



Speech by

Michael Hart

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Hansard Tuesday, 12 February 2013

MOTION: NATURAL DISASTER EVENTS OF 2013

 **Mr HART** (Burleigh—LNP) (9.01 pm): I, too, rise to speak in support of the motion moved today by our Premier. I start by adding the condolences and thoughts of the residents of the Burleigh electorate to those in all parts of Queensland who were affected directly or indirectly by the floods and devastation resulting from recent weather events. To those who lost loved ones, to those whose houses were inundated, to those whose crops and livestock were affected and to those who suffered financial hardship on behalf of the people of Burleigh, I offer you their love and support.

Tropical Cyclone Oswald formed on 21 January in the Gulf of Carpentaria. By Sunday, 27 January ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald was pounding South-East Queensland. North Bundaberg was being evacuated, with 100 homes flooded and an expectation of 200 more going under. In Gympie we were seeing rooftop rescues carried out in towns to its west—places like Widgee and Sexton. There were people reported missing and widespread flooding.

The mayor of the Sunshine Coast was warning residents to evacuate before it was too late, with storm surges and 125-kilometre-an-hour winds and torrential rain expected. In the Lockyer Valley the disaster coordination centre was activated and a very close eye was being kept on the Lockyer Creek and the Bremer River.

In Brisbane and on the Gold Coast TV weather broadcasts were telling us that we could expect winds of 100 kilometres per hour or more plus rainfall of between 200 and 300 millimetres in 24 hours. In fact, we saw 450 millimetres of rain in the Gold Coast hinterland during the two days prior to that event. As we have heard from other members today, over a metre of rain fell during the event. By 6.30 on that Sunday night, 2,900 houses and businesses on the Gold Coast were without power. By 8 pm in my household we were sitting in the dark listening to the wind outside building itself into a frenzy.

We have heard from the Premier the stark statistics of lives lost, houses inundated or destroyed, crops flattened and livestock lost. We have heard from the members for Bundaberg, Burnett, Gympie, Lockyer, Nanango, Beaudesert, Maryborough and the Deputy Premier and member for Callide of the destruction caused in their electorates by ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald. We have heard from the Treasurer the sort of economic impact this disaster will have on our state.

Because those affected are spread over a huge geographic area, unfortunately the media and therefore the general public tend to focus on the bigger, more graphic events while those in small pockets who are affected tend to be forgotten. If actually not forgotten in the bigger picture, individuals often feel overlooked or neglected when coping with their own recovery.

On the Gold Coast, as the member for Southport said, in general we dodged a bullet this time around. However, there are pockets of the Burleigh electorate where people felt overlooked or neglected and may have been frustrated with unfortunate delays, particularly with regard to the reconnection of powers. Residents such as residents of Evandale Crescent, Miami, could not understand why all the houses around them had power while they waited four days to be reconnected. Owners of small businesses such as Kylie Halpin, who has a bakery in Sixth Avenue, Palm Beach, had no power for five days. This small business, like hundreds of other small businesses around Queensland, beside losing

stock which has to be replaced generally at their cost, lost six days sales and therefore personal income for that period. But in true Queensland character, people like Kylie recover as best they can and get on with their life while generally worrying about others before themselves.

In commenting on these local victims of the weather events, we must commend the activities of the Energex teams that worked tirelessly to reconnect power to residents and businesses across our electorate and wider South-East Queensland. I am told the overall workload of the Energex teams in completing reconnections was close to double that of the 2011 floods, which is a notable effort that needs to be congratulated.

Other areas of local damage that went unnoticed by the media were at Fleays Wildlife Park where Steve Penrose and his team worked tirelessly for seven days to clear the damage to the landscape and infrastructure in the park. Their efforts enabled the park to reopen to the public at the end of that week. In Steve's words, 'They copped a pounding.' But his team just went about quietly and efficiently clearing and repairing. Minister Dickson and I toured Fleays last Tuesday and looked at the damage that remained to be cleaned up. Unfortunately, several large trees were brought down in the storm, one partially destroying the original platypus breeding enclosure which is something Fleays in the past has been famous for.

Of course, as seems to happen with all natural disasters such as this event, unexpected people and organisations come out of the woodwork to help in whatever way they can. I am sure members all agree that a vote of thanks needs to be given to our police, our firemen, our ambulance officers, our SES volunteers, our council workers and of course our Defence Force.

One of the standouts on the Gold Coast was Surf Life Saving Queensland. The Premier has already told us today that 15 helicopters rushed to help conduct rescues in Bundaberg. One of those was the Westpac rescue helicopter from the Gold Coast which, along with other units such as the EMQ unit, conducted numerous rescue missions.

One of the unusual reports we saw on TV in the images from Bundaberg was that of the emergency services crewman who flew into Bundaberg having never conducted a real rescue. He had had plenty of practice runs but no real life rescues. Then in one day he carried out the rescue of 50 people. That was a new record for EMQ. We can basically say that in the morning he was a novice and in the afternoon he was an expert. What a remarkable story.

As we heard from the member for Beaudesert, surf-lifesavers from local Gold Coast and Burleigh clubs helped with the clean-up and with checking on the welfare of the residents of Mount Tamborine who were severely impacted by the storms. Members of my surf club Pacific—in particular, Ken Clark, Jared Clark and Rachael Duke—were among those lifesavers who gave up their time to help other people. I am very proud of those lifesavers.

In this week just past, the Breaka Burleigh Surf Pro was staged at Burleigh Heads. During a visit to the event last Friday with the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games and member for Currumbin, the organisers asked us what sort of support they could offer. So over the past week and weekend they promoted the flood appeal around the contest and spectator areas. They also broadcast the minister's Australia Day II video. We want to congratulate them for doing that. In addition, at the end of the weekend they donated a signed surfboard for auction to the flood appeal.

It seems to be a special trait of Australians in general that whenever people in communities suffer, as they have done right down the coast of Queensland in this past month, the average person wants to help however they can, whether it be through physical effort or financially. I take this opportunity to thank Scott Gillies and his team at Surfing Queensland for the support of the wider professional surfing community.

History tells us that unfortunately we will have similar events in Queensland at some unknown time in the future. Through the heartfelt experience of all those who have suffered to whatever degree in this past month, we in this House owe it to every individual to give them the assurance that we will continue to improve the response and support to such events. I commend the Premier's motion to the House.