




Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Wednesday, 16 February 2011

MOTION: NATURAL DISASTERS

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (2.49 pm): I rise to speak on this condolence motion to pay my respects to those who lost their lives in the floods that devastated so much of Queensland during the summer of 2010 and 2011. The events that have unfolded in the past two months have emphasised, if any was needed, just why we are bred differently north of the New South Wales border. On one hand we enjoy a climate and lifestyle that at times is reflected perfectly by those well-known tourism slogans that have helped us become so popular beyond our borders. But, on the other hand, we all know that life in Queensland cannot be conveniently captured in a postcard. In a very short space of time nature's wrath can inflict unimaginable devastation upon our communities, and so it was across our great state in late December 2010, January 2011 and February 2011.

In a few short weeks the majesty and privilege of living in the best state in the best country in the world was quickly contrasted with the terror brought on by the extreme weather events that affected so many of our fellow Queenslanders. In particular, the scenes that occurred on Monday, 10 January 2011 in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley defied belief. Cars were tossed around in floodwaters like toys, houses were swept from their stumps and, worst of all, families were torn apart. None of us will forget the bravery of 13-year-old Jordan Rice, who urged a rescuer to save his brother from rising floodwaters first. Those floodwaters stole Jordan and his mum, Donna, from us and tore a family in two. Unfortunately, these tragic circumstances were repeated throughout the Lockyer Valley as another terrible wave of water, described as an inland tsunami, swept through communities without warning. One minute Queenslanders in these communities were going about their lives and daily routines, as we all were on that fateful day; the next they were grappling with the threat posed by a broiling, surging swell of horror and heartbreak. It is impossible to imagine the terror.

However, in equal measure Queenslanders have borne witness to extraordinary acts of courage and determination in the aftermath of these terrible natural disasters. From the Lockyer Valley to Lakes Creek in Rockhampton, from Condamine to Cardwell, from Karalee and Rosalie to Theodore and Tully, from Bundaberg and Bundamba and Goodna and Ingham to the southside Brisbane suburbs of Rocklea, Fairfield, Norman Park and Oxley, and to communities such as Fernvale and Lowood, we have seen the true Queensland spirit come to the fore in the wake of these disasters. We have also witnessed courage and compassion from friends, neighbours and complete strangers that make all of us proud to be Queenslanders. This spirit has also been evident among staff of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, some of whom bore the brunt of the recent natural disasters.

In difficult times during the past few weeks departmental staff distinguished themselves by continuing to serve the people of Queensland with a level of dedication beyond the call of duty. I had the privilege to speak to the courthouse registrars in many flood affected areas including Gatton, Pittsworth, Dalby, Chinchilla, Warwick, Goondiwindi, Stanthorpe and Taroom. Those registrars and other court staff stayed at their posts and continued to serve the people of Queensland, even as floodwaters threatened their communities. Among them was Mark Koszan, the registrar at the Gatton courthouse. Mark chose to sleep at the courthouse after the terrible flood that affected the Lockyer Valley because, as Mark told me, he just wanted to be able to help anyone in need and answer any queries from members of the public if

required. These acts of dedication and commitment in difficult and sometimes traumatic circumstances, which were repeated right across the Public Service and across our state in so many fields of endeavour and in difficult circumstances, are too numerous to mention. But those countless acts of courage and kindness and bravery and endurance, as articulated by so many members in their support for this condolence motion, will inspire citizens of this state for years to come.

This same spirit was evident in the hordes of volunteers who have put their hands up to help out their fellow Queenslanders in the wake of these disasters. Here in the south-east this spirit was exemplified by the tens of thousands of people who spontaneously reached out to complete strangers and kick-started the flood recovery in so many streets and suburbs. But we should also acknowledge the numerous other volunteers who contributed during these disasters—the orange army of SES teams, the Red Cross volunteers in the evacuation and recovery centres, and the countless community groups that pitched in without question. Volunteering has always been an important part of my life and all Queenslanders can be proud of their achievements in recent weeks. I want to make special mention of the extraordinary response from residents within the electorate of Greenslopes. Fortunately, the electorate of Greenslopes was spared from the worst effects of this extreme weather, but that is not to say the electorate survived the floods unscathed. There were a number of homes in Norman Park in particular that were affected by the rising brown tide of floodwaters. For those people who had to throw out furniture, rip up carpets and get the muddy water out of their homes, the flood had a significant impact. It was depressing to see someone's life reduced to a pile of rubbish on the footpath, although we all realised that others were much more affected.

I am pleased to advise the House that many residents in the Greenslopes electorate made the effort to help out their neighbours in response to the floods. Numerous volunteers contacted my office to ask how they could help out. As the floodwaters rose, I joined a band of willing workers to help sandbag homes in Riddings Street in Coorparoo. I also doorknocked parts of Temple, Jellicoe and Burke streets in Coorparoo as local creeks started to rise. After the floodwaters peaked, the volunteers and I headed to Adina Street, Norman Park, where we helped residents take the first steps towards recovery. When our assistance was no longer required, the group and I headed off to other southside suburbs such as Fairfield and Oxley, where there was enormous damage to property. Among the people who helped out were Yvette, Ross and Trent Abberfield; Michael Beckett; Katherine Eames; Andrew Elphinstone; Simon Hammer; Michelle and Rod Massy; James Oliver; Jonathon Ring; Matthew Sellers; Zosia Kilmartin; John Denny; and Joe Kelly.

This same spirit of cooperation was evident at the evacuation centre that was established at the Queensland Sports and Athletics Centre, better known as the QEII Stadium to many southsiders like me. I spent an evening helping set up camp stretchers to make the place ready for the hundreds of flood refugees who had to take shelter while the floodwaters rose around their homes. It was both humbling and heart warming to see the best of humanity on display during the floods crisis.

But the generosity of southside residents did not stop there. As the floodwaters receded and the impacts were fully revealed, it became apparent that many schoolchildren were going to start the school year with little in the way of school books and other materials. I put out a call within my electorate for donations of stationery for schoolchildren in flood affected areas, and the response was remarkable. Just four days after issuing the request, my office was like a de facto stationery warehouse. Virtually every available square centimetre of floor space was covered with bags and boxes of books, pens, rulers, rubbers, glue sticks, knapsacks and even lunch boxes and water bottles. In all, the donated stationery was worth about \$8,000—a staggering response from residents and community groups from the southside suburbs. One very savvy community group, the MacGregor Lions, whose membership included a former school principal, even went to the trouble of separating its donation in year levels. There was a bag containing materials suitable for year 1 students, a bag of materials for year 2 students, a bag for year 3 students and so on. The principal at the school could not believe the generosity and thoughtfulness of these gifts when we dropped them off. In the end, we needed a convoy of four cars to deliver the stationery to the Bundamba State School in the electorate of Ipswich and Redbank Plains State School in the electorate of Bundamba, and more stationery supplies will be on their way soon to the badly affected electorate of Ipswich West.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the great Greenslopes stationery drive. In particular, I would like to mention some of the community groups that responded to my request. These groups included the Greater Mount Gravatt-Mansfield Lions; MacGregor Lions; Father Dimitri Tsakas from the Greek Orthodox Church at South Brisbane as well as the broader Greek community of South Brisbane even though they were struggling from the impact of floodwaters; southside mums from the Brisbane Family Day Care service; Julie Fox and her brother Chris Fox from the Greenslopes newsagency in the Greenslopes Mall where I did my first 'Walk a day in my shoes' stint; Australian Merchandisers; AgriFood Skills Australia; Officeworks's Canberra warehouse; GHD, the engineering and professional services firm; the Community and Public Sector Union; the Workplace Health and Safety Queensland office at Lutwyche; and Queensland South Native Title Services.

Of course, the generosity of the Greenslopes community did not end with the flood clean-up or the stationery drive. I am pleased to report that almost 200 residents attended the Great Greenslopes Australia Day Sausage Sizzle at Easts Junior Rugby League Club in Holland Park on 26 January 2011. This event managed to raise almost \$2,000 to contribute to the Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal. Special mention must go to Easts Junior Rugby League Club, which hosted the event without charge and also donated the day's bar takings. I also wish to thank the members of the Lions clubs from Holland Park and Greater Mount Gravatt-Mansfield who cooked hundreds of sausages on the day.

Along with numerous individuals who generously donated such as Eva Key and the Wynola Girl Guides group from Coorparoo, other supporters of the great Greenslopes sausage sizzle included Greg Purcell from Meat You Here butchery in the Greenslopes Mall; Shantelle McCudden from Baker's Delight in the Greenslopes Mall; Tony Merlino and Dot Smith from Coles at the Greenslopes Mall; Andrew Nicolau from JJ's Fruit Shop in the Greenslopes Mall; Clarence Wong from Brumby's at Mount Gravatt; Dearne Maxwell at Contours gym in Greenslopes; Dan O'Kane from Dan Murphy's at Holland Park; Sonya Smith at Video Ezy in Greenslopes; Susan Meehan from Objects d' at the Greenslopes Mall; Renee Dawson at Andrews Light Up at Mount Gravatt; Peter Weiss from LJ Hooker at Coorparoo; Cass Conwell from All About Health and Body; and Paul Windsor from Vintage Cellars at Stones Corner. This is the sort of community spirit that makes the south side such a great place to live.

As we begin the long journey to recovery from these devastating natural disasters, I am reminded of the words of the disciple Paul to the Christians of Rome—'Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, persevere in prayer'. We must all be patient and persevere as we recover from these terrible disasters. But I have faith that the Queensland spirit will prevail. On behalf of myself, my family and the residents of the state electorate of Greenslopes, I express my sincere condolences to those who have suffered, and who continue to struggle, at this difficult time.