

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 110

asked on Wednesday, 6 March 2013

MR PUCCI ASKED THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE PROTECTION (MR POWELL)

QUESTION:

Will the Minister outline the steps the department is taking to help the Queensland community recover from ex-tropical cyclone Oswald?

ANSWER:

This matter falls under the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection's portfolio. I refer the member to the relevant Minister.

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection is actively working to ensure Queenslanders and Queensland's natural assets and heritage values recover from the devastating impacts of ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald. While maintaining its frontline agenda as a strong environmental regulator, the department is working hard to enable rapid economic recovery and reduce the regulatory burden on businesses and local government.

During the response phase (between 26 January 2013 and 4 February 2013), 168 department employees undertook approximately 2,200 hours of work directly related to ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald. This included regional officers on call 24/7 and other officers available for call in as necessary over weekend periods.

The department established mechanisms to reduce greentape for industry and local government to receive the necessary environmental approvals to respond to emergent issues and commence recovery efforts including: fee relief to affected businesses and local governments; the establishment of a local government disaster coordinator on Tuesday, 29 February 2013 - the first working day after the event - to 'case manage' requests for assistance; the introduction of an exemption certificate to allow previously approved coastal infrastructure to be replaced without needing to re-apply; the issuing of 14 temporary emission licences (TELs), two of these issued within a two hour period, and the remainder within 24 hours; and publication of information sheets and staff on-ground/on-call to provide advice on hazardous chemicals, waste management, and extractive and screening activity.

The department is undertaking a range of actions to assist in the path to restoration including : monitoring turtle populations at Mon Repos, removing debris to allow turtle movement, and relocating turtle nests; responding to reports of dislocated dangerous wildlife and undertaking remedial actions as necessary; determining the impacts on water quality in key areas such as Gladstone Harbour, Moreton Bay and Great Barrier Reef catchments; monitoring releases from Central Queensland mines and sewage treatment plants; assessing the extent of impacts of sedimentation on

seagrass meadows and subsequent impacts on turtles and dugongs; assessing the likely impacts on floodplains, rivers and creeks, groundwater quality, soil quality, vegetation of high conservation value, protected plant and animal species riparian and aquatic ecosystems and coastal areas; and determining damage to heritage sites and working with owners to determine paths to restoration.

On 1 February 2013, the department released its first Post-Disaster Recovery Action Plan which sets out the recovery priorities and individual operational recovery plans that guide departmental activities and timeframes, ensuring critical infrastructure, economic activity and the natural environment recover. Since the recovery phase was initiated on 4 February 2013, approximately 175 officers have undertaken around 4,000 hours of work related to ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald.

In addition to the administration of its responsibilities, the department is also the functional lead agency for environmental recovery under the Interim State Disaster Management Plan 2012, responsible for coordinating planning and implementation of environmental recovery activities. On 5 February 2013, the department convened the first meeting of the State Environment Recovery Group. This group, chaired by the Director-General of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, provides advice to the Minister for Local Government, Community Recovery and Resilience on the measures required to achieve environmental recovery.

The group works across relevant agencies and other organisations to coordinate environmental recovery activities and monitor and provide advice on current and potential environmental and cultural heritage issues.

An important role of this group is to look at environmental management measures and natural safeguards that can improve resilience and provide cost effective solutions for reducing community vulnerability, as well as benefits for the lifestyles and livelihoods of local communities.

The department has established a dedicated team to provide the central coordination and liaison for the Queensland Government's environmental recovery response and provide secretariat support to the Environment Recovery Group.

On 28 February 2013, the Australian and Queensland Governments agreed to jointly fund a range of measures to aid recovery, including two measures relating to farm clean-up, environmental recovery, and soil conservation activities. This includes ten million dollars funded under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) Category D, to be delivered to the worst impacted communities to provide short term employment and assist primary producers to clear debris and restore fencing. An additional ten million dollars will be made available for flood specific environmental recovery work, including remediation and resilience works for riparian ecosystems and soil conservation.

The Departments of Natural Resources and Mines; Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries; Environment and Heritage Protection and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority are working together to design an integrated approach to delivering these two measures.