



Speech by

**Mark McArdle**

**MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA**

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

**Mr McARDLE** (Caloundra—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.28 am): Heavy rain this summer has caused flooding and devastation to many areas in the north, far-north and north-western Queensland. Many Queenslanders have lost their homes, their businesses, their cars, their pets, their livestock and their livelihoods. With the death of seven Queenslanders, this state faces a real tragedy. But it is in the face of this tragedy that we see the spirit of this great state coming to the fore.

We see Queenslanders working in unison to ensure the people in north Queensland not only rebuild and regather their strength but also move forward to build a better north Queensland than they have ever had before. The flooding has caused the banks of many rivers to burst, and the town of Ingham on the Herbert River has been very hard hit, with waters rising to 12.2 metres twice in one week. The floods in the Hinchinbrook electorate have been described as the worst in 30 years, and as the floods begin to recede the long clean-up begins and locals hope that the rain will not return.

The Bruce Highway, the major highway connecting the north, has been flooded and closed in parts since January this year, causing major disruption to regular highway traffic, including food supplies. Last week 200,000 litres of fuel and 40 semitrailer loads of fresh food had to be loaded onto barges in Cairns to supply Woolworths and Coles for all areas between Cairns and Townsville. The Bruce Highway closures caused supermarket shelves to empty. A roadblock is still in place on the Bruce Highway south of Cardwell and most roads in and around Innisfail have reopened only today. Cattle farmers around the gulf have seen their grazing properties flooded and destroyed. Not only are these Queenslanders cut off from the outside world by floodwaters; graziers are facing a combined loss of around 10,000 head of cattle, with losses estimated at \$1 million. Stock are stranded, starving and drowning.

To all those who have helped, will help and are helping at this point in time, we say thank you. On occasions those words seem to convey so little, but there are times when they capture a spirit and convey a lot more. This is one of those occasions. This is an event that has wrenched the heart of Queensland, and it is during these times that we see the strength of character and resolve that lies just below the surface of each and every Queensland. I am certain I convey for all those who have suffered in north Queensland the sense in this House that we will be right behind them to make certain that whatever they need to have done is done.

Whilst Queensland suffers the worst floods for some time, we wake this morning to hear that in Victoria there is a death toll from bushfires of 173 people and sadly rising, with some people predicting that more than 200 people will have died by the end of this week. For so many people in Queensland who have moved north, leaving their families and so many of their friends in Victoria, this is a very personal sadness. Those who perished were people who last week were talking with their families and friends, had plans for their future, had things to do and had places to see. These were people who had experiences to live, and these were people who thought of tomorrow as it would come.

I share with all honourable members their sadness and sympathy for the tragic loss of life of so many of our fellow Australians. There is a growing sense of helplessness and sadness not only at the coalface in Victoria, where people are fighting fires and the winds that carry that danger further, but also right here in Brisbane and indeed in Queensland. But it is through tragedy and adversity that Australians recognise that, regardless of colour, age or gender, we are united by our growing sense of national pride and identity. This was so evident and reinforced during last month's Australia Day celebrations. I know there is a genuine commitment by the entire Australian community that if there is something we can do to ease the pain of those suffering we will do it. Sadly, we cannot bring back those who have died and we cannot take away the pain of the survivors. We cannot take away their sense of loss nor the devastation that they are going through and will go through for some considerable period of time. But what we as Australians right across the nation can do is commit to them that they will, with our help, rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Australia is indeed a lucky country. Australia is indeed a country of contrasts. But one thing that unites us is that we are in fact Australians and that we do understand that when the going gets tough we will pull together and make certain, wherever the tragedy is, that we will be there to relieve people's tragedy, relieve their suffering and provide solace for the future.