




Speech by

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MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard Thursday, 17 February 2011

QUEENSLAND RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY BILL

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (7.40 pm): I rise this evening to contribute to the debate on the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Bill 2011. The bill before the House will establish a single authority to oversee and assist with the reconstruction of the flood affected zones, including implementation of flood mitigation recommendations and infrastructure reconstruction.

The authority is charged with the sole task of rebuilding Queensland in the wake of these two devastating natural disaster events. A commission of inquiry has also been established to examine the procedures of flood mitigation and the management of our dams and waterways.

The bill before the House will create a separate act of this parliament and amend several other acts for the purposes of establishing this Reconstruction Authority. Given the amount of damage to vital infrastructure and services that has been incurred, there are relevant time line factors which will need to be taken into consideration with the rebuilding efforts across the state.

Priority needs to be given to projects and communities which need assistance as a matter of urgency. Accordingly, it is vital that the Queensland Reconstruction Authority is not simply another layer of bureaucracy. The focus of this new body is to ensure that communities, supporting infrastructure, industry and the plethora of services offered to Queensland communities are operational in a short period of time. All of the relevant social, economic and environmental impacts in this period of rebuilding Queensland must also be considered.

The responsibility to oversee the local rebuilding efforts of many communities across Queensland is of paramount importance. That is why the LNP moved swiftly and decisively to appoint one dedicated spokesperson for the recovery process. My colleague the member for Redlands has tremendous local government experience, having been elected to serve on the Redlands Shire Council from 2000 to 2009. During that period, the member for Redlands was also a representative on the water and waste committee, chairman of the development assessment committee as well as serving as deputy mayor.

The LNP is committed to the task of rebuilding Queensland and the long journey of recovery ahead for many communities. I concur entirely with the sentiments of the Leader of the Opposition in welcoming the appointment of a reconstruction minister in the Queensland government, as was already the case in the federal government and the Queensland opposition.

The task of rebuilding Queensland will need to be undertaken in a manner of due process and will take a considerable amount of time. The responsibility for this task should be bestowed on one dedicated minister. I question the Premier's ability to fulfil this responsibility with the required attention, given her other roles and responsibilities as Premier of the state. After all, this role will require more than being a good newsreader or weather reader.

Queensland is Australia's second largest state in terms of area, third largest in population, but most decentralised in terms of the population of Queenslanders who reside outside the capital city. The majority of Queensland's towns and cities are either built on the coastline, a river or both. Whether it is the northern

coastal rivers of the Herbert, Proserpine or Flinders, the Fitzroy, Burnett, Mary or Bremer or the inland rivers of the Condamine or Barcoo, Queensland is renowned for its system of rivers.

With this in mind, the overall issue of flood mitigation becomes important for most regions in the state. In Goondiwindi, the levee bank of some 11 metres was built in 1958 and serves the town well given its location on a flood plain and that it is split in half by the Macintyre River. Temporary flood defences can be constructed relatively quickly and in many cases, such as in St George, these temporary defences protected property from flood inundation.

The development of flood risk maps is essential in reducing the risk to people and property of rising floodwaters in communities which are particularly flood prone. There has been a call for these maps to be published on the relevant local government websites so that information can be disseminated to the community when required.

There are provisions in the bill before the House which are of concern. Local government jurisdiction and planning authority can be resumed. This does set a concerning precedent as the best people to undertake local planning are local people in local governments. Cooperation between local government and the relevant authorities should be the priority, rather than the local government being overridden by state government authorities.

A constituent has raised with me an issue regarding the urban footprint in the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2010-2031, where flood plains are built up and landfill often disturbs the natural flow of the watertable. I would envisage that the government is undertaking a review of this urban footprint to ensure that appropriate caution is heeded in considering the planning requirements of local communities across Queensland.

The major Queensland industries of tourism, mining, agriculture and small business have been dealt a massive blow by these two natural disasters. It is important that governments rebuild infrastructure to assist in the transport of goods and services across the state. Many areas which were not directly affected by the floods or cyclone have been indirectly impacted following the closure of many major regional roads and rail lines. Over 25 per cent of our road network has been impacted by the recent disasters and will need some form of repair or rebuild.

The damage to agriculture is heartbreaking. After enduring years of drought, many farmers had crops which were heading for harvest. In another cruel blow, floodwaters and cyclonic winds and rain struck our agriculture sector at a time when many farmers across the state were heading for the best season in years. The resilience of our farmers will again be tested, but government needs to recognise a role in supporting this sector with subsidy and employment assistance.

The Queensland tourism industry is a major employer and contributor to the economy. The Bligh government has already commenced a \$10 million advertising package to rejuvenate this sector, but more needs to be done to send the message to the rest of Australia and indeed the world that Queensland is open for business and back on its feet. The development of the tourism sector should be a priority for local regions and the Queensland government. The industry is intrinsically linked with other sectors of the economy and needs to be given additional support and attention.

This morning we heard the Minister for Tourism blame the media for all the hype and hysterics in relation to the cyclone. The Minister for Tourism needs to look at who was standing at the front of all those press conferences and actually putting this in the minds of people around the world and not be so quick to blame the media when it was the Queensland government giving the media all the information in the first place. It is easy to blame the media, but when they are feeding the media with hourly updates they cannot turn around and blame the media and the rest of the world for thinking Queensland is closed for business.

Mr Reeves: It saved lives.

Mr BLEIJIE: I understand that, but those opposite cannot blame the media today for their operational role when they had a role to play. They cannot turn around and blame the media for closing Queensland. It was the statements of those on that side of the House that made people in the rest of the world believe that elements of Queensland are closed for business. Over the past 13 years this government has racked up an \$84 billion debt during a period of mining boom and prosperity for the state.

In closing, I want to reiterate the points that many of my colleagues have made today. We seriously doubt whether the Queensland government, whether this Labor government and all its task forces and the Reconstruction Authority has the competence to actually deliver, has the competence to get our AAA credit rating back and has the competence to restore faith and trust in Queenslanders that it can rebuild Queensland.

I think the case is in the negative. The Queensland community cannot trust this Labor government. If we base it on nearly 20 uninterrupted years of Labor rule in Queensland, can Queenslanders now turn around after three weeks of tremendous disaster in Queensland and trust the Labor Party? They cannot.