

Slater feels for Innisfail



Billy Slater

TO see the town you grew up in ripped apart by a natural disaster was devastating, Melbourne Storm fullback Billy Slater said.

Slater, in Townsville yesterday, said he hoped the Bruce Highway was cleared so his parents could make it to the Storm's clash with the Cowboys at Dairy Farmers Stadium tomorrow night.

His parents, uncles and aunts and cousins live in Innisfail.

Slater said his family were among the lucky ones.

"It's so sad to hear about people without houses and jobs - it's not good to see that happen to the place where you grew up," he said.

Slater said he lived through a few cyclones growing up in Innisfail. "But nothing like this ... it's going to take a lot of help from outside," he said.

Slater said he had no plans to get to Innisfail himself, but planned to catch up with family this weekend.

The former Innisfail local started his own appeal for the town this week, where people can donate by connecting to the Melbourne Storm website and following the links.

Don't miss our Cowboys banners next week



LEFT: These two heifers have become mates after surviving Cyclone Larry
ABOVE: Brigitte Humphries

Photos: SCOTT RADFORD-CHISHOLM

Cows comfort each other after terrifying ordeal

By **JOHN ANDERSEN** on the Tableland

TWO heifers freed from a tiny shed on an Atherton Tableland dairy farm after being trapped inside by fallen trees for four days have become bosom buddies.

Dairy farmer Brigitte Humphries, whose picturesque farm sits in a fairytale setting on the edge of Millaa Millaa, had to crawl through a mountain of fallen trees yesterday to rescue six heifers which had sought shelter in the tiny shed when Cyclone Larry started to blow on Monday morning.

She thought they were all dead, crushed by the

avalanche of fallen rainforest trees that grow around the dairy Brigitte runs with her father, Joe Daley.

When the wind finished its bashing of Innisfail late Monday morning it roared up the Palmerston Highway, smashing rainforest and farm buildings in its way.

When it reached the top of the range it turned its attention to pretty Millaa Millaa and the surrounding farms, including Ms Humphries'.

"I thought the heifers were dead, but I had to check," she said.

"There was no way to reach them. There were so many trees down that I didn't know if I could get to

them. In the end I managed to crawl in through the back and amazingly they were all okay.

Two of the rescued heifers lay together yesterday, their heads touching.

They looked for all the world like they were best mates.

"Yes," said Ms Humphries, looking at them.

"They've been through a lot together."

She said Larry had given the farm's pig population a working over as well.

The farm's younger generation of porcines managed to escape when a falling tree smashed their pen.

They were still enjoying a

free run of the farm yesterday.

"The pigs are out, but they can stay out. They're not a priority," Ms Humphries said.

"I had a shed that collapsed on a pig that I thought would have to be put down, but he's fully mobile now."

She said there were still a lot of powerlines down behind the pig shed and that she had to be careful to keep the animals away from the wires.

"Otherwise all my pork will be cooked at once," she said.

Ms Humphries said some cows had been hit by falling tree limbs, but that

miraculously none had been killed or seriously injured.

"We had cows in one paddock where there were a lot of fallen powerlines," she said.

"We had to go in and get them out, but luckily none of them got hurt.

"We're really lucky we didn't lose any animals. I was going to put my horse in the dairy where I thought he'd be safe, but a vet advised me not to. I'm glad now because with all the trees that came down he would have been killed or injured."

She said it would be another four days before power was restored to the farm.

Health targets kitchen

Residents angry at attempt to shut down free meals

By **VIKKI CAMPION** in Innisfail

ANGRY cyclone victims railed against Townsville-based Queensland Health officials for trying to shut Hope's Kitchen down in Innisfail last night.

Hope's Kitchen was the only place for a free hot meal after Cyclone Larry struck the town and emergency supplies were stuck in trucks along the Bruce Highway.

Innisfail butchers, bakers and grocers donated food and volunteers off the street kept it running under the advice of experienced chefs.

Yesterday bureaucracy tried to stifle all that has kept Innisfail's struggling survivors alive.

One man, who refused to be named because he was employed by a sister agency of Queensland Health, said he was furious.

"They have been on their backs all day trying to shut it down," he said.

"That is the place which has fed

all the people here, thousands of us. They are the ones who have been feeding the fire service, the ambulance and the SES and now they are trying to make them close up shop.

"I commend Hope's Kitchen for what they have done but this is not right, this is utter crap."

Jeff and Gilda Baines of Jagads Epicurian Emporium, an Edith St cafe, and Len and Anita Oliveri of Oliveri's Continental Deli, who are next door, have worked tirelessly since the cyclone hit.

Last night, the benches and barbecues were packed away.

And locals feared it was for good.

Instead of a bustling street of hungry cyclone survivors lining up for dinner, only Mr and Mrs Oliveri and three of the hardest-working volunteers sat on a nearby bench, drinking a beer.

"We will be back for breakfast," Mr Oliveri said.

"We will be open tomorrow

again. They cannot shut us down. They have nothing on us.

"We had State Health here, someone from Townsville, but we are experienced cooks and food handlers, it is what we do for a living and I have served nothing to any of these people that I would not eat myself.

"I have been working in this industry for 23 years, we are all qualified people, there is no way they will close us down.

"Many people have only lived off what we could offer here."

Hope's Kitchen has fed more than 5000 people since Cyclone Larry hit.

Mr Oliveri said the need for the kitchen was not as bad now.

"The Salvos have four soup kitchens now and they are taking the load off us," he said.

"Domino's is out there too, driving up from Cairns and handing out pizza.

"And then there is the coffee van."

Mr Oliveri thanked the business houses for donating tonnes of meat, fruit and vegetables to cook.

"Every day we have had fresh produce from Cairns and Innisfail," he said.

"I am the only one in town with a cold room that still works so we have been storing it all in that and bringing it out as we need to.

"Just today Coles gave us 50 loaves of bread. Every little bit helps and I just do not know how to thank them, everybody has put so much into this.

"Even the hotel gave us a beer to drink."

Mr Oliveri said Hope's Kitchen attracted international support.

"We had seven Pommies and four Italian girls here, backpacking, they were cooking and cleaning, until the British Embassy came in today and picked them up," he said.

"They were out the back the whole time and they were doing mongrel work."

Sharon Casey, a modest Innisfail mother, was one of the hardest-working volunteers, cooking for hours in the drizzle.

She was joined by volunteer Evelyn Pitt, who was trying to evacuate people from Innisfail when she became stranded and could not return to Cairns.

Shane Holmes lives above Jagads and despite facing a massive clean-up himself has worked tirelessly collecting donations and turning sausages.

"As soon as I saw them set up I was down here," the 20-year-old said.

"It kept my mind off the misery."

Mr Holmes' family banana farm was devastated in Cyclone Larry.

"It's the family farm, so I won't get paid," he said.

"I'll just have to clean it up for free. I'll have to chop all the bananas down, pick up all the bags and string. It will be a long, thankless job.

"Unlike this one."