



Speech by


## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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### PREMIER'S DISASTER RELIEF APPEAL, ALLOCATIONS

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (11.36 am): It is famously claimed that Marie Antoinette responded to the cries of the poor by saying, 'Let them eat cake.' There is a modern-day equivalent here in Queensland, where Premier Bligh's government has told the state's destitute from the disasters for the last four months, 'Let them eat red tape.'

Queensland has experienced a number of disasters this year. The Bligh government's disaster response is just one of them. The failure of the Premier and her government to respond with compassion and humanity to the flood and cyclone disasters that hit our state at the beginning of this year is becoming more and more evident. Today, 4½ months after the floods—19 weeks after people lost their houses and their belongings—and 16 weeks after Cyclone Yasi, the Premier has announced what should have been done immediately after the event. People have been struggling in affected areas. They have been crying out for help. They have been met with a wall of bureaucracy.

Now the Premier has realised the message coming through, even out of the bureaucracy, that these people need basic human help. They need to be able to eat. They need to be able to rebuild their lives. They need to have human contact and reassurance that they do have the support of the community.

The funding announcement regarding St Vincent de Paul is welcome. But, like so many other organisations, St Vincent de Paul has already been out there for months trying to help people get back on their feet. They have done good work. They have helped many people. They have done it despite the government.

Waiting for the government to respond has been a futile exercise. Why has it taken the Premier four months to catch up? Why has it taken her so many rounds of funding, red tape and refusals to people in need when the message has been blatantly clear all along? This is too little too late. For every week that these people have had to fight just to put food on the table or just to get to the table the trauma has been worse. The isolation and sense of abandonment has been worse. The failure of this government has been worse.

The Premier has stated that this funding is to help people who fell through the cracks. The cracks were put there by the Premier and her government in their efforts to impose as much bureaucracy and red tape on this heartache as possible. The cracks are the result of the incompetence of this government in distributing funds given generously and spontaneously by Queenslanders and others. People are struggling to get back on their feet. They are struggling because this government has denied them timely assistance. It has denied them access to funds, donated by their own neighbours, colleagues, families and friends.

This government has literally denied them the right to refurbish their homes simply because they did not own the four walls around their lost belongings. The hard-heartedness of this government's response has hit hard at the people who lost everything and who cannot afford to re-establish. There has been an obvious need for help before this point. It is not good enough that people are still struggling. It is not good enough that day-to-day essentials have become luxuries in Queensland. The response to these disasters should have been a human response aimed at helping people get through the trauma, helping them get

back on their feet. It should never have been the bureaucratic nightmare it has become, with arguments over guidelines and eligibility and people being told that they have not suffered enough and forced to endure more because the government said they did not deserve that help—basic necessities, basic necessities such as food and household goods.

There are no excuses for the Premier for people having to wait four long months before receiving this basic level of help. Premier, do not expect any accolades for this announcement. It is too little too late. It is a slap in the face for the victims who have had to endure the trauma of the floods and cyclone followed by weeks of anxiety about how to feed their families, how to clothe their children, how to return to a sustainable lifestyle. The devastation may not have been uniform, but the cold-hearted response and mismanagement of this government has been. All of Queensland has experienced the government's bungled economic management. Now we are witnessing that same slipshod approach applied to disaster relief funds.

The Premier is right in one thing: nothing can restore the lost memories, the photos and the treasured belongings. But there will also be little done to erase the negative memories of trauma and need in the months following the disasters. It would not have taken much to provide support to people in affected areas at the time they most needed it, with just a view of the situation with compassion and care and support of the people who are on the ground, reaching out to as many people as they can.

*(Time expired)*