




Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Wednesday, 16 February 2011

CYCLONE YASI, RECOVERY ASSISTANCE

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (9.40 pm): Earlier today, the federal Treasurer, the federal Minister for Agriculture and the Premier of Queensland announced the assistance package available to businesses and primary producers devastated by Cyclone Yasi. I acknowledge the package has been developed in consultation with industry groups. I welcome the fact that category C and category D NDRRA have been activated, as they were after Cyclone Larry. These measures will provide much needed support to communities in my electorate affected by Cyclone Yasi.

I am grateful the federal and state governments have recognised the significant needs of industries devastated by Cyclone Yasi. I must, however, continue to press for two additional important measures—that being a fuel excise relief payment for households, businesses and primary producers left without electricity for extended periods and a support package for the transport industry to avoid a crippling cost of living increase in North Queensland.

As of 10 am today, there were still 7,421 customer connections without power between Ingham and Innisfail in my electorate, despite the best efforts of Ergon Energy crews working around the clock. The damage to the electricity distribution system in many communities throughout my electorate ranges from serious to catastrophic. In some rural areas, people will be without power for several weeks. Many households, businesses and farmers are relying on generators and this is very costly. Following Cyclone Larry in 2006, the Howard government provided assistance to businesses, farmers and households that needed to generate their own power by refunding the excise paid on diesel and petrol until supply was restored. I urge the federal and state governments to include this fuel excise relief payment to households, farmers and businesses in their support package. Recent increases in the retail price of fuel have exacerbated the problem faced by households, businesses and farmers affected by Cyclone Yasi, many of whom are also catering for extended family, friends and neighbours without generators.

Many transport operators that normally carry North Queensland products to southern markets have been left without loads and face the prospect of huge increases in costs to bring goods back to North Queensland. For example, road transport operators that normally carry bananas out of areas of North Queensland that have been devastated by Cyclone Yasi will have no loads to carry south. The cost of hauling loads back into North Queensland will be astronomical and freight costs have already increased. Backloading does not exist in the transport industry anymore. Both legs of the journey need to be economically viable. If transport operators are short of loads to carry south, I am concerned the cost of carrying loads back into North Queensland will skyrocket.

I am worried about the possibility of a double or triple whammy for cyclone affected communities. A blowout in the cost of living on top of a shortage of housing and the loss of employment would be diabolical. I urge the federal and state government's to amend their support package to provide assistance to the transport industry.