

Relief fund donations fall short by \$500,000

By Daniel Mercer

PORT HEDLAND residents will be hard pressed to find adequate cyclone relief funding, according to acting Mayor Arnold Carter.

Donations to the Cyclone George Relief Fund began on March 9, but so far only \$510,000 has been provided – with more than 95 per cent of that figure coming from BHP Billiton and Fortescue Metals Group.

"No other major company apart from those two has made any contributions so far which is a little bit disappointing," Mr Carter said.

The acting Mayor said monetary donations had been thin on the ground and much greater generosity would be required.

He said many people would need financial assistance after Cyclones George and Jacob severely damaged homes and property throughout the region.

"We can only distribute what we've got, so we'll just have to cut the money we distribute down to the money we've got available," he said.

"I was anticipating at least \$1 million because \$1 million can be spent quite easily on what needs to be done."

In a bid to encourage greater support for the fund, Federal Liberal Senator Alan Eggleston has called on Prime Minister John Howard to make donations tax deductible.

"All contributions to the fund should be made tax deductible in order to encourage more support for the fund which would help rebuild the community," he said.

"I feel that tax deductions for donations will encourage even more people to dig even deeper and give to the fund."

Mr Carter agrees, saying the relief fund would struggle without the incentive.

"We fully agree with it because we think it'll make a big difference to ordinary people making a donation," he said.

"There's also a lot of companies that would want that."

"I do hope that they accept the request because it will make a big (financial) difference to what

we've got at the present time."

While lamenting the shortage of funds Mr Carter insisted he was thrilled with the community's recovery efforts in the wake of the cyclones.

"We've got to take into consideration the enormous amount of in-kind contributions that people gave after the cyclone by making available their staff, their trucks, their cranes, their forklifts," he said.

"Everything like that enabled people to move around quite safely after the cyclone."

Mr Carter said people seeking assistance from the relief fund would be assessed according to their level of urgency.

He urged members of the community to find a way to donate, but he stressed that contributions of white goods and clothes would not be accepted.

"We are really looking for financial contributions from subcontractors or any person at all who might have a bit of spare cash," he said.

"We could certainly use it

because we've got a lot of applications we're going to have to consider."

Donations will be open until the end April.

People wishing to donate should visit the Cyclone George Relief Fund on the National Australia Bank website – www.national.com.au.