




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Tropical Cyclone Debbie

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.53 am): I want to continue speaking about Tropical Cyclone Debbie, which well and truly left its mark on Queensland. With Tropical Cyclone Debbie covering almost 2,000 kilometres from Ayr to the border, few areas in this state were not touched by this monster of a system, although some areas in Townsville would have welcomed a little more rain as a result of this system and perhaps that would also have been the case for areas in the west and the south-west. But in areas along the coast, it was certainly a case of far too much rain, too much wind and too much storm damage. Tropical Cyclone Debbie delivered a large degree of harm, damage and destruction and left other areas untouched. The south-east, Wide Bay, Central Queensland and, of course, North Queensland were all affected in one way or another. Townsville was cut off and isolated by flash flooding and some dams were left overflowing.

During the course of the cyclone, I was in Townsville, having agreed to attend an engagement up there. I was marooned in Townsville for three days waiting to get out but, while I was there, I took the opportunity to visit the electorate of Burdekin with the member for Burdekin, Dale Last, and various other parts of North Queensland. I saw farms and animals wiped out. I saw racecourses ruined, businesses inundated and shops flooded. There was immense damage to roads and infrastructure and this morning in this place many tales have been recounted about that.

As I said earlier, cyclones are not a time for politics. The Premier and I both travelled to the hardest hit areas to offer our support on a unity ticket. We visited Mackay, and I thank the member for Mackay and the member for Mirani for their hospitality on the day that we were there. As I said earlier, along with Prime Minister Turnbull, opposition leader Shorten and the member for Dawson, George Christensen, I also witnessed firsthand the aftermath of the trouble caused by Tropic Cyclone Debbie in Proserpine, Airlie Beach, Mackay and Bowen. Indeed, I spent some considerable time with Brigadier Chris Field discussing his plans for the reconstruction of those towns that were so devastated.

As I said, we know that Queenslanders are an inspirational and resilient bunch. I am sure we will hear stories from the member for Whitsunday and the member for Burdekin particularly in relation to some of the experiences that they had and some of the work that has gone on in their areas. I remember visiting a small motel on the outskirts of Airlie Beach. The fence had come down, the roof had come off, but the operators were still doing their best to house the hardworking emergency services workers who were staying there. They will have to excuse me if their name does not come immediately to mind, but I am sure the member for Whitsunday will mention their name. They were very generous in their hospitality. I think the member for Whitsunday has probably spent more than a little time talking to them over the past weeks. All Queenslanders stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Bowen, Proserpine, Airlie Beach, the Whitsunday islands, Mackay, the Logan and Scenic Rim areas and all the areas in between that were damaged—farmers and the business operators who suffered as a result; people who watched their topsoil wash away, their roofs peel off and their businesses flood.

I again pay tribute to the dedicated military and emergency services personnel and power workers who worked incredibly hard under trying circumstances to restore vital and essential services. Indeed, for the period that I spent in the area, which was some three weeks following the cyclone, you could not drive on a road somewhere in North Queensland and not see an Ergon or Energex truck and people putting back up powerlines and continuing the hard work of restoring power. The days, the weeks and the months ahead will continue to be hard for many people. Our prayers and thoughts are with all of those who have been affected. I want to thank particularly those members of my team whose electorates were smashed by the cyclone: Jon Krause at Scenic Rim, Mark Boothman in Albert, Jason Costigan in the Whitsundays, Dale Last in Burdekin and Ros Bates in Mudgeeraba. I know that others have contributed. I know that those members worked tirelessly and are still lending support and assistance where possible.

It is also important to acknowledge the mayors. On a number of occasions I spoke to Andrew Willcox in the Whitsundays. He personally put in a tremendous number of hours leading the disaster recovery group. The exhaustion was pretty well evident on his face, but he still fronted up every day and had to deal with the media, which perhaps is almost as tiring a task as dealing with the disaster management group recovery operation. I also acknowledge Greg Williamson in Mackay, Luke Smith in Logan—who activated his disaster management group and did a great job—and Greg Christensen in the Scenic Rim. When I visited with Jon Krause a local horticultural producer in the Scenic Rim I asked, 'Where has all the dirt gone?' He said, 'Mate, most of it is probably in your electorate.' It all washed down the creeks and streams and down the Brisbane River. That is a long way. It may well have passed by the green banks in Clayfield. I also acknowledge the mayor of Isaac and Margaret Strehlow in Rockhampton. Thank goodness the floodwaters were not as high in Rockhampton as it was thought they were going to be.

That is a good segue to refer to the great work of the member for Indooroopilly, together with the federal government, on the Yeppen floodplain, which was expected to be able to prevent Rockhampton being cut off from the south by floods up to 10 metres. That worked and communications were maintained, whereas previously Rockhampton would have been cut off. That was great work by the federal government and the then state government in investing in that infrastructure and seeing it through to completion.

Cyclone Debbie was a monster. It was slow moving and the damage caused was considerable. I mentioned the story of Jeff McConnell, an SES worker whose own house flooded, who had to text his kids to let them know that the flood was coming but who carried on with his duties. I say to Jeff and to everyone impacted by this beast of a storm, we will not forget you over the weeks and months ahead.

I want to particularly thank the people at the Yatala Pies shop. We visited them after the floodwaters had receded and saw the work that was going on—the volunteer work that was going on as well as the work by staff. There were no hot pies. It was 6 April—my birthday. We returned there a couple of weeks later and saw the business booming. In fact, up to 6,000 people a day are now going through the Yatala Pies shop. I say to anyone going past that way, if you want to taste something new and different, partake in a cyclone pie with pineapple on the top—just go light on the tomato sauce is my recommendation. Airlie Beach is rebuilding; it needs to for the tourism trade.

Mr Costigan: Don't forget Proserpine!

Mr NICHOLLS: I have not forgotten Proserpine, member for Whitsunday. No doubt the member for Whitsunday will be remarking on the group of people who volunteered to go out and fix people's places, Team Rubicon, former members of the military and paramedics who made themselves available to help after emergency services had gone through. They did a fantastic job. We need to see category C funding come through. From my own experiences after Tropical Cyclone Marcia and the recovery from Yasi, there are delays in getting that money through. I say to all parties involved that they must get their act together and deliver funding. It does require proper documentation and speedy assessment by the authorities. We will see Queensland rebuild. Queensland has rebuilt before. Nothing could have prepared the people we visited, like Ash and Fran at Draper's Siding who have lived in their house for 22 years, for the devastation, but they still show the resilience to turn up and get back on their feet again. Like the rest of Queensland, they will rebuild.

Whilst it has been tough times for those affected, from the north to the south and down into New South Wales, we know that Queenslanders are tough and they will rebound. Talking about being in North Queensland, one thing that makes life even harder for the people of North Queensland is the fact that unemployment in the north under this Palaszczuk Labor government is getting worse and worse. This morning we heard from the Treasurer. He is fond of quoting figures, but he did not quote this one: in Townsville unemployment is officially 11.7 per cent and the youth unemployment rate is over 21 per cent, having leapt from 16.8 per cent a year ago. Around 1,700 young people from the Townsville region

have lost their jobs. We are seeing crime continuing to explode. Last week when I was there our very own candidate for the seat of Townsville, Casie Scott, found a thug on the run from police hiding in the downstairs toilet of her house. That is a sign of the increasing lawlessness that is affecting Townsville under this soft-on-crime Labor government that has created a revolving door of young offenders.

There are also issues around power and water supply that have not been solved by this current Palaszczuk Labor government—issues that will not be solved by it, issues that will only be solved by a Nicholls LNP government. We commit to starting work on fixing those problems within 100 days of being elected, should we be so fortunate.