




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Weather Events, Floods

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (2.20 pm): Today we have heard a lot about the impacts of torrential rainfall in Townsville and North-West Queensland. There are several of us sitting in this chamber who have experienced what it is like to have a major catastrophic event in their electorate or, in fact, in their region—bushfires, cyclones, storms and floods—and we all know how it impacts upon our communities. It is now our turn in Townsville: more than a year's worth of rain falling in just eight days. I would like to thank those members on both sides of the chamber who contacted me and wished me and my family all the very best as the rising floodwaters forced us from our home. We were the lucky ones in our street. We did not get the flooding into our house. However, it snuck in by stealth through an overflowing toilet. With eight days of no power, Jackie and I would lie in our bed at night unable to sleep with the guilt of our place being saved and yet all around us our friends and neighbours were emptying their life possessions onto the footpath to be later collected and dumped.

Each day would start and end with a meeting of the local disaster management committee headed by the mayor and accompanied by the core essential team. This group of high-performing professionals guided the city through one of the most devastating times. I would like to acknowledge all the members of the local disaster management committee. We have heard the Leader of the Opposition acknowledge many, many people and I would like to do the same. The highest praise must go to Mayor Jenny Hill. With her stoic leadership and strong determination, she led the city through a time of disaster. I would also like to acknowledge my brother Peter who took four days off from his work in Darwin, flew to Townsville and helped me help others clean up. Thanks, mate. We are a garrison city and thank God for the men and women in camos who have been absolutely astounding. I thank Brigadier Scott Winter for all the recovery work his thousands of troops are performing across our city right now. They will concentrate their efforts in the western region as of tomorrow.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of unsung heroes in this story. There is the flotilla of tinnies who started a makeshift boat ramp at the intersection of the Bruce Highway and city access road. I bet the Minister for Main Roads did not expect that! Then there is my mate Gary Browning and his aviation fire rescue teams. These are the fireys at the airport. They worked a 30-hour straight shift, rescuing 250 men, women and children in pitch black darkness at night, pulling them to safety. In a scene a bit reminiscent of the *Titanic* movie, at around 2 am an elderly woman, so exhausted, resorted to blowing a whistle to attract the attention of those fireys. They rescued her and then led her to safety. Wrapped in a blanket the woman was then comforted by ambos. The fireys then returned to the same street to rescue neighbours of that woman. The kitchen bench where the woman was sitting was by that stage underwater. These rescuers are humble people saying they are just doing their job, but we all know they are more than that.

Now comes the hard work—the clean-up. Those of us who have been through disasters like this remember how our communities come together. They rise above all else. While I was out helping clean homes I had several people break down and cry on my shoulder. Losing everything, they were still

thankful they were alive. Their lives are in a scatter, not knowing what to do or where to start. They stare with hollow eyes into their houses; inch deep mud on the flood and black debris lines across the walls a constant reminder of the flood level. Some of those black lines were well above my head.

An army of volunteers swarm through the houses removing their ruined possessions and respectfully placing those possessions on the footpath. I think the thing that got me the most was the Oncology Children's Foundation teddy that was placed amongst the pile of possessions out the front of someone's home. Still other volunteers walked amongst volunteers handing out freshly made sandwiches, muffins or bread rolls. Someone else—a stranger—was handing out bottled water. Whether they are the rescuers, the volunteers or sandwich makers, they are the foundation rocks of our Townsville community which we are built upon. We thank you, Townsville, because we stand together.