

**KIMBERLEY FLOODS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

*Statement*

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [6.36 pm]: Before I deliver my second instalment on the floods in the Kimberley, I would like to just reflect a little on the comments of my colleague Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. For the record, we have not spoken about the fact that the Minister for Planning, Hon Rita Saffioti, chose in her wisdom and rather *Yes, Minister* style to quietly—or maybe she thought it was quietly—abandon the strategic assessment of Perth and Peel. The strategic assessment of Perth and Peel is a vital piece of strategic planning that aims to preserve endangered species and also find a pathway for affordable housing in our city. I think that is a very good point, my honourable colleague. There is a lack of strategic planning, and I think that people will judge this Minister for Planning very poorly in the future for that.

I want to follow on with my second instalment on the Kimberley floods. I know some members opposite got rather worked up over my comments. I am not intending to do that and never have, other than to say that it is day 44 and I remind the house of how many days it has been since 3 January, when a terrible disaster occurred. How long will it take, whether it is 200, 300 or 500 days, I do not know, because we must be reminded of the time it is taking —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I invite all members to make their comments directly through the chair, unless they are interjections and then perhaps you might rethink that.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I do reflect on the name-calling that goes on in this place, but it is not about name-calling. I have been on the phone and I am going to make a little comment about the conversation I had today. I have asked this question about the sewage, for example, flowing into the Martuwarra Fitzroy River. It has been flowing into that river and we had comments about rising water. That was weeks ago. We had a little burst of extra rain. That was weeks ago. There are four Aboriginal plumbers in Fitzroy Crossing right now, ready and willing to do the job and they could have done the job some time ago. I was there the other day —

**Hon Stephen Dawson:** It would have been washed away.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** That is absolute rubbish.

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I do not have to comment on these things, because the point is this government is incompetent.

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Let us face it, at the end of the day, the government has needed people like me to point out where it is failing. It needs people like me because if it did not, it would just quietly go on with the job of not dealing with the issues in the way they need to be dealt with. The opposite side can argue that it is doing a perfectly good job, but we have seen how ineffective the response has been to cyclone Seroja in Kalbarri. We need to see a better response and we need to see more focus. I was pleased that finally there was the appointment of Rob Cossart as the recovery coordinator. I am pleased that that occurred, although—no disrespect to Rob, whom I know—I would like to have seen somebody at a more senior level hold that role, someone who was able to take a direct line to the Premier and the Prime Minister and hold them to account. As I laid out in, we could say, my manifesto because I knew this was coming —

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** The government is unable and does not have the advice. It does not get the right advice. We need accountability. We need a proper mechanism to outline where the problems are and where the failures are. We can see it on an ongoing basis.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** There will be a lot of member statements. The more you yell, the more I will stand every day and seek the call. You can yell and try to stop me, but I am not going to stop. You can try to interject. I am looking —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Honourable member, please direct your comments through the chair, not across the chamber or in a provocative manner. That is the last warning. Please direct your comments through the chair.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** It is my view that there has not been enough focus on the proper governance that is required to deliver a focused program of recovery. There has not been sufficient focus. There needs to be more accountability and more transparency about what is happening. No key performance indicators are available to us. To date, we

have had no reports in this chamber about the progress that has been made; very little has been said about it. All we get is a constant parade of self-congratulations.

That is what is happening. That is why I am speaking on this matter with great conviction. More needs to be done. There are personal attacks being made against me in this place, which, President, I think are verging on bullying. This is the problem we have in this chamber. People do not want to hear the truth. They do not want to hear what is going on on the ground.

**Hon Rosie Sahanna** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** There needs to be more transparency. There needs to be more senior leadership. There needs to be more accountability.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am constantly being interjected on by others in this chamber. Aspersions are being made against me. I was referred to as some sort of vulture. That is unacceptable. I implore you, President, as I address my points to you, that I need to be given the opportunity to speak about what is going on in that place, because people's economic future depends on it. I am representing the opposition in my community and speaking up for people who do not feel as though they have a voice. When I stand in this place and put my reputation on the line—I will have some water, President, at your discretion—and I am called a vulture, it is not very pleasant, but I will continue to do it. People in the East Kimberley are suffering because they are paying twice, and up to triple, the price in transport costs. I have put forward a petition to this place, and I will continue to raise the matter on their behalf because those people's businesses are now on the line. We have not heard a single word about that matter from the other side.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Again, I am addressing my comments to you, President, but there are constant attacks that go on in this place. I will not resign from standing in this place and representing the people I am supposed to represent. There are so many half-truths presented in this place. A lot needs to be addressed in a rational and sensible way.

Can I get to the point of day three? We got to the narrative of day two and comments were made about the fact that I had not acknowledged the volunteers. In fact, I had. On 12 January —

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** President, I make the point that up until day four, emergency services had not been able to fly into Broome. That is when they arrived. My narrative is getting to day four, the same day that the minister finally arrived in Broome. I have seen the great work by fire and emergency services volunteers who have come from all over this country, but those fire and emergency services volunteers and the Australian Defence Force did not start to mobilise until they were able to get into that community.

Several members interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** If people would just for a moment listen to what I am saying instead of throwing accusations and yelling at me in some out-of-control process, they would realise that I am saying that there was a window of opportunity before the disaster struck to mobilise those resources and have them on the ground in greater numbers so that there would have been an opportunity to deal with the problem when it arrived.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** I am raising these questions in a measured way. I am putting the minister on notice that he needs to answer these questions.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** On day four, the ADF landed in Broome. On day four, people began to mobilise. There was a process.

*Statement*

**HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services)** [6.43 pm]: I rise to respond to some of the comments made by Hon Neil Thomson tonight. I have been deeply embarrassed by his commentary over the past five weeks. He sought very early on to play politics with the lives of the people in Fitzroy Crossing.

**Hon Neil Thomson** interjected.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** He has. There are people in those communities who have lost everything. What we saw in early January was unprecedented. We saw ex-tropical cyclone Ellie circle around Fitzroy Crossing three times. It dropped an inordinate amount of rain. As a result of that rain, people's houses and animals were washed away, and roads and bridges were broken. This person has made ridiculous statements from the outset. This honourable member knew that the weather event was still happening in the Kimberley around Fitzroy Crossing and Broome, yet, at the outset, he was calling on people to land. But, of course, numerous times when the Department of Fire and Emergency Services sought to send extra people across to Fitzroy Crossing, as did the Department of Communities, planes could not land because the weather event was continuing. This honourable member sought to play politics.

I am very grateful. I was not here last night to listen to the earlier contributions, but I have been able to read some tonight. Every resource has been put into responding to the ex-tropical cyclone and to recovery in that community. I think the honourable member has been disingenuous over the past few weeks. I think he has been disrespectful, including tonight when he was disrespectful to Rob Cossart, who has been appointed as the state recovery coordinator. I will say thank you to each and every person involved in the response so far, be they volunteers on the ground, volunteer and career firefighters on the ground, State Emergency Service people on the ground, or volunteer and career emergency services personnel from Victoria and New South Wales. From right across Western Australia, hundreds have been involved. The ADF has been involved. Every resource has been put into it. The Prime Minister and the Premier were there in the early days. Ministers continue to get there on the ground. Community connectors have been appointed. Material has been translated into Kriol and Walmajarri, the local languages for people.

I understand people on the ground feeling frustrated. This was unprecedented. But what I do not understand is the constant attacks and the constant politicising that Hon Neil Thomson continues to do. This was unprecedented. This is getting every resource and every focus put on it. Every time Hon Neil Thomson stands and makes accusations or says untruths, I will call them out, as will other members on this side. We are very, very grateful to all those people who have helped with this recovery so far. We are also very thankful for the stoic nature of the people on the ground who have been affected. Many have lost houses. Many have lost everything. We will work with them, whether it is through disaster recovery funding arrangements, the Lord Mayor's distress fund or however else to get people back on the ground.

This is challenging. It is a challenging place. We are only six weeks into the wet season. We probably have two months more of it. In fact, early on, Main Roads and other agencies were involved in starting to rebuild. The Water Corporation started to rebuild sewage pipes and Main Roads started to put a barge system in place. Guess what happened? The rain came. The water came and the river rose and these things were washed away because we are in the wet season, honourable member, and we will be in the wet season for at least six weeks or maybe two months more! Things are happening.

**Hon Neil Thomson** interjected.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** My goodness, honourable member, you are showing no understanding of the Fitzroy Valley.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, please! Please direct your comments through the chair.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Every resource has been put in—people on the ground from all agencies. I am grateful to all those people who have put their effort into dealing with this event. We are still in the wet season. Although, thankfully, Main Roads has been able to do some great work in opening one lane of Great Northern Highway between Broome and Willare, it has had to be done in stages because the wet weather is still there and the river keeps rising, and that will happen for the next six or eight weeks. Every resource has been put in. On one day, over 200 planes landed at Fitzroy Crossing Airport, which is the same as at Heathrow or Sydney Airport, but this is only a small landing strip. Every resource has been put into this community, as every resource should be. We are committed to getting these people back on track and back to normal as quickly as possible, but it is challenging. If anybody in this place speaks untruths, they should expect to be held to account.