

CYCLONE SEROJA — ASSISTANCE PACKAGE

457. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to the state government's ongoing efforts to support those communities impacted by tropical cyclone Seroja.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the emergency welfare assistance that has been provided by the Department of Communities in both the immediate aftermath of the devastating cyclone and the weeks and months that have followed?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how these efforts will continue into the future?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I would like to thank the member very much for the question and for her work in her community. It has been a real pleasure working with her in dealing with this and other challenges in her electorate. Before I answer the question, though, can I just acknowledge that tomorrow we have a couple of special birthdays. The Minister for Health might be having a special day and the Minister for Sport and Recreation, too. One of them is having a significant birthday, but I will leave that for people to think about.

- (1)–(2) I have an important update for the house about how communities have been recovering from cyclone Seroja. I really want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Department of Communities and its partner organisations, a number of community sector organisations, that have been working very hard on the ground since straight after the disaster, really from the get-go. Many of them have been doing that where they actually live in the community. They either live there or have family members who live in the affected areas. They are not only doing the work in the relief centres, and have been continuing to do the work since then, but they are dealing with the cyclone's impact on their own family members.

I can advise that as of 15 August, since the cyclone hit, the Department of Communities has deployed 210 frontline staff to work alongside 127 Australian Red Cross staff. They have responded to 4 013 calls to the disaster hotline. They have coordinated provision of over 6 400 meals or food boxes, and held 4 718 meetings with impacted residents about their welfare needs. There have been 7 458 applications for emergency financial assistance, and, as a result of that, \$2.62 million in financial assistance has been given.

The Department of Communities has been in touch with 415 households about category 3 and 4 financial assistance, which is for the replacement of essential household items or home repairs. This is a really significant contact. Members can see from those metrics that the Department of Communities has been doing the hard yards. The staff members have been out there. They are not only talking to people who come into the recovery centre, but also doing outreach. This is when some of the Department of Communities workers really come into their own. They know how to connect with people. They are patient. They have skills. They have head and heart, and it is a real pleasure to work with them.

The Premier noted that people will be coming from Afghanistan, and the Department of Communities will be part of that response as well regarding hotel isolation.

I would also like to thank all the community sector organisations, including the volunteers who have been part of this effort. I met some of those volunteers when I went to Northampton not that long ago, and some of them were from interstate. They connect with the Australian Red Cross. They might be people who are nearing retirement or have recently retired. They come across here and do a bit of volunteering. They holiday a bit, then go back to volunteering, and they have skills working in the recovery relief effort. I thank the members of the Department of Communities, the community sector organisations and the volunteers who have helped with the relief effort.