Brisbane and the Inner City Bypass was closed. But nature was not finished with us yet. On Thursday evening the first severe thunderstorm warning for the Emerald region was issued at 5.35 pm. The small town of Blackwater suffered hail and wind damage to over 130 homes and schools. I visited the area on Friday along with the local member, Jim Pearce, and for the second time that week I was genuinely shocked by the severity of the damage caused. By Friday of last week, Brisbane had seen 232 millimetres of rain, Ipswich 264 and Blackwater 54.

The cost of last week's severe storm has been huge in financial terms and, much more worryingly, in terms of human hardship. To date over 18,000 insurance claims have been registered to the value of over \$175 million. This has been one of our most difficult times, but the response of the community is something that all Queenslanders can be proud of. Over 25,000 calls were made to the SES hotline in the week after the storms hit. Between 250 and 400 SES volunteers have been involved on a daily basis contributing an estimated 25,200 volunteer hours of effort. At the peak of the disaster on Thursday, 20 November, over 1,500 Emergency Services and Australian Defence Force personnel were involved in storm damage operations. They completed almost 5,000 jobs across Queensland, including 1,500 tarping jobs since last Sunday.

These efforts have been almost superhuman. Volunteers came from north Queensland, central Queensland and outside the state from both New South Wales and Victoria. Over 200 QFRS officers and 850 Defence Force personnel played their part. The efforts of these volunteers and our emergency workers and our Defence Force personnel have been nothing short of magnificent.

The numbers that I have outlined here this morning tell something of the scale and magnitude of what has happened, but they do not tell the stories of human hardship and bravery that I and other members of the House on both side of politics have witnessed over the past week. Energex and Ergon

workers toiled through more than one night in torrential rain to restore power to homes while their own families stayed at home and worried for their safety. At one stage more than 30 kilometres of powerlines were down and on the first night of the storms alone damage to power poles blacked out over 80,000 houses. SES workers put their lives on hold for a week to give something back to the communities they love. I think I speak for all Queenslanders when I say thank you to each and every one of them for their service and for their sacrifice. The fact is that we just could not have got through it without them.

A feature of these storms has been how well all levels of government have come together to respond when needed. I have to say that the Minister for Emergency Services, Neil Roberts, did an outstanding job of coordinating efforts. The member for Ferny Grove, whose own electorate was savaged very severely, did a sterling job in managing the restoration of power through his responsibilities as minister for energy. The member for Ashgrove, Kate Jones, deserves a special mention for her tireless work on the ground with storm victims.

Across Queensland, 13 local government areas have been declared under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. The efforts of these local governments have been outstanding. Each and every one of them responded swiftly and appropriately to the disasters that were facing their region. I would like to give particular credit to Lord Mayor Campbell Newman, who worked tirelessly for the people of Brisbane. I particularly mention his prompt contact with Enoggera army barracks early on Monday morning, which ensured that we had Army personnel on the streets by Monday afternoon. In that regard, I also thank the Prime Minister and particularly the acting Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, with whom I spoke early on Monday morning and who acted swiftly to put in place the disaster declarations necessary for us to ensure that people could get hardship relief and who ensured that protocols were put in place to authorise the Army deployment.

As Premier, I visited each of the five recovery disaster centres in south-east Queensland and I met many people who are doing it very tough. They are doing it tough now and they are facing what can only be described as, I think, a very difficult Christmas. We are now working to provide them with the support they need. The Premier's appeal that was launched last Wednesday now stands at just over \$917,000. We have seen a total of 4,885 applications for personal hardship, totalling more than \$2.6 million. That is 4,800 people who have needed some help to get through this in financial terms.

There is no doubt it has been a very challenging time for Queensland, but I am very proud of this state and I am very proud to say that Queenslanders have proven themselves to be up to the challenge—proven themselves to be equal to one of the most significant disasters, particularly that our capital city has seen, for possibly three decades. We will now move into the recovery stage. The minister for public works has worked with the Insurance Council to ensure that we can put in place a task force to oversee the rebuilding. That will be chaired by John Gaskin, the President of the Master Builders Association, who brings to the task his experience from the recovery efforts after the Mackay floods.

But we know that for those people who are waiting for their homes to be rebuilt after this disaster, they face some really tough times. There is never a good time for something like this to happen, but they will feel it particularly hard as we go into the Christmas period. I know the thoughts of everybody in this House are with those people who suffered this damage. We look forward to them having a time over Christmas to share with their family and we will be their holding their hands as they go through what is likely to be a difficult period in the aftermath of these storms. I conclude by repeating my heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped in ensuring that we were able to cope with this disaster.

Motion to Take Note

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier) (9.43 am): I move—

That the House take note of the statement.