



Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Wednesday, 24 March 2010

BABINDA RSL HALL

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (12.00 pm): Last Saturday I marked the fourth anniversary of Cyclone Larry by officially opening the rebuilt Babinda RSL Hall. The efforts that community members, the SES and other government agencies put in post cyclone—not only in Babinda but right across the region—are a testament to the spirit of the people in Far North Queensland. The original hall was extensively damaged by Cyclone Larry and had to be demolished. It was built post World War II, when sugar prices were high and Babinda was booming. It was funded using community donations that included direct contributions from the pay of Babinda Mill workers and cane farmers contributing a levy on the tonnage of sugar cane sent to the mill. As is the case in many small towns, the hall was part of the fabric of the Babinda community and was used for numerous activities and events, many not related to the RSL.

In the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Larry, the Queensland government established the Tropical Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal, with the Australian and Queensland governments contributing \$1.1 million each to the appeal. The appeal, chaired by the Hon. Terry Mackenroth, generated an enormous response, with a final tally—including interest earned—of just over \$23 million. Appeal funds were distributed across affected communities. The largest single project was the allocation of \$2.4 million for the reconstruction of the Babinda RSL Hall. This represented almost 10 per cent of appeal funds collected. An insurance payout of \$100,000 and \$250,000 donated by RSL sub-branches across Australia funded the building's fit-out.

I know there is an enormous sense of relief at having the hall completely restored, particularly as the hall pays homage to those local men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of their country. The rebuilt hall will be able to sustain another severe cyclone; it will also be able to be used as an evacuation centre and to direct local area emergency activities.

I congratulate the Cairns Regional Council, the Queensland branch of the RSL and the Babinda community for their tireless efforts on this project. Scores of Babinda residents have photos of time spent at harvest festival balls, debutante balls and other events. Now that tradition can continue and a whole new generation will make their own memories in years to come. This facility is a fitting way to remember the power of nature, the heroes who came to the community's rescue and the resilience of the people of Babinda. Generosity of spirit built the first hall. Nature tore it down. It is fitting that that same spirit of community was responsible for building it again.