




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Burdekin Electorate, Tropical Cyclone Debbie

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.18 pm): We have had Cyclone Larry, Cyclone Yasi and Cyclone Marcia and now we can add to that list of devastating cyclones Cyclone Debbie. When Cyclone Debbie hit Bowen and the Whitsundays on 28 March, the residents could not have imagined the destruction that was about to befall them or how their communities would be torn apart and the landscape changed forever. When I drove into Bowen after the cyclone, I was confronted with houses and businesses without roofs, blown-in shopfronts, trees and powerlines down and debris everywhere. The enormity of cleaning up and rebuilding the shattered community was almost overwhelming. Yet, in true Queenslander style, the residents rolled up their sleeves and started the long process of recovery. In the days following the cyclone, the conditions were horrendous. There was no water, no power, no food and the service stations were closed so there was no fuel. I remember the first night sleeping outside in the car park because of the hot and humid conditions. The thing that struck me was the quiet. There was no noise, there were no streetlights and, apart from the occasional car driving past, there was no movement.

During the course of my time in Bowen I visited many of the farms in the district, including the cane farms around Proserpine. It was nothing short of total devastation for these farmers. Machinery and packing sheds, coldrooms and irrigation equipment had been ripped apart with virtually 100 per cent of crops losses around the Bowen area. I remember walking around a cane farm on the outskirts of Proserpine and it was as if someone had come in with a giant set of shears and cut the cane off at waist level. It was devastating for the farmers and will significantly impact this year's harvest.

Following the cyclone the recovery effort commenced. I want to acknowledge the work performed by the Whitsunday Regional Council local disaster management group, led by Andrew Willcox, the SES and the Australian Defence Force. There was no more welcome sight than those personnel and their convoys rolling into town. I was going into the SES building twice a day during the week after the cyclone. Some of those personnel had not had a shower for days. It was terribly hot. They certainly suffered, but they kept coming back and going out every day to help with the clean-up.

I also want to acknowledge Ergon and all the energy sector workers brought in from outside the region for the work they did in restoring power to communities. We could almost hear the sigh of relief around the community when power was restored and residents were able to have their first hot shower and their first hot meal in days.

We should not forget that, after crossing the coast, Cyclone Debbie continued to wreak a path of destruction on inland communities such as Collinsville and Moranbah. A number of buildings were unroofed in Collinsville, including the local FoodWorks store, which, to this day, remains unopened, awaiting a decision on whether it will be demolished or rebuilt.

That is what I want to highlight. We still have business owners in this area who are endeavouring to reopen their businesses—people like Gordon and Anne Little, who operate the outdoor camping store in Bowen, or Terry Must from Arabon Seafoods, whose pontoon and seafood-processing shop was destroyed. The list goes on and on. I visited Ben Martin's mango farm on the outskirts of Bowen. His mango trees were snapped off at ground level. Ben told me that he now faces a four- to five-year wait for new trees to grow and produce fruit. This is a long-term recovery process.

Perhaps the most devastating impact though was on those farms that border the Don River. Floodwaters following Cyclone Debbie overflowed the banks causing massive erosion to several farms that may never again be utilised for production. Wayne and Leanne Born from Koorelah Farms lost 60 acres with in excess of two metres of topsoil washed away across the entire block. Jim Davies, on the other side of the river, lost his entire lime orchard and will likely lose a substantial number of mango trees. These communities need assistance. I know that, whilst the NDRRA scheme has been activated, there is still a lot more work that needs to be done to get these communities back on their feet.

Cyclone Debbie will go down in history as one of the most destructive systems ever to hit Queensland. We should not forget that the recovery is a long-term process that requires dedicated, ongoing community and government support. I know Brigadier Chris Field is doing an outstanding job coordinating the recovery effort and that this work will go on for some time yet. I will continue to work with my affected communities to ensure our businesses and our farmers are back up and operating as soon as possible. After driving into Bowen last week and seeing the tomato seedlings back in the fields, I know this process has begun.