



Speech by

Jarrold Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (3.13 pm): I rise this afternoon to speak to the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill being debated in the House today. The bill amends the Disaster Management Act 2003 and the Public Safety Preservation Act 1986 to enhance the disaster management arrangements for emergency events in the state. For a state as large and diverse as Queensland, a rigid, thorough and efficient disaster management plan to respond to the range of natural disasters that could and do happen without notice is fundamentally paramount. Whether it is in the form of cyclones, tropical thunderstorms, swift localised flooding or bushfires, Queenslanders face threats from Mother Nature of varying manner across all of Queensland at all times throughout the year. Members would be fully aware of the man-made disasters that we occasionally face such as oil spills.

The bill before the House adopts recommendations from an independent review of Queensland's disaster management plans which was required following two significant events which took place in the last 18 months. Although my electorate is predominantly coastal, we do not face the annual cyclone watches as my northern colleagues do. However, we are not immune to disaster. No country or state ever is.

One disaster that I wanted to discuss within the parameters of the bill was not a natural disaster but, in fact, human induced and affected the pristine coastline of my electorate early last year. On 11 March 2009 an oil spill occurred off the South-East Queensland coast that devastated beaches from the Sunshine Coast through to Moreton Bay and down to the Gold Coast, including the pristine beaches in the Kawana electorate.

Some 230 tonnes of fuel oil, 30 tonnes of other oil and 31 shipping containers—that is, 620 tonnes—of ammonium nitrate spilled into the Coral Sea north of Moreton Bay during Cyclone Hamish after unsecured cargo on the container ship *MV Pacific Adventurer* damaged other cargo, causing the spillage. In late July 2010 the clean-up effort was declared complete. It took 1,425 personnel 16 months to clean up 155 hectares of coastal area. This included 21,220 plants and 2.6 kilometres of fencing to protect recovering vegetation.

The government's response to that situation, I have to say, was slow and inefficient. In the end, the government panicked and threw money at the problem, hoping it would go away in a hurry. After all, it was in the midst of the state election 2009. Some reports estimate that the clean-up efforts for the spill cost taxpayers up to \$100,000 per day.

There was not a well-structured plan in place that responded to the disaster in an appropriate manner. I had a call the morning of 11 March 2009 from the general manager of the Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club. I was there first thing in the morning on 11 March on the beach. I remember parking at the surf club. The Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club had been commandeered by Maritime Safety Queensland as one of the headquarters for the oil clean-up recovery. I got out of my car and the stench

from the oil was poisoning. When I reached the beach I could not believe it. The beaches we love, the Currimundi beaches where our turtle lay, were covered in this black, thick sludge.

Council responded immediately to the oil spill. Volunteers were not allowed on the beach but the council had its workers on the beach with its machinery. After some time council was ordered to take its people and machines off the beach. Council's priority was to get the oil off the beaches. In my view, that was the right approach at the time. Council was first to respond, not the state. Congratulations should go to the Sunshine Coast Regional Council for its prompt response. Good on it for not sitting around waiting for the government to make up its mind what it was going to do in the situation. The prompt response from the council could not have been achieved without the first-class assistance of the local Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club. As I said, the surf club became an operation hub for the clean-up effort, and not just for a day but for weeks at a time.

While I have this opportunity, I would like to congratulate Ian Waller, the general manager of the surf club at the time, and the staff for their willingness to cooperate during the oil spill clean-up last year. Their community-minded spirit took precedent when something needed to be done to prevent any further environmental degradation from occurring. I also pay tribute to John Thorpe, the president of the surf-lifesaving club at the time of the oil spill. Considering the circumstances, it would have been difficult for any community executive to carry out what the surf club actually did.

However, as a result of the surf club being commandeered for operational HQ it actually lost a whole week of trade. Some 18 months later, it is still in negotiations with the government to gain compensation for the loss of trade. It should be compensated. It was not only the loss of trade; there was equipment broken in the winds. Its quad bikes and four-wheel drives were driven through the oil. Now that the Premier has started to listen to the community, I ask the Premier and the government to stop wasting everyone's time and adequately compensate these community groups and the Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club. It did everything it could to assist the government in the clean-up operation.

It was noted in today's *Sunshine Coast Daily* with respect to this man-made disaster—

One of the hardest hit was the Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club, which was forced to shut its doors for 16 days after the March 11 spill, while it was transformed into Emergency Services Queensland's incident control headquarters.

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However, the body dealing with compensation claims, consisting of representatives from Swire Shipping and Federal Government appointed experts, is refusing to pay up.

Mr Waller said an "unacceptable" compensation offer was made and declined.

Out of \$100,000 required for the compensation some \$3,000 was offered to the local surf club. It continues—

'The club was shut down so the clean-up could be properly coordinated. We did the right thing and did everything we were told to do,' Mr Waller said.

'During the 16 days the club was used for incident control, more than \$100,000 in revenue was lost, a devastating amount for a medium-sized club.

Further, the club has gone on the record today—and bear in mind, this is a local community club that was commandeered for the operational clean-up of a man-made catastrophe—as saying that, first and foremost, this compensation claim is about ensuring that the club can continue operating to the best of its abilities servicing the local community, particularly now as we enter surf life-saving season. Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club is disappointed at the outcome of today's negotiations that occurred some two hours ago as it has advanced only slightly further in its claim.

When our community clubs are commandeered in the case of environmental disasters we cannot treat them like this. We cannot let one and a half years go by without resolving an issue involving a community club of volunteer men and women upon whom we in this parliament rely to go and risk their lives by saving the lives of those in the surf. To turn around some 18 months later and say, 'We used your facilities. We had use of your bikes, your trucks, your four-wheel drives throughout the man-made disaster, being an oil spill, so here is \$3,000 out of the \$100,000 you lost,' is a slap in the face for community organisations and this surf club. We should not be treating our community clubs in this way. After all, this is an important community organisation.

I believe that the bill before the House will ensure that, should any such spill occur again, our coastline and marine wildlife would be sufficiently protected by a disaster management plan that acts swiftly and precisely to halt the spread of any oil. The three-tiered structure of the disaster management plan clearly did not work well when the oil spill struck the coast last year. I am pleased to see that the government has adopted the key recommendations from an independent review that the structure of the plan be amended. I believe the legislation before the House addresses those inconsistencies identified by the review. The biggest change in the structure of response lies with the role of the Queensland Police Service. The Police Service was identified as the most capable state authority to assume command and control of disaster events at a state level. The current structure plan involves a three-tiered system of local

government and local disaster management capability supported by district capability that is supported by state capability. The system relies on a bottom-up escalation from local levels of response and four phases of disaster management, which are of course prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

The independent review found that Queensland was the only state in Australia where the legislation in relation to disaster management does not specify that an individual be appointed as the state controller in any such emergency. The bill before the House now clears up this confusion with the creation of the state disaster coordinator, the state recovery coordinator and the local disaster coordinator. This now provides a clear chain of command, which is vital for a swift and efficient response to any emergency event. In relation to the oil spill of March 2009, that was one of the things that slowed down the response. There was a breakdown in communication between the local government and the state government responses and this inhibited the response to clean up the mess and halt any further environmental degradation. The creation of these three coordinators will create greater accountability and ensure that Queenslanders do not have any confusion between local and state responses to a disaster situation.

The initiation of the independent review was a significant step for disaster response in Queensland as a number of flaws were identified and remedied in the legislation before the House today. Some of the flaws can, of course, be amended without legislation. I would like to reiterate the points outlined by the shadow minister, the member for Mirani, in his contribution.

Can the minister provide some undertakings that the government will adhere to the recommendations of the review in relation to the flaws which could be rectified through non-legislative means? They are, for example, the disaster management information and communication systems, which are not yet sufficiently integrated or compatible; the disaster management plans and planning initiatives at state, district and local levels, which need significant involvement in disaster management arrangements; and the key stakeholders who need to be involved in planning processes in exercises at local, district and state levels but who were not always available for these purposes. I understand that some arrangements are to be put in place before the summer's peak storm season. I would appreciate any information the minister can provide on these arrangements and the anticipated time frame of release.

I have many constituents in my electorate—as do all members of this House—who serve in a voluntary capacity in the State Emergency Services branches on the Sunshine Coast and in other voluntary roles and are often called upon in times of disasters. I want to place on the record my public gratitude to the volunteers of the SES and the members of our emergency services for the invaluable role that they play for the community when disaster strikes.

In conclusion, I reiterate that in relation to the oil spill last year, the man-made disaster, the Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club was commandeered—its whole club was taken over by Maritime Safety Queensland and the fire department for weeks at a time. The surf club fed all the state response units and managed it quite successfully. I congratulate Ian Waller, the manager of the surf club, and John Thorpe, who was the president at the time. Again, I reiterate to the minister that it is now 18 months since that community club was commandeered. It has lost some \$100,000 in revenue because of that operation over which they had no control. To have been offered \$3,000 to cover a loss of \$100,000 is really a joke considering that what happened and what took place was out of their control. In the negotiations it had today with government representatives, they said, 'Provide us with some more details and we will assess it again next week.' However, those details that the government and the investigators require have been provided three times previously to that department. To now come back to the surf club in Kawana again two hours ago and say, 'We need some further information. Get it to us by next week,' is a joke because the details have been provided on many occasions by the surf club. I submit to the minister that he needs to look at the situation, he needs to talk to the Kawana Waters Surf Lifesaving Club. If it cannot get adequate compensation to recover this \$100,000, it will be in dire straits as we head into the peak surf season.