

BRISBANE FLOODS

I came to Brisbane from Perth in 1970. Shortly after arriving I picked up a hitch hiker, who was a draftsman working with Cameron McNamara on the flood mitigation scheme for Breakfast Creek, and I asked him about the flooding for which Brisbane was famous.

His words were, “90 feet over the Moggill ferry and 66 feet over the Jindalee boat ramp in 1893”.

And will it happen again. Yes, he said, “last century we had over five major floods and it's now 1972 and we have not had one yet, what do you think the chances are.”

The next day I was in the BCC offices trying to get a flood map of Brisbane. They did not exist so, having done a unit of Geology at Uni, I went to the Mines Department and purchased a silt deposit map for Brisbane.

This showed me the all time high for Brisbane flooding, which interestingly is very near the 1893 levels. I subsequently purchased the old station masters house at Oxley station even though the silt deposits were in the bottom corner of the block.

The 74 floods came and went and I then purchased a house in Tennyson. The BCC flood internet site (which I can no longer find) says that the block is unaffected by flood but I know that the whole block was underwater in 1893. Not the sort of misinformation we should be getting.

One, maybe two days before the 2011 flood, I was walking over Pamphlet Bridge and noticed the river level was at about low tide. I thought this odd as I had heard that the dam was at 130%. The river should have been running full to get the dam level down. It's OK to hold back the water at the end of the cyclone season but certainly not at the start.

Before the flood many people mistakenly believed that Wivenhoe Dam would prevent any future river flood and purchased properties that were clearly in a flood plain. We were told that the Wivenhoe dam would take a metre off the top of a 74 flood. What we should have been told was how much it would take off the ultimate flood. Probably with higher run-off and larger flooded area this figure would be about one foot.

After the flood I was told that the flow in the river was considerably higher than in 74 and yet the levels were a couple of metres lower. This is probably due to the river being dredged for 25 years after 74.

Out of all this I can make a few suggestions.

1. Dredge the river on a permanent basis to the best profile for maximum run-off. The rock bars (Seventeen Mile and Dutton Park) should also be blasted away. This would also remove one argument against running the City Cats up to Kenmore. - To ease the congestion on the Western Freeway.
2. Develop accurate plans for flooding depths and areas. The ultimate flood should be used as the basis for future planning. 3D mapping contoured blankets could be made using “Inroads software” to show the 2011, 1974 and ultimate flooded areas. These could be overlaid on a contoured map of Brisbane so flood depths could be easily determined for any address. Google earth has the basic levels which appear accurate enough.
3. Car parks are urgently needed at Railway stations. Places like St Ives at Goodna, Fairfield Gardens at Fairfield and Yeerongpilly future development site could be built with parking on the lower level and shops and offices above the flood level.
4. The proposed new rail line under Brisbane will have to be re-evaluated. Water would flood down into the system from Alice St and the Fairfield entrance in a big flood.
5. Electrical distribution will have to be given a complete going over. Places like Tennyson Reach should have all their switchgear above ultimate flood level. The circuits should be

split so that areas can be isolated as they are flooded without the whole place having to be shut down. Maybe even all flooded areas should be on a different system than those in non flood areas.

6. People should be left in no doubt that they have no flood insurance in flooded areas. House prices would reflect the added risk.
7. FACTS about the flood levels must be readily available. Platitudes can be very painful when they become reality.
8. The Carrington Rocks Yacht Club should be rebuilt. It's an intergral part of Brisbane's cultural fabric.

CONCLUSION

Brisbane has been through a tough time in 2011 and we can hope that we take a few lessons from it. Having seen how quickly the lessons of 74 were swept under the table I do not have any great confidence, but I felt I had to put some of the 2011 lessons on paper.

My father was the Chairman of the SAA committee that wrote the original wind codes for Australia and was on the committee which updated them in the eighties.

Pity he is not around to see that a proper building code is developed for Brisbane for the future.

Brian McMillan - Tennyson