



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

30 May 2017

WALLSEND ELECTORATE FLOODS

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (12:16): How can we forget the catastrophic 2007 Wallsend storm and tempest 10 years ago when winds peaked at 124 kilometres an hour, 300 millimetres of rain fell in the Hunter, 10 lives were lost and more than 100,000 homes were left without power? The impact is embedded forever in our minds. Even though the media focuses on the Pasha Bulker image, it is the storm and tempest impact that is critical, especially in Wallsend, which has a history of bouts of saturation since the early 1800s. Given our recorded flood history, the cost of the 2007 storm and tempest passing the \$2 billion mark, underinsurance, business revenue losses and flood-related job losses, why are governments choosing loss over growth, with minimum gain? I champion growth in Wallsend and the Hunter because I do not want to keep hearing stories such as the following quote from a resident who said:

I remember the flood well. I was a teenager at the time and both of my parents were stuck at work because the flooding hit so unexpectedly in the mid-afternoon. Before I knew it, my house was ankle-deep in floodwater. Before the water went down, it reached up to my stomach. My next-door neighbours were recently arrived immigrants from India, and they didn't speak the best English, so I waded out to help them to switch off their power and stay safe. It was a harrowing experience, but we were lucky.

On Friday 7 June in Wallsend, before my eyes—and it seemed in a matter of moments—water surged over the peaceful Federal Park. Floodwaters breached the second storey of Wallsend businesses. They had no power for days and millions in revenue vanished with the torrent. Falling trees and rising floodwaters destroyed millions of dollars in property, many of which were uninsured and underinsured. All this happened in Wallsend as Nelson Street businessman, Max McCorkell, confirmed stories about the flood and its aftermath.

It devastated the business community, devastated the main street, and businesses have never gotten over it. My business ended up losing \$30,000 a year due to damage from the flood and the slow recovery. Most of the people who owned businesses on Nelson Street have retired now and want to forget it as a particularly bad time.

In the stories of hardship and loss, we find happy endings. Cafe Tempest, named in memory of the flood and founded in its wake, does a brisk trade. Much of Nelson Street has rolled over since

then, and new businesses have opened their doors, but our happy endings have their limits. Eight years on, the April 2015 storm barraged Wallsend and once more caused extensive damage in the Hunter. Power was lost for days and businesses lost millions of dollars. In the aftermath, calls for flood mitigation works have increased. The damage wrought in 2007 was not just once in a lifetime. We are living in a state of uncertainty. Infrastructure redevelopment must be funded now. If Nelson Street goes underwater again in the next east coast low, how much confidence will potential business owners and investors have? History has shown that Wallsend flooding is not a matter of if but when. We need to choose growth over insecurity.