



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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MOTIONS OF CONDOLENCE: NORTH QUEENSLAND FLOODS AND VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (10.16 am): Mr Speaker, as a fellow north Queenslander, you will be familiar with the resilience of north Queenslanders in the face of adversity. Over the last several days, I have travelled to and from my home to my office in a boat—reminiscent of scenes from Venice, I suspect. But I think the most amazing thing that I have witnessed over the last several days is the ability of people affected by the major flood event in my electorate to see things in perspective. As the bushfire event in Victoria has unfolded, I have been absolutely amazed to hear people around town, who are cleaning out their homes affected by floodwaters, expressing their disbelief, horror and compassion for the people of Victoria and for the people of the north-west of Queensland. I say to the member for Mount Isa and the member for Charters Towers: even while we have been dealing with our own set of circumstances in the Hinchinbrook shire, your constituents have been in our hearts and in our minds given the enormity of the situation in your area of Queensland.

All members of this House should be under no illusions that there is a major emergency services effort underway in the Hinchinbrook shire in my electorate of Hinchinbrook. I want to salute the emergency services operating in the Hinchinbrook shire. Their efforts have been truly remarkable over the last 10 days. Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service officers operating in that area, both local officers and officers who have been brought in from across the state of Queensland to assist, have served with distinction. The ministers responsible in this House for those three services should be proud.

I want to make a special mention of the swift water rescue team of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service which over the last 10 days has performed a number rescues in floodwaters in north Queensland. I have had the privilege to be stuck in the airport in Townsville with a couple of those officers who were looking to relieve some of their colleagues in Ingham. We eventually met up in Ingham a couple of days ago. They have been doing remarkable work for which I am truly grateful.

The State Emergency Service volunteers deserve a special and separate mention. We should always remember that they are volunteers and that when the going gets tough and we in north Queensland face severe flood events, severe storm events or cyclones they leave their own families and head out into the elements to do the hard jobs that none of us want to do. In Ingham and the Herbert River district they, on many occasions, leave their families who are in difficult circumstances themselves to do their duty.

I want to make a special mention of the employees of the Hinchinbrook Shire Council who sometimes get overlooked in these circumstances. Many of the staff are isolated in their own homes throughout the district. Those people who are able to make it into work in town in Ingham are working at truly remarkable levels of endurance and capacity. They are working with a skeleton crew and yet they are maintaining outstanding levels of service to the public in very difficult circumstances.

As was mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition, the charities that have arrived en masse in Ingham—Lifeline, Red Cross and the Salvation Army—are operating the emergency accommodation

which is located in the library of Ingham State High School. They have made a magnificent effort supporting over 50 people who have been evacuated from their homes which have been rendered uninhabitable by the floodwaters. The Department of Communities and, more recently, staff from Centrelink have been operating the Hinchinbrook community recovery centre. They are providing immediate assistance to people who, in many cases, have lost almost everything.

The assistance from the state government through the natural disaster relief arrangements, the recent announcement by the federal government and support from the Premier's Flood Relief Appeal will provide the basis for an immediate response to this major flood event. While this support is very welcome, insurance companies will be required to pick up the bill for most of the damage to private property. I have been in contact with the insurance industry which has assured me that it will be able to respond quickly to the needs of affected policyholders in flood affected areas across north Queensland.

I have had some very early contact from Suncorp which was excellent. It advised me that as soon as the floodwaters had receded Suncorp had a team of up to 60 assessors mobilised to respond to claims lodged by their customers in the wake of Cyclone Ellie and the active monsoon trough in north Queensland. I contacted the Insurance Council of Australia myself and it has advised me that policyholders in north Queensland who have been impacted by recent floodwaters should contact their insurance companies as soon as possible so that their claims can be assessed quickly and allow the clean-up process and repair work to occur. Today, I call on the insurance industry to act with as much compassion and understanding as possible in the processing of insurance claims coming forward following these events.

Although much of the attention over the last few days has been on the Hinchinbrook shire, I am becoming increasingly concerned about flood events in the Cassowary Coast area just north of the Hinchinbrook shire. I have had a number of reports of extensive primary producer crop damage and other people who have been affected by floodwaters in that area.

The resilience of north Queenslanders is truly remarkable, but the morale of those in the Hinchinbrook shire was affected to a large degree when the Herbert River rose for a second time in less than seven days to a peak of 12.25 metres. The day that the Premier visited, waters looked to be receding and people were heading out of their homes and into the streets to commence the clean-up of their residences, their business premises and their properties. The morale of people on Saturday after a significant flood event both in the Herbert River valley and in the catchment area of the Herbert River that night—the water started to come back up—was affected and the level of angst in the community was palpable.

I am confident that going forward, with the support of the Queensland and Commonwealth governments and with the support that neighbours, families and friends provide to each other in north Queensland, we will come out of this major event stronger and more prepared in the future to respond to these emergency situations.