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By: Attorney-General's Dept

Minister Ludwig - Opening Statement

Date: 22/2/2011

This summer has seen an unprecedented number of disasters in Queensland, NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. In other words, in every single State and almost every Territory. Floods, cyclones and bushfires have all caused large-scale destruction and in some cases have resulted in a tragic loss of life.

Since October, record flood events have impacted seven out of eight jurisdictions. In the course of this we have also experienced numerous cyclones (in fact 10 since October), most notably of course Tropical Cyclone Yasi. 45% of Australia, or 287, local government areas have been affected by these floods and extreme weather events.

The Australian Government takes a whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approach to disaster response and recovery. At the Australian Government level, agencies such as Prime Minister and Cabinet, Department of Regional Australia, Department of Health and Ageing, Centrelink, Geoscience Australia, as well as the Australian Defence Force have all worked together for the safety and well-being of affected communities. This has occurred in coordination with State, Territory and local governments who of course lead their respective responses, and together with the army of volunteers, are at the coal face of combating and responding to the needs of their communities.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the various Australian Government agencies, in the State and Territory Governments and of course all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly and selflessly in extremely difficult circumstances.

Specifically, I also want to record my admiration for the outstanding efforts of the staff of Attorney-General's Department, particularly Emergency Management Australia and the Public Affairs Branch, over the last the last four months. EMA has led and coordinated the response of the Australian Government to natural disasters and a range of other threats through its Crisis Coordination Centre and that operates 24 hours a day.

The staff of EMA have provided the point of contact for the States and Territories to access Commonwealth assistance, coordinated inter-jurisdictional and international offers of assistance, deployed numerous liaison officers to State Disaster Coordination Centres, supported Australian Government and helped key decision makers be fully informed about the unfolding disaster events and actions required. Importantly, they have also worked tirelessly to enact arrangements that allow the delivery of financial assistance via a suite of measures like the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment and the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements to ensure that those in need can quickly access financial support.

As at 16 February 2011, the Commonwealth has granted and paid through Centrelink over 595 856 claims for the Australian Government Disaster Relief Payments totalling approximately \$694.6 million and 49 848 Disaster Income Recovery Subsidy payments worth over \$22.2 million.

It is appropriate to express gratitude for the record.

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