




Speech by

Howard Hobbs

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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WESTERN QUEENSLAND, FLOODS

 **Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—LNP) (12.11 pm): Today I want to talk about the flooding that occurred throughout the Warrego electorate, particularly Charleville, Mitchell, Roma and St George and, of course, about the landholders on those river systems, particularly the Maranoa and the Balonne rivers and, of course, those in the Warrego. I pay tribute to all the volunteers and essential service personnel who worked tirelessly to fight this natural disaster and assist many flood victims.

In every major event such as this there are lessons to be learnt. We must ensure that improvements are made to processes for future events. Charleville's Bradleys Gully was predicted to reach three metres. It only made two metres. The prediction was out by a third. When questioned, locals maintained they were confident the three metre prediction was wrong. It begs the question as to why the hospital and nursing home was evacuated at that time when locals knew flooding would not impact those facilities. I pay tribute to the minister who phoned me about this matter. I thank him for the courtesy of the call. On the information that he was provided with there was no choice but to do what was done. I accept that. Down the track when we drill into the issues we might find that the figures were not right. In future those are the sorts of things that we need to ensure are more accurate so that better information is provided.

The subsequent evacuation of the town in the night, which was necessary due to the uncertainty of the integrity of the temporary levee bank from rising floodwaters in the Warrego River, is of concern, as is the timing of that evacuation. The construction of the dual-purpose floodgates that were put in place to manage floodwaters in the gully and river were completed; however, the earthworks to those gates were not, leaving the town vulnerable—a most serious and unsatisfactory situation. A decision was made to open the temporary levee on the Warrego River. This was not needed. Then it had to be rebuilt under wet and difficult conditions. I pay tribute to the council staff who worked long and hard to keep the floodwaters out of the town. A 1990 levee bank and Bradleys Gully diversion should have been built years ago. The residents of Charleville deserve to have faith in genuine infrastructure built to protect them and not listen to platitudes, talk and excuses. Main Roads needs to ensure that the road to Augathella near Charleville does not contribute to flooding in Charleville.

The flood in Mitchell was an unprecedented record flood that devastated the town, with approximately 400 buildings impacted and irreparable damage to the bridge over the Maranoa River and the main road link to Darwin. Residents were living like refugees for many days while authorities struggled to cope with this unprecedented disaster. A huge effort was put in by many volunteers and authorities and all worked tirelessly to assist the Mitchell community. Landholders up and down the Maranoa were hit hard with floodwaters at record levels entering many homes and wrecking infrastructure such as fences, dams and roads. The railway line through the town contributed to the level of flooding on the north side of town and the building of a levee bank to protect Mitchell must be investigated.

Roma has had three major floods in two years. This flood was totally preventable and urgent action must be taken to build a levee bank that will prevent future flooding in Roma. If Dirranbandi and St George can build levee banks to protect their towns in a few days it can also be done in Roma. This and previous flooding has cost Roma \$100 million. A \$7 million levee bank is a good investment.

The emergency flood alert to phone and text did not work. This must be rectified. I pay tribute to all volunteers and authorities who worked tirelessly during this record flood. More work must be done to make the natural disaster manual more relevant to smaller communities. I found the process very bureaucratic and in many cases it hindered the clean up. St George was evacuated when it was predicted the flooding would reach 15 metres. It reached 13.98 metres and the temporary levee held. However, approximately 45 homes were impacted. The Bureau of Meteorology predictions were not accurate during the flood and more work must be done to ensure more accuracy in the future. Businesses in St George were hard hit during this flood and evacuation. Despite the fact they were spared flooding, assistance is required. A category C natural disaster assistance package should include assistance for businesses affected by flooding. Insurance companies and residents should buy local for a local recovery.

This flood event was difficult because of the large areas that were affected by flooding. The Maranoa bridge is a big issue. Kym Murphy from Main Roads worked hard to ensure that the roads were opened when they could be. Cameron Castle from the Department of Transport did a great job as well. I probably should not be naming any person because there were so many people who worked hard during that difficult time. Mitchell does not have the economy that Roma has and will need assistance in the future to make sure it comes through this flood with flying colours.