




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Record of Proceedings, 12 February 2019

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Floods

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (2.25 pm): To quote the iconic work of Dorothea Mackellar, ‘I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains, of ragged mountain ranges, of droughts and flooding rains.’ In recent weeks, North and North-West Queenslanders have longed for sun. We have seen the sweeping plains turn to inland seas, mountain ranges transformed into waterfalls and we have indeed seen flooding rains on a scale never before seen in the north of this state. As we celebrated Australia Day, in the north the skies began to open. What was initially celebrated soon turned to heartbreak. Over the ensuing 10 days we saw rainfall that was measured in metres. I know at my house at Alligator Creek I measured 1.5 metres in 10 days, with some areas in North Queensland measuring in excess of two metres of rain.

By 3 February, a week after the rain had started, Townsville was facing a disaster. The Ross River Dam was approaching 42.99 metres, or 247.6 per cent, and drastic steps were needed. Like an unfolding nightmare, that water had to go somewhere and, unfortunately, it spread out across Townsville suburbs downstream from the dam impacting almost 20,000 homes. Imagine the horror of waking up in your bed to find yourself lying in floodwater. The fact that more people did not lose their lives in this event is nothing short of a miracle and is testament to the emergency services and Defence Force personnel who, along with volunteers, risked their lives to save their fellow Queenslanders. Streets where cars usually jostled for position became waterways with a stream of boats ferrying people to safety, dump trucks became rescue vehicles, roofs became places of safety and Queenslanders became heroes.

I have seen the devastation in Townsville firsthand. Together with the Leader of the Opposition and the deputy leader I spent a few days last week helping with the clean-up—and what a heartbreaking task that was. To carry out kids toys, bedding, personal possessions and furniture and pile it on the footpath was both humbling and distressing. Many residents have lost everything—their homes, their cars, their possessions and, in some cases, their jobs. That heartbreak extends to the many small business owners who face financial ruin. They have seen their livelihood swept away in the floodwaters and now face an uncertain future.

Take the small town of Giru on the northern banks of the Haughton River. The locals there have seen their fair share of floods but this was one of the biggest. They are a tough lot in Giru and when I visited them last week they were getting on with the job of cleaning up, without fuss and without complaint—just as the residents were in Majors Creek, Woodstock, Groper Creek and on Rita Island. Just as we commit to help the people of Townsville rebuild, we must ensure that people in those small communities also get the help they need and deserve.

In recent days we have seen the disaster unfolding in the north-west of our great state. From the pain of drought to the agony of flood in such short time; it is proof indeed that we live in a state that can be generous in its gifts and brutal in its cruelty. The loss of up to 300,000 head of cattle in the north-west

defies comprehension, with the impact of these losses to be felt for years to come. The recovery in this area needs to be swift, decisive and ongoing. Our farmers have gone from drought to floods and small communities, like Julia Creek, Richmond, Hughenden and Cloncurry, need our support if they are to survive this catastrophe.

For too many years we have seen the Bruce Highway closed by flooding and, in the past few days, we have seen thousands of people stuck on the side of what is supposed to be a national highway. People who were eager to return to their homes or who were trying to get in and help loved ones were left to sleep in cars and pray for the waters to fall. Plantation Creek at Ayr is a perfect example. In 2019 there is absolutely no reason half a metre of water should block the Bruce Highway, there is no reason so many motorists should be stranded and there is no reason vital supply routes to devastated communities should be threatened.

In conclusion, I offer my thanks and the thanks of all Queenslanders to all those who assisted in this disaster and who will continue to play their part in the recovery. Their efforts are truly appreciated and their selfless commitment to helping fellow Queenslanders shall be remembered long after the last of the mud is washed away.