



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONDOLENCES

Australian Natural Disasters

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker King, Catherine, MP

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Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing and Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport) (11.30 am)—I commend the member for Hinkler and those other members who have contributed to this condolence motion to date and also those who are to do so after me. I think this debate certainly serves to demonstrate that politicians do not only exist in this place. We live in Bundaberg, we live in Ipswich, we live in Toowoomba and we live in Ballarat. These are our communities and they are directly affected by these terrible natural disasters that have occurred. These are our people who have been affected and these are our home towns. We feel very strongly about what has happened to them.

As the 2010 sitting year came to an end, I do not think any of us could have imagined the devastation that this country would face over the summer. In fact, people in the communities around Ballarat, which had been affected by floods in September, were actually looking forward to something of a better break through the holiday season to help them recover further. Many of them had just moved back into their homes, new carpet was laid, new kitchens were put in, the plaster was back up on the walls, and the gardens were restored, ready to celebrate Christmas after four months out of their homes.

Little did those people from places like Creswick and Clunes expect that by today—the day after the resumption of parliament for 2011—they would have experienced flooding not once more but in many cases twice more. Other areas like Skipton and Beaufort, just outside my electorate, were also seriously impacted by the summer floods. Areas including the city of Ballarat were also severely affected, as were suburbs such as Miners Rest, houses in Delacombe—again, the third time flooded in the course of four months—and the suburb of Alfredton.

Heartbreakingly, as I said, many of these families were flooded again over the weekend. Numerous houses and businesses were inundated, along with community facilities including two football and netball clubs, a senior citizens centre, a community swimming pool, bowling clubs, caravan parks, community halls and playgrounds.

Roads and other infrastructure have suffered severely. The shoulders of some sealed roads are frankly too dangerous now and the fast-flowing, high volume of water swept gravel from many of the unsealed surfaces. There is a great deal of scouring damage on sealed main roads and in and around culverts and bridges, including a number that will need to be entirely rebuilt. In many locations it is a serious mess and a serious danger to be driving on these roads.

I do think it is important that, while I am reflecting on what happened in my own electorate and while we understand just how devastating floods are anywhere, most importantly in this condolence motion our thoughts do turn to Queensland. I know that the people in my electorate would absolutely want their heartfelt wishes to go to the Queensland communities, particularly those where lives have been lost. We cannot even imagine the circumstances that those families in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley are facing today and will face for many, many years to come. We certainly recognise that and I think it is very important in this condolence motion that all members do so. I think Queensland has suffered a very severe blow and in raising the issues in Victoria I do not want to distract from that at all. The tragic loss of life is deeply harrowing and our thoughts go out to their families.

We have all been challenged to ponder how cruel the extremes of this great nation can sometimes be. But, thankfully, we have also had the privilege to witness the formidable resilience of our communities and the great generosity of people who have assisted on the ground and given freely to appeals for funding.

I want to again thank those organisations, including the SES, the CFA, the Red Cross, St John Ambulance, Victoria Police, service clubs, council staff and ADF personnel, and the many other kind-hearted locals who just got stuck in and helped whether it was before the floods in filling sandbags or after the floods in helping people to clean their homes and their businesses. That community support, I know, will continue. I experienced that generosity during a collection on Australia Day for our local flood relief. It is a heart-warming and reassuring

experience to hear and see people wanting to share their experiences whether they be the people in Queensland or our own local community.

As a government and a nation we need to stand together to help flood affected communities rebuild their roads, their bridges, their rail lines and their public facilities. But most of all we need to help them rebuild their hearts. Many of the communities I represent are anxious each time it rains. They are angry and they want answers as to why the floods have occurred and what can be done to minimise the damage that has been done in those communities. There is a lot of work we need to do in those communities to achieve that. Whilst today is not the day to debate issues around how that gets paid for, I do think it is up to every one of us in this place to stand with our communities in the days, months and years ahead and to understand the great responsibility we bear both here in this place and as community leaders to make sure that the heart of these communities is rebuilt and that we do not damage them by the debate that ensues. Thank you.