




Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

Hansard Thursday, 13 October 2011

BALGAL BEACH, FLYING FOXES AND PONTOON

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (12.40 am): I rise to draw to the attention of the House two issues of concern to the Balgal Beach community in my electorate of Hinchinbrook. I have written to the environment minister, Vicky Darling, asking her to take immediate action to move on a huge colony of flying foxes adjacent to homes at Mystic Sands near Balgal Beach as it subjects local residents to intolerable levels of noise, unpleasant odours and the threat of disease. Public safety must come first.

This is a case of history repeating itself. I previously raised the issue of the flying fox colony at Mystic Sands in this parliament in November 2007. The EPA refused to take any action to move on the flying fox colony, preferring instead to subject local residents to significant health risks and a diminished quality of life. DERM must not take the same attitude this time around. DERM must take immediate steps to move on the flying fox colony—which is estimated to be tens of thousands in number—so as to protect the health and wellbeing of local residents. I have urged the minister not to delay or procrastinate. Local residents are reporting large volumes of flying fox excreta being dropped on their homes and not feeling safe to move around their backyards or hang out their washing.

Given the threat to human health from contact with flying foxes, it is a matter of public safety for DERM to move on this flying fox colony. The Bligh government claims it issues damage mitigation permits to councils to move on flying fox colonies that adversely impact on local communities, but DERM takes forever to process them and when it does issue them they are usually full of unrealistic conditions that render the permit almost useless.

The Queensland Reconstruction Authority has recently advised the Townsville City Council that an NDRRA application to replace a pontoon servicing the Fisherman's Landing boat ramp at Balgal Beach that was washed away by Cyclone Yasi has been refused. The QRA has informed the council that, under Commonwealth NDRRA guidelines, the pontoon is not eligible for funding because it is not deemed to be an essential public asset. I have written to the Premier in her capacity as Minister for Reconstruction requesting all correspondence outlining the advocacy the QRA has undertaken in support of the council's application for NDRRA funding. I have argued in my letter to the Premier that a strong case can be mounted, based on the NDRRA guidelines, and that the advice from the QRA should not be accepted without the strongest possible representations to the Commonwealth.

The pontoon was an integral piece of public infrastructure at Balgal Beach. Recreational boating is a major community activity in the area for locals and visitors alike. It provided safe access to boating activities for young children, seniors and people with disabilities. The loss of the pontoon has caused major disruption to the local community, and that is why the local community considered the infrastructure to be urgent and worked so hard to secure funding for the original pontoon, which was destroyed by Cyclone Yasi. As such, its replacement should attract NDRRA funding.