




Speech By
Hon. Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Record of Proceedings, 10 May 2016

MOTION: NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF AND RECOVERY ARRANGEMENTS

 **Hon. WS BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services) (2.30 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion. It was very revealing to follow the newly minted Leader of the Opposition. After listening to his contribution earlier, I left unsure whether the opposition was supporting or opposing the motion. He seemed to be making points on both sides of the argument.

It was interesting to hear what was said by the Leader of the Opposition about his time as Treasurer and his role with the NDRRA. When talking about these budget provisions, when you look back at the particular budgets of 2013-14 and 2014-15 we can note that in 2013-14 there was \$1.5 billion or thereabouts in receipts from the Commonwealth where the Newman government at the time declared a \$488 million budget surplus. In the following year there is about \$1.16 billion in Commonwealth receipts followed by a \$542 million surplus supposedly declared.

The notion that these payments were not a significant component of the bottom line budget position of those two financial years and those two budgets is a misrepresentation of the fact. That central issue goes to the very purpose behind the Commonwealth's actions on these matters. The base actions of the federal government in deferring this funding to local councils trying to rebuild communities is a travesty, and the House should recognise that. It should recognise that this was a very deliberate mechanism put in by a Liberal National Party to deliberately undermine Queensland's efforts and Queensland's good reputation.

Under the NDRRA, the Australian government provides up to 75 per cent of funding, with 25 per cent from the Queensland government, for eligible natural disaster events. The state government provides this funding to councils and other state government agencies to recover and is required to submit a claim to the Commonwealth by 31 March each year to seek reimbursement. The Commonwealth rules also require the state to use the Queensland Auditor-General to validate and ultimately certify the claim to the Commonwealth.

We have played by the Commonwealth's own rules, submitting the 2014-15 claim for over \$1 billion on 24 March this year in good faith, ahead of schedule and certified by the Queensland Auditor-General as per the federal requirements. This billion dollar claim was for works that were already completed in 2014-15 dating back to events like the Brisbane floods; Cyclone Oswald, which devastated Bundaberg; Cyclone Ita in North Queensland; and the immediate recovery works following Cyclone Marcia in my own electorate.

This is money the Queensland government has already paid out to councils around the state to prioritise the recovery of our communities. This is money that we used to rebuild whole towns where houses were ripped off their stumps by floodwaters and Turnbull is refusing to cough up the dough. Historically the Commonwealth has always paid the amount due on the claim in the same financial year

it was lodged regardless of whether it had acquitted the claim or undertaken any assurance activities over it. This happened last year and the year before that, as was revealed in the previous government's budget positions. There was no reason for our government to expect that we would not receive our fair share of funding on time this year, as has happened in the past.

Since submitting the claim in March, Commonwealth officials have raised no issues in relation to the state's 2014-15 claim. Despite this, the Commonwealth has decided to provide Queensland with no reimbursement of funding in 2015-16 for natural disaster funding assistance. This is an unprecedented and shocking move by the Commonwealth that should have the entire House up in arms. Instead the Turnbull government's share, \$1 billion, is being delayed and split over the next two financial years for no apparent reason other than a politically motivated move to withhold money from Queensland.

We have not been consulted at any point or notified of this decision in the lead-up to the budget. In fact, the Palaszczuk Labor government was shocked on budget night to see the funding ripped out of our budget this year with no notice or consideration. We have not been advised of the rationale behind the decision to defer payment over two years and can only assume it is because the Commonwealth government could not get its own house in order. This is an outrage that every member of this House should be up in arms about. It is deliberately designed to disadvantage Queensland and we should be supporting the motion.

(Time expired)