**Question on Notice**
**No. 381**
**Asked on 12 March 2008**

MRS ATTWOOD asked the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology (MR SCHWARTEN)-

**QUESTION:**

Will the Minister provide details of the assistance provided by the Department of Public Works staff during the recent floods in Queensland?

**ANSWER**

The Department of Public Works is accustomed to responding to natural disasters.

The wild weather that Queensland experienced across the State in the first two months of 2008 resulted in major flooding, with Mackay and Emerald the worst affected areas. The Department of Public Works has been extensively involved in the disaster recovery for these events, with the ongoing support of local government and district disaster management group operations. The department's support has been largely provided through QBuild, but also included engineering support from Project Services, motor vehicles from QFleet and logistics support from SDS.

The Queensland Government, through both the Departments of Public Works and Housing, was quick to respond to the impacts on social housing tenants due to the floods in the Mackay and surrounding areas during February 2008.

On 15 February 2008, Mackay was devastated by unprecedented flash flooding. The speed and severity of the flooding caused major inundation to large areas of low lying residential and commercial property, and disruption of local services. QBuild was, and still is, on hand to assist with the clean up.

Working closely with a number of impacted State Government agencies and, in particular, the Department of Housing and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts, QBuild worked tirelessly to assist in any way possible, including carrying out damage assessments to Queensland Government infrastructure.

Immediately after the flood hit Mackay, QBuild staff commenced the coordination of the departmental response operations. At the peak of the operations, approximately 50 QBuild staff members were working on disaster response operations in the Mackay area.

Evacuation centres were established to provide much needed accommodation for those members of the community worst impacted by the flooding. Bedding materials were transferred from Rockhampton for use at the evacuation centres.

Following the floods, officers from the Department of Housing and QBuild inspected 840 properties and also visited 12 seniors' complexes in flooded areas to determine the safety and wellbeing of all residents.

QBuild has organised for approximately 20 kitchens to be delivered, flat packed from Brisbane, for installation in affected Department of Housing residences.

In the four weeks after the flood, 39 flood-related bond loans and 21 rental grants were provided by the Department of Housing.

Social housing policy concessions were immediately implemented from 18 February 2008 for one month. For all tenants, this included an amnesty so that there was no rent or tenancy management impacts on tenants if they provided accommodation for a new household member, along with the suspension of:

- rent arrears activities
- rent reviews and assessments
- debt recovery activities.

A total of 19 additional staff assisted the Department of Housing's Mackay-Whitsunday Area Office to operate three Recovery Centres, inspect properties and visit tenants. An outreach service was also provided at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Centre for a short time.

Department of Housing officers liaised with St Vincent de Paul to tenant 21 households in the Nebo Road property formerly known as Sugar City Motel.

The Mackay-Whitsunday Area Office's Area Manager is an active member of the Community Recovery Functional Committee and will continue in this capacity while also working as a member of the Taskforce established to oversee rebuilding efforts.

The Department of Housing also contacted all housing providers in the region to assess the level of damage to Community Housing properties and to gauge the needs of tenants. A total of 22 properties managed by Community Housing providers were affected by the floods. Assistance grants of up to $10,000 have been offered to these housing providers to assist in meeting the needs of flood-affected households.

In line with the arrangements afforded to other social housing tenants, Community Housing providers were encouraged to suspend rent assessments, arrears processes and debt collection activities for four weeks.

Thirty-three schools were inspected by QBuild following the flooding, with 18 sustaining damage. All but two of the schools were operational by 18 February 2008, three days after the flooding. The remaining two schools opened successively over the following two days. Work is continuing on the repairs at the affected schools in line with the Department of Education, Training and the Arts' priorities.

SDS sourced materials and QFleet provided a small number of ex-government vehicles for use in flood response and recovery operations.

When floods hit Central Queensland in February 2008, Emerald was the worst affected.

QBuild sourced materials, and utilising SDS' supply and logistics expertise, was able to deliver more than 500 mattresses and bedding equipment for evacuation centres. QBuild also supplied catering equipment, food, refrigerated storage and toilets to Emerald.

As floodwaters receded from Emerald, QBuild started planning for possible flooding in Rockhampton which fortunately did not sustain any major damage.

In addition, the Queensland Building Services Authority has established the Mackay Rebuilding Coordination Centre at Porters Plaza, 36 Carlyle Street, Mackay, as a one-stop-shop for anyone needing assistance with insurance issues and rebuilding or repairing their flood damaged home. Licensed builders and tradespersons are able to register their services at the Centre for the convenience of local home owners. Residents and contractors are encouraged to visit the centre or telephone on 1300 727 795 for information and advice.

QBuild also provided assistance and materials to the Queensland Building Services Authority to help set up the Mackay Rebuilding Coordination Centre.