




Speech by

Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Wednesday, 16 February 2011

MOTION: NATURAL DISASTERS

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services and Multicultural Affairs) (12.34 pm): I rise to speak in support of the condolence motion. The summer of 2010-11 brought to our state devastating floods and cyclones, a collision of natural disasters unprecedented in modern times. The flooding events took the lives of 35 Queenslanders and left their mark on communities, not just physically but also emotionally. Whole communities have now pulled together to support families, friends and neighbours at a time of unimaginable catastrophe. Volunteer armies also sprung up throughout Queensland.

At the outset, I pay my respects to all those Queenslanders who lost their lives. I pay tribute to Van Toan Giang, who lost his life in stormwaters in Durack while checking on his father-in-law's property during the floods. I know that the Vietnamese community has been deeply affected by this tragic loss. He was a young man, recently married. I extend my deepest sympathies to the family and the local Vietnamese community at this very difficult time.

I acknowledge the Premier's outstanding leadership during the recent natural disasters. She has inspired a state and a nation, leading Queensland through one of its toughest times. I thank Ipswich Mayor Paul Pisasale, Councillor Milton Dick and Councillor David Morrison for their efforts locally on the ground. I also thank my own staff for helping me to clear out entire shelves of Gatorade at the Richlands Woolies on more than one occasion. It was all handed out to thirsty volunteers during those hot summer days.

In Gailles, entire families lost a lifetime of possessions and stood powerless as their personal effects were destroyed in the floods. When the water receded I visited those normally quiet streets—Dulin Street, Alma Street, Mirrin Street, Killalan Street—and the damage was immense. Wrecked fridges and air conditioners, spoiled bedding, tennis rackets, Scrabble boards and childrens' toys were piled sky high on the footpaths. I personally witnessed acts of amazing compassion and kindness in this neighbourhood. I saw volunteers helping residents salvage personal possessions from their homes. I saw people lending families generators, trailers and shovels. I saw mothers and children delivering sandwiches, cakes, pikelets and cold drinks to volunteers who were helping with the clean-up. I saw Army and Emergency Services workers and community recovery staff working around the clock to help get families back on their feet. For many, this period was a time of great sorrow and loss, but it was also a time of great community spirit.

The residents of Gailles Caravan Village lost their homes and possessions, which were swept away in the floods, but they did not lose their spirit. Some found refuge in the community recovery centre that was established at the Shiloh Christian Church at Redbank. With the help of volunteers and staff, they were able to get back on their feet and start rebuilding their lives as alternative accommodation was sought.

During the flood crisis, one of the most inspiring things I witnessed occurred in the low-lying area of Centenary Village in Darra, where a flooded creek swamped up to 70 family homes. The flood level had reached the roof of one woman's house. Most of her possessions were ruined or swept away and she had

no insurance. However, she had spirit, courage and tenacity, and she was determined to fight on and rebuild her life. Her son was leading the working bee at the house, with neighbours also lending a hand. I asked two men who were pitching in with the clean-up how they knew Isabela. 'Oh, we don't know her', one of the men replied. 'We are just here to help, like everyone else.' One the men had come from Murrumba Downs and the other had travelled from Strathpine on the north side. They had given up their time and travelled to help a complete stranger. They are among the true community heroes of the floods. That was repeated across the streets of Brisbane and the state.

Also, Cathy Easte established a recovery centre for flood affected residents in the local community hall at Centenary Village. Tireless volunteers made this centre a real community hub for local residents, with state government recovery workers also providing much needed outreach to people who could not travel to the Wacol centre.

There was one especially inspiring volunteer at this recovery centre. Allan Wade from Innisfail in Far North Queensland stayed for six days to help local residents get back on their feet because he was not able to travel home. Allan was a tower of strength for these residents during a difficult period. He wants to revisit Centenary Village to do more recovery work and raise funds for the flood affected residents on his way to the blues festival at Easter. Well done, Allan.

The Camira-Springfield Community Centre also did an outstanding job during the floods. It served as a one-stop recovery shop, with part of the centre transformed into a giant warehouse with essential items for flood affected residents piled metres high. Non-perishable food, clothing, electrical goods and children's toys were donated in vast quantities—a lifeline to so many people.

The nearby Wolston Park Golf Club at Wacol was also hit hard by the floods, with fairways swamped and the clubhouse submerged by floodwaters. This is a real community club and its membership and green fees are amongst the lowest in Brisbane. This is where the workers of Gailles, Goodna and Camira go to play golf. I know that members of the club want to see the course repaired and the clubhouse refurbished. I am confident that Mary Byrne and her committee will ensure the club bounces back.

Deaf Services Queensland did a great job during the natural disasters keeping deaf and hearing impaired Queenslanders informed. Auslan interpreters featured heavily during the flood and cyclone updates provided by the Premier. I want to pay tribute to their outstanding efforts during this time.

We also kept Queensland's multicultural communities well informed throughout the floods. Multicultural Affairs Queensland produced disaster relief fact sheets in over 30 languages including Chinese, Filipino, Greek, Japanese, Samoan, Spanish and Vietnamese. Queensland's multicultural communities are working tirelessly to raise funds for the Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal. I want to thank them all for their generosity and compassion and for working side by side to help flood affected residents. Our multicultural communities have helped to show above all how much we have in common; that, first and foremost, we are all Queenslanders.

In conclusion, in the aftermath of the floods, there were people standing side by side, shoulder to shoulder. There were no divides, just people bonded by a will to get things done. This was community in action in our streets, in our suburbs, in our cities, cleaning, carrying, baking, delivering, shovelling, hosing and salvaging. There was an army of volunteers—strangers by name, but not in spirit. This was real mateship. It is what Queenslanders and Australians are renowned for throughout the world. This is what our Australian history has recorded throughout the generations. It is a story told time and time again. We will always be there to help one another in good times and in bad, for better or for worse. We will see things through together.