



Speech By  
**Kim Richards**


**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2023

## **MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

### **Russell Island, Deaths**

 **Ms RICHARDS** (Redlands—ALP) (2.51 pm): Our community has experienced one of the biggest tragedies in its history with the loss of five little boys—Zack, Harry, Kyza, Koah and Nicky—and their really brave dad, Wayne. They were lost in the most tragic of circumstances. The house fires were something to be seen. On behalf of my community, and I think of everybody in this place, I offer to the Godinet and Stephenson families our heartfelt condolences for their loss.

The impact has been felt deeply across our island community. There are about 5,000 people who live on Russell Island. On the darkest of nights though the brightest stars shine, and there have been so many in our community who have shone brightly over the last 10 days. I had never before seen a community come together in such a way to support one another.

I want to start with our Russell Island fire brigade officers—the whole volunteer crew—led by Larry and Kev. They did an absolutely incredible job on the morning. They got to that fire quicker than any mainland fire brigade would and they were able to salvage one of the houses. To that team I can only say thank you so much for all that you do in serving our community.

To the Queensland ambulance officers who were also first on the scene and for what they faced I say thank you for your service. To all of our frontline personnel on that day—all of the backup QFES officers, the QPS, the SES: you did an incredible job. To the Schinkel and Howell families who have also lost their homes and everything that they own, our thoughts are also with you, but I am pleased to say that through government agencies and community support they now have roofs over their heads. They have had great counselling. One of the most amazing community responses was from the Redland City Council's disaster management team and the department of communities in terms of the work they did and the support they provided with councillors and chaplains across the island supporting the community and the families that were so heavily impacted.

To the Bay Islands Community Services—a great neighbourhood centre—with Doris and the team there, who took care of the families who flew in from New Zealand and other parts of Australia to be with their family: thank you for helping in complex circumstances. All of the businesses on the island came together so quickly. From the cafes providing sandwiches and cakes on the day and the IGA providing meals to our real estate agents moving nimbly to help find accommodation for the Schinkel and Howell families, it is simply incredible to see.

The school community response has been unbelievable. There are 200 children at the Russell Island State School. It is a really small school and they lost four of their classmates. Kyza and Koah were in kindy and Zack and Harry were in grade 5 and 6 respectively. The Department of Education's response from the get-go on Monday morning was nothing short of incredible.

I do not think anybody can underestimate the leadership shown on the day by principal Leanne McMahon. She had experienced the fires at Mabel Park. To think that she would have to relive the same set of circumstances is unimaginable. For the work that she did in nurturing, caring and showing deep compassion to our school community and to all of the families I say thank you so much for all you have done. I say thank you to all of the teachers and students who have shown remarkable resilience. I am going to table the principal's newsletter because it is one of the most beautiful and powerful pieces I have read. She closes by saying—

As we come to terms with this tragedy, let us remember that time is a precious gift. It serves as a reminder to cherish every moment we have with our loved ones. In times of darkness, our unity shines as a beacon of hope, and together, we will navigate this journey of healing and resilience.

*Tabled paper:* Email, dated 22 August 2023, from the member for Redlands, Ms Kim Richards MP, enclosing extract of Russell Island State School newsletter [1162](#).