




Speech by

Hon. David Crisafulli

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

Hansard Tuesday, 12 February 2013

MOTION: NATURAL DISASTER EVENTS OF 2013

 **Hon. DF CRISAFULLI** (Mundingburra—LNP) (Minister for Local Government, Community Recovery and Resilience) (10.54 am): I was born and bred in regional Queensland and I do not usually flinch from the challenges Mother Nature can throw at us. What I do flinch from is unnecessary suffering, and I have seen more of that in the past two weeks than I can absorb with peace of mind. Hearing of Queenslanders who died in these floods and being with others grateful to be alive but trying to cope with having lost everything else takes the words off the newsprint and the images off the television and it makes them part of our lives: three-year-old Angus Burke from Gordon Park; Roger Boyles, 65, from Greenbank; 81-year-old Wolfgang Kaden from Bundaberg; Gerry Yu-Kun, 25, of Taiwan and Andrew Leong, 34, of Malaysia, both farm workers; and 27-year-old Jacob Shearer, whose van beside the creek in Widgee was a reminder of the tragedy when I visited the tight-knit community. All of these people were loved sons, uncles, brothers, fathers or husbands. My heartfelt sympathy goes out to those who now mourn their deaths.

Far greater minds have grappled with the senselessness of lives lost in freak circumstances, and quite simply there are no words that stop loved ones asking why. For those who are trying to muster the strength to clean up and rebuild again, the task ahead of them is quite simply overwhelming. I have lost count of the number of times tough regional Queenslanders have broken down in front of me in the past few weeks. It began in Bargara on 26 January when Andrew Cooney was left with very little after a tornado wiped out his home and possessions. In Mundubbera the local motel owners dodged a bullet in 2011, but this time they were not so fortunate. To see the emotion on Sherry Breitkorf's face as she tried to get over the shock, absorb the loss and get on with cleaning up is something I will never forget.

Unfortunately, I saw that look of despair and fear many times in the days that followed. In the past week I have been to Bundaberg, Bargara, Lowmead, Winfield, Monto, Gayndah, Mundubbera, Gympie, Kingaroy, Dalby, Chinchilla, Laidley, Mount Tamborine, Logan, Gladstone and Maryborough. Yet again these communities are shovelling out mud and facing the job in front of them, courageously confronting loss—in some cases for the second time in as many years—and even more bravely putting their shoulder to the wheel and starting to rebuild. We will assist each and every Queensland community to rebuild. I assure those towns that are small in population but large in spirit that they will not fall between the cracks.

Last week I travelled to Lowmead and Colonial Cove near Winfield. We arrived in the main street of Lowmead to find the local hotel stripped of all furniture and high-water marks still visible along the bar and on the jukebox. Owner-manager Jo Taylor was exhausted, the stress of cleaning up and resurrecting her business etched in her face as Stephen Bennett and I spoke with her. This is the town's main business, with the building also home to the local post office. Two doors down long-time local Ron Williams was also assessing what was left of his home. While a kind neighbour set about hanging out Ron's important documents to dry in the sun, Ron told me how the water crept up into his backyard. By late afternoon the flash flood had inundated his living room, washing most of his belongings out the door towards the railway line. As I chatted to them both, I was struck by the strength and resolve of Jo and Ron. They will recover because they have to. Like so many people I have met since that fateful Australia Day, they are determined to pick up the pieces and get their lives back to normal. Will it be easy? No. But recover they will, because punching adversity in the face is what Queenslanders do, and they are not alone. I echo the

comments of both the Premier and Deputy Premier when they spoke about the work of the local councils. In many cases these were first-term mayors dealing with an incident of this magnitude when many of them were still getting their feet under the desk in their careers in local government, and yet they stood up and their councillors stood up and their staff stood up.

I also put on record my thanks to our members of parliament, many of whom I have seen in action in recent weeks. They have been great ambassadors for their communities and I thank each and every one of them.

I thank the federal government for its assistance and its interest in this event, and in particular Senator Ludwig. For those members who missed it, last night we received news that the next round of clean-up and recovery grants has been approved. Primary producers in the local government areas of South Burnett, Gladstone and Scenic Rim as well as parts of Banana, Goondiwindi, Ipswich, Somerset, Southern Downs and Toowoomba will be eligible for that assistance under the NDRRA. Small businesses in targeted areas in Gladstone and Southern Downs will also be able to apply. That declaration follows the earlier declaration of Bundaberg, Fraser Coast, Gympie, Lockyer Valley and North Burnett.

We all have a role to play in getting Queensland back on its feet. But we also have a responsibility to make sure that this state is better prepared to handle the next flood as well. Whether that be improving our infrastructure, as the Deputy Premier mentioned with that example of the water supply in his part of the world, or constructing a new levee, these things must be built with a view to the future, not the past.

But today is not to focus on the future, but rather this solemn day is to be spent remembering the people who died and the people who have lost everything except hope. Tomorrow we will turn to the job that must be done better, smarter and stronger to give Queenslanders what they need and what they deserve and that is the security and peace of mind that will come from living in towns and cities rebuilt at long last to offer some protection from the might and power of nature.