



Speech by


**Jarrod Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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## **MOTION: NATURAL DISASTERS**

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (8.04 pm): I rise to speak in support of the condolence motion before the House today. In recent weeks Queensland has been battered by rains, floods and cyclones. She has been tested to the extreme, so much so that statistically 70 per cent of her was covered in waters. The terrible human cost of this disaster is something that we will all live with for quite some time. Sadly, 35 of our fellow Queenslanders lost their lives to the torrent of water that swept across this state with three people still missing. My thoughts and prayers are with those families who have not only been impacted in some way but who have also lost loved ones.

On Sunday, 9 January my family and I were travelling home after a few days at Jimna. We were heading down the Jimna to Kilcoy road and soon realised that something was not quite right. Half the range had completely fallen and blocked the road. We turned back and waited till Monday. Overnight more of the range slipped. We were stuck. The local ranger drew us a mud map to get us down the Kilcoy Murgon Road.

When we arrived in Kilcoy it became apparent that many towns in Queensland were in severe trouble. Kilcoy was cut off to the outside world. We spent some five days in Kilcoy. At the same time we watched in agony as fellow Queenslanders, particularly those in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley, were devastated by the torrents of waters and floods that traversed the area.

I recall being in the Kilcoy pub with my family and some 150 other stranded travellers who were stuck in Kilcoy with no way out north, east, west or south. The Kilcoy folk really came to the party. There were hundreds of people stranded in Kilcoy. The local Kilcoy Lions Club set up the emergency evacuation centre where they fed and made 300 meals a day. There was such a diverse range of people stuck in these floodwaters in Kilcoy. But it was great to watch the community spirit unfold in a town that was cut off from the outside world. After three to four days the milk ran out, so the milk was coming over by boat from the dairy. The abattoir workers were being choppered out of Kilcoy across the river into the abattoir to butcher the cattle.

On the 10th and the 11th we watched the unfolding events in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley. As I said, the town folk of this area of Kilcoy really stood by the people who were stranded, some of whom had a couple of days of clothes and others who had no money and no access to bank accounts because the ATMs were empty.

I want to thank the people of Kilcoy, particularly Lorna Sherwood from the Kilcoy Lions Club, who did a lot of the coordinating at the emergency evacuation centre. I want to thank Sandy Adams who, with her team, provided over 300 meals a day to the flood stranded guests. I also want to thank the special events group which is a not-for-profit association that helped; the SES and, of course, all the emergency service workers; Sergeant Marty Tanwan, who was one of the area coordinators and the local sergeant in the town of Kilcoy; and the IGA. On the Monday the IGA was fully stocked. By the Friday it had run out of bread, milk and personal hygiene supplies but it kept donating to the local Lions Club and the butchers in the area to feed the hundreds of people who were stuck in Kilcoy until the roads were clear.

There are a couple of events in people's lives that they can recall. They can remember exactly where they were at that point in their life. For me, I can remember exactly where I was when the world found out about Princess Diana's death and also September 11. I will never forget being stuck in Kilcoy as Queensland flooded and we watched on the news as the Lockyer Valley and Toowoomba were ravaged by this flood from hell.

While flooding is something that we have seen at various times in our past, flooding of this magnitude has been widely reported in the media in comparison to the devastating floods of 1974. For those of us who were not here in 1974 it is hard to imagine flooding of such magnitude sweeping down the Bremer River, into Ipswich and the Brisbane River and into many suburbs. Thankfully, many communities were able to prepare themselves for the inundation of floodwater, in some cases on more than one occasion.

Whilst statistically 70 per cent of the state was covered in floodwater, many communities did have time to prepare themselves for the rising waters. But let us spare a thought for those in the Lockyer Valley and directly east of the Toowoomba range who had no warning of the wall of water that was heading towards their small but close-knit communities. Sadly, there was also loss of life suffered in Ipswich as the floods swept through the Bremer River and on to Brisbane.

We were greatly underprepared for the events of 10 January 2011 in Toowoomba, Murphys Creek, Postmans Ridge, Withcott, Grantham and throughout the Lockyer Valley. The human cost of the Queensland floods in the summer of 2010-11 is immeasurable. We as legislators and leaders in our respective communities are charged with the task of rebuilding Queensland and ensuring that we are more prepared to respond to natural disasters across this great state.

As the floodwaters subsided and the clean-up task began, our state faced another natural disaster of epic proportions. Tropical Cyclone Yasi was a massive storm set for landfall somewhere between Townsville and Cairns. Many of the residents who live in and around the city of Innisfail in North Queensland and who were still rebuilding and getting their lives together after enduring Tropical Cyclone Larry on 20 March 2006 were preparing for an event that had the potential to be even more devastating.

The spirit of North Queensland should never be underestimated. While the region is often prepared for the annual cyclone season, the circumstance of two massive cyclones—Larry and Yasi—in the space of just five years has the potential to paralyse many communities for decades. Wind speeds of between 250 and 300 kilometres an hour are a frightening prospect, but the tenacity that the people of North Queensland displayed in the face of tremendous adversity in enduring these massive cyclones is truly inspirational. In comparison, Hurricane Katrina had recorded wind gusts of 280 kilometres per hour.

We have heard much about what it means to be a Queenslander. More than being Queenslanders, we are Australians. Throughout the years, in the most terrible of situations, Australians have banded together. We are a family, and nothing brings a family closer than times of immeasurable trouble. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the emergency services personnel across Queensland who have worked so tirelessly in very dangerous situations to protect and assist their fellow Queenslanders in their time of great need.

The Queenslander spirit has never been more evident than during the recent natural disasters across the state. In the aftermath of the floods, it was great to see so many volunteers out to help their fellow Queenslanders with the difficult task of cleaning out their homes and businesses and in many cases having to count the cost of the damage and start all over again. This tremendous gesture of mateship embodies the true spirit of our state. When times get tough, the first question many people ask is, 'How can we help?'

In my own electorate I was happy to support the fundraising efforts of the Kawana Waters Uniting Church and the Uniting Churches of the southern Sunshine Coast region in assisting with the Help the Flood Victims concert, which was held at the Events Centre on 29 January. With the assistance of those who attended, the variety concert event had some very generous donations from business—Ian McDowell from Sunshine Toyota and Bob and Natasa Shelley from [australianeedsyou.com](http://australianeedsyou.com), who helped in raising the funds—totalling some \$20,000 in one night. These funds will be split evenly between the Lockyer Valley and the Burnett regions to help rebuild communities. So I say to my friend and colleague the member for Lockyer: as you and your community were facing your darkest hours, the people of Kawana were thinking of you, were praying for your community and will gladly hand over the split cheque of \$10,000 to help in and around your community.

There have also been significant other fundraising events in my electorate which I have been pleased to assist and support. On Sunday, 23 January, Dave Holmes and his team from Honky's Events arranged the Flood Festival 2011, a variety of local music acts and activities for families in the Kawana electorate. Our local businesses were called upon and, boy, did they deliver and come to the party! Thousands of dollars worth of auction items were donated. Flood Festival 2011, on top of the \$20,000 raised by the Uniting Church, raised another \$13,000.

On Sunday, 6 February, the Sunshine Coast Unite for Queensland Flood Appeal was held by a local organisation with the assistance of the Kawana Waters Surf Life Saving Club and the Lions Club of Lake Currimundi-Kawana. Another \$5,000 was raised from that afternoon which included performances from Uncle Bob's Jug Band, the Sunshine Coast Ukulele Masters and a surprise performance from their local member—me—as an Elvis Presley impersonator. I was either that good or that bad that they requested a second song. Of course I obliged.

**Mr Langbroek:** Do one now.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** No, no. Residents from Living Choice Retirement Village in my electorate also organised a local donation pledge of food and clothing which was sent to the Ipswich community in the aftermath of the devastating floodwaters. I would like to publicly thank Mr Eric Brusewitz and Dawn Chalkley for their efforts in organising this donation of much needed supplies to residents in some of the hardest hit areas in Queensland. I want to say thankyou to the Kawana electorate for sending volunteers and thanks to the surf-lifesaving club for sending their RPVs and their lifesavers and for donating money. Individually these fundraising efforts and donation pledges may seem insignificant in size, but collectively they will provide a great deal of assistance to residents who will struggle to recover from these disasters for a very long time.

So although my electorate did not face the battle from hell with the floods and cyclones, we were thinking of our fellow Queenslanders and were doing what we could without fully understanding or appreciating the severity of the situation. But what we did do is come together in all forms of community groups, some of which I have mentioned today, to fundraise, to raise awareness and to pack boxes to send throughout Queensland.

In one of Australia's unofficial anthems, *I am Australian*, the writer, Bruce Woodley, penned two new paragraphs following the devastating bushfires in Victoria. One new paragraph is particularly relevant to our recent disaster events in Queensland. He added the words some 22 years after the original song was penned. The paragraph reads—

There are no words of comfort that can hope to ease the pain  
Of losing homes and loved ones the memories will remain  
Within the silent tears you'll find the strength to carry on  
You're not alone, we are with you. We are Australian!

Then he added a further paragraph, which of course dealt with the Victorian bushfires but is so true and embodies our Queensland spirit. It reads—

There are so many heroes whose stories must be told  
They fought the raging fires of hell and saved so many souls  
From the ashes of despair our towns will rise again!  
We mourn your loss, we will rebuild. We are Australian!

I would like to offer my personal condolences to the families of the people who have been lost to these disasters. On behalf of the people of the Kawana electorate, I say: may those who were lost rest in peace.