




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Record of Proceedings, 11 May 2017

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Tropical Cyclone Debbie, National Parks

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (10.09 am): In the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Debbie, an army of volunteers came from across the state to assist Queensland Parks and Wildlife rangers with the recovery effort in our national parks. As we know, the Whitsunday region's national parks and the iconic Whitehaven Beach were among the worst hit areas. Thanks to the tireless work of staff and volunteers, the tourism industry and others who rely on our national parks have now begun to get back on their feet.

This dedicated recovery effort has enabled businesses to reopen their doors sooner and kept locals employed when they needed it most. The iconic Hill Inlet track and lookout on Tongue Point was open to visitors just eight days after Debbie had stripped and felled almost all of the trees. Less than two weeks after Debbie crossed the coast, Parks and Wildlife staff also had 90 per cent of camping grounds and 30 per cent of walking tracks up and running—just in time for the Easter weekend. This was a magnificent achievement. They had the colossal task of stabilising and recreating 350 metres of beach at Whitehaven to make it safe for visitors and return what Debbie had taken. Due to the short time frames and the constraint of having to work at low tides, crews worked in shifts around the clock to get the job done. Some 10,000 cubic metres of eroded sand was pushed back up the beach. The most badly damaged trees had to be mulched.

Meanwhile, the Whitsunday Islands' fringing reefs were also inspected. Teams were deployed to undertake reef health impact assessments at popular snorkelling locations. Information on the condition of the surviving coral was collected and feedback provided to dive operators. Most of the 90 public moorings were repaired within two weeks to ensure structural integrity post cyclone. In the three-week period after the storm, the clean-up operation involved a virtual army of people and machinery—six departmental vessels, two chartered vessels, 26 Airlie Beach marine and terrestrial staff, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority officers and 42 staff from northern and central regions, some from as far away as Cooktown and Mossman. They all pitched in. I want to acknowledge the hard work of staff and volunteers and the visitors who continue to visit the Whitsundays whose efforts are supporting the communities impacted by Tropical Cyclone Debbie.