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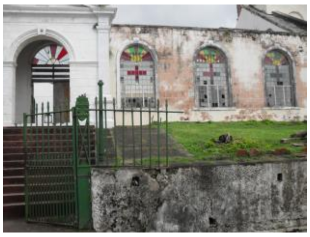
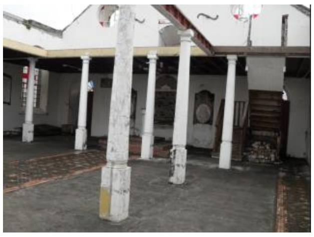
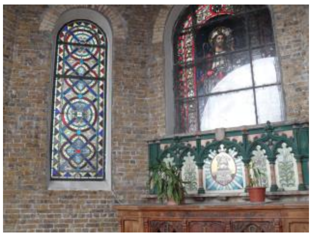
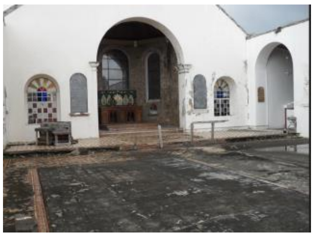
DISASTER FUNDING – BEST AT NATIONAL LEVEL

A LESSON FROM THE CARIBBEAN

The need for disaster recovery funding to come from the highest possible collective level was very strongly illustrated to me one day in early 2011. That morning, we had landed in Granada from a Caribbean cruise ship and came into the town. I had been aware that apart from the terrible political events that had previously occurred in Granada as evidenced by the bullet holes in a wall shown to us by the tour guide where they had shot their prime minister, a devastating cyclone had been through the area a number of years before.

As we explored around the town, we became aware that damage from that cyclone was still around seven years later. As we stood in the middle of a ruined beautiful old stone church with almost all the roof gone and debris still scattered around, I thought, how lucky we were to live in tropical Australia and not in Granada – about the same latitude, same climate, same susceptibility to cyclone damage, but where damage of this scale and type would have been cleaned up and probably rebuilt years ago.

Poor old Granada, I thought, all alone not capable of being able to recover quickly from such an event. How much better it would have been if Granada had been part of a political federation. Unfortunately, attempts to set up such a political union had failed in the preceding decades.

At the time, the challenges of disaster recovery were much on our minds. Earlier on the cruise, news of the terrible early 2011 flooding in the Toowoomba area came through. In the preceding five years in 2006, we had seen the recovery from cyclone Larry take place in the Far North. The magnificent 'Art Deco' Innisfail Town Hall had been restored. Cyclone Yasi hit Cardwell also in 2011 and within a short period, we were to see the ruined foreshore quickly built back to look better than ever. Across southern Australia, we have seen damage from tragic bushfires quickly restored.

How much better it would have been for the Caribbean Islands if the major disaster risk funding had been pooled in a broader political entity.

The lesson for Australia in the current debate about the balance of funding for disaster recovery as between Local, State and Federal levels is clear. The bigger the entity responsible for funding, the bigger the pool, the better. It seems to me that the previous system where the Commonwealth Government was providing the majority of the funding was working well.

The 'betterment' principle had been accepted that was seeing marginally extra funding being made available to ensure that restored infrastructure was built to a standard that made it less susceptible to future events as demonstrated by the new bridge across the Mitchell River at the Dunbar Koolatah crossing.

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