




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 12 February 2019

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Weather Events, Floods

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (2.10 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, as you know yourself, in describing what our Townsville community has endured over the past two weeks, let alone what they have ahead of them in terms of recovery, it is hard to know where to start. Before I go on, I must address the comments that the Leader of the Opposition made this morning during question time. She used that time to question our Premier, who showed great leadership during the floods, on the water releases from the Ross River Dam. The LNP is ignorant of the facts. I did not see LNP members at any LDMG meetings. While people are still hurting in my community, the LNP members are using the time of this parliament to muckrake and score cheap political points. It has been noted by many in my electorate that the LNP's behaviour in a time of crisis is disgraceful. I will take it as far as saying that it is un-Australian. The members opposite should hang their heads in shame.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as you have also witnessed, what I witnessed at the Townsville disaster centre and the LDMG in the lead-up to the peak of the flooding and now in recovery mode was truly outstanding leadership and all local, state and non-government agencies working together cooperatively to do their very best to ensure that my community and public safety was a priority. From the start, I acknowledge the outstanding leadership of Townsville Mayor Jenny Hill, as the chair of the LDMG; Mr Wayne Preedy, the local disaster coordinator; and the acting CEO, Mr Mike Chiodo.

The response from the Townsville City Council is hard to put into words. On Sunday at 5 pm I walked into the centre to find Mayor Hill speaking to 60 staff, giving them an opportunity to go home to their families before the peak of the floods. They all chose to stay. In the lead-up to the peak of the flood that Sunday night, over 800 council staff had been working in crews 24 hours a day, manning 18 sandbagging centres and responding to many other calls for assistance. On that fateful night, I saw the immense bravery of all of those assisting the thousands of people who were escaping unprecedented floodwaters. I would like to thank our volunteers, our mighty ADF and our emergency service for their amazing efforts in helping those in need. In recent days, along with the Premier, I visited the evacuation centre at Heatley where families have spoken of the outstanding rescue efforts of those volunteers and organisations. That night they saved many lives. No words can ever thank them enough.

Needless to say, the North Queensland spirit is alive and well. As a community, what knocks us down does indeed make us stronger. In recent days, having been on the ground in Idalia assisting friends and families, street after street, house after house, I have seen mates helping mates to move flooded and damaged personal belongings on to their footpaths. The area looks like a war zone. Many other suburbs have been severely damaged. Although accommodation is needed for many people in the evacuation centres, thousands of other families have been displaced and are staying with friends or families. In fact, it would be difficult to ascertain how many people are staying with others. At the height of the flood, I had 20 people in my own home, albeit visiting after a family tragedy. Many had their accommodation at risk in Aitkenvale and Mundingburra.

Having such a protracted rain and flooding event means that recovery will be slow, so we will need to put our shoulders to the wheel to help lift our community back up. Many sports facilities have been ruined or damaged, so our weekends can be put to good use in helping to clean up. We know that each home is being assessed by teams from QFES and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. Ergon and the ETU are working very hard to ensure that homes are safe before electricity is restored to those who are still without power. That task alone is huge. I am grateful to the number of people from across Queensland who have arrived to help.

Yesterday, the bulk clean-up by the ADF began. Where would we be without our mighty ADF? I consider them each truly remarkable as many members of the ADF had their own homes damaged. I also thank the Red Cross, the Salvos, UnitingCare, the St Vincent de Paul Society and the many other community organisations that helped. Just months after fighting fires in Central Queensland, members of our state's Rural Fire Service are arriving in droves to help clean streets and homes. Amazing people are arriving from right across Queensland. All members should be proud of the SES and volunteers in their communities who are turning up.

We have a huge infrastructure task ahead of us as well as helping many local businesses get back on their feet. More help is on the way. This morning, Minister Fentiman—who I wrote to seeking assistance for the Townsville Business Development Centre, which has been flooded with calls of assistance—has responded by setting up a small business recovery centre in Townsville. I thank the minister.

Speaking of businesses, the corporate generosity is also hard to put into words. It is exceptional. I am grateful for those donations and they will all be needed. I thank our Premier and all the ministers for being on the ground in Townsville.

(Time expired)