



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Australian Natural Disasters

SPEECH

Tuesday, 5 February 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Abbott, Tony, MP

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Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): I join with the Prime Minister to acknowledge the dangerous summer that we are still living through and also to point out that the worst of mother nature tends to bring out the best of human nature right around our country, as tens of thousands of Australians rise to the challenges of the natural environment they face.

The Prime Minister, the parliament, the coalition—all Australians—salute the emergency services workers who have done so much to respond to the ravages of fire and flood. Obviously we salute all the volunteer firefighters; we salute the other volunteers from the Salvation Army, from the Red Cross and elsewhere who are rallying to help victims. We particularly salute the community volunteers who come from nowhere at times like this to help their fellow Australians—the mud army that has been mobilised in Bundaberg and other parts of Queensland and northern New South Wales; neighbours helping neighbours to recover from these heartbreaking circumstances.

Every state and territory with the exception of the ACT has been affected by fire. In Tasmania, many homes have been lost on the Tasman Peninsula, particularly at Dunalley. In New South Wales, many homes have been lost, particularly around Coonabarabran. Much damage has been done in Victoria—in Gippsland in particular—and South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland have also been affected. Even now Western Australia is being affected by fires. In Bundaberg—an area, a city, a region devastated by floods just two years ago—they have experienced the worst floods on record; what they believe was a one in 200-year flood event, with 7,500 people directly affected and 3,000 homes flooded. Our hearts go out to everyone affected by this terrible tragedy. I particularly salute the local member, the member for Hinkler, Paul Neville, who has not just been helping to organise relief and emergency assistance but also been personally helping—and indeed he carries the scars of his assistance in the floods over the weekend. New South Wales, too, has had record floods on the Clarence River and some 2,000 residents have been evacuated in Grafton and surrounding areas.

I acknowledge the swift response of the national government and I acknowledge the efforts of the Army, magnificent as always, and the good work of Centrelink. I know the farmers and the business people from flood and fire affected areas are looking forward to the relief packages which are normally put in place for business. If I could make one suggestion: I think it would help if these business relief packages were extended to businesses that have been commercially impacted as well as physically impacted by flood and fire, because recovery is not just a matter of physical rebuilding; it is also a matter of economic rebuilding. That is something that has to be of concern to this parliament.

It has been a difficult and dangerous summer for many Australians. Our hearts go out to those affected and we are resolved to do whatever we reasonably can to help put those people back on their feet.