

KIMBERLEY FLOODS — RESPONSE

Statement

HON ROSIE SAHANNA (Mining and Pastoral) [5.20 pm]: I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the Kimberley floods. As a Kimberley girl myself, I thought I would follow up on yesterday's comments. First of all, I would like to acknowledge and commend the comments made by Hon Stephen Dawson and Hon Kyle McGinn on the state government's response to the flood crisis in the Kimberley. This unprecedented flood event was exactly that—unprecedented. I have listened to comments from other members in this chamber stating that the government should have been in a position to expect this level of flooding and damage and to have prepared accordingly. I find that difficult to comprehend given that no-one could ever have expected the Fitzroy River Bridge to collapse and for this level of devastation to be experienced. Further damage then occurred to the roads around Willare between Broome and Derby that effectively cut off many towns and communities in the West Kimberley from Broome. This happened within the space of a couple of days, and while ex-tropical cyclone Ellie was still hovering over the region causing widespread flooding and the closure of Broome airport for two days.

The work by the government and Main Roads Western Australia on the recently staged one-lane reopening of the Great Northern Highway between Broome and Derby was nothing short of incredible. It was achieved within a short time frame whilst working through almost daily wet-season storms. Ten kilometres of this highway was completely washed away by the floods. The crews have worked tirelessly to build a temporary track so that access could be gained and Broome, Derby and the western side of Fitzroy Crossing reconnected. The Main Roads operations director said that the damage to these roads could not have been predicted and that roads could not be easily designed to accommodate a one-in-100-year flood.

The response to the flood emergency at Fitzroy Crossing is ongoing and a priority for this government, as demonstrated by Hon Stephen Dawson. The unprecedented challenges faced by the response team and the immediate aftermath of the emergency were overcome, and the teams are still overcoming daily challenges. We should all be extremely grateful to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services; the countless volunteers and the State Emergency Service and Australian Defence Force personnel who have all come from around the country; the tradespeople from Water Corporation and Main Roads; and the many volunteers from the Fitzroy Crossing town itself. Every resource has been put into rebuilding the communities affected by this event and Western Australians have all pulled together.

I have spoken at length with many residents of Fitzroy Crossing and communities in the Fitzroy Valley. The feedback from the people who I have spoken to is that the community is thankful for the response and assistance that has so far been provided by all government agencies, state and federal, and emergency services, including flood relief packages provided by the government, and not forgetting the many volunteers in Broome who have worked tirelessly to provide emergency clothing and other household necessities needed by people.

An emergency response is a process. It cannot just happen or be resolved overnight. The town will take a while to rebuild and no doubt new challenges will need to be overcome, but they will be. A lot of long-term residents from Fitzroy Crossing and Fitzroy Valley are still in Broome or Derby, unable to return home to their damaged properties. But there is an understanding that the community first needs to be rebuilt and the town made safe before the people are brought back home.

This is not the first time Fitzroy Crossing has been affected by flooding. I reflect on the 1984 floods, the 2002 floods and the 2017 floods, during which the region received more than 1 000 millimetres of rain. The people of Fitzroy Crossing always regroup and have proven themselves very capable of overcoming adversity and natural disasters that affect their remote towns and communities. They are resilient. They are proud and grateful people. All they want is to just get their community back to normality.

A disaster such as the Kimberley floods should not be about political parties taking advantage of the situation or tearing down the government, which is providing the necessary response. An emergency event should bring together all parties to work for the benefit of everyone. It should not be about who is not doing what; the focus should be on working together. The state government has formulated a competent and well-managed response to this emergency, and I am confident that it will continue to provide the necessary rebuilding support that will see Fitzroy Crossing and its surrounding communities back on their feet.

In ending, I would like to honestly commend the McGowan government on the way it has responded and continues to respond to the flood emergency in the Kimberley. Thank you.

Government members: Hear, hear!