




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Tropical Cyclone Debbie

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (3.12 pm): Much has been said during this sitting week with regard to the outstanding response across Queensland to Tropical Cyclone Debbie. I concur with all fellow members who have spoken of the incredible and outstanding efforts of our state's volunteers, state government agencies and 35 councils that were affected pre and post Cyclone Debbie.

In the days before 28 March and Debbie's eventual crossing of the coast in the Whitsundays, our Townsville local disaster management group stood up as the very real threat of Cyclone Debbie posed a significant risk to the city of Townsville. We dodged a bullet. Of course, many communities suffered as a result of Cyclone Debbie and the subsequent immense flooding.

I acknowledge some of the people I observed in the many briefings until the threat had passed: our Mayor, Jenny Hill, and in particular Mr Wayne Preedy, who had literally just started—day one—in his new role with Townsville council as team manager for emergency management. He comes with years of experience as emergency management coordinator at Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Our LDMG had all of the relevant agencies working together ensuring our city was prepared, with all plans in place.

I was also most impressed with our ADF. We are blessed to have the nation's largest army base in Townsville, led by an outstanding leader, Brigadier Chris Field, who leads the 3rd Brigade at Lavarack Barracks. Who better to lead the state's recovery operations than Brigadier Field? I also acknowledge our Premier for her leadership in working with the Australian government to have the brigadier released to lead Queensland's recovery.

Brigadier Field led Joint Task Force 661, JTF 661, which was part of a whole-of-government response to assist North Queensland's natural disaster response to Cyclone Debbie to enable recovery within the capacity of local and state governments. JTF 661 was a purpose-built Navy, Army and Air Force team, with headquarters at Lavarack Barracks. Team members were drawn from 45 units across our ADF and totalled 1,504 people. Fixed wing, rotary wing and naval—through HMAS *Choules* and *Melville*—assets were deployed extensively in and around North Queensland to inform government on situational awareness and to confirm safety of isolated people in communities.

I will give a quick snapshot of their operations. They delivered 165,000 litres of water to affected communities, cleared routes for civilian access, cleared significant storm surge and cyclone debris, conducted partnered works with SES and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, cleared public places, assisted with the evacuated 535 personnel from the Whitsunday area, transported medical supplies and flood barriers, and assisted with the removal of flood levees.

Queensland owes every ADF man and woman involved, including retired veterans from Team Rubicon, a great debt of thanks. I think fellow members will join me in commending each and every one of them.