

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 6

asked on Wednesday, 13 February 2013

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

QUESTION:

What recovery strategies has the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection delivered to address the extensive sand and beach erosion problems created by ex-tropical cyclone Oswald?

ANSWER:

Erosion hot spots along the coast such as at Toogoom, Noosa and Palm Beach have again been adversely impacted by ex-tropical cyclone Oswald. Fortunately, property losses from coastal erosion have been low in this event. Damage has primarily been to tidal works in rivers such as jetties and pontoons. However, there has been severe erosion of the beaches and dunes in some areas, making some properties highly vulnerable to any further coastal erosion events.

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has prepared a post disaster recovery plan for this event which sets out the recovery priorities and individual operational recovery plans that guide departmental activities and timeframes. The plan is intended to ensure efficient and effective recovery of critical infrastructure, economic activity and the natural environment from the severe weather and flood impacts.

The plan includes an operational recovery plan for coastal structures and beach nourishment. It has a recovery goal of ensuring that the rebuilding of damaged coastal structures and the replenishment of eroded beaches with sand is not delayed by the need to obtain new development approvals.

This has been achieved by the department issuing an exemption certificate under the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995* to allow previously approved tidal works to be replaced on a like-for-like basis.

With regard to Toogoom, the erosion threat to houses is extremely serious and residents organised to push sand up from the beach to protect their properties. However, the most recent storm event around 25 February has seen most of this sand again lost to erosion. A seawall appears to be the only solution but may need to be placed wholly or partially on State land and may impact on a Marine Park and Fish Habitat Area. The department is further assisting residents here by coordinating a whole of government discussion to resolve issues that may impede the construction of a seawall and will liaise with council to fast track any development approvals required.

More broadly, the department has consistently encouraged and supported the development by councils of shoreline erosion management plans where development on the coast is under imminent threat from sea erosion. These plans are a proactive approach to managing the threat; incorporating an investigation of the underlying cause of the erosion, an analysis of available management options and consultation with the community. The department provides technical support to councils in developing these plans and more generally where councils require advice on coastal erosion management.

For many decades new urban development has been located outside of areas at risk from coastal erosion. This has been achieved by provisions within the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*. The legislation is based on twin policy objectives of keeping people and property safe from actions of the sea while allowing coastal areas to naturally erode and recover which ensures our iconic beaches are retained. However, it should be noted that coastal areas developed before the 1980s are often subject to ongoing coastal erosion risk and local councils will often be required to assist with coastal works to protect property and maintain beaches.