



Speech by


## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 16 February 2011

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### MOTION: NATURAL DISASTERS

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (5.57 pm): I rise to offer my heartfelt condolences to the families suffering the loss of loved ones and all the impacts flowing from recent tragic events of the floods and cyclone in this summer of 2010-11. While my own area of the Sunshine Coast has been left relatively unscathed, we stand together with other Queenslanders who hurt for those who have lost so much, offering our support, our prayers and commitment not to forget the victims throughout this vast state.

In the days and weeks following the different stages of the impact of these disasters there was a clear sentiment from people I met who were saying, 'Don't forget us.' They implored that they would be feeling for some time the impact of the events which had taken them to their knees. The devastating natural forces and the subsequent devastation in many other areas meant that media attention shifted from one crisis to the next unfolding crisis. So we saw a situation where those who had suffered so much did worry that perhaps their particular circumstances, which had been so incredibly difficult, might be cast aside. As we remember in this vast state that there have been so many impacted with such incredible forces of nature, we have a responsibility to remember them all and to work to support them all.

As members of parliament well know, as do the thousands of volunteers and front-line public servants, the hardest work is not done in the media spotlight but in the ongoing slog to repair, restore and rebuild homes, hearts, communities and businesses. I pay tribute to those countless thousands who answered the call for help, to the heroes who risked their lives to save others and to all who slogged in the heat and humidity in the clean-up and rebuild of shattered homes and businesses—and this is ongoing. Our police, the fires, SES, electricity linesmen, other emergency service personnel, council leaders, workers and all involved in front-line services have risen to the task in an outstanding way.

I pay particular tribute to my colleagues Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer, and his wife, Ann, whose community was so brutally savaged by flash flooding which took many lives; also to the member for Hinchinbrook, Andrew Cripps, whose beautiful North Queensland electorate was shredded by Cyclone Yasi; to the member for Toowoomba South, Mike Horan; and to so many MPs from across this parliament, across the political divide, who have had a real impact in their local areas but who have also been hands-on in supporting their affected communities. We stand alongside of you.

If there is a silver lining in these terrible events, it has been to see the best of people coming forward, thousands of volunteers, at personal cost to themselves, armed with shovels, brooms, mops; tradies volunteering their labour; and unskilled labour volunteering their elbow grease. I will never forget the sight. It was inspirational. Among the tragedy of lost homes and precious possessions turned to garbage on the kerbside was this wave of people of all ages but particularly young people, giving of themselves.

I was proud to work alongside other workers of the mud army in Brisbane and also volunteers from the Maroochydore Surf Life Saving Club in the clean-up in Ipswich. As the member for Nicklin said, we worked together with this great surf club, and it was wonderful to see these young people in action. Sunshine Coast surf-lifesaving clubs also sent their highly trained volunteers with rubber duckies from the seaside to the front line of inundated streets of Brisbane, working alongside SES personnel to check

houses for stranded homeowners. There are many, many other stories of volunteer organisations and of volunteers individually answering the call. There has been something of the Anzac spirit, mates helping mates and strangers providing solace through practical service.

After the immediate crisis, the need for help does not go away. In fact, it can become so much more critical as despair can replace courage when the recovery is prolonged and wearing as people count their losses and bear the daily strain of getting back on their feet and getting their businesses, their farms and their lives back in order. This is a mental burden which can be hard to fathom. In meeting with farmers at Cecil Plains with my colleague the member for Condamine, Ray Hopper, I heard how some of these farmers went under floodwaters not once but twice in a very short period of time. Many lost their third crop in a row. They are hardworking, proud people who do not ask for handouts, but now they have been dealt a devastating blow of losing their homes and their livelihoods, and this is a story that is told in so many areas. They survived the drought—10 years of drought in parts of Queensland—only then to invest in the crop they hoped would be their turning point. And they have lost it. They cannot get back on their feet without help.

Governments have a responsibility to recognise these diverse needs throughout this state and, for us in our personal giving, to equip the front-line services—both professionals and volunteer services—to go where we cannot all go and to give practical help and mental health support. Too many lives have already been lost. We do not want to lose anymore as people struggle to deal with the fallout of their losses. Tragically, we are already hearing stories where this impact is becoming a reality.

There are lessons to be learnt from what went wrong in these events and what went right and how to ensure the rebuilding is done with integrity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. I will say more on these issues when the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Bill debate is before the House. However, at this time I will note that the Bruce Highway, a National Highway, needs national priority in improving its flood immunity as well as other critical transport links which have been ripped apart.

A few weeks ago I drove from Bundaberg to Rockhampton where I met with affected communities, council leaders and road workers when the Rockhampton Airport was still underwater and the Rockhampton section of the highway had been reopened. Queensland was divided for 12 days when the highway was cut at this critical juncture. But the impact goes long past the recession of the water. There are huge impacts upon people's livelihoods, on the transport sector and on the businesses that rely upon those transport links. The member for Hinchinbrook, Andrew Cripps, has also raised other transport industry impacts, and I applaud his advocacy, as the repercussions from Cyclone Yasi require special attention for people in the transport and trucking and related industries if they are to survive and to be able to go on serving these local economies on the road to recovery.

There is a long road ahead. But we have seen a magnificent response from Queenslanders. We have seen a generation responding to a cause. In some ways it is almost a rediscovery that our neighbours really are our fellow members of Queensland. But there is a lot of work to be done, a lot of questions to be asked about how to approach these needs and, most importantly, a great need that we do not forget in this vast state the vast areas that have been impacted and the diverse needs that need to be met not only with compassion but also with extremely practical help.