




Speech by

Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Thursday, 17 February 2011

QUEENSLAND RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY BILL

 **Hon. SJ HINCHLIFFE** (Stafford—ALP) (Minister for Infrastructure and Planning) (5.56 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Bill 2011. None of us will forget the natural disasters of this summer. The recent floods left 35 dead and 70 per cent of the state impacted, while category 5 Tropical Cyclone Yasi threatened the region between Townsville and Cairns and contributed to one fatality. The gravity of the situation and task ahead is apparent in the statistics. More than 5,400 houses and over 3,500 businesses have been inundated. More than 5,900 people were evacuated. There were commercial losses of \$4 billion in the agricultural, tourism and mining sectors and over a \$1 billion worth of cyclone damage. However, behind each of these numbers is a resident or a business owner, their families and their friends. I doubt that there is anyone in Queensland who does not know someone who has been severely impacted by the events of this summer. Few also would be unaware of the spirit experienced in the face of adversity and of the good humour and resilience that was evident from Innisfail to Indooroopilly.

I now turn to the main purpose of the bill, which is the creation of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. Independent planning powers will provide the authority with the ability to slash red tape, the capacity to intervene in approval or regulatory processes and the capacity to declare designated reconstruction areas in the face of flood and cyclone recovery. These powers will help ensure that the reconstruction of impacted areas will occur as quickly and as efficiently as possible—helping Queensland get back on its feet.

I welcome the appointment of Major General Mick Slater as chair of the authority board. The major general is very well suited for this role and I know that he will get the job done. We have heard great testament to his efforts already by a number of members during this debate. I further welcome the appointment of the former coordinator-general and director-general of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning, Graeme Newton, as the chief executive officer of the authority.

The real test in these circumstances is how you rebuild better, more resilient than before. To that end, I commend to the authority and the affected communities the principles of adaptive building design. As I have told this House on occasions before, the vernacular Queenslanders has design features that were developed by bitter experience and typical ingenuity.

Late last week I joined the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Local Government—who I know would have enjoyed that meeting but who will now go on to more enjoyable opportunities—at a meeting with mayors from flood and cyclone affected areas across our state. I believe that an important role for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority is to consult and, in turn, work closely with relevant local authorities. As the Premier noted during debate on the condolence motion, our disaster management arrangements rely heavily on local responses, local people and local authorities. I highlighted the important role of day labour in local authorities during the recovery and the management of the crisis. I applaud the responses of these organisations and believe that they will continue to have a very large role to play in our recovery.

Further, this bill includes three building related reforms that will assist in the flood and cyclone recovery. Firstly, it introduces a six-month exemption that will allow owners of properties with non-shared swimming pools to lease their properties without first obtaining a pool safety certificate. This will add to the stock of rental accommodation in areas where rental accommodation is most needed to rehouse flood and cyclone evacuees and accommodate tradespeople relocating to disaster affected areas to help with the recovery effort. This change is being made with the safety of children squarely in mind.

Pool safety certificates remain a requirement for homes sold. This is an appropriate balance for those who have committed to the pool safety inspection business. The amendment includes a requirement for a prelease notice that alerts the new occupier of the property to the fact that the pool may not comply with the new standard and may pose a risk to children. Nothing in the exemption absolves the owner of responsibility to comply with the currently applicable pool safety laws. Further, consultation on this matter has occurred with members of the Pool Safety Council, including Hannah's Foundation, the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Real Estate Institute of Queensland.

Secondly, the bill extends the ability of all hotels, motels and resorts to apply to the chief executive officer of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning to implement a pool safety management plan. It must be demonstrated that they can implement appropriate safety measures to provide child safety, such as an onsite lifeguard. Historically, this was only available to 19 resorts across Queensland. It is envisaged that this may benefit those resorts in flood and cyclone affected areas by providing them with more flexibility in relation to their duty to comply with pool safety requirements. The CEO of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, Mr Daniel Gschwind, has advised my department that the extension of the pool safety standard exemption to all resorts will provide relief to resorts during the reconstruction, and that it is very much appreciated by our very important tourism industry.

Finally, a transitional amendment will reinstate and validate certifying functions performed by local government building surveying technicians. Prior to 1 January 2010, these local government employees were authorised to certify buildings up to two storeys in height and a total floor area of 500 square metres. This amendment will directly benefit people in remote regional areas who require the services of local government building surveying technicians to approve flood and cyclone related building works. This will improve recovery in those communities and is another significant measure of this bill.

The bill provides for the rebuilding, recovery and reconstruction effort in the face of these terrible natural disasters. On that note, I commend the bill to the House.