




Speech by

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MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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QUEENSLAND RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (4.05 pm): I rise to speak to the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Bill 2011. The necessity of this bill is self-evident; it is essential to the enormous task of rebuilding this state. What is also self-evident is the need for this to be done well and with a minimal waste of funds and resources. The real and unavoidable cost of recovery is in the billions of dollars. This is a heavy burden for a state that has had to sell off its assets to stay financially viable. We cannot afford for bureaucracy to choke the reconstruction effort before it begins.

The urgency of getting our primary producers—bananas and sugar in Tully and Cardwell; livestock and agriculture in the Tablelands, Burdekin and Charters Towers—and businesses back on their feet in as short a time as possible cannot be overstated. The current vulnerability of small rural communities decimated by the floods or obliterated by winds cannot be overlooked. The failure of one of these communities is the failure of the authority and it will be judged harshly by rural communities of Queensland, who are sick of being neglected and burdened by red tape and bureaucracy. It is important that rural towns do not collapse under pointless bureaucratic delays to funding and infrastructure. These towns have suffered in the extreme and deserve better than to be passed over because they do not fall within local government boundaries. This has already happened with the rural resilience package announced by the Premier yesterday. Cattle properties in the Charters Towers Regional Council area such as Maryan Vale, Reedy Brook Station, Chudleigh Park, Craigs Pocket, Valley of Lagoons, Lamonds Lagoon and many more were directly in the path of what the Bureau of Meteorology has classified as the very destructive winds of Cyclone Yasi. It is vital to remember that the winds that hit the region were the same strength as the winds that destroyed Innisfail when Cyclone Larry went through in 2006. These stations have sustained enormous damage over vast areas. The magnitude of the clean-up is not even fully known, but early reports suggest that the bill for primary producers in the area could run into tens of millions of dollars.

The Charters Towers Regional Council area was not included in the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements launched by the state and federal governments. It is very important that it is included because properties in the top end of the Charters Towers Regional Council area were hit by category 4 destructive winds. There is absolute devastation throughout that region. I table this copy showing where that cyclone went through. It clearly shows that the northern end of the Charters Towers Regional Council area copped category 4 winds but has not received that financial assistance and support. I hope that this situation is rectified and resolved urgently. The support for these people is an important issue, and there is no support for these people who have been severely smashed.

Tabled paper: Tropical Cyclone Yasi track map [\[3968\]](#).

I understand that efforts are being made to rectify the oversight of these stations and that the geographical zones requiring assistance are being identified. However, it is an example of the desperate need for detailed information to be gathered from the ground to ensure accurate and efficient reallocations of funds and resources. Common sense and compassion must be the guiding principles of the reconstruction operation. The implementation of this legislation must be transparent, accountable and competent. Already we are seeing red tape and bureaucracy hampering efforts of local people in Far North Queensland to lend a hand.

The BlazeAid organisation is trying to arrange a base camp at the Mount Garnet showgrounds to provide assistance to farmers in the southern Tablelands and northern Charters Towers shires who have been stranded by Cyclone Yasi. However, they are unable to do that because the dongers on the showgrounds do not comply with regulations introduced by the department of resources last year.

There are families who are isolated on properties that have suffered massive damage to infrastructure and they need urgent assistance. One station owner was told that he could not clear his road because his chainsaw licence had expired days previously. This is exactly the type of bureaucratic nonsense that we need to be addressing swiftly and decisively.

There needs to be a practical, hands-on approach and a suspension of the excessive and unreasonable bureaucracy that has hounded recovery efforts in the past. The bill provides the authority with the power to override local government authorities. This power needs to be handled with consideration given to the superb efforts that many councils have put into disaster management so far. Local councils have the on-the-ground knowledge and local connections that are essential to the success of Queensland's reconstruction. They have worked tirelessly coordinating the response to these disasters and have faced daily the tragedy and gut-wrenching realities of loss and heartache in their shires and regions. It would be a further tragedy for these councils to be railroaded and sidelined by outsiders who feel they can gauge the needs of these communities better than those who live and work there. The task requires cooperation, and this needs to be focused, rather than the overriding powers of the authority.

I would like to raise the issue of the Gregory Development Road. It is an inland highway, stretching from Mount Garnet right down to Clermont. This inland highway is a vital link for the north and south. I have brought up before—and many local authorities have brought up—the importance of having this road fully sealed, upgraded and flood proofed. When the coast was cut off for more than six days, word got out that there was an inland highway stretching from Charters Towers right through to Mount Garnet where trucks could get their supplies backwards and forwards. When they realised this was open, it became a convoy of vehicles. We have been pushing for this for many years. There has been money allocated to it, but it is too slow in coming.

I will name a few creeks that need to be built up and upgraded to flood proof this region—Hann Creek, Lolworth Creek, Fletcher Creek, Basalt River, Sandy Creek, Stockyard Creek, Snake Creek, Clarke River and other low-lying areas but only just a few. If we can raise those bridges three or four metres, that is all that would be needed and we would never have to suffer the result of the roads being cut off for long periods of time. We would have that inland highway and we would be able to get the goods, fruit and vegetables, tourism and transport to-and-fro without having the issue of it being cut off. That really needs to be looked at. The authority needs to look at this very intently.

Another issue is in relation to Telstra and the mobile phone towers. This is another issue that the authority needs to look at closely. When the power goes out, then there is no power to those towers to provide the telecommunications network. As an example, when the power went out at Ravenshoe—it is bad enough when the power is out for five days, let alone having your telecommunications out for five days—one business owner in the town was smart enough to realise, before Telstra did, that the place needed a generator. So he provided his own generator which gave telecommunications back to the region. That was so simple, but that area suffered without telecommunications. Do you know what it is like for Ergon Energy to try to get into these places that have been smashed to smithereens from the cyclone? They are unable to get access and they have no communications. This issue definitely must be resolved.

Also, another issue is the evacuation centres and the importance of having evacuation centres. I believe that the authority needs to investigate this. Mount Garnet, which is a community of nearly 1,000 people, had no evacuation centre. It is not that they did not have a place to go but there was no appropriate evacuation centre to go to that could withstand category 3 or 4 winds that were going to come through. I believe that the council and the authority need to work very closely and find ways of getting funding to build these evacuation centres, because cyclones are not going to stop coming. They are going to keep coming. We have cyclones zooming past us all the time in North Queensland, but we have never had one of this magnitude. They will come back, and we need to be very prepared for them.

I wanted to bring all of those issues to the attention of the House. Later on down the track we will be hearing much more, but I hope that the authority takes note of what I have just said.