

KIMBERLEY FLOODS

Statement

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [9.46 pm]: I would like to reflect on the recent events in the Kimberley. There will probably be a few members' statements about this, because so much has occurred in the Kimberley in recent weeks. I would like to at least put to those members opposite who have the power to do so that there might be an opportunity at some point to undertake an independent review of the situation in the Kimberley and also of the response to the disaster. As the dust settles and the broken infrastructure is slowly repaired and people are returned to their homes, it is important for us as a society to make sure that we are properly prepared for disaster response. That issue has been raised in this place on many occasions. It is also important to make sure that we are prepared for the challenges that we are facing as our climate is changing, with events such as record rainfall and record storms. We need to be better prepared, particularly in remote areas that are difficult to get to and difficult to respond to.

If I can use 3 January as day zero, on day zero minus 10, my wife and I were in Carnarvon. We had been there for the Christmas break. I recall speaking to my wife about how I had been keeping an eye on the modelling for the rainfall in the Kimberley, and it looked concerning. I do obsess a little with models. I maintain a close watch on these things. On 26 or 27 December, I said, "We'll have to go back home to Broome because I can't guarantee that we'll be in a situation in which we can get back to Broome." Ex-tropical cyclone Ellie was lingering off the north of the Kimberley and coming down in a way that was reminiscent of a previous storm in 2017–18 when an ex-tropical cyclone lingered in and around Broome and created close to two metres of rain over a period of six weeks. The uniqueness of this system is that it appeared that the track would linger around the centre of the Kimberley in those headwaters and catchments of the Fitzroy River.

On 28 December, we packed up first thing in the morning and drove from Carnarvon to Broome. As we crossed through Roebuck, the rain began. Many members who are familiar with the Kimberley would know Phillip Hams. He is a local identity up there. He lives at Gogo Station and has played a fairly significant role in the community over the years. He was sending me data on the river flows. His interest in the possibilities of future irrigation quickly turned to concern about the future of the community of Fitzroy Crossing and the downstream communities along the river. On 1 January, Dimond Gorge recorded a flow of 560 000 megalitres. Mount Krauss recorded a flow of 511 000 megalitres. They are the two main monitoring points and give us a fairly good idea about how much water is going to come down through Fitzroy Crossing. On 2 January, those flows had risen to 925 000 megalitres for Dimond Gorge over a 24-hour period while Mount Krauss recorded 1.2 million megalitres over a 24-hour period. On 2 February, the bridge was still standing, the water level was close to the bottom of the bridge and there was obviously concern about the future.

The point is that with all these disasters, there is a warning about what is going to happen. We need to look at how well the government responded when the obvious signs of what was happening were upon us. The challenge we face in those remote areas is that once there is a disaster, we need to mobilise the resources needed in order to respond to the disaster. That became very apparent in the following days. In fact, by 3 January, people were ringing me and sending me photos of the bridge. Those photos that were in *The West Australian* with the kangaroos on the little outcrop were sent to me by Andrea Myers, a good friend in Fitzroy Crossing. She had gone out in the morning just as the news broke that the bridge had collapsed and would not be useable. It became clear that this was a disaster of significant proportions. A lot of homes in the community were flooded. Water was coming into the IGA store. Its freezers had to be turned off because of the electricity issues, so there was a loss of perishable food. There was a huge concern about feeding the community. People started to move into temporary shelters and evacuation centres. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services volunteers were working tirelessly. These are all local people who were rescuing people in their dinghies and so forth. At that stage, I understand there were no significant resources deployed by the state government or the military, which came later.

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: The member who likes to make comments from the floor has no idea, absolutely zero idea, about what happened or what was going on. The point is that I am not here to make a particular criticism of anything, other than that —

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Neil Thomson has the call.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: There is an opportunity for this government to reflect on how it responds to these situations, particularly in our remote areas where these difficulties arise.

On 5 January we saw the first military aircraft. We were now into day two. Reference was made in the *Broome Advertiser* about people being left clueless and confused. I was getting multiple calls; people were concerned about how they

were going to have enough food to get by and keep themselves going. They did not know where they were going to be located. That was not me; that was people in the community.

I went to Broome airport and it was blowing a gale. By that stage, the system had come over Broome and for 48 hours the airport was unusable. A C-130 flew into Broome and I took its track on the radar tracker as it circled overhead and then flew back to Port Hedland. I find it hard to understand how we could not find another way and we were not more prepared to identify how we could get those resources into that community. There were opportunities to maybe even go up to Kununurra and come through that way; I believe the Kununurra airport was open. These are questions that I think deserve to be asked and considered through a formal process. I would like to see some sort of formal and independent review, like a royal commission, on the processes that actually occurred in the north.

There is more to be said on this; I will give chapter and verse on what happened over the last month or so, but more needs to be done and we need to be prepared.

Statement

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [9.56 pm]: I feel the urge to get to my feet. Firstly, I thank all the volunteers and department people who worked tirelessly in an emergency situation. Not once did I hear the member mention any of the stuff that took place. He did not thank them; all he did was seek to be a vulture, preying on misfortune within —

The PRESIDENT: Order, member! Keep your comments through the chair, rather than directed at individual members.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: It was really hard to watch the cringe coming from the Facebook page of a certain member in this chamber during a crisis in which people's lives were at risk. It was an absolute disgrace. The minister should be applauded for what he did, not attacked on cheap-shot political TV shows and news grabs, which is what vultures do—they prey on low-hanging fruit, trying to cut through. It is shameful and disrespectful to all the people who were out there in the Kimberley, working tirelessly. The local member did a fabulous job on the ground. The minister was up there as soon as he could be, yet a member in this chamber was out there within days of the incident, saying that it was all the state government's fault, and that it had all gone to—I will not say that word! But it was an absolute disgrace to see the member come into this chamber after making crises for his own benefit. That is exactly what we have seen, and the people of Western Australia will see that.

I get very passionate about this because, as the member said, we are talking about an emergency situation that has taken place. Things change; roads go. We could not land planes, so we had to come up with a new option, and we did. That is exactly what the state and federal governments did; they acted and went with the flow, and overcame the challenges they faced. I am damned proud of what the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and our emergency services did. I am damned proud that people from Coolgardie and all over Western Australia went up there, and I thank them for what they did. They saved lives; they did not go looking for a grab on a TV show or the news. They were out there, saving lives.

I am sick and tired of seeing this type of low politics in this chamber, and I will not stand for it. The local member, the minister, the departments and the heads of departments all pooled together and made sure it was the best situation they could during a crisis. Absolutely, when we get the opportunity after something happens, we go back and review it, but the member was talking about it pretty much the day after it happened. It was insane to see how quickly the member was jumping to make political points outside this chamber instead of focusing at the crisis at hand. It is an absolute shame and I am really annoyed that the member has come in here on the first day of this Parliament and sought to find himself another video-grab so he can send it out there on his Facebook page. It will not get any more views than his mask on his face on the plane—I give him the hot tip!

I am very proud to say that Western Australia pooled together in that disaster. I know that the minister is on urgent parliamentary business, and I am sure he would have jumped to his feet as well, because I am absolutely disgusted by what we just heard in that member's statement.