

CYCLONE GABRIELLE — NEW ZEALAND

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [5.55 pm]: This week there has been some conversation around the issue of flooding. As we go to our break, I would like members in this place to spare a thought for the people of New Zealand, my home country and the place from which I came in 1985. The situation on the ground is very dire at the moment. I note that the New Zealand government has sought the assistance of the Australian government. Given that we are in this state and that will be a matter for the federal government to consider, I hope that that request will be considered very carefully. Tropical cyclone Gabrielle travelled down through the Pacific Ocean across the top of the Tasman Sea and severely affected Northland, then travelled across the Bay of Plenty, which is where I spent most of my youth. My first years were spent in the town of Opotiki in the North Island. The winds from the back end of that cyclone have severely affected the east coast of New Zealand. If people are interested in this issue, they may want to familiarise themselves with the town of Gisborne, a coastal town that, in New Zealand terms, is quite remote. It is a city of 30 000 people. It is now completely isolated. Something in the order of 15 000 people living in the city of Napier and up the coast to Gisborne were evacuated from their homes.

This event just speaks of some of the big challenges that are occurring across the globe as we see these events striking our communities with greater force. This is certainly looking to be the most severe cyclone that has affected the east coast of New Zealand. Unfortunately, I have family members in harm's way. I spoke to my mother earlier today. We are unable to contact my brother and his family, although we expect they are safe, along with some nephews and extended family members. People may also like to familiarise themselves with the town of Te Karaka. My Māori brethren live in that part of the world. Five hundred members of that community had to climb the surrounding hills in order to be safe. It is certainly a very timely reminder. We saw the same story in the north of our state. We have seen bridges smashed. I am familiar with some of the places after looking at the photos. Bridges that have stood since the 1960s or for even longer have been wiped out. A significant recovery effort will be required over a long period.

I think it really does sheet home the need for a re-evaluation of our infrastructure across both Australia and New Zealand because of the challenges we are facing. I note the comments of people who said that we need an ability to anticipate the severity of these storms. I understand that but it is time to evaluate, given the changes that are happening to our climate. We know that is occurring.

It is predicted that these storm events will become stronger and more frequent, and, certainly, if this is the case, there is more rain to come. As I said, over the next few days, I am hoping to hear good news from my family. Before communications were cut, I heard that one of my nephews had to be evacuated because they were on a lower lying part of the Waipa River flood plain, which has flooded significantly. I am making this point today because what we are seeing is happening in quick succession. There is certainly a concern. We hope that the recovery efforts are going to be rapid and effective. We hope that, over the next few days, the rain eases. There is still more rain predicted to come.

House adjourned at 6.00 pm
