NSW gears up to help Queensland respond to Cyclone Yasi

NSW emergency crews – including the State Urban Search and Rescue Taskforce led by Fire and Rescue NSW – are on standby for deployment to Far North Queensland if they are needed to help respond to Tropical Cyclone Yasi.

The State Urban Search and Rescue Taskforce will comprise 68 members of FRNSW, the NSW Ambulance Service, NSW Police Force, Department of Services, Technology and Administration and representatives of the ACT Fire Brigade.

Premier Kristina Keneally yesterday said the NSW Government had offered all possible assistance to Queensland as the State braced for the impact of the category five cyclone – expected to cross the North Queensland coast late tonight.

Wind gusts of up to 300 km/h and a dangerous sea level rise as the cyclone approaches, crosses the coast and moves inland are expected to cause widespread destruction.

The Bureau of Meteorology is warning that Tropical Cyclone Yasi is likely to be more dangerous than any experienced during recent generations.

"NSW stands ready to pro-

vide whatever help and support is needed by our northern neighbours as they face Cyclone Yasi," Ms Keneally said.

"The State Emergency Operations Centre has been activated around-the-clock to monitor current NSW bush fire, flood and heatwave conditions and coordinate any required NSW response to assist with Cyclone Yasi.

"Senior NSW emergency services leaders are in constant contact with their Queensland counterparts and are ready to provide all necessary support, resources and personnel.

"As we saw during both the Queensland and Victorian floods, our emergency services workers – both paid staff and volunteers – have been quick to offer their assistance to their interstate colleagues as they face terrifying weather.

"I again thank them for their professionalism, courage and commitment to protecting the people of this nation in times of great need."

The NSW State Emergency Service is ready to despatch:

- Highly-trained volunteers and staff;
- Swift water rescue technicians;
- Air operations experts;
- Logistics and IT support officers;
- Chaplains; and
- Floodboats.

Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan said the first NSW specialist to head north – a District Emergency Management Officer from the Monaro region – would travel to Brisbane for preliminary briefings tonight before then being deployed to Cairns as part of the initial damage assessment team.

The State Urban Search and Rescue Taskforce, led by Fire and Rescue NSW, is on standby for immediate deployment north as required.

"This fully self-supporting team will comprise 68 members of FRNSW, the NSW Ambulance Service, NSW Police Force, Department of Services, Technology and Administration and representatives of the ACT Fire Brigade," Mr Whan said.

"These search and rescue specialists include firefighters, Police officers, Ambulance paramedics, engineers and control, planning and incident commanders.

"They will be able to conduct structural assessments on buildings and critical infrastructure such as bridges, confined-space search and rescue with thermal imaging cameras and listening devices, limited hazardous materials clearance and medical aid."

A team of additional District Emergency Management Officers also is available to assist Queensland councils with ongoing community recovery operations and other NSW Government agencies are liaising with their Queensland counterparts about possible assistance.

///

New Year greetings for the Year of the Rabbit

On the Chinese New Year, the Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Kate Lundy, extended her best wishes to all Australians welcoming the beginning of Year of the Rabbit.

"Across Australia, cities and towns will come alive to the beat of the cymbals and drums of the lion dance, firecrackers and dragon parades," said Senator Lundy.

"Australians love to celebrate and Chinese New Year has become one of our most spectacular cultural celebrations.

"Chinese New Year has been celebrated in Australia since the gold rushes of the 1850s and has become an annual event of significance to many people.

"People celebrate in a variety of ways, including watching traditional lion or dragon dances, giving or receiving lucky red envelopes called hongbao or laisee and enjoying banquets.

"Chinese New Year is an opportunity for all Australians to share with one another our diverse cultures in the spirit of celebration and to recognise the contribution Chinese Australians have made to our national story for over 150 years.

"Australia has been immeasurably enriched by the arrival of migrants from many lands and our new migrants continue to contribute towards the success, prosperity and cultural richness of our nation.

"I wish all Australians Gτηg X? Fβ Cαι and Kung Hei Fat Choi – for a happy, healthy and prosperous Year of the Rabbit."

NSW GOVERNMENT TO SAVE FAMILIES $100 ON POWER BILLS

Wednesday, 2 February 2011

I know that NSW families are facing cost of living pressures, particularly through electricity prices.

That is why my Government is taking action to save NSW families more than $100 on their electricity bills in 2011/12 alone.

The NSW Government will offset the costs of the Solar Bonus Scheme, so that families will not bear the brunt on top of other cost of living pressures.

Without this decision, the Solar Bonus Scheme would have meant an increase in electricity bills of between 5 to 10 per cent from July 1, 2011.

The NSW Government's changes will now come into effect on July 1 – coinciding with the original expected increases.

I am dedicated to supporting NSW families and helping them meet cost of living pressures so my Government is also looking at efficiency and other savings that will allow for a further reduction in prices from July 1.

Along with our extensive range of consumer protection and hardship policies and programs, we are focused on protecting and assisting families who may be facing difficulty in meeting the rising costs of living.

Yours sincerely,
Kristina Keneally MP
Premier of NSW