



Speech by

**Andrew Cripps**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

Hansard Tuesday, 25 October 2011

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## **DISASTER READINESS AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr CRIPPS** (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (5.05 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Disaster Readiness Amendment Bill. My contribution to the debate will focus on three aspects of the bill. The objectives, amongst other things, are to implement recommendations of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry interim report and improve the state's disaster preparedness ahead of the next wet season; amend the Disaster Management Act to strengthen and streamline disaster management planning and preparation, response and recovery, including through amending the membership of the State Disaster Management Group; require publication of disaster management plans on websites; streamline extensions of declared disaster situations; and amend the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 to ensure that repairs to community infrastructure, other than buildings, for example roads and bridges, that is damaged because of an emergency, such as a natural disaster or accident, can be carried out as quickly as possible to restore the functionality and safety of the infrastructure.

Unfortunately, my electorate of Hinchinbrook has been the scene of more than its fair share of natural disasters in recent years, whether it be Cyclone Larry in 2006 or the major flood event that occurred in the Hinchinbrook shire in 2009 or, of course, Cyclone Yasi that occurred earlier this year in February. Unfortunately, the functionality and the effectiveness of disaster management legislation is particularly pertinent for the constituents of my electorate.

In the first instance, in relation to the amendments that will implement recommendations from the Floods Commission of Inquiry regarding flood preparedness, I want to talk about the correspondence I had with the Premier after the 2009 record flood event in the Hinchinbrook shire. I wrote to the Premier on that occasion and I requested a number of things that were specifically related to improving the resilience of the local community to flood events when they occurred. I acknowledge that a couple of items on that list have been achieved. I am very grateful and I acknowledge those items. But a number of important initiatives have not been achieved. In the first instance I indicated to the Premier that the length of the airstrip at Ingham needed to be extended and the airport needed flood-free access. The Premier herself visited the Herbert River district on a number of occasions during the natural disaster events that I mentioned and she has landed on that airstrip on a number of occasions, so she would appreciate the need and the vital strategic asset that that aerodrome is in the event of a natural disaster in that area. Unfortunately, when we have a fairly substantial flood event in the Herbert River district we get a situation where that airport is actually inaccessible via the Bruce Highway. The SES and other emergency services have a devil of a time accessing the strategic asset that is the airstrip at Ingham.

Flood mitigation projects in local waterways and the improvement of local drainage infrastructure are initiatives that have become very important after Cyclone Yasi. Allocations have been made to clean out waterways because of the amount of debris that has gone into them, preventing them from functioning properly. In 2009 I advocated for funding to be made available to ensure that the infrastructure in relation to waterways and drainage was improved in that area. The old chestnut in the Hinchinbrook shire is flood-free access over Palm Creek. The state government keeps insisting that it is a local government responsibility to provide flood-free access over Palm Creek during a flood event. However, it is actually state government services, including the police, the ambulance, the Fire and Rescue Service and the State

Emergency Service that must replicate their capacity on both sides of Palm Creek during a natural disaster that causes them the most inconvenience. It is unfortunate that those issues have not been addressed.

The second matter in relation to the amendments to the Disaster Management Act that I want to address is the very encouraging amendment being made to include the ADF on the state management committees for natural disasters. On 2 September last year when we debated the Disaster Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I noted that the government had not taken the opportunity to make any reference whatsoever to the ADF in that legislation, which was the overhaul of disaster management legislation. At that time, because we have had experience of how important the ADF is and the critical role it plays following natural disasters, I made the point—and was criticised by the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services at the time for suggesting—that it should be involved formally in that legislation. On 8 March this year, after Cyclone Yasi, in this House I gave a speech in a matter of public interest debate where I again called for the ADF to be involved in the formal committee structures associated with our disaster management legislation. Again, I was criticised by the minister for making those observations.

It is very satisfying that in the amendment bill that we are debating today the first steps are being taken to formally include the ADF in our state disaster management committees. It plays a critical role that, up until this point in time, was based on conventions. That is true, and the ADF has previously performed exceptionally well on the ground after natural disasters when it has been called upon. However, twice in this House previously I have made the point that it would have been much more beneficial if our disaster management committees at the local level and even at the district level had input from the ADF. I am pleased that on this occasion we are taking the step to include it at the state level, but I would like to see some formalisation of its involvement in local disaster management groups and district disaster management groups, because the relationships, the responsiveness and the effectiveness of those committees would be enhanced by a formal relationship with the ADF at that level.

The last issue that I want to canvass relates to the amendments to the Sustainable Planning Act. A while ago the then Deputy Premier consulted with local governments in relation to the draft national standards for the construction of buildings in flood hazard areas in Queensland. Section 2.7(b) of that draft national standard has come to the attention of some local authorities in my electorate, because it proposes to stipulate that floors of enclosed habitable rooms must be no more than one metre below the defined flood level. The Hinchinbrook Shire Council responded to the previous Deputy Premier, who is still the Minister for Local Government, in this regard and indicated that the local government by-laws in the Hinchinbrook Shire require habitable rooms of dwellings to be constructed no less than 300 millimetres above one in 100-year flood levels. If a national standard requiring floors of non-habitable rooms to be no more than one metre below the defined flood level is established, the significant negative impacts of such a requirement would be that the large amounts of infill that would be required in areas like the Herbert River district to meet that standard could result in a number of adverse outcomes, including the diversion of floodwaters into neighbouring properties. All of the issues that we experience when we have these flood events could be exacerbated if we implement that draft national standard for the construction of buildings in flood hazard areas in Queensland. That is a worry that the Hinchinbrook Shire Council has expressed to the Minister for Local Government and I think it is a very pertinent issue.

The nature of architecture in North Queensland is such that the owners of the homes take precautions not to have habitable rooms on the ground floor. They have practical plans to remove all of their belongings from the bottom floor to the top floor when a flood is on its way. If we require those landowners to have the non-habitable rooms above the one in 100-year flood height, significant amounts of infill could have very significant adverse outcomes for neighbouring properties. You could have a perverse outcome where the impact of flooding on neighbouring properties is exacerbated by a draft national standard along those lines. I implore the government to give consideration to flexibility and to an understanding of local circumstances when it comes to that national standard for construction. I am very pleased in relation to a number of other amendments in this bill.