



Speech by

## Hon. Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard Tuesday, 12 February 2013

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### MOTION: NATURAL DISASTER EVENTS OF 2013

 **Hon. JA STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games) (4.31 pm): I rise to join the condolence motion brought before the House by the Premier of Queensland, the Hon. Campbell Newman. Like honourable members who have spoken before me, I wish to place on record my heartfelt sympathy for those whose lives have been turned upside down literally and to express my sincere condolences to those who have lost loved ones as a result of the cruel storms that mercilessly struck and created havoc for many communities across Queensland under the name of Cyclone Oswald.

We are no stranger to summer storms—we could say that it comes with the territory—but the severity and speed of these chaotic weather conditions caused intense damage and destruction that has wearied even the toughest Queenslanders. For some this was the second, third, even fourth severe storm and deluge in as many years. Whilst the areas affected are much smaller than in 2011, the heartache and despair for many is much the same, and even worse for some.

This afternoon I wear two hats: one as the member for Currumbin and the other as the Minister for Tourism and Small Business. My electorate of Currumbin did not escape the impact of Cyclone Oswald, but thankfully not to the extent of a number of areas. Three suburbs in my electorate were without power for several days, there was considerable sand erosion from our famous beaches and many trees and other greenery were torn from their roots and scattered across roads. The Currumbin Valley State School was unable to open until the Friday after the floods and a unit block in one of our beachside suburbs of Bilinga lost its roof, but lucky it did not do any other damage to people or property.

I am truly thankful there was minimal damage in Currumbin compared to some other parts in Queensland, yet I am sure those who were affected did experience considerable difficulties. However, cyclones do not stop at borders. Oswald carried its gale force winds and heavy rains into northern New South Wales cutting power and causing damage to homes and crops.

Even more affected though was the Bundaberg, North Burnett, Maryborough, Gympie, Gayndah, Lockyer and Scenic Rim areas. Only 48 hours before devastation struck I was visiting the Bundaberg region. On Mon Repos Beach at Bargara I witnessed several turtle nests produce hatchlings on the one night and a female loggerhead came up to the beach to lay her eggs. As I said at the time to the honourable member with me, 'I feel this is better than winning the quadrella.' This was a bumper turtle season with crowds of around 300 visitors and tourists coming to this special place each evening to watch nature at her best.

Tourism was going particularly well in this neck of the woods and will again. I find it hard to comprehend the destruction that took place on this pristine, undisturbed location in such a short space of time, but nowhere near as much as Cathy Gately and her team of rangers and volunteers who lovingly protect and tag turtles and hatchlings from dusk until the wee hours of the morning several months of the year.

I am further shocked and saddened by the massive inundation across Bundaberg and North Burnett. The loss of agriculture is estimated at \$10 million in crops, let alone the loss of livestock.

Thousands of residents, as we have heard, had to evacuate their homes and many were plucked from their rooftops by the wonderful emergency teams. Small businesses were decimated.

My thoughts are with all of the wonderful hospitable people I met during my recent visit as a guest of Stephen Bennett MP, the member for Burnett. I met with the Bundaberg Chamber of Commerce members, the Burnett Heads marina and local community groups. Mayor Mal Forman and his councillors did an amazing job. The recovery will take time but there is so much determination and goodwill around that already seeds of hope are showing through the mud and silt.

Jack Dempsey, the member for Bundaberg and the Minister for Police and Community Safety, and his team are to be commended for their stamina and terrific efforts. This disaster was all the harder for Jack as Bundaberg is his beloved home town.

Last week I visited the town of Laidley in the Lockyer to meet with small business owners and to offer support and a bit of TLC. These resilient souls had only just recovered from heavy floods two years ago and had made a fresh new start when it happened again. I went to Laidley after receiving the most heartfelt email on the Monday after the floods from Kathy Brady who is the president of Lockyer Valley Tourism.

Kathy told me of the destruction that the town had witnessed. I walked the main street of Laidley with Kathy and visited a number of the affected businesses. It was distressing to see that virtually every business had suffered some sort of damage as a result of the flooding, again.

The Eagle Rock Cafe was completely transformed after the 2011 floods and turned into a stylish retro cafe, complete with a jukebox and all new retro interior. Many people drove out in their classic cars just to visit the Eagle Rock Cafe. This year it had 1.1 metres of water through it along with copious amounts of mud and silt—the highest level on record. The resilience of owners, Denise and Gary Morris, is amazing and I cannot wait to visit Eagle Rock Cafe when it is rocking again.

Next door, Rachel is the young owner of the florist shop who found the energy after the 2011 flood to turn her flooded flower shop into a beautifully decorated tea room that also sold flowers. Rachel was faced with the awful reality that it has all happened again. But I am pleased to say that her shop is up and running.

Across the road the newsagency was another building that was improved and extended after the 2011 floods. Many people have put their life savings into these improvements. Helen and Russel's newsagency had 90 centimetres of water wash through, destroying all their hard work recovering from the 2011 event.

The stories of Denise, Gary, Rachel, Helen and Russel are just some of the touching stories I heard while in Laidley. They are no doubt repeated elsewhere. To quote Kathy Brady, 'No-one let the 2011 floods beat them and the result was an amazing new town. We will do it again.'

I wish to acknowledge the business recovery team led by the very capable Gary Warrener. I commend Gary and Sarah Buckler and their team on doing such a great job in responding so quickly to and offering practical assistance for small businesses in Laidley. I would also like to acknowledge and commend Ian Rickuss MP and Mayor Steve Jones.

One of the lessons that was learned from the 2011 floods was that tourists very quickly cancelled their forward bookings for holidays to Queensland upon hearing about the natural disasters night after night on the news. It was their belief that the whole of Queensland was under water even though some peak tourism destinations were unaffected.

This is something we did not want to see repeated and it is why my team at Tourism and Events Queensland have initiated a tourism recovery campaign entitled 'Australia Day II' to encourage Queenslanders and Australians to support our tourism industry and reclaim the January Australia Day lost to bad weather. Our proud Australian and lamb ambassador Sam Kekovich is rallying the call to celebrate Australia Day a second time with Australia Day II to be held on Saturday, 23 February.

Honourable members, let me assure you that Queensland is well and truly open for business. Affected destinations are getting back on their feet, and one of the ways Australians can assist our tourism industry is by holidaying in Queensland. The Premier and the entire government have been working around the clock to minimise the ongoing effects of the floods and offer practical assistance to tourism operators and small businesses impacted by the recent natural disaster. The collaboration of efforts across all departments is to be commended. Their prompt cooperation is a credit to all involved and has no doubt saved lives. Our mayors must also be acknowledged across Queensland for taking the lead in their regions.

Along with the physical roll-out of emergency services, we were able to provide virtual assistance as well through our newly revamped business and industry portal, which can be found at [www.business.qld.gov.au](http://www.business.qld.gov.au). This site has been growing in popularity throughout the state's business community for the past few months, but the spike in use over the flood period was extraordinary. So it is good to see that it has been utilised as a valuable resource during the peak demand for information. Last month there were more than 100,000 unique users on the site, which is an increase of over 100 per cent on the same time last year. In the 10 days following the floods, over 11,000 individual Queenslanders visited the site, with almost 50 per cent of these accessing information on disaster assistance and recovery. This is quite remarkable given the number of Queenslanders without power during this period. But we are a resourceful lot in the Sunshine State who embrace technology. This is demonstrated by the fact that more than 50 per cent of visits to our site were from mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets.

Along with this information came monetary support. As has been mentioned by other honourable members previously, category B assistance to flood affected small businesses has been activated, and I wish to thank the Minister for Agriculture for driving this support so quickly and for including our small businesses. Category B assistance has been activated in 23 local government areas and category C in five LGAs. Category B assistance includes concessional loans of up to \$250,000, while under category C businesses can also apply for grants of up to \$25,000. I would encourage all businesses affected by these floods to avail themselves of this assistance.

As has been said, the resilience and determination of Queenslanders was on show once again over the past weeks. But in true Queensland spirit we get up, dust ourselves off—or should I say de-mud ourselves—and start again. I am so very proud that this government was able to, in no small way, help our fellow Queenslanders in their hours of need.

Finally, I wish to put on the record my deep appreciation for all of the police and emergency service personnel, the volunteers, the mud armies, the community recovery teams and everyone who has supported clean-up efforts. I am sure that every honourable member in the House feels the same way. May I say to all Queenslanders affected by Cyclone Oswald that, whilst the mental and physical scars remain and emotions are still raw, homes and personal possessions perished and tragically six lives were lost, you will not be forgotten. May you find some comfort in knowing that you are all in our thoughts as we build a more resilient Queensland for the future. I commend the motion to the House.