

Pinnaroo Storm – 26 February 2008

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (15:35): Last December, a few days before Christmas, a short but violent storm struck the small township of Pinnaroo. Being so intense and coming, as it did, literally out of the blue, the townspeople were caught completely unaware and were shocked and stunned by its destructive ferocity. It tore roofs from houses causing structural damage to some of them. It uprooted and snapped big branches off scores of trees, flooded the local hospital, damaged a CFS building and generally created havoc throughout the whole district. Many shops were flooded in the busiest week of the year, being right before Christmas. Just when the whole community was getting into party mode for the Christmas break, their focus shifted from party mode to clean-up.

The town's emergency services worked flat out to restore public safety and order from the chaos of this mini-tornado. I visited the storm-ravaged town the following morning and was shown around by Southern Mallee District Council CEO, Rodney Ralph. What I saw amazed me. It was like a war zone, but it had all happened in a very short space of time. It was very reminiscent of the extraordinarily violent storm that ravaged Karoonda (also in my electorate) a couple of years ago.

The people of Pinnaroo rallied, and with local council leading the way, the massive clean-up began almost immediately. By early January, it had become obvious to Mr Ralph and others that, while the streets and parks had been cleared of debris and some sort of order had been restored to public facilities, the clean-up was far from over. It is fair to say that the business of cleaning up is far more complex than it was 20, 30, 40 years ago. Those were the days when you pushed all the broken trees and rubbish into a heap and set light to it, jumped back onto the bulldozer and went home. As members would be well aware, in this modern day of environmental awareness that approach is no longer acceptable.

Disposal methods are far more precise and labour-intensive and special equipment is needed with specially qualified personnel trained to carry out such tasks. This is not a criticism: it is an observation of how conscious we have become of the fragility of our environment and the need to ensure that one quick and easy clean-up job does not lead to another more expensive and more difficult clean-up. Special machinery and expertise that is beyond the needs and reaches of most rural councils had to be brought in from other places. What we used to do with the bulldozer and a box of matches is now done with mulchers, shredders, protective clothing, knowledge and great care. Instead of smoke, heat and waste, we produce other products designed to minimise water use as well as waste and pollution.

The job at Pinnaroo took an unexpected twist when it emerged that some of the waste turning up quite innocently at the local dump was asbestos sheeting from a time when it was a common building material. For the uninitiated, it would seem a logical thing to do; that is, throw it into a trailer and take it to the dump. Not in 2008. The disposal of asbestos, as I am sure all members are well aware, is now a highly sensitive issue. There are all sorts of

rules and regulations about the handling and disposal of asbestos that the average citizen would rarely have to think about, let alone be expert in. Local council realised this was an issue that needed more than the simple solution of getting in a qualified contractor.

Some public education was required because, while storms of this sort, thankfully, are still relatively rare, the demolition of older houses, sheds and other buildings is a fairly common occurrence. Council sought to be proactive in this and take a reasonable, responsible leadership role in providing that education but, as would be the case in most councils, if not all, this was very much outside budget. In fact, it was a substantial amount of the specialised clean-up cost for the mulchers and their operators, and insurance does not cover everything.

The government was subsequently lobbied for what I believe was the relatively modest amount of \$70,000, as calculated by Southern Mallee District Council Chief Executive Officer, Rod Ralph. As the amount sought did not meet funding guidelines it was initially rejected, however, following my personal representation to treasurer Kevin Foley the funding was approved as a one-off grant. On behalf of the local council and all the residents and business people of Pinnaroo, I thank the government for this consideration.