



**Sharon Grierson MP  
Federal Member for Newcastle**

**14 June 2007**

**Hunter Storms**

**Ms GRIERSON** (Newcastle) (9.36 am)—The tempest struck our region last Friday exposed the people of Newcastle and the Hunter to the world and, although we appeared battered and bruised, our community strength has been revealed for all to admire. The natural disaster began when 50-knot winds and 17-metre waves blasted the coal ship *Pasha Bulker* over the Nobbys Beach reef almost onto the shore, posing an immense rescue and salvage challenge. AMSA, Newcastle Port Corporation, harbour master Tim Turner and United Salvage Adsteam all went into action, and I particularly thank Gary Webb for his constant updates. Rescuing the 21 crew members in the horrendous weather was executed by the Westpac helicopter team with precision, skill and courage. Always our everyday heroes, on that day they were superheroes; to Graham Nickisson, the crew chief and that bright, shiny boy I once taught: I am immensely proud. To the entire environmental damage control and salvage teams, thank you for being there so quickly. We hope for a safe and successful salvage.

But Mother Nature had more in store. Rain continued to fall that day in quantities that would quench the thirst of this land, defying the man-made

pass constructed to contain the run-off and cutting paths of destruction through streets, homes and businesses. Trees were uprooted, powerlines fell and torrents of water wreaked havoc everywhere, and thus the rescue effort began. Family members, neighbours and strangers undertook great acts of bravery and compassion. About 2½ thousand State Emergency Service volunteers worked day and night, responding to 15,000 calls for help. At the height of the storm, 200,000 homes were blacked out, 28,000 people's phones were off and water supply was cut in many areas. A superhuman effort by emergency and health workers, police, power, water and telephone teams swung into action, averting further tragedy.

But the loss has been great and, while restoration has commenced, nothing can be done to bring back the nine people who lost their lives over the course of that terrible weekend. I extend my deepest sympathy to the families and loved ones of Wayne Bull; Adam Holt and Roslyn Bragg, their daughters, Madison and Jasmine, and their nephew Travis Bragg; Nigel Beeston; and Bob and Linda Jones.

Thank you to the SES commanders, police commanders and the Premier's office for their coordination and updates. Thank you to all our agencies and authorities who kept the information flowing and a very special acknowledgement to the entire 1233 ABC Radio team for their amazing heart-warming round-the-clock coverage. For many people without power, the trannie tuned to the ABC was their only link to the world—a constant source

of emergency information, human contact and hope. We are all grateful and proud.

Now that the recovery phase has begun, it is time for everyone—political leaders, bureaucrats, insurance companies, contractors, tradesmen and retailers—to become heroes too. Today I name in parliament the first insurance company to fail that test. I name CommInsure, the insurance business arm of the Commonwealth Bank, which increased its profit after tax by 38 per cent last year to \$215 million. You have failed one Hamilton North family who have complained to me. I ask you to think again. My office will continue to monitor the work of all parties involved in the restoration phase and I will keep the Parliament informed. *(Time expired)*