



Speech By  
**Hon. Shannon Fentiman**


**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

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Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2016

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Natural Disasters, Community Recovery**

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (10.12 am): It is hard to believe that it has been five years since Tropical Cyclone Yasi hit Queensland and nearly 10 years since Tropical Cyclone Larry crossed the Queensland coast near Innisfail on 20 March 2006. Of course, last weekend we acknowledged one year since Tropical Cyclone Marcia hit the Central Queensland coast, causing devastation across local communities.

In those 10 years since Cyclone Larry we have made significant improvements to the way we respond to natural disasters. Following Tropical Cyclone Larry, the department of communities invested in a number of dedicated regional community recovery support officers and appointed additional central office recovery staff to provide training and operational support to our regions. The Ready Reserve was also established to allow staff from across the Queensland government to be deployed quickly to a disaster affected area. We have also strengthened relationships with our recovery partners, other government agencies and NGOs.

Helping people to recover and the safety of our communities after a disaster is a responsibility that this government takes very seriously. That is why in the past year we have been committed to reforming Community Recovery and I am pleased to advise the House that we are delivering on that commitment. People now have greater access to information before, during and after a disaster. In addition to the Community Recovery 24-hour 1800 hotline, we now have a dedicated disaster management website, a Self Recovery app and a Recovery Twitter account.

We have also introduced a new grant, Immediate Hardship Assistance—Essential Services, for people who have lost one or more essential services, such as power, for more than five days. This grant is worth \$150 for a single person or up to \$750 for a family of five or more. We have dramatically changed how financial hardship assistance is provided to individuals and families. In 2006, the department handed out cash or cheques. Today, we are able to offer debit cards and electronic payments.

We will be progressively implementing even more improvements over the next 18 months. We are currently developing an online grants portal and payment system for people experiencing personal hardship following a disaster. This will be the first of its kind for any jurisdiction in the country and at the forefront of disaster relief administration worldwide. When introduced, our new service will allow people to apply, be assessed and receive payments direct to their bank accounts without having to leave their homes and without having to queue for hours at a recovery centre.

I would like to thank the hardworking Community Recovery staff for the work they do to help Queenslanders get back on their feet after a disaster. Whether it is providing quick and fast help on the ground or assisting people online, their work is truly invaluable.