




Speech by

Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Tuesday, 25 October 2011

DISASTER READINESS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs) (8.33 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Disaster Readiness Amendment Bill 2011. I do not need to remind honourable members about the suffering that many Queensland families endured earlier this year. Many tragedies and near misses occurred. Sadly, some of those were the result of drivers entering floodwaters. Tragically, nine people died in Queensland during the last floods when their vehicles were caught in floodwaters.

One of the aims of this bill is to reduce the incidence of drivers attempting to cross floodwaters when it is unsafe to do so. The danger is not just to drivers and passengers; the government also wants to eliminate the risk to potential rescuers as well. Rescuers, as we know, may risk their own lives attempting to save those who drive through dangerous floodwaters and then happen to get into trouble. During emergency situations such as Queensland experienced earlier this year, police resources were stretched to the limit. They have to attend many incidents and their efforts are first class. Due to the extreme wet weather conditions earlier this year, the police requested the assistance of transport inspectors. The inspectors responded to that request and were able to provide very valuable assistance. In parts of southern and south-eastern Queensland transport inspectors monitored road closures for up to 24 hours a day. The road closures were clearly signed. The closures were to protect the safety of road users and also to protect the road infrastructure.

The amendments contained in this bill ensure that transport inspectors will have clear powers to enforce such road closures. By doing this the amendments will help to release police to continue their vital emergency responses in other important areas. These amendments make sense. Transport inspectors are trained to be experts in road safety. They perform a first-rate job in keeping our roads safe. Their roles are many and varied. They are often performing numerous behind-the-scenes roles, particularly regarding heavy vehicles. During the extreme wet weather conditions earlier this year they also performed many on-road emergency management activities. They educated drivers about the dangers of floodwaters, they advised the public of temporary road closures and provided frequent updates for the 139040 hotline and website. These services provided up-to-the-minute traffic information for all motorists. Once the floodwaters receded, inspectors worked around the state to open roads as quickly as possible. Thanks to the hard work of local inspectors and others, the Bruce Highway around Gympie reopened to the south and through the heart of town just six days after floodwaters closed the National Highway link in January this year.

Transport inspectors also performed a valuable role working cooperatively with other agencies. They worked closely with disaster management groups, local government and the heavy vehicle industry. Wherever possible they found alternative routes for heavy vehicles when roads were cut. This in turn enabled heavy vehicles to continue to provide much needed supplies to Queensland communities. Transport inspectors are highly experienced and well trained. They are clearly recognisable by their uniforms and identification. Over the last two months they have been gearing up in readiness for the next wet season. They have been attending pre wet season training and information sessions and bedding down protocols to respond to emergency situations.

The amendments in this bill relate to just one small aspect of the work undertaken by our transport inspectors, but it is a very important aspect. The amendments will enhance the inspectors' ability to protect our valuable road assets but also, more importantly, to protect the safety of our fellow Queenslanders. Giving transport inspectors clear powers to enforce road closures will also allow police to concentrate their emergency response efforts on other important areas. It will ensure that in times of disaster all government departments are working together for the good of Queensland. This bill puts the safety of Queenslanders at the forefront of disaster management and I therefore have no hesitation in commending this bill to the House.