




Speech By
Hon. Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

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MOTION

Queensland Floods

 **Hon. ML FURNER** (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities) (2.00 pm): Unfortunately on many occasions, as Queenslanders we have become accustomed to many natural disasters, and the recent flood event in February and March was no exception. It was truly unprecedented. I have been around long enough to have seen the 1974 floods. As a young lad I helped out with the evacuation there as well as the 2011 flood, but I do not think anyone was prepared for this particular flood event. We have seen thousands of homes and businesses inundated across 19 local government areas and, sadly, I put on the record like every other speaker, our deepest condolences for the 13 lives that were lost in this event.

In my electorate of Ferny Grove, we saw many sporting organisations inundated, like Pure Tennis not far from my office. We are there to assist them in their time of need.

In my portfolio, we saw farmers, in some cases for the second time, affected by flood. The Palaszczuk government always stands by our primary producers, and we will on this occasion again. We will stand shoulder to shoulder and support them as we have done through natural disasters year after year. That support includes things like assistance through, for the first time, an online damage survey. I must put on record my appreciation of AgForce and the Queensland Farmers' Federation who supported the survey which enabled primary producers to assess and provide information to us, to make sure we are well prepared to assist them through their needs.

It was good to see out in the Lockyer Valley my good friend, the current member for Wright, Scott Buchholz who even commended the Palaszczuk government last week on our response to, and assistance for, this natural disaster. It is good to hear there are people out there, not only primary producers but also other members of parliament supporting us.

It was worthwhile going to Gympie as well and I know the member for Gympie is well versed in what occurred in that particular town. The flood event there was the second highest on record. It was great to get out to Nolan Meats to speak to Terry Nolan about the damage that occurred to his business. He is probably the largest employer in that town. We will stand with him and those in Gympie and surrounds to support them. Terry estimates \$15 million in damage to that particular business, including product. Nevertheless, two days earlier than the day of our visit, he was already processing cattle—I think 400 head he commented at the time—so it just shows you the resilience of businesses like Terry Nolan's.

We also went to the Lockyer Valley and visited Qualipac where we spoke to Troy Qualichefski and his team, and also to Mitch Brimblecombe out at Moira Farm. These are resilient people. You wonder sometimes how they bounce back when they experience these weather events, but nevertheless, they are bred tough up here in Queensland. As Queenslanders, we are there to provide support through the Queensland Rural Industry Development Authority through grants and assistance.

We have activated a \$559 million assistance package that provides eligible producers recovery grants of up to \$75,000. Those grants have been offered, as I said, through QRIDA and, as of last Monday, they received 998 applications and already approved nearly \$1.9 million in assistance, not only to primary producers but also to small businesses.

Once again, as a government, we are there when these natural disasters hit. These are the times when people suffer the financial losses and hardship that governments stand up and support them. Underlying that is true optimism. I see out in those fields of perished crops or topsoil that has been washed away that optimism in the willingness to go back and start farming again, to start their business recovery. That is the experience of our true salt-of-the-earth primary producers in Queensland. That is why I am really proud to have QRIDA by their side to assist them in times of need. We went down to the offices of QRIDA just after the event to make sure they were well prepared. They had a good team of people ready and willing to stand up to get this funding and support out the door.

QRIDA are very well versed in providing assistance, having dealt with more than their fair share of natural disasters, including the monsoonal event west of Townsville in 2019. They continue to support not only primary producers but also small businesses and businesses alike through the typical natural disasters, and we always will.