




Speech by

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MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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QUEENSLAND RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY BILL

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (4.43 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Bill. The Queensland Reconstruction Authority Bill proposes to establish the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to coordinate the reconstruction and recovery of the state of Queensland following the record floods in December 2010 and January 2011 and Tropical Cyclone Yasi in February 2011. In view of the scale of devastation caused by the record floods and by Cyclone Yasi, the Queensland Reconstruction Authority will be established as a new independent statutory authority to manage and coordinate the program of infrastructure reconstruction and recovery within disaster affected communities. The authority will include a dedicated North Queensland office with responsibility for reconstruction and recovery following Tropical Cyclone Yasi. Honourable members will understand and forgive me for being particularly interested in this part of the bill.

The bill proposes to give the new authority primary responsibility for coordinating, implementing and monitoring the rebuilding and recovery of communities that have been affected, damaged or destroyed by the floods and by Cyclone Yasi. It is proposed that the authority will work across all levels of government to plan and facilitate an effective and coordinated program of reconstruction of community infrastructure and other property. It is further proposed that the authority will have the specific function of facilitating flood mitigation and ensuring that the protection, rebuilding and recovery of the disaster affected communities is carried out effectively, efficiently and appropriately. In order to achieve this objective, the authority will be charged with facilitating and expediting regulatory approvals from both state and local governments to rebuild infrastructure and other property.

The bill proposes to provide the authority with the power to decide priorities for community infrastructure and the community services needed for the protection, rebuilding and recovery of affected communities. The explanatory notes accompanying the bill explain that it is intended that the authority will take into account the social, economic and environmental impacts of the flood and cyclone damage and the broader needs of the community. Importantly, the bill provides for the authority to be charged with considering whether or not existing damaged infrastructure ought to be repaired, replaced with like infrastructure, relocated or re-established with natural disaster resilient infrastructure. Significantly, while local government will retain primary responsibility for land use and building approvals, the authority will be vested with significant powers to enable it to effectively fulfil its functions.

The authority will be provided with a suite of powers that may be exercised in declared reconstruction areas. These powers include the power to expedite both state and local government regulatory decisions and approval processes by issuing notices requiring a decision maker to make a decision or advising that the authority itself will assume responsibility for making the decision in question. These notices are based on similar powers that are exercised periodically by the Coordinator-General under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971.

Finally, it is proposed that the authority will have the power to undertake reconstruction or development works in order to rebuild disaster affected areas of the state. In this regard, the authority will be able to undertake works under the direction of the responsible minister by regulation and will be able to

acquire land in order to undertake works, implement a development scheme, or otherwise perform the authority's functions.

I have taken the opportunity to put on the record an explanation of the role of the proposed Queensland Reconstruction Authority in the anticipation of many of my constituents in the Hinchinbrook electorate approaching me for such an explanation in the coming weeks and months. In particular, I believe my constituents will want to learn more about the role of the North Queensland office of the authority.

In the two weeks since Yasi hit, I have travelled far and wide throughout my electorate visiting devastated communities and speaking to and listening to my constituents. During those travels I have on a number of occasions encountered Major General Mick Slater, who has been appointed chair of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. I have decided that I rather like Mick Slater and that I can have confidence in him now that he has, in many respects, the future of my electorate in his hands. Mick Slater has spent plenty of time in North Queensland. He has trained at the jungle battle school at the top of the Tully valley in my electorate. As a career soldier, Mick Slater has spent plenty of time deployed in Townsville. Mick Slater spent time supporting the reconstruction of many communities in my electorate after Cyclone Larry in 2006 under the leadership of another major general, Peter Cosgrove. I believe Mick Slater appreciates the circumstances of North Queenslanders and has considerable affection for them.

As the chairman of the authority, Mick Slater also has responsibility for overseeing the rebuilding of flood affected communities in central and southern Queensland. As such, Chief Superintendent Mike Keating has been appointed the director of the North Queensland office of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. As a senior police officer in North Queensland, I have known Mike Keating on a professional basis for a number of years. I have also spoken with Mike Keating on a number of occasions since his appointment and I am similarly confident that he is more than capable of fulfilling this role.

Mike Keating has been stationed in North Queensland for 20 years, including in Cairns, Innisfail, Cardwell, Tully and Townsville. In North Queensland, the test to be able to refer to yourself as a local is very tough indeed. Many hard markers in North Queensland might still not acknowledge Mike Keating as a local but after 20 years surely he would have to go pretty close. What do Major General Mick Slater and Chief Superintendent Mike Keating have in front of them?

I would like to talk about my priorities and the priorities of my constituents. I would like to put these priorities to the Premier in that capacity and in her new capacity as the Minister for Reconstruction. These priorities are separate to those priorities that I have been advocating for over the last two weeks in conjunction with industry leaders and other community leaders to be part of the joint federal and state government NDRRA assistance package for businesses and primary producers. I understand the difference between the two.

NDRRA assistance funding is primarily targeted at short-term assistance and at restoring existing infrastructure. It is critical that the objective of the authority is much more than short term and much more than simply restoring existing infrastructure. If the authority does not aim to substantially improve the infrastructure in the communities affected by Cyclone Yasi in my electorate, then I believe it will have failed and I will be bitterly disappointed and my constituents will be bitterly disappointed at a golden opportunity lost.

I want to reiterate the urgent need for the provision of affordable housing to the cyclone ravaged communities in my electorate. On Tuesday during the condolence motion, I mentioned the urgent need to deliver affordable housing to the cyclone affected communities in my electorate, and I thank the minister for her attention to that matter. I am anxious about the pensioners, the farm workers and those people on low and fixed incomes in my electorate and their capacity to survive through this ordeal when so many of them have had their homes badly damaged. A shortage of affordable housing in my electorate will see many farm workers and award wage earners in a situation where they will have no choice but to leave their chosen community. This could lead to a serious population decline in my electorate, compromising our capacity to recover, restore and rebuild. This in turn would result in a downturn for small businesses in cyclone affected areas. As such, affordable housing is one of the key reconstruction issues in my electorate post Cyclone Yasi. I am confident that the Minister for Housing appreciates the integral nature of this issue and that she will respond effectively.

The tourism industry is an industry I mentioned during my speech on the condolence motion. The difficulties that it will face in my electorate are considerable. As I mentioned the other day, they relate not only to the damage to their business premises but also to the damage to the reputation of the destination when such graphic images in the wake of Cyclone Yasi were distributed nationally and internationally. Having said that, the tourism industry knows what it needs to do to re-establish itself. The tourism industry needs a plan for the future beyond simply re-establishing the infrastructure in place before Cyclone Yasi. The tourism industry is a major employer in my electorate, but many tourism operators will be seriously considering the prospects of another lean year when deciding whether or not to reopen. What is needed is a vote of confidence in the tourism industry in the Hinchinbrook electorate. The state and federal

governments need to bring forward infrastructure projects that do more than simply restore what we had before Yasi.

The tourism industry has pointed directly to the urgent need to deliver much improved commercial and recreational boating facilities at Mission Beach, which is a hub of the tourism industry in my electorate. An opportunity to deliver this infrastructure was not seized upon in the reconstruction effort after Cyclone Larry in 2006. The tourism industry at Mission Beach knows what it needs. I know that Mission Beach Business and Tourism has put this proposal strongly to the government on a number of occasions, including since Cyclone Yasi. I table a copy of the briefing paper from Mission Beach Business and Tourism that I know has been put to the government since Cyclone Yasi.

Tabled paper: Paper titled 'Mission Beach: Surviving and Thriving post Tropical Cyclone Yasi' [3969].

The briefing outlines the history of disadvantage faced by Mission Beach as a tourism destination, but it also outlines its enormous potential—if only this opportunity to show confidence in the future of the Mission Beach community is embraced by the government through the Queensland Reconstruction Authority.

We also need to bring forward the proposed eco accommodation project at Wallaman Falls, north-west of Ingham in the Herbert River district. In November 2009, the government announced its plans to pursue the development of a number of eco accommodation projects to boost visitor numbers to Queensland's national parks. The Wallaman Falls site would be excellent. Progress on this project is overdue, although there are several sites in cyclone affected areas of my electorate that would be perfect for such projects, including the old Cardstone village site north-west of Tully and Blencoe Falls at the top of the Kirrama Range Road north-west of Cardwell.

While it may sound unimportant, we also need to put a real effort into restoring roadside signage throughout the cyclone affected region that provides travellers with direction and information. This will really help tourism accommodation centres like Cardwell and Kurrimine Beach. After Cyclone Larry, tourism operators found that not having the numerous road signs that had been blown away really impacted on the ability for tourists, especially grey nomads and self-drive visitors, to navigate their way around the cyclone affected area.

In September last year during debate on the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I canvassed matters pertaining to the two most recent major natural disaster recovery efforts in my area, being Cyclone Larry in the Cassowary Coast region in 2006 and the serious flood event in the Hinchinbrook shire in 2009. The Larry reconstruction resulted in the refurbishment of the old Johnstone shire hall, a new emergency services building and a new secondary school in Innisfail. This is an outcome for the Innisfail community whereby infrastructure was put in place that was a considerable improvement on pre Larry standards.

In contrast, after the major flood event in the Hinchinbrook shire in 2009, I put forward, on the invitation of the Premier, a range of issues that would have improved the capacity of the Hinchinbrook shire to respond to future flood events. The hardstand area around the SES building in Ingham was sealed. Other issues that I raised included flood-free access over Palm Creek, relocating the flood prone Ingham Fire Station, improvements in local drainage infrastructure and improved access to the Ingham Airport. None of these things happened and it was very disappointing. They are still very important and pressing issues for emergency services in the Hinchinbrook shire, the Hinchinbrook shire council and the local residents of the Herbert River district. I would like to once again advance these projects on behalf of the communities in the Hinchinbrook shire which urgently need to have their capacity to respond to these major regular flood events improved. I am anxious that the post Yasi reconstruction experience in my electorate reflects the post Larry 2006 experience rather than the post Hinchinbrook 2009 flood experience.

Along with the commercial and recreational boating infrastructure at Mission Beach, other infrastructure outcomes that I believe need to be part of the reconstruction effort include rebuilding Tully State High School, redeveloping the facilities at the showgrounds in Tully, revisiting the issue of delivering affordable sewerage in Cardwell and protecting the foreshore in Cardwell to protect the Bruce Highway and the Cardwell community. In the days after Cyclone Yasi, the Premier visited my electorate to inspect for herself the damage to the built and the natural environment. The Premier visited Tully State High School and on doing so stated that Tully State High School would have to be completely rebuilt. I have asked the Premier and the Minister for Education that I be consulted and included in the development of plans to rebuild Tully State High School. Hopefully, as happened with the secondary school in Innisfail after Larry, we can achieve a positive outcome out of a terrible experience for secondary students in the Tully district.

The showgrounds in Tully are a hub of the community for many sporting clubs, the annual agricultural show, the rodeo and community events such as Relay for Life. The old pavilion at the showgrounds in Tully has been destroyed and the Stan Mackay Pavilion has been badly damaged. The Percy Pease grandstand is remarkably still standing. Percy Pease was a predecessor of mine who

represented the Tully district in this place. Percy Pease was a Labor member for what was then the state seat of Herbert between 1920 and 1940. That should give the Queensland Reconstruction Authority a good indication of how old that grandstand at the showgrounds in Tully is. The Tip Byrne Indoor Sports Centre at the showgrounds is also a relic. Those two pavilions, the grandstand and the indoor sports centre at the Tully showgrounds desperately need redevelopment. This would result in a very positive outcome for the community and the Tully district, a community that has been devastated by Cyclone Yasi.

The issue of affordable sewerage for the town of Cardwell has been a complicated one in recent years, since an application for SCAP funding by the former Cardwell shire council was successful in 2007. Since that time the new Cassowary Coast Regional Council has found it difficult to secure approvals from DERM to proceed with this project. Several conditions proposed by DERM have seen the estimated cost of delivering sewerage to Cardwell significantly blow out without any corresponding increase in the size of the SCAP grant. With the Cardwell community seriously damaged by Cyclone Yasi, I put it to the government and the authority that the time is absolutely right to take this opportunity, while so much reconstruction is going on in Cardwell, to deliver affordable sewerage to these terribly disadvantaged residents. The local residents cannot afford to fund the blow-out in the cost of the sewerage scheme, costs driven up by regulations and conditions proposed by DERM. If this authority really can cut through the red tape, this is surely its opportunity to do so.

Lastly, the foreshore in Cardwell was very badly affected after Cyclone Yasi. All Queenslanders saw the extraordinary damage to the Cardwell foreshore with the eastern lane of the Bruce Highway undermined, the whole highway covered in sand and the recreational areas along the Cardwell foreshore destroyed. I have seen the damage firsthand, as has the Premier, as have other ministers, and as has Major General Mick Slater and Chief Superintendent Mike Keating. The restoration and protection of the Cardwell foreshore needs to be a project that is urgently considered by the government and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority.

The LNP opposition is committed to supporting the reconstruction of Queensland following the devastating floods in central and southern Queensland and the horrific damage caused to North Queensland by Cyclone Yasi, damage that was regrettably centred on my electorate of Hinchinbrook. That support of the LNP opposition extends to supporting the passage of this bill. I submit these infrastructure priorities to the government and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority for its consideration in good faith, in the interests of my constituents and the communities that I represent which have been so terribly affected by Cyclone Yasi.