




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 16 March 2022

MOTION

Queensland Floods

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (2.35 pm): I rise to add my voice in support of this motion. Fortunately my part of the Gold Coast was spared, but I know I speak on behalf of the entire community I represent as I extend my sympathies to all of those who have lost so much and my thanks to our emergency services. Seeing the most populated part of our state go through this yet again is difficult to comprehend. In that week Brisbane recorded 790 millimetres of rain. For comparison, in a typical year London will only experience 690 millimetres. The loss of life that that deluge led to across the region is tragic and I offer my condolences to the families of all of those people and to the enormous number of people who have lost their homes and so many of their possessions.

As shadow environment minister I want to raise a couple of points on this catastrophe: firstly, waste and then some of the broader environmental issues. Floods create a lot of rubbish. In 2011 I helped with the clean-up in Ipswich, alongside my dad. We borrowed my uncle's Dingo digger and dump truck and headed into Basin Pocket. It was devastating. The Bremer River had gone over two-storey-high houses. We were filling up the truck scooping up people's entire lives to take to the tip at Swanbank. I remember waiting in line for hours to get rid of a single load.

A decade on, I now have a ute and I was back at it with the very hardworking member for Currumbin, helping collect rubbish from some of the flooded houses in Elanora. These floods will create even more debris overall than 2011. Brisbane's Lord Mayor, Adrian Schrinner, said last week that the clean-up will involve a year's worth of landfill which is already tens of thousands of cubic metres of waste.

I want to thank my opposite number, the Minister for the Environment, because on the Monday after that terrible weekend I contacted her directly about waste levy exemptions for affected councils after hearing from the member for Glass House about his constituents in Woodford who were being charged at some tips to throw out their flood damaged items from their ruined homes. The state government rightly gave an exemption for 12 affected local government areas so they will not be charged \$85 a tonne for flood related waste, which will make the clean-up easier.

In terms of the broader environmental impact, we will not know much of this for some time, but we are already seeing some extraordinary damage. On our rivers and creeks Maritime Safety Queensland has confirmed there has been over 1,100 tonnes of material cleaned up from the river's surface so far, with workers and volunteer groups pulling out pontoons, jetskis, yachts, trees and many other, sometimes unusual, objects, but clearly there will be much more below the water's surface.

Beaches from north to south have had debris wash ashore, with the people on K'gari, or Fraser Island, putting out a massive call to arms to help clean up the enormous amount of waste that has washed ashore there. There is also the problem of polystyrene, with huge pontoons made of this washing up along our 300 kilometres or so of beaches. Volunteers are spending countless hours trying

to clean up these tiny beads. They have a huge impact on our marine life and I urge the state government and councils to look at ways they can support these clean-up efforts and any alternatives to polystyrene.

Healthy Land & Water has also said that there will be five to 10 times the amount of mud and silt washed into Moreton Bay from the Brisbane River than in the 2011 floods, which could mean up to 10 million tonnes of sediment in Moreton Bay alone. It has also stated that it believes that this is due to there being no large-scale riverbank revegetation projects in the decade since the last major flood events.

We will not know the full impacts for some time to come, but it is clear that the long-lasting environmental damage will be extensive. I implore the state government to ensure these impacts are recorded and measures are taken to prevent future impacts. We cannot prevent natural disasters, but we can do more to make sure our environment, our river systems and our infrastructure are as strong and as resilient as they can be to minimise the effects of future events.

Climate change does mean these disasters will happen more and more often and with greater severity. The latest IPCC report released as these floods were occurring said within this century we will see one-in-100-year flood events occurring several times a year. The state government is not even halfway towards its 2030 emissions reduction target, which is almost identical to the federal government's, and there are serious doubts about their pathway to net zero. We need practical action to help manage and minimise these disasters and to do our bit for Queensland to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There are lessons from this that must be learned: on disaster communications from the top down, on our planning laws, on mitigation work and on betterment projects.