




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 23 February 2023

MOTION OF CONDOLENCE: ARNOLD, MR M; DARE, MR A; MCCROW, MS R

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (11.43 am): I rise to contribute to the condolence motion for the Wieambilla local Alan Dare, Constable Rachel McCrow and Constable Matthew Arnold. Alan Dare and his wife Kerry lived in the Warrego electorate about halfway between Tara and Chinchilla. Rachel and Matthew were police officers stationed at the Tara Police Station in my electorate. Both had served as general duties officers at the Dalby Police Station prior to working at Tara.

There is not one single factor that explains this incident—there are multiple contributing factors—and no doubt more will come to light once the Coroner reports his findings. The horrific incident that happened at Wieambilla on the afternoon of 12 December 2022 left six people deceased. It touched the soul of the nation. Police officers Constable Rachel McCrow and Constable Matthew Arnold and a neighbour, Alan Dare, all lost their lives on that fateful afternoon. What happened is not something that Australians expect in this country. The quiet rural area of Wieambilla has become etched in history—a history which is difficult for the people who live there to understand.

On behalf of the communities of Wieambilla and Tara, I wish to pass on our deepest sympathy to Rachel's family and friends, especially Judy, Wayne and Samantha, and Rachel's dog Archibald. Our deepest sympathy is with Matthew's family and friends, especially his triplet brother James and sister Hayley, and parents Terry and Sue. To lose a sibling is a tragedy; to lose a triplet is indescribable. Similarly, our deepest sympathy is with Kerry Dare and her family—Kerry is watching today—Corey, Renee and Rose and their families and extended friends. It is incredibly tough on the Dare family. They have lost their rock Alan, who was a giant to them, a big man who did little things and loved his Ford motor vehicles. These three families are in our thoughts and will be for many years to come.

Constables Keely Brough and Randall Kirk survived that day. Randall managed to flee back to his vehicle and alert police command. Keely was able to hide in the nearby bushland. Both Randall and Keely and their families need our support, and they are always in our thoughts. What they have experienced has been horrific and it will be with them for the rest of their lives. There are 16 other police officers from Miles, Chinchilla, Dalby and surrounding stations who had to lead the extraction team to the property on that afternoon. They too need our support and we should remember their incredibly brave efforts on that day.

Rachel and Matthew were police officers that every community wants. They took community policing and respect for the police to a higher level. They were well respected in the Tara community for the way in which they did their job—so much so that a few days after the incident there were some individuals who were wanted for questioning about their criminal behaviour who came up to the police station, laid their tribute flowers and proceeded to hand themselves in to the police voluntarily. Many Tara locals have told me stories about how helpful and kind both Rachel and Matthew were to them with their day-to-day police matters.

A further crime incident occurred in Tara in January this year. It again shook the fabric of the Tara community. Regrettably, over the weekend of 11 and 12 February, bushfires destroyed 18 structures, many of which were homes, in the Wieambilla district area. I also want to acknowledge the impact of

those fires on the Montrose area. Sadly, media reports indicate that the bushfires may have occurred due to alleged arson. When it comes to Tara and Wieambilla, these communities just do not seem to catch a lucky break. I was in Tara a week ago and I can advise the House that there are still flowers being laid outside the Tara Police Station. This will continue for a long time.

I want to acknowledge those members of this parliament from both sides of the House who at the time reached out personally to me and my office. Your support is greatly appreciated. Tara has lost two young, bright police officers, and Wieambilla has lost 18 structures and homes in a bushfire and a local resident in just three months.

If six lives were lost due to a flood or a bushfire, there would be a disaster declaration, and services and support from many agencies would engage to assist the community over a period of time. In the circumstances that presented on Monday, 12 December, there is no disaster declaration. Afterwards there is a void, a void that can be felt in the community and can be seen on the faces of the people in those communities. A lot of work will need to be done to help the community heal, as every day they feel the loss of Rachel and Matthew and Alan. The Wieambilla and Tara communities will never forget the contribution of Alan and Rachel and Matthew. Vale, Alan Dare, Rachel McCrow and Matthew Arnold.