



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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NORTH QUEENSLAND FLOODS

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (11.29 am): Honourable members would be aware that for the last 10 days the Hinchinbrook shire in my electorate of Hinchinbrook has experienced a prolonged and serious flood event—the largest flood event in the Herbert River district since 1977. Bureau of Meteorology rainfall totals for the first nine days of February for locations in the Hinchinbrook shire range from a low of 440 millimetres at Upper Stone to 1,318 millimetres at Hawkins Creek. Gauges in Ingham recorded between 900 millimetres and 1,000 millimetres for the same period.

This severe flood event has been caused by very high rainfall associated with Tropical Cyclone Ellie and an active monsoon trough in north Queensland, falling simultaneously throughout the Hinchinbrook shire and in the upper catchment areas of the Herbert River causing it to peak on Tuesday, 3 February and Wednesday, 4 February at 12.25 metres. Regrettably, following further significant rainfall in the Herbert Valley and upper catchment areas, floodwaters in the Herbert River peaked for a second time at 12.25 millimetres on Saturday night, 7 February 2009.

This second peak has been a real blow to the morale of the people of the Hinchinbrook shire, many of whom had commenced cleaning up their homes, business premises and properties on Friday, 6 February when waters had started to recede. They face the massive task of cleaning up again today after floodwaters began to recede very slowly yesterday, delayed by king tides and a watertable well past saturation point. My thoughts and prayers are with my constituents as they face this enormous, difficult and, for many, heartbreaking task.

The Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Emergency Services, the shadow minister for emergency services and Her Excellency the Governor have all visited the Hinchinbrook shire over the last seven days and witnessed for themselves, at various stages, the extent of the floodwaters, the extent of the damage, the remarkable efforts of our emergency services and the resilience of the people of the Herbert River district. They have all been welcome and demonstrated genuine concern for the welfare and circumstances of those affected by this flood event.

I will speak again in the future in this place about the efforts of those who have distinguished themselves during the immediate response to this major flood event. At this point, it is enough to say that all Queenslanders can be proud of the efforts of the officers of the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service, both locally and those who have been brought in from across the state, to assist with this enormous task.

A special mention must be reserved for the State Emergency Service volunteers who have laboured tirelessly for days in terrible weather, many spending a considerable amount of time away from their own families who are also in difficult circumstances to undertake their duties. They have been an inspiration to many. I would also like to recognise the many employees of the Hinchinbrook Shire Council who have worked so very hard to maintain a range of services to the public and support the local disaster management committee to respond to this situation.

When the Premier visited the Hinchinbrook shire on Friday, 6 February I indicated that I had been speaking to local stakeholders about what our community required to recover from this major flood event

and enhance the capacity of the Herbert River district to better respond to this type of situation in the future. I have today written to the Premier outlining the initiatives and projects I believe could go a long way to achieving that objective and seeking a whole-of-government response from the Queensland government committing to these requests.

Amongst them are immediate requests for a number of upgrades to facilities at the Ingham State Emergency Service unit headquarters, a small business assistance package to help the economic recovery of the local community and assistance for the Hinchinbrook Shire Council to upgrade the access to and facilities at Ingham Airport, a major strategic asset during flood events and similar disaster situations. I have asked the Premier to consider a number of requests in the short term, including an assistance package for the sugar industry. Sugarcane crops have now been inundated for 10 days, as have the assets of the harvesting and milling sectors. I have pressed for a new Ingham Fire and Rescue Service station, the current one having been inundated yet again by floodwaters, and requested additional funds for the Lower Herbert Water Management Authority, the Herbert River Improvement Trust, the Herbert River Catchment Group and the Hinchinbrook Shire Council for flood mitigation and drainage improvement projects.

Lastly, I have canvassed with the Premier several long-term projects including achieving flood-free access across Palm Creek, which runs through the middle of Ingham and divides the town during flood events causing serious logistical problems for emergency services and local authorities. I have also stressed the need for improvements to the state controlled road network in the Hinchinbrook shire to mitigate the impact of flood events cutting off access to Ingham from outlying communities and the need for a dedicated emergency accommodation centre with facilities to house people displaced by major flood events or similar disaster situations.

As I have indicated to the Premier, it is my responsibility to advocate for the community that I represent in the wake of this major flood event. The requests that I have put forward have been made in good faith and are a genuine attempt to progress initiatives and projects that will assist the Hinchinbrook shire to more effectively respond to major flood or similar events in the future.