

Rescue funds give hope to residents, business owners PM's helping hand



DEEP CONCERN . . . Prime Minister John Howard hugs a child during his visit to cyclone-ravaged Babinda yesterday
Photo: TROY RODGERS TR383040

By VIKKI CAMPION in Innisfail

IN Babinda, shop owners gave them a broom to sweep out invading floodwaters, in Miriwinni farmers led them squelching through flattened banana paddocks and pleaded for help.

And in Innisfail's crowded council chamber, North Queensland received a helping hand from Prime Minister John Howard, Premier Peter Beattie and an entourage of local, State and federal politicians.

And relieved residents clapped. For emotional victims of Cyclone Larry, an unlimited supply of emergency State and Federal government cash was something to applaud.

On Monday, survivors lost their homes, on Tuesday they lost their jobs and yesterday they lost their despair, with news of an uncapped repair fund.

Some of the most powerful men in Australia saw North Queensland's plight for themselves yesterday as they drove through decimated townships to road-test the package.

Funding offered includes money equivalent to the dole for cyclone survivors, special low-interest loans and cash grants.

And it is not over yet.

"This is our initial response," Mr Howard said.

"I think it is a very comprehensive response to a very difficult situation.

"I have heard remarks made, they (businesses) might lose employees who do not have jobs and may go elsewhere, may go south or whatever and they will lose them.

"The Federal Government will be looking at that and there are some other things we might do in that area."

Mr Howard said the package would take effect as soon as possible.

"We are very, very keen to get people up on their feet," he said.

"And we do hope that the very fact that we have been able to announce this immediately rather than going away and thinking about it for two or three weeks will be seen by the community as our determination to help things."

Mr Howard said the State and Federal governments would each give \$1 million to a relief fund.

The Federal Government will also give the equivalent of the dole to farmers and small businesses until September and tax-free cash grants of \$10,000 to each if they employ fewer than 20 full-time employees.

It will offer loans up to \$200,000 at low-interest rates and if that loan is used to replant or rebuild, 25 per cent of the loan will become a cash grant.

Mr Howard said he road-tested the scheme with all levels of government and cyclone victims to prevent getting it badly wrong.

"This disaster is not anybody's fault," he said yesterday.

"Countries like Australia can afford to be fair and generous to get people back on their feet."

He was also pleased all tiers of government worked out a plan within three days of Cyclone Larry's fury.

"We are working as a team in the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, let us

THE PACKAGE

- » \$2m state and federal welfare for farmers
- » \$10,000 handouts to farmers and small businesses
- » Loans up to \$200,000 at 4 per cent, no interest in the first two years
- » \$25,000 cash grant for loans for rebuilding business, cane farm or sheds
- » Australian Defence Force to remain in region for as long as needed
- » Commonwealth to provide \$40m top-up to Queensland for relief and recovery operations.



demonstrate that same team spirit here in North Queensland," he said.

"In response to a natural disaster that great Australian spirit will shine through.

"This is not something to be contaminated by party politics."

Premier Peter Beattie said he and other political leaders had worked their guts out to find solutions fast.

"New Orleans fell apart through no co-operation, well, this was the strongest co-operation you could get," he said.

"We needed an immediate response. We have worked our guts out to get it.

"This will provide the whole of North Queensland an opportunity to rebuild."

Mr Beattie urged North Queenslanders to look after each other as they go through hell and back.

"Here is a package to help your community to rebuild, I want to appeal to corporate Australia to donate to the community," he said.

"You will see a lot of people go to hell and back over the next few days, and they need all the support they can get, there is a future, that is the important thing."

Paronella Park owner Mark Evans thanked them for saving the future of the historic castle and its rainforest gardens.

"It has taken a huge amount of weight off my shoulders," he said.

"The 25 per cent will be a lovely bonus, thank you very much."

A banana farmer told the chamber \$200,000 would not be enough to replant very large farms.

Mr Howard said it was not a final decision.

"If we can be persuaded to raise the ceiling a little higher I will," he said.

"I can't give out a figure (on how much it will cost the Government) — all up on both sides it will run up into hundreds of millions of dollars."

WIN

100 double passes to the nQ Premiere of...



To be in the draw to win one of 100 double passes to see the North Queensland premiere of Ice Age 2 at Birch, Carrol & Coyle cinemas at 10am on Sunday, April 2 cut out the coupon (right) and paste it on an entry form published in the Townsville Bulletin on Saturday, March 11 or March 18. When you have collected three coupons, send your entry to Ice Age 2 Competition, c/- Townsville Bulletin, PO Box 2030, Townsville, 4810. Entries close at 12 noon on March 29 and winners will be announced in the Townsville Bulletin on March 30. (Conditions apply — see Public Notices)





'Rural people could be dead'

By VIKKI CAMPION

PEOPLE may have been killed in Cyclone Larry but nobody would know, rural survivors said through tears yesterday.

Police told a press conference outside Innisfail Shire Council chambers that it was a blessing that no one had died. Even Prime Minister John Howard said it was a miracle.

Survivors Bev and Bryan Thomson said no one had checked.

Their Upper Daradgee property was mowed down in the cyclone.

"They lost their home, all their furniture, and a business which will take two years to grow back.

It was destroyed in two hours on Monday morning.

And nobody checked if they were still alive.

Mr Thomson said he believed many rural properties had been forgotten.

A focus for aid and cleaning up has been centred on Innisfail's CBD leaving rural properties to themselves.

Many properties out of town are flooded in and without help.

Mr Thomson urged authorities to explore the rural homes.

"Everything is gone," he said yesterday. "Our whole property has been torn to shreds and nobody has gone up that way to see the devastation, nobody has bothered, we have been forgotten."

He and his wife embraced to comfort each other and Mrs Thomson began to cry.

"I have lost my business," she said.

Mrs Thomson was one of the only suppliers of the sucrier banana in Queensland.

Her whole farm was destroyed. She said she supplied the banana to a demanding Asian market.

"I am the only grower in North Queensland," she said. "Now everything is gone it is going to take at least two years and a lot of money to get this up and running again."

"We have to start from scratch again. We have to replant but first we have to try and clean up that mess. It would be good to have some help from the authorities."

Mr Thomson said helicopters first flew over his house 72 hours after the cyclone struck.

"Before that we saw no one," he said. "Nobody at all came to help us."

"It was unbelievable, everything was smashed or torn and we were left all alone. People could have been killed. They could be hurt in their homes."

"Nobody came to see if we were ok, so how do we know if they are?"

"We checked on our immediate neighbours but properties out of town could be in big trouble."

Operations Commander Inspector Bob Walters yesterday said he was astonished nobody had been killed in Cyclone Larry.

"It is amazing," he said. "I have never seen anything like this in North Queensland. The fact there was no major casualties is a blessing."

Mr Thomson said it could be too good to be true.



DOING THEIR BIT . . . Deltar and Karsston Sheahan clean up at Flying Fish Point Photo: DARREN HILDER 02383275

Evacuation proves wise choice for family

By DANIEL BATEMAN

THE Harris family had never regretted living in a beach house until early this week.

Sharlene Harris evacuated her family of seven from their home at Flying Fish Point and discovered waves reaching 9m had crashed over their house and a two-storey home next door when Cyclone Larry struck.

The damage to their home was minimal compared to other houses facing the beach, some which had roofs ripped completely off, others with doors blown in.

"It's completely wet inside, but I guess we were really lucky when you

look at everyone else," Sharlene said.

Her daughter Karissa said the evacuation process left residents confused and not knowing where to go.

"It was just crazy, really crazy," she said.

"We were evacuated to the TAFE but it was really unorganised. It was scary."

"Three people pointed to the hills beforehand and told us to go there and when the SES people came, there didn't seem to be any evacuation plan."

"At the last minute they organised the TAFE, but there was no facilities there for anything."

Sharlene said police officers helping evacuate Flying Fish Point residents were 'fantastic' in the crisis.

"They were really, really good," she said.

"There was a lot of reassurance and that made us feel safe, while everyone else was freaking out because of the ocean."

The road next to the beach had large chunks ripped out of it, and shore boulders were rolled over by the power of the wind and water.

"A lot of residents don't want to be here anymore," Sharlene said.

"I feel for everyone who lost their homes, but we just want to go now."

SPECIAL PHOTO LIFTOUT



Supermarket re-opens

CYCLONE-struck Innisfail's biggest supermarket was open for trade yesterday.

Only 10 people were allowed in at a time to Coles to prevent stressing out the already emotional teens behind the tills. Staff assured customers waiting in line they had plenty of milk and fresh bread.

"We have plenty of food, so please be patient," a staffer told the line.

Shopper Sommer Gardner said it was a great relief to replenish supplies for her three children and her husband Rodney.

"They have everything you need plus eftpos but no cash out," she said.

"They have run out of batteries and some other things but there is plenty of food, fresh fruit, nappies and pantry fillers."

Mrs Gardner said enduring Cyclone Larry was made harder with an eight-week-old baby.

"He has a cough so I am quite worried about him," she said.

Her other children were aged just four and six years old.

"It was so scary going through it with young kids in an old Queenslander," she said.

"It was my first cyclone, I have only lived in Innisfail for two years."

Shopping for her family was 14-year-old Candice Ball, whose family's house in East Innisfail took substantial damage to one side, and water damage on the lower level.

"It was my first time in a cyclone, but I reckon I could survive anything after surviving this," Ms Ball said.

She said shopping for groceries now was a lot calmer than in the lead-up to the cyclone, where there was panic for supplies.

Shopper Mick Hunter said the calmness among other customers was noticeable.

"Everyone's calmed down now and everyone's happy that no one was killed," Mr Hunter said.

A family chemist had reopened yesterday along with SuperCheap Auto, pubs, bottle shops, camping stores and service stations.

ENGLISH Language Classes

Townsville's 1st English Language Institute is now accepting enrolments for day and evening English classes

- Beginner classes to Advanced
- CLASSES BEGIN MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2006
- Korean Language Classes Available*

GROUP DISCOUNT AVAILABLE (5+)

Apply in person
8.30 am - 6.30 pm
Mon-Fri

381050261

Townsville Language Institute and ELICOS Centre
Block B, City Campus,
Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE, Walker Street
Ph: 0428 750 692/4750 5664

Repaying the favour

Queuing up to help the cook

By VIKKI CAMPION

TEARS have been flowing at the makeshift charity dubbed Hope's Kitchen in Innisfail.

Thousands of famished cyclone victims lined up yesterday for a hot meal on Edith St for the third day running.

Then in a show of appreciation, the fed moved to the other side of the barbecue to help cook for those worst hit.

At Hope's Kitchen the wet, the homeless and the hungry find the only free hot meal in town.

It had been 72 hours since Innisfail had electricity.

Jagads Epicurian Emporium owners Jeff and Gilda Baines, who accidentally started the food kitchen, have not left its gas burners in that time – despite the extra help.

More donations, huge orders of fresh fruit, tonnes of meat and safe milk arrived from Cairns and Townsville businesses yesterday.

A wet grandmother stood in line with two five-year-old boys who were left wide-eyed by the spread before them.

They had only eaten cold, tinned baked beans since Cyclone Larry struck on Monday and left



WORTH THE WAIT . . .
Kaiden McKenzie, 3, waits in line for food with his grandfather Bill Jeffery TR 383018

them with no kitchen and a fridge full of rotting food.

"They weren't starving," she said.

"But they were not happy. They can't believe all this food. It is like Christmas."

She broke down in sobs as she

spoke, her empty plate shook in her hands.

"This is just wonderful community spirit. Just wonderful.

"This is what we pray for." Mr Baines, still behind the barbecue, had only stopped smiling to weep.

"I stepped away last night and had a huge cry," he said.

"It's helping me get by.

"First we had people line up for food, now they are lining up to help.

"We have had backpackers – girls from Italy and England who

have never seen anything like this – volunteer.

"People with their own families, their own children, are helping.

"Most still do not have kitchens and they will have to eat here again."

And the donations don't stop.

A delivery man from Cairns asked Mr Baines to sign off on the donation.

Mr Baines scrawled a large thank you on the receipt paperwork.

"Make sure they get that," he said.

The donations do not stop coming – meat, eggs, fruit and vegetables, everybody is helping.

"It is great, we have served more than 2500 people each day and have cooked up tonnes and tonnes of meat.

"People's reaction has simply been amazing. It has been beautiful."

Mr Baines said a lot of his property had been damaged in the cyclone and he was waiting for insurance papers to arrive.

MASSIVE AUCTION SATURDAY

Viewing Friday from 9am • Auction Saturday 25th 8.30am • Bidding starts 10.30am

Over 200 rolls of quality CARPET

Top of the range products

Hand-made Chinese RUGS

Carpet laid in 2 days

Vertical and venetian BLINDS available

Verticals fitted within a week

2000sqms of new season FLOOR TILES

Over 200 rolls of Vinyl in stock

Free call 1800 067 111 • Jason 0407 144 740 • Neil 0419 776 121

CASH'S FLOOR COVERINGS

16 McIlwraith Street, South Townsville • Phone 4771 3300 • Fax 4771 3133