



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Motions

16 November 2017

WALLSEND STORM FLOODING CONSEQUENCES

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (13:21):

That this House:

- (1) Notes the Wallsend community is still feeling the effects of the traumatic flooding of June 2007.
- (2) Notes the legacy of the flooding caused 10 popular Nelson Street businesses to close and left 20 affected businesses in doubt.
- (3) Urges the Minister for Emergency Services and the Minister for Planning to assist Newcastle Council to rebuild the three town bridges.

I gave notice of this motion six months ago. I get up early and I give notices of motion in relation to my electorate on a regular basis, and I have done so for 10 years. My electorate is the most important thing in the world to me. I am not a party hack and I never have been. My electorate always comes first, as it does today. Historically the issue of flooding in Wallsend has been traumatic, as it was in 2007. What this motion aims to achieve is that we give some certainty to the good businesses and community of Wallsend. We should all feel for the Wallsend community.

Despite being 10 years ago, the 2007 Hunter storms still loom large in Wallsend. When Ironbark Creek broke its banks over the June long weekend in 2007, much of Wallsend was inundated. Hundreds of homes were rendered uninhabitable. Billions of dollars of damage was done. In the aftermath, 10 businesses in the Wallsend high street, Nelson Street, were forced to close. Homes, including my own, were left in darkness for weeks. People lost everything—their homes, their businesses and their possessions. The economic impact on the local community is still being felt today.

The ravaging storms occurred not long after my election to this place. Since then, I have been working towards much-needed flood mitigation works in Wallsend. I am pleased to be able to say that Newcastle City Council has in recent months made great strides towards safeguarding Wallsend against future flood events. The planned works include widening the Ironbark Creek stormwater channel, which is the responsibility of Hunter Water and is a State Government utility, and removing and renovating bridges across the creek to improve water flow. Properties have been acquired, which is good, plans have been finalised and works have been budgeted. We are ready to go. We have been ready to go for a long time.

Julie Walter, the owner of Café Tempest on Nelson Street, was so moved by the experience of Wallsend during the 2007 storm and its aftermath that she renamed her business after it. We do not call it the Pasha Bulker in Wallsend because it was not about a ship; it was about us in Wallsend being inundated yet again, losing businesses and houses, and the insurance companies making it very difficult for us to rebuild the town. Julie said:

The 2007 floods had a lasting impact on Wallsend and the community still isn't entirely over it. I opened my business after the 2007 storm but in 2015, when Wallsend was hit again, we lost tens of thousands of dollars of goods and business. These flood mitigation works are really important for business owners—they'll give us some certainty in moving forward, so we can build our businesses without worrying that one bad rain storm will wash it all away.

A local resident whose home was routinely flooded in the days after the 2007 storm because of waves caused by cars driving through floodwaters said:

Even a minor reduction in the level of flooding would have helped save my property. We were lucky, as we had pretty comprehensive insurance, but so many others weren't so fortunate and lost so much. If the mitigation works can knock a couple of inches off the next flood, millions of dollars can be saved.

However, the replacement of the Tyrell Street bridge over Ironbark Creek, identified as the first phase of the flood mitigation works, will mean a significant impost on Newcastle City Council's budget. It has done the work and is ready to go ahead, but it should not have to shoulder the burden alone. We have had some productive meetings with the interim general manager, Jeremy Bath, who has been to Wallsend a number of times. He is committed to improving people's lot in Wallsend and reducing the risk of flood—I applaud him for that. I applaud Newcastle City Council for doing what was needed for households and businesses in Wallsend's west—it is really important. These residents deserve some certainty too. I am calling on the Minister for Emergency Services and the Minister for Planning to come to the table and engage with Newcastle City Council and Hunter Water to deliver these works as soon as possible. It is time to get this done for the people of Wallsend. They deserve it, and we have waited 10 years for it.