




Speech by

Jon Krause

MEMBER FOR BEAUDESERT

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MOTION: NATURAL DISASTER EVENTS OF 2013

 **Mr KRAUSE** (Beaudesert—LNP) (3.15 pm): I rise to join in the support for the condolence motion moved by the Premier this morning. For many Queenslanders, the summer of 2012-13 has seen Mother Nature visit upon them terrible and in some cases horrific events. Much of Queensland has suffered, in particular, along its long eastern coastline from Hinchinbrook down to Rockhampton, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Burnett Heads, Bargara, Gympie, Maryborough and countless other communities along the way and off the coast. I add my condolences to all the communities that have suffered so much, but especially to those who have lost family members or friends as a result of this natural disaster. I am sure all Queenslanders and Australians will stand with all those communities that have suffered loss and will give a helping hand to restore those communities, their businesses and their lives.

Brisbane, Ipswich and the south-east corner have been hit again. Naturally, there was considerable relief that in the Brisbane River catchments the flood was not as severe as in 2011. Sadly, that cannot be said for people in the Beaudesert electorate. This flood was worse than 2011. In the Logan River, flowing from the border ranges to Jimboomba, it was on a par at least with 1991, which was the last major flood in Logan, and in the west of my electorate, in the Teviot, Warrill and Bremer catchments, it could be said to be the worst flood in living memory. Tamborine Mountain, a community of several thousand, located 500 metres above sea level, was devastated by the cyclonic winds of ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald. Trees were brought down, houses were damaged and water damage was inflicted on many dwellings. Localised flooding, on top of a mountain, roared through some businesses and homes with a ferocity not seen before. Today I do not have time to detail the full extent of the flooding and storm damage to the electorate, but it was very widespread across the entire electorate. No community was left untouched.

There is no question that communities in the Fassifern Valley, the Bremer catchment west of the Cunningham Highway and the Teviot catchment near Boonah have been devastated by this flood. Probably members have not heard about these areas on TV, but Kalbar, Aratula, Tarome, Rosevale, Warrill View, Harrisville, Mount Walker, Moogerah and Frazerview are the places that, for generations, have grown vegetables for us, have produced milk for us and have nurtured productive and efficient primary industries that are as good as any in the world, supplying the world through exports out of the Port of Brisbane. Those places, which are not even an hour by car from this chamber, have just suffered the worst natural disaster in their living memory. Many of the primary production businesses in that area, like other places, are family ventures, sometimes involving multiple generations and siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins. They have been built up from generation to generation, adapting to become more efficient and investing in capital to survive in more competitive markets. They are experts in their field. They have invested in infrastructure and equipment. Most importantly, they have invested time, money and love in their land to build a business that is essential to Australia. This flood, which saw over 1,200 millimetres dumped in the hills of the Great Dividing Range above the Fassifern and Bremer catchments, has destroyed large sections of all of those businesses.

They are the same hills that were referred to by the member for Lockyer. The rain fell and flooded Laidley in the aftermath. The topsoil is gone. Acres of laser levelled soil, cared for and fostered over many years, has gone. Topsoil which has grown some of the best carrots in the world was washed away in just a

few hours. In its place is a thick layer of silt—silt like that on Mick Rieck's place across the road from Kalfresh on the Cunningham Highway. Many hours of hard work lie ahead to try to remove the mud from the ground so that growers might be able to start over again. In some places all that is left is a layer of clay where once there was a solid layer of topsoil.

So much water came so fast that crops and trees have just been ripped out of the ground. The Warrill Creek has cut swathes through farms, changing its direction. Steve Moffatt, a fourth generation grower, showed me where the creek had widened from around 20 metres to 100 metres. The water simply washed away the creek bank and continued on to take with it acres of topsoil, along with irrigation equipment, pipes and pumps worth thousands of dollars.

The loss of crops in the ground in the Fassifern and Bremer catchments would run into many millions of dollars. One business alone estimated crop losses at \$2 million. That was just one of dozens of similar businesses. But these are just the immediate losses—losses you can attempt to put a figure on. Greater still are the incredible unknown costs to the whole community and Queensland's economy of restoring this region to its productive capacity—the cost of shifting the silt, the metres and metres of silt, the cost of rejuvenating the land with topsoil and undertaking all of the painstaking work that goes into building a world-class horticultural industry which has taken decades to complete.

The Bremer River which threatened Ipswich in this flood runs through my electorate near Rosevale and Mount Walker. These areas did not escape the carnage either. People like Peter and Heather Wehl who showed me the impact on their property at Rosevale cannot simply go back to work when the water has receded and carry on with their lives. The same applies to properties on the Teviot near Boonah where floodwaters found parts of properties nobody can remember seeing flooding before. It will take all of these areas months, even years of hard work, money and courage to put back what has been taken away.

Then there is the emotional toll on families. This was a flood of frightening ferocity. Mal Abbott, a local Tarome resident who has seen a few floods, told me he has never in his life seen the water go so fast, not even in 1959. For a couple of hours, no doubt there was fear—fear that the fast, swiftly rising water would not just claim farms, but homes and lives as well in the early hours of Monday, 28 January.

Many of our farmers have just got back up after being impacted upon in 2011. The stress levels have grown, no doubt in line with their lines of credit. Now again they have seen with their own eyes their life's work and livelihood washed away. They battle on, trying to put aside the shock and fear that such an event brings. Many are not willing to accept government help because they consider others to be more in need than they are. But some may not be able to get back up after this event.

Our growers do not expect the government to bear all of the losses inflicted on them by natural disasters, but I am here to tell members that the Fassifern communities will not be forgotten because we need primary production areas like these to supply our future needs. For well over 100 years they carried out that task. We owe it to ourselves to help these communities rebuild.

I thank the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for visiting this region with me on Tuesday, 29 January to see the damage for himself. I know the community appreciates this as well as the support his department, DAFF, is providing them through outreach officers.

From the west of the electorate to the east, Tamborine Mountain and Beechmont as well were hammered by a storm, the likes of which have not been seen before. Cyclonic winds brought down trees all over the mountain, cutting off access in the immediate aftermath of the storm. The wind was so strong that it blew rain into homes horizontally, causing water damage to many homes, adding to the toll of fallen trees on homes and roads. There were trees down everywhere on Tamborine Mountain after this storm. It was unbelievable. Many powerlines were brought down and parts of Tamborine Mountain were without power for six or seven days. That is a long time to be without power when people's water supply and sewerage systems depend on electricity and when they are cut off from all other assistance.

Aside from the damage and loss of electricity, residents of the mountain have been shaken up by a storm which caused significant destruction to their mountain-top paradise. I want to thank all of the residents, volunteers and others who have got stuck into the job of clean-up on the mountain to remove fallen trees and debris. I was up there on Wednesday, 30 January and there were trees everywhere—on the roads, in people's backyards, fallen in the parks and on all the escarpments around the mountain. It looked like, as one resident put it, that the mountain had been put through a blender.

Tourist infrastructure was damaged or destroyed and shops were flooded when rain poured down and water could not get off the mountain quickly enough. People were frightened by a storm which raged like a cyclone. I can attest to this myself. Although I was not on the mountain during the event—I was at home in Boonah—I can tell the House that I have never experienced the type of squalling winds in that part of the world that blew through the Fassifern on Sunday, 27 January and Monday, 28 January. I can only imagine what it was like 500 metres above sea level. By Friday, 1 February much of this mess on the mountain had been cleared. The roads were open and the early shoots of recovery were sprouting.

I want to pay tribute to the resilience of our community, both on the mountain and elsewhere. They looked out for each other. They set up a recovery centre themselves which would later become an outreach centre for the department of communities. Local rural fireies doorknocked elderly residents to check on their wellbeing. Surf-lifesavers from the Gold Coast volunteered for the clean-up. SES crews helped in any way they could. A whole band of other volunteers helped those in need who had suffered damage.

Energex crews, over a dozen at one stage, I believe, restored power to the mountain efficiently and in very difficult conditions. I take my hat off to them and thank them for their dedication. I also would like to mention the dedication of local community groups who helped the schools on the mountain recover from this devastating mess. I mention in particular the farmers across the road from St Bernard State School who came to the schoolyard after the storm and cleared the mess away before the students and staff returned. I thank the Minister for Education, John-Paul Langbroek, for visiting the mountain schools a couple of weeks ago. I know that the visit was appreciated. The fact that those schools were back in business so soon after a major storm is certainly a credit to them and the community. The Premier visited the mountain on Sunday, 3 February to announce the appointment of Bill Mellor as the southern Queensland recovery coordinator and saw some of the destruction for himself. But the resilience does not just find itself on the mountain; it is in the whole region which is already looking towards the future and picking itself up.

The Logan and Albert rivers run through the central part of the Beaudesert electorate. They also experienced a very significant flood event on this occasion. Damage to farms, including lost fences and cultivated land, lost crops and damaged or destroyed equipment will set back many businesses. Power was lost to several dairy farms for a significant time, resulting in lost production and income. Thankfully our towns of Rathdowney, Kooralbyn, Beaudesert and Jimboomba were largely spared inundation. But the Logan did cut a significant path of damage all the way from the ranges to Jimboomba.

Meeting with locals in Glenlogan Lakes Estate in Jimboomba on 30 January, I was struck by their stoicism and determination to get on with things despite being without power for three or four days. They wanted to make sure that people in other areas were being looked after because, as they put it, 'They only did not have power; they did not have inundation like residents in the other parts of the state.' They were cut off for two days but kept their chins up and got on with the job.

I thank Tracy Davis, the Minister for Communities, for visiting Jimboomba with me on 30 January to see firsthand the damage which was caused there. I mention also residents in Cedar Grove and Cedar Vale who were cut off for a number of days and yet have got on with the job of recovery in a commendable manner.

The Albert River also roared down towards the coast filled up by over 25 inches of rainfall falling in Springbrook in the three days to Tuesday, 29 January. Twenty-five inches is an unbelievable amount of rain to fall even in Springbrook. The Albert cut off many in Cedar Creek, Tamborine and Mundoolun. The rainfall at Springbrook also hit Canungra, and power was lost there also for many, many days. Unfortunately, landslides have cut the goat track which runs from Canungra to Tamborine Mountain. The land continues to slide daily. I was up there last week with a Transport and Main Roads officer. While we were there, there were a couple of rock falls. The road is continuing to slip down the hill towards Canungra. This road is going to require significant engineering and excavation works for it to be reopened. I know that the Minister for Transport and Main Roads has his officers looking at this as we speak.

Beechmont also was at the forefront of the storm, perched atop a mountain many metres above sea level. It took the brunt of ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald, much like the residents of Tamborine Mountain. As I have said, no part of the Beaudesert electorate was untouched by this storm and flood.

Those areas affected by floods will not be forgotten—and they were not forgotten during the event. I pay tribute to the Scenic Rim Regional Council and the role it played in communicating with residents during the disaster and in the first days of the clean-up. The Scenic Rim Regional Council's disaster management Facebook page had about 180 likes before this event on Saturday, 26 January. Now it has about 3,300 followers and the community has really got on board with this method of communication with its council through disasters. This communication was a lifeline for many residents. Jeff McConnell, the Scenic Rim SES coordinator, and all of his crews deserve our heartfelt thanks and congratulations for the way in which they have assisted the whole Scenic Rim through this process.

There has been much damage to roads and bridges in the Beaudesert electorate including the Mount Lindesay Highway and the Cunningham Highway, which Minister Emerson visited two weeks ago. Unfortunately, some of the work undertaken by the council following the 2011 flood—work that was only recently completed—was destroyed. Bridges were lost and roads were torn up. At Tarome, Gap Creek ran so hard that it washed away a 50-metre section of road next to the culvert on the road. So the culvert survived, but there was just so much water coming down from the ranges that the road next to it was washed away and the creek has altered its course permanently.

The Scenic Rim council has started building temporary access tracks already to restore access to residents, but the task facing council and Main Roads will be a large one. I commend the Premier's approach to sort out with the Commonwealth the disaster recovery funding arrangements which recognise that there may be better ways to construct this infrastructure to see whether it can be made less vulnerable to future drastic weather events. In Logan City, many roads were cut and damaged—in particular, Camp Cable Road and the Mount Lindesay Highway, Cusack Lane and Teviot Road.

I thank all of the SES volunteers who went out and helped with the clean-up as soon as the flood receded but also during the flood event. They helped to rescue people or to make people safe in times of need. I thank all of the volunteers who volunteered at the community outreach centres and who assisted the department of communities to do their job. I thank the rural fire brigade, the local police officers and also staff of the Scenic Rim Regional Council who assisted the department of communities in their task.

I thank all of the councillors of the Scenic Rim Regional Council and Councillor Trevina Schwarz of the Logan City Council for their work and for their outreach into their communities during a time of need. I mention in particular Councillor Duncan McInnes and Councillor Rick Stanfield, who have made it their business to reach out to affected families and primary producers in the Fassifern Valley area. I also thank the Communities staff who have put so much time and energy into the community outreach centres on Tamborine Mountain, Canungra and other parts of the electorate. I thank Minister Tracy Davis as well for making those staff available.

I believe we need to look into ourselves now to see what we want to be and to make it happen. There has been a lot of destruction caused in this state as a result of this natural disaster. We need to facilitate our vision for the future of Queensland. For the Fassifern community, I know that they will already be looking to rebuild their local economy. The community know how to do it but they also need to know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Electricity and water prices are the major costs incurred by these businesses. The way electricity network costs have been increasing dramatically over the past years will make the decision to rebuild that much harder for some producers. I believe the government must look at relieving some of these pressures—electricity network charges—in particular to those areas and to those industries that have been so devastated by this natural disaster. Yes, a hand to clean up and restore assets is most welcome, but a clear signal that there is long-term support for these communities to help with electricity and water cost issues is essential, in my view, to those businesses becoming significant contributors to the local economy once again.

We also need to look at Queensland's readiness for natural disasters. It seems that disaster recovery arrangements very much depend on the Commonwealth's cooperation to provide assistance. We need to look at whether this is an ideal situation.

To the farmers of the Fassifern, to the residents of Tamborine Mountain, to all who have been affected in the Scenic Rim and Logan City Council areas, to all who have suffered loss and who need some help: the Queensland government stands with you and, as your member of parliament, I will stand with you as you recover and rebuild your community, your local economy and your lives. We extend our condolences to all who have suffered loss—loss of life, loss of livelihood. I join with all the other members who have spoken on this motion in offering my condolences to all affected. I commend this motion to the House.