



Speech By
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DISASTER MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.56 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Disaster Management Amendment Bill. At its core, the objective of the bill is to create a new cabinet committee called the QDMC to replace the previous two committees, the DMCC and the State Disaster Management Group. The previous member who spoke in this debate said that the highest level of management has to be able to take control of a disaster. With the Premier chairing the Queensland Disaster Management Committee and with the Minister for Local Government, Community Recovery and Resilience as the deputy chair and their executives and various other ministers on that committee, all of those people in the room can take responsibility for making a decision and the capacity to implement that decision. I come from a community that had a most unusual set of circumstances happen in 2011 when there was a tragic loss of life. I was laying quadriplegic in hospital when I heard the news that Toowoomba had been flooded. It seemed strange and bizarre to me that Toowoomba could flood. I literally said to the nurse, 'They must have meant Townsville,' because how could Toowoomba flood given it is on top of a mountain? The reality was that it flooded because there were some severe restrictions through the centre of our town.

I note that state disaster management really revolves around prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, and I want to touch on a couple of elements of that. Toowoomba had been expanding for a number of years and the creek lines in Toowoomba had had more and more houses draining into them which meant that, when the weather event that we experienced happened, that caused a great deal of water to run into the creeks—that is, East Creek and West Creek and then later into Gowrie Creek—and the creeks were unable to deal with it. In terms of preparedness, we found that in Toowoomba there was a lack of ability to be able to hold back the water. There was also a lack of ability for the water to be able to pass unhindered through the creek lines. What have we done about that since coming to government? Talking specifically about prevention and preparedness, what has been our response in relation to the disaster that was experienced in Toowoomba? I am pleased to say that, with the help of the local government minister, we have been able to spend a lot of money on our creek lines, in particular the West Creek line, and millions of dollars have been spent jointly between ourselves and the local council.

Anybody who goes to the PCYC in my area can stand there and look at how much clearer the creek line will be in the future. Also, with the help of the Deputy Premier, we are spending \$45 million to build a road and also the bridge at one of the severe bottlenecks at Russell Street, which will be widened to more than double its original width and double its depth. That road will have four times its original capacity. This work is all about prevention. We will now know that, after a few more months work on the creek line, we will be able to prevent the type of disaster that hit the CBD of Toowoomba. In terms of the other creek line that goes into the electorate of my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, the member for Toowoomba South, the local council there has created an environment in which it can hold back the water there so that the flow of the creek will slow as it comes down towards the CBD, which will allow for better management of that water. These projects have been supported

by the state government as they create an environment in which our community can be much better prepared should there be floodwater coming from the suburbs to the south of Toowoomba.

In addition, a great deal of time, energy and effort has been spent on the existing Toowoomba range crossing. In 2011 and again in 2013 that crossing was almost closed to heavy goods traffic simply because weather events had hit both lanes so hard. Those lanes were built right on the edge of the escarpment. They had not been upgraded for some time and they could not take the quantity of water that had poured down upon them. They were closed for a period of time. The closure of the Toowoomba range crossing and the various other range crossings owing to the weather event in 2011 meant, effectively, that the delivery of fuel, food, general produce, industry, exports—pretty much everything moving east-west from the Darling Downs and western Queensland—were put at threat. That threatens our whole economy. It certainly threatens my town of Toowoomba and its capacity to be able to feed itself, fuel itself and maintain itself. Certainly, we came very close to losing connectivity between Toowoomba and the western downs and Brisbane and the port.

I think that a sensible government would not only look to fix the infrastructure, which is exactly what we have been doing, but also look at the management of that infrastructure that led to it being put into the situation that it was in and the disaster that unfolded. I think the structure that we have in this bill will make for a more streamlined system in terms of disaster management. Certainly, in terms of disaster preparedness, the work that this government has done on building infrastructure and preparing itself for a similar event in the future means that the people of Toowoomba will have a much greater level of resilience and a much greater level of reliability and connectivity of their road network to be able to get around town and connect to the capital and to the port.

The Minister for Local Government touched on the report of the Productivity Commission in which the suggestion was made that mitigation costs should be borne 75 per cent by the state and only 25 per cent by the federal government. I would be happy to support that proposal as long as the state's capacity to tax increases along a similar line and that the federal government stops taking Queenslanders' money, which does not allow us to be resilient to a natural disaster that is completely out of our control. From my point of view I think it is very important that people understand that the cost of repairing damage from a disaster and building in mitigation works after a disaster has been funded 50-50 between the state and federal governments. I think that we should certainly be looking to get back as much of our tax that is paid to the federal government so that we can prepare ourselves and defend ourselves in times of natural disasters.

I congratulate the people involved in the work that has gone into East Creek and West Creek at Toowoomba and the work that is going on at the moment on the Russell Street bridge. All of this work will reduce the impact of a flood event on my community in the future. However, particularly and most importantly, the construction of the second range crossing will add both a resilience and a capacity to be able to survive such a disaster, keep commerce flowing and keep the necessities of life flowing to the communities to the west and to the east.

From my point of view, I think this is a good bill. I think that the minister is to be commended for introducing it. It simplifies the emergency management structure. It means that the people who have both the capacity and the authority to make decisions will be sitting in the room so that we will be able to deal with natural disasters in a more effective and efficient way. Ultimately, that is what is in the LNP's DNA: efficiency, effectiveness and getting bang for your buck rather than a bunch of people having a talkfest with a multitude of committees.