



Speech by

Hon. Warren Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Tuesday, 10 February 2009

MOTIONS OF CONDOLENCE: NORTH QUEENSLAND FLOODS AND VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

Hon. FW PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Main Roads and Local Government) (10.43 am): It is with a sense of deep sadness that I rise to speak in this condolence motion. I join with previous speakers in extending my deepest sympathies to the families and friends of those who have lost their lives, their homes and their possessions in these tragic circumstances. The impacts we have seen from nature's forces during the past month or so—both in north and north-west Queensland and in Victoria—are almost beyond comprehension. In particular, the speed with which bushfires ravaged regional communities in Victoria was as frightening as it was comprehensively destructive. My own senior policy adviser grew up in Victoria and knows the towns of Kinglake and Marysville. He is very familiar with them through visits to those towns during his childhood. He has, like us all, been shocked by the television footage that shows that both of those small communities have been effectively wiped from the map.

Coming from a small regional community myself, I fully understand and appreciate the bonds of friendship that are formed among residents. I may be biased, but I think these bonds are often stronger in smaller communities, which means the effects of these types of disasters are even more devastating. I am still trying to comprehend how so many lives could be lost and disrupted in so little time. For those who have survived these bushfires, we all realise that their lives have been changed forever. I just hope and pray that they are able to regain some degree of normality to their lives as soon as possible.

Normality is something that the residents of northern Queensland will be looking forward to after more than a month of torrential rain across many areas. The north-west has had once-in-a-lifetime falls, and flooding in the Townsville-Hinchinbrook areas has been described as the worst in 30 years. Being from far-north Queensland, I am used to heavy rainfall during the wet season, but some of the sustained rainfall that we have experienced in Ingham, Townsville and in the north-west has far exceeded that of the usual rainfall during our annual wet season.

Fortunately, we have not seen the same loss of life from the north Queensland floods as has been experienced in Victoria, but I am still deeply saddened by the losses we have experienced. Having lived in many affected north Queensland towns, including Kidston, Mount Isa, Ingham and Charters Towers, I know from experience that the Einasleigh, Leichhardt, Burdekin and Herbert rivers can become raging torrents, which is hard to comprehend in the dry. I also know that these communities are very resilient and will be back on their feet soon after the floodwaters recede.

Of course, this will also mark the time that road crews from my Department of Main Roads will be hard at work assessing road damage and conducting repairs. They will ensure that the highest-priority works are done as quickly as possible to get freight moving again in the north. I must congratulate the road crews from Main Roads who have been working virtually around the clock during these floods to inspect sites, close roads when necessary and then reopen them as soon as possible. NGO volunteers, Department of Communities staff, our emergency services personnel and council employees deserve our heartfelt thanks for their magnificent contribution in very difficult circumstances. No doubt this dedication will be mirrored right across the region as residents start the hard work of cleaning up flood-damaged