



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Torres Strait Flooding

SPEECH

Monday, 21 March 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11.56 am)—I commend the member for Leichhardt for taking the time to move this motion. While I do not doubt his commitment to the Torres Strait Islands people in his electorate, I do wonder about the timing of this particular motion. For myself, I proudly have a Torres Strait Islands flag on my desk and I am very respectful of their contribution to Australian history. I am not totally sure that the Murray Islands are in the Torres Strait; I assume they are—any lawyer knows the contribution that Eddie Mabo and the two other successful claimants made in the Mabo decision. I know of their long-term connection to the land and to the sea and to the areas in between, particularly their fish traps. Also, on a committee with you, Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, we gained insights into the importance of Torres Strait Islanders in keeping feral incursions out, particularly in protecting honey bees, and in their contributions to defence and security.

So I do commend the member for Leichhardt for his commitment to his people. However, he has a strange view of history. Unfortunately, he is not in the chamber so I cannot glean from him just when this flood devastation occurred. I get the impression that it was either at midnight on 24 November 2007 or when the election writs were issued! I am not sure when the devastation actually started to occur. Maybe it was the day Labor were elected! But it seems a bit strange that, while he was the member for that area from 2 March 1996 through to 24 November 2007, there were no problems whatsoever with flooding in the Torres Strait. My understanding of anthropogenic climate change is that we have accurate measurement of sea levels over the last 200 years—accurate, empirical data from scientists, not Alan Jones type fakers. These are accurate measurements of sea levels, empirical data, that show that over that time we have had about a 20-centimetre rise in sea levels.

I believe in climate change. I believe that humans have contributed to it. I do not believe that it is bovine faeces, to paraphrase the Leader of the Opposition. I believe that it is real and that people have contributed to it. Obviously that is going to have an impact in areas like the Torres Strait. Every Queenslander knows the challenges that come with being a local government in a remote area, and especially so when you are dealing with islands. The rateable basis for these shires is nothing like that for my area and Brisbane, which is an economy bigger than even Tasmania's.

Mr Neumann—Twice as big.

Mr PERRETT—Twice as big, some might say. I would not say that, but our rateable area is completely different to the Torres Strait Regional Authority's rateable area, which gives it particular challenges when it comes to providing protection against sea rises. So what do you do? We contribute money sensibly. We have given \$400,000 for new research into climate change and how it affects the local area. Those opposite made light of that fact; they said, 'Oh, it's obvious!' Well, it is not necessarily obvious. My area was flooded in the recent floods, in January, and it was completely different to what happened in the 1974 floods and a bit different for the member for Blair. For example, in 1974 the water came down Oxley Creek; this time, in 2011, the water came up the creek. I have people in my area whose houses had been flooded up to the ceiling in 1974 when the water came in through their back door; this time it came through their front door. So you do not just rush in and say, 'We'll build these walls.' You do have to understand the situation, especially if you are going to commit significant amounts of money.

It is also good to see that we have contributed \$1 million to the regional tide gauge network so that people can have additional warnings. And perhaps we need to give additional support to the Torres Strait Regional Authority so that they can make proper decisions about where the housing and the infrastructure are located. Those are concerns in the Ipswich and Brisbane areas as much as they are in the Torres Strait. The federal government can play a role in guiding local government in this area.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Sidebottom)—The time allocated for this debate has now expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.