



Speech by

## Hon. Judy Spence

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard Tuesday, 10 February 2009

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### MOTIONS OF CONDOLENCE: NORTH QUEENSLAND FLOODS AND VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

**Hon. JC SPENCE** (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport) (10.33 am): I also offer my condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives in Victoria and Queensland over the last few weeks. Last night I approved the deployment of two teams of four Queensland police forensic specialists to assist Victorian police in the gruelling task of identifying those who have lost their lives in the ongoing bushfire tragedy. The eight police deployed to Victoria last night were the very same police who were sent to help the federal government following the tragic Bali bombings in 2005.

The extraordinary disaster that continues to unfold in Victoria has shocked us all. As soon as we received the request for assistance from Victoria Police, our police were deployed. They arrived on the ground last night and commenced their arduous work this morning, and the commissioner tells me that he expects them to be there for a long time. Queensland is the world leader in this area of forensics, and each police team consists of three police forensic specialists and a police photographer. The expertise of these police is unquestioned, and some of these police have been recognised for their work in this field with Orders of Australia.

The Queensland Police Service has risen to the challenge in the last 10 days, assisting the people of north Queensland during this time of devastation. An additional six police were deployed last weekend to Townsville to assist and coordinate with the State Disaster Management Group. Police have also deployed one civilian to act as a media officer to get the important messages out to the people of north Queensland. Six police from the Public Safety Response Team have also been deployed to Ingham to assist with flood response and coordination efforts and to provide relief to the police in Ingham who are providing 24-hour, around-the-clock assistance to that local community. I also acknowledge the ongoing contributions of the over 1,400 police who are permanently serving in the northern and far-northern Queensland police regions and who are undoubtedly providing a great service above and beyond the call of duty under what can only be described as trying times. I know that the people of north Queensland are appreciative of all of the police efforts during this time and I know that they would join me in offering our collective thanks for that work.

I take the opportunity to acknowledge a conspicuous act of assistance that police have provided. Last week four Chinese tourists attempted to cross the flooded Eight Mile Creek on the Kennedy Highway in their Toyota campervan and were soon washed off the bridge into the swollen creek. The four tourists were all unable to swim and police found them huddled together on their submerged van as the floodwaters surrounded them. Police rescued all four tourists and they were all unhurt apart from some mild hypothermia. I congratulate all police involved in this rescue. It is certainly indicative of the ends that police will go to, often without thought for their own safety, in an attempt to save others. In fact, the House should know that the first police officer to lose his life in Queensland was a police officer from Ipswich who died trying to rescue someone in the swollen Bremer River during a flood.

Police in Ingham have even converted holding cells into makeshift bedrooms. But police are not the only officers in my portfolio assisting the people of north Queensland. Low-risk work camp prisoners from Townsville and Rockhampton prison farms will travel to Ingham tomorrow to assist with the flood relief effort. Experienced corrective services officers and 41 prisoners—37 men and four women—will join emergency services crews and the local community embarking on the flood clean-up. We envisaged help would be needed, so I activated contingency plans late last week to prepare prisoner work camps for deployment should north Queensland accept the offer of assistance.

This morning 21 prisoners and three supervisors from Rockhampton will travel to Townsville prison in preparation for deployment tomorrow. This prisoner work camp will then leave Townsville Correctional Centre and arrive in Ingham a few hours later. The prisoner work camp crew will be self-sufficient and will take with them clean-up equipment including vehicles, trailers, chainsaws, shovels and gloves and they will work alongside disaster relief crews wherever they are required, as they successfully did in The Gap at the end of last year and for other major clean-up efforts over recent years.

This morning we are also dispatching a crew of 24 work camp prisoners and three supervisors from the Darling Downs Correctional Centre. That crew will travel 1,400 kilometres to Townsville in anticipation of a further request for assistance. We will take advice from the State Disaster Management Group, but if need be the extra prisoner work camp could also be on the ground in Ingham by Friday.

Work camp custodial officers and prisoners have an outstanding record of providing assistance to communities after natural disasters. At this time last year we had a record number of over 100 prisoners completing storm and flood assistance work in areas including Beaudesert, Mackay and Charleville. It will be tough, hard work and work camp prisoners involved in these assistance efforts have always taken pride in making a real contribution to help a community get back on its feet.

The corrections officers who supervise these prisoners are truly resilient, resourceful individuals who work long, hard hours alongside the prisoners, often knee-deep in mud. I have visited many of these clean-up gangs. They are usually given the toughest jobs that no-one wants to or can do. Today I particularly want to place on the public record my thanks to these supervisors, who often do not get any public recognition for the wonderful job they do for us every day of the year, but particularly when they are called out to help.