




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Grantham Floods Commission of Inquiry, Report

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.37 am): Shortly after I became Premier in February the people of Grantham approached me with questions that had remained unanswered for the past four years. They wanted answers. They wanted the fulsome truth about what happened on that terrifying day in January 2011 when one of the most ferocious natural disasters in Queensland's history hit the Lockyer Valley, killing 21 people—12 of them in their town. They wanted closure and they wanted an ending to their story. My government acted quickly. My government was determined to give the Grantham survivors the opportunity to close the loop and get a full picture, get the truth about what happened and how it happened and what led to this catastrophe.

My government appointed highly respected QC Walter Sofronoff to head a commission of inquiry which would gather firsthand evidence from the survivors and carry out scientific testing to establish that truth. Last week Mr Sofronoff handed me the report of his commission of inquiry. What it shows ultimately is that no-one is to blame. No-one could have prevented what happened in Grantham that day and, importantly, no-one contributed to this catastrophe. Critically, no man-made structure made this disaster worse.

No-one who experienced the horrific events in Grantham on 10 January will ever forget them. No-one who lived through this event and certainly no-one who lost a family member, a friend or a neighbour will ever truly be able to put the past in the past. But I hope that their questions have finally been answered and I hope that they can now rest in the knowledge that the calamity that hit Grantham was an unpreventable act of Mother Nature.

Mr Sofronoff's thorough report gives all Queenslanders a unique and compelling insight into the events of 10 January 2011. It makes for confronting reading and recounts the true horror of that day with eyewitness reports—telling us stories that are important to our history and stories that should never be forgotten. It is a remarkable piece of forensic work.

There are stories like those recounted by Grantham resident Wendy Hodda, who faced an unthinkable choice as the floodwaters rose at a frightening force around her home on the Gatton-Helidon Road. Ms Hodda was at home with her elderly mother; her 10-year-old son, John; and her three grandchildren, Elisha, seven, Corban, five, and Mercedes, two. Warned by telephone that the evolving situation would soon become a life-or-death battle, Ms Hodda ran to a shed to fetch a ladder and, with the help of her 10-year-old son, helped the three younger children on to the roof. Tragically, she was forced to leave her mother, who walked with the aid of a frame, at the highest point she could find, sitting on the kitchen table. For several hours Ms Hodda and her child and grandchildren sat on their roof shielding themselves from the rain and the cold with a blanket. Her 86-year-old mother perished inside the house.

Lisa Spierling was at home in Grantham with her husband and four of their five children aged between four and 12. As the floodwaters rose, Mrs Spierling was advised by a neighbour to get to higher ground, although at this stage there was no sense of imminent danger. But almost immediately that changed, and Mrs Spierling and her three older children fled to the apparent safety of their neighbour's ute as her rescuer, Robert Wilkin, carried the youngest child. As they backed down her driveway, Mrs Spierling and her children in the ute's tray witnessed a wave of filthy brown water carrying debris approaching and urged Mr Wilkin to drive fast.

As they approached the railway embankment in central Grantham, Mrs Spierling—holding Mr Wilkin's baby and with her own four-year-old on her hip—shepherded her terrified children toward the only relatively high ground within reach. With the children screaming in fear, Mrs Spierling described how, when her two sons reached the top of the embankment, she threw the younger children toward them on the railway line to safety. She then climbed up herself. Shortly afterward, she guided her children to higher ground along the railway tracks at the local school. Confident her children were safe, she turned back toward the brown wave of water to help others reach safety.

Andrea Foyle was at her parent's house on the Gatton-Helidon Road with her children, her sister and her mother. The rapidly rising waters had trapped them in the house. As the waters continued to rise, Andrea called her husband, Matthew, to say goodbye—such was her conviction that she was about to die. She and her sister decided to get to the roof. Her sister climbed up first and Andrea passed her sons up. She then clambered up herself. The family were later among the first airlifted from the scene.

Brenda Ross lived on Anzac Avenue with her partner, Christopher Face, and her sister, Elizabeth Fraser. Her son, Joshua, lived in an adjacent property. Ms Ross had been in recent poor health and various illnesses had seen her in hospital. Ms Fraser was at the railways yards when she received a call from her sister. Ms Ross said the water was up to her knees. She was sitting on her bed. Joshua was with her. He spoke to his aunty. He sounded frightened. He said the lounge room was falling apart and the house was 'creeping and the walls were shaking'. Ms Fraser knew that this meant that the water was now too high and there was nothing she could do. When she tried to ring back, there was no answer. From the pub next door to the Ross residence, witnesses said they saw the house collapse into the water. Brenda Ross, Joshua Ross and Christopher Face perished inside the house.

The story of Grantham is not just about remarkable escapes and terrible losses. It is about the heroes who found incredible inner strength. It is about the emergency service crews, the helicopter crews and the swiftwater rescue crews who saved so many people. It is about people like 23-year-old Johnathon Klaassen, who, against advice, handed his telephone to his brother, took off his shirt and dived into the raging torrent when he realised two very small children were trapped in a house. He reached the house by swimming with the current and found a terrified little girl on a couch surrounded by filthy water. Clutching the traumatised girl, he heard another child's voice from a back room. He raised the alarm and the little boy's father found him cowering in a bathroom. A helicopter arrived and the children were winched to safety.

These are the kinds of stories that live on for the people of Grantham in their hearts and minds. They will never be truly relegated to the past and nor should we expect them to, but it is my true hope that this inquiry has helped heal wounds. It is my government's true hope that now that no stone has been left unturned in investigations into the Grantham tragedy questions critical to the survivors have now been answered. I thank Mr Sofronoff for his detailed, thorough, exhaustive investigation.