

HOME AFFAIRS ESTIMATES – NEMA SESSION - MINISTER WATT OPENING STATEMENT (764 words)

Thank you to the committee for the chance to appear here today.

Since I last appeared at the committee, Australians have continued to experience extreme weather.

This continued over the weekend, with Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle making landfall at Norfolk Island as a category 2 system.

It has since been downgraded to a sub-tropical low-pressure system and is headed for New Zealand's north island today.

Fortunately, early reports suggest Norfolk Island has sustained no major damage. We do have reports of power outages across the island and fallen trees blocking some roads.

The Albanese Government stands ready to support the Norfolk Island community through the recovery process in the coming days and weeks.

It's a timely reminder for all Australians, no matter where they live, to be well prepared for natural disasters.

Australians are also lending a hand when disasters hit overseas.

While Gabrielle was bearing down on Australia's most eastern territory, more than 70 heroic Australian emergency services personnel were heading west to provide expert assistance in Turkiye in the aftermath of those devastating earthquakes.

I can confirm that the team has touched down and are ready to provide much needed help on the ground in some of the worst impacted areas.

Of course, since the last time I appeared before you, there have been more devastating natural disasters here at home as well.

Major flooding and bushfire events in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory have required major response and recovery efforts from federal, state and local disaster authorities.

I would like to thank National Emergency Management Agency officials, along with State, Territory and local government personnel for all their hard work over many months to ensure Australians have been kept safe during this time.

We continue to support Australians through recovery.

Since the election of the Albanese Government, more than \$1.6 billion has been paid out through the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment and the Disaster Recovery Allowance.

We have also provided nearly \$2.7 billion in joint funding through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement.

To give you an idea of the scope of these disasters; in the last year, nearly 70% of Australia's population has lived in a natural disaster declared local government area.

While we are committed to standing shoulder to shoulder with communities through response and recovery, we must ensure that the money available to individuals and communities in the immediate aftermath is fit-for-purpose.

That's why I have commissioned former head of the AFP and former Bushfire Recovery Chief Andrew Colvin, to undertake a review into all federal disaster funding.

The review will look into all Australian government disaster payments, helping to shift the dial from recovery to resilience.

Because the Albanese Government is committed to sharpening our focus on improving Australia's resilience to natural disasters.

By investing more in resilience, it's hoped that we can reduce the impact that severe disasters have on communities and help put downward pressure on rising insurance premiums.

Since coming to office, the Albanese Government has already committed more than \$1.4 billion in building disaster resilience across Australia, more than the Morrison Government spent on resilience during their entire time in office.

That includes through our key election commitment, the Disaster Ready Fund, which since last Estimates has been legislated.

Up to \$1 billion will be available over the next five years for projects such as levies, drainage improvements, bushfire evacuation centres or even seawalls. Applications are now open for state and territory governments for the first round.

But we are building resilience across a range of programs.

Just this week we have announced over \$38 million in resilience projects funded alongside the states in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, with more to come.

The Resilient Homes programs in Queensland and New South Wales are picking up pace-with well over 130 homes bought back in Queensland and offers going out in the Northern Rivers.

We are working with insurance companies through the Hazards Insurance Partnership, to improve information sharing capabilities and help to drive down the cost of insurance.

Through the National Cabinet process, work is underway to ensure we don't keep building on flood plains putting families at

risk – an issue the former Government put in the too-hard basket for years.

The Albanese Government is committed to preparing better and recovering quicker from natural disasters. And we are seeing evidence of that happening already.

Thank you very much and I'd be happy to take any questions from the committee.