



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Cyclone Pam**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 24 March 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 24 March 2015  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Thistlethwaite, Matt, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

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**Mr THISTLETHWAITE** (Kingsford Smith) (20:16): I move:

That this House:

- (1) acknowledges the devastation caused by Cyclone Pam on the people of Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Kiribati;
- (2) recognises the enormous destructive force of Cyclone Pam and notes the loss of life and destruction caused including:
  - (a) damage to 90 per cent of Port Vila homes and entire villages across the archipelago;
  - (b) displacement of 45 per cent of Tuvalu's population and significant destruction of the outer islands of Tuvalu; and
  - (c) severe damage on three of Kiribati's southern islands:
- (3) recognises the:
  - (a) enormous effort that will be required by governments and non-government emergency teams to find those missing from the disaster; and
  - (b) huge task now facing our friends in the Pacific to rebuild and repair following the devastation of Cyclone Pam;
- (4) acknowledges the international effort to provide assistance to Vanuatu; and
- (5) calls on the Australian Government to monitor the situation closely and to work with the governments of Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Kiribati to provide timely and appropriate further assistance as needed.

On 13 March Cyclone Pam wreaked havoc on one of our closest neighbours, the archipelago of Vanuatu. A category 5 storm with winds of more than 300 kilometres an hour, Pam smashed into the string of 83 tropical islands home to 270,000 of our nearest neighbours. Trees were toppled, boats and ships whipped from their moorings, hospitals and schools damaged—some destroyed—and homes obliterated. Cyclone Pam was a natural disaster unlike anything Vanuatu had seen before. As a result, up to 70 per cent of Vanuatu's population has been displaced and, tragically, the latest UN death toll stands at 16. The nearby island nations of Tuvalu and Kiribati also could not escape the cyclone's fury, with 45 per cent of Tuvalu's population displaced as well.

Vanuatu and the Pacific islands are our neighbourhood. They are our close friends. In difficult times such as this, Australia stands with our neighbours in their time of need. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Ni-Vanuatu and those affected by this devastating natural disaster as they begin the long and arduous task of rebuilding their homes and their lives. Labor supports the government's assistance through \$10 million worth of aid, and we thank the more than 450 Australian Defence Force members, 56 search-and-rescue personnel, 26 medical staff, including doctors and nurses, and the wonderful 22 members of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who have been working with Vanuatu officials to help those most in need. We also commend Vanuatu's Prime Minister, Joe Natuman, and the Vanuatu government on the terrific job that they are doing in assessing the needs of the people and ensuring the worst-affected regions are receiving food, water, shelter and medicine.

Typically, many Australians are also digging deep to generously offer their support through financial donations. I ask Australians, however, to be wary. Unfortunately there are those who would seek to take advantage of this generosity. People should be wary of Cyclone Pam fundraising scams on social media, door to door and at their local shopping centres. The best way to identify a scam is to ask the person for their identification and to check the charity on the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission website.

Tragically for the tropical islands of the Pacific, weather events such as Cyclone Pam are becoming more and more violent. For these people, climate change is not just something to think about down the track; it is occurring now. Whenever I meet with Pacific leaders, their No. 1 concern for their future is climate change. For Australians, climate change is something that we think about in 20 or 30 years. For the Pacific, it is a present danger. As the world continues to warm and sea levels rise, the relatively small and vulnerable Pacific island nations are the globe's canary down the mine, and already they are noticing changes. In the wake of Vanuatu's storm, the President of Vanuatu, Baldwin Lonsdale, made an emotional plea to the international community to do more on climate change. The Premier of Niue, Toke Talagi, said this week:

We keep talking and talking about climate change. We keep talking about actions on climate change. But the consequences to the inaction is what's happened in Vanuatu, in Tuvalu and in Kiribati.

Homes are being inundated, the acidification of the ocean continues to threaten fish stocks, and the very existence of many small island states hangs in the balance. More must be done by countries that are able to alleviate the effects of climate change, particularly on our regional neighbours in the Pacific. I thank all of those Australians who have been working in Vanuatu with Vanuatu government officials, with Ni-Vanuatu communities, to repair the damage, to get those communities back on their feet. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those—our neighbours, our friends—who are suffering from this horrendous natural disaster.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER ( Mr Craig Kelly ): Is there a seconder for the motion?