



House of Assembly

Extract from Hansard
Wednesday 23rd March 2016
Page 4883

PINERY BUSHFIRES

The Hon. A. PICCOLO (Light)

(17:21):

In speaking in support of the motion to adjourn, I would just like to bring to the attention of the house a survey I have recently undertaken in my electorate of the people who were affected by the Pinery fires.

On 25 November, 119 days ago, the people in my electorate in the communities of Wasleys, Woolsheds, Templers, Magdala, Pinkerton Plains and Hamley Bridge, were affected by the fires which started at Pinery.

Sadly, in that fire two people lost their lives, and a number of people were injured.

The purpose of the survey was to find out what people on the ground were thinking – those

people who were affected by the fires – and how, as a local member and, perhaps, government in general, could respond to the various issues.

We had around 10 per cent return rate on the survey, which is quite usual for a survey. In terms of the results, we had 20 responses from Wasleys, three from Hamley Bridge, six from Templers, one from Magdala, one from Woolsheds, and one from Pinkerton Plains.

Of those residents who responded to the survey, six stated that they had incurred a personal injury in the fires; 19 said that their home was destroyed, or affected in some way; five lost animals or stock; six indicated they lost a motor vehicle; 11 had outbuildings affected by the fires; seven lost crops; and eight had their machinery of some type affected by the fires. In addition to that, there were also some people who lost their gardens or pasture, and eight people lost fences, extensively.

Six people who responded to the survey indicated that they were forced to relocate because of the fire. Of the 32 people who responded, 26 have registered with the Recovery Office. Those who did not register with the Recovery Office indicated they did not believe they needed help – there was no major damage – and some were not sure whether they had registered or not.

In terms of challenges facing the residents, we asked what

challenges the residents were facing after the fire. Overwhelmingly, 50 per cent of people said that cleaning up was the biggest challenge they had. Fifty per cent of people indicated that they were affected in the sense of the clean-up.

The major issue also impeding the clean-up are the ongoing dust storms which people in the fire-affected areas are having. That was quite a strong theme throughout the survey responses, and certainly only a week or so ago we had some major dust storms through that area as well. Not only dust storms, but we are also losing very valuable topsoil which is required for production out there. If we do not get some more rains very quickly, a lot of farmers are going to be in dire straits.

The rains are required if for no other reason than to get some plants growing in the area and some growth to actually stabilise the topsoils.

Of the 32 respondents, eight people said that mental health recovery was a major issue for themselves, and that is, if you like, a sleeper issue, that people were finding it tough to rebuild. By rebuild, I do not mean physically rebuilding, but rebuilding their lives in the sense of what they are going to do next. A number of people are still trying to decide what their next step is and what they are going to do: are they going to rebuild a home or go somewhere else? You have to remember a number of the farmers are in their 70s and it is a very

difficult decision for them to make. I have an enormous amount of empathy for them. Of those people, a number said that they were not actually sure whether they should rebuild or relocate.

People indicated they were generally happy with the insurance process. In the main, the insurance companies have been quite responsive. There are some isolated cases, but in the main they have been quite responsive. One of the issues which has come up is the cost associated with rebuilding fences. Rebuilding fences is a major problem there. Farmers did not insure some fences because of the cost involved in insurance, and we are working with a number of farmers trying to assist them in that process.

Another issue which came up is the lack of a postal service in the town. Members would remember that the actual Wasleys post office was significantly burnt during the fire. The couple who run the post office there are working really hard to rebuild it. I would have to say I am not sure that Australia Post have done all they can with that recovery process. From what I have been seeing, they really have not gone out of their way to do much in terms of rebuilding that post office or the postal service and other interim measures. What they did is redirect all the post to Roseworthy. That is fine as a short-term thing, but in terms of actually understanding how important that post office is to that town in terms of the recovery process, I think for Australia Post it is just business as

usual. I am disappointed with the response of Australia Post, as are a number of other people.

The other issue which has come up time and time again is lack of mobile coverage. I raised that issue only a couple of weeks ago in this place when I indicated that we need to do more, as part of the Black Spot program, to make sure that we have better coverage in these communities.

Of course, some families who were affected by severe injury are still struggling in terms of their personal recovery. Our heart goes out to those families who are still dealing with some major issues relating to burns to their bodies, etc. For a lot of farmers, it is going to be a real challenge in terms of income. If the rains do not come and there is no income this year, it will be a major issue for that community involved in terms of rebuilding that community.

In terms of the services, we asked people what services they have accessed. Eight of the 32 people who responded said they have accessed the state recovery centre. Six said they have been in touch with Red Cross. In terms of Red Cross, I would just like to congratulate them on sponsoring a psychologist who came out there and spoke with people, and that is Dr Rob Gordon. I would say that, at the outset, when I thought they were bringing in a psychologist, I was a bit sceptical about how effective that would be. Dr Rob Gordon is actually an outstanding

psychologist; he did a wonderful job.

I went to one of the sessions with the community out there and I was extremely impressed with the way he approached it: no lecturing, not telling people what to do, but through a whole range of storytelling he actually helped to relate people's experiences. You could hear after the session that they were engaged with him. I understand that, as a result of that very positive response, Red Cross has invited him back and he is doing some more sessions and I look forward to those.

In terms of services that residents have accessed, BlazeAid came in for a big tick from the community. BlazeAid has well supported the communities out there.

Generally speaking, people are also happy with the response by government agencies. That has been quite supportive. They also had support from Samaritan's Purse, and I also understand the Mormons were up there helping people clear up and rebuild.

In terms of how people have rated overall the dissemination of the information about the recovery process, 10 of the 32 said that it was good, eight said that it was satisfactory, and the remainder said that it was poor. So, there is obviously some work to be done there in terms of communicating with the community and making sure that people get access to information.

It was interesting that the strongest response we received in the survey was that people felt that a door-to-door approach would be much more effective, rather than in other ways.

People said they just wanted the personal touch and also for people to tell their story. That is a lesson to be learnt. I understand that some door-to-door work has been done but the information suggests that it should have been done earlier.

Also, there was concern about the lack of, perhaps, a Facebook page where people could load information up or other people could interact. A general Facebook page has also come up in the survey.

In terms of how people rated overall the recovery process to date, eight of the 32 said that the process was good, 11 said that it was satisfactory, and the remainder said that it was poor. In terms of the comments about the response by Australia Post, it was seen as poor and that some of the information has been confusing, and also that the focus was on the townships and not enough on outlying areas.

What I can say is that there was a lot of strong support for the volunteers who have worked with communities, and also a concern about access to funding, which is something I will talk about at a later date.

Time Expired