



2 April 2011

The Floods Commissioners
Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry
Brisbane

Dear Sirs,

My home did not flood in January of this year but I helped in the clean up of my relatives' home, in Oxley, where the entire downstairs area was flooded and the upstairs areas were flooded to the top of the kitchen bench.

It was appalling to see the atrocious and unacceptable third world conditions of raw sewage and silt being deposited in a family home. I am incensed at the poor planning which has facilitated this disaster.

From the outset it needs to be made perfectly clear that the 2011 flood was not an unprecedented event. Any government which looks at the history of flooding in Brisbane since the 1840s would have ample evidence to be able to conclude that these floods are recurring events that need to be managed. The charts and detailed descriptions for past Brisbane and Ipswich floods are on the BOM website www.bom.gov.au/hydro/flood/qld/fld_history/brisbane). The flooding experienced by Brisbane in January 2011 was not unprecedented. Any government with half a brain would know that. Brisbane is a major city that has been built on a flood plain. The south-east corner of Queensland has to have flood mitigation plans **because the history (as detailed on the BOM website) shows conclusively that floods are recurring events in south-east Queensland.**

a) Preparation and Planning. State Government.

It would seem that this disaster occurred precisely because there was no proper preparation and planning.

My husband and I have been living in Brisbane for almost 25 years. In that time we have seen a huge increase in the population in the South-east corner but there has not been a concomitant increase in the provision of infrastructure to cope with the increase in population. In particular, the water supply for the south-east corner has not been secured (witness the years of drought which began five or six years ago and which led to water restrictions). No new dams have been built and the construction of the desalination plant at Tugun has been bedevilled with inefficiencies.

Whose responsibility is it to make these sorts of decisions about major infrastructure of this kind? Surely it is the Qld State Government that should be doing this kind of planning? Why has this planning not been done? Is the State Govt shirking its responsibilities or is it merely planning for the short term basing decisions around whatever is best to ensure their re-election? This combination of political opportunism and self-interest is simply not good enough. And now we have to put up with raw sewage floating through our houses, courtesy of the State Govt. Not happy, Anna.

I would suggest that the floods commission call for expert (non-partisan) opinion on where the best place is to build another dam. The Woldene Dam idea might need to be re-visited. Perhaps there are better locations. Call in the experts. But please do not call in the politicians. They don't seem to know what they are doing. And that is causing a lot of pain to a lot of people in south east Queensland.

Furthermore, we have always been told that Wivenhoe Dam was to be used primarily for flood mitigation. Blind Freddie can see that that is not the policy that was actually followed. So who took their eye off the ball? It is the State Government's responsibility to ensure that Wivenhoe is operated properly. If the manual was not suitable for the conditions that we began experiencing with the La Nina weather pattern, then who was responsible for being smart enough to adapt the dam's operating policy to the prevailing weather conditions? Obviously no-one in the state govt was able to be that smart.

I expect the floods commission to investigate press reports that the State Govt was briefed by the Bureau of Meteorology in the latter part of 2010 that they could expect a wetter than usual rainy season this year. Is this report correct? What action did the Govt take to protect its citizens from the prospect of flooding? Did they take any action at all? Did they review the dam operating manual? Did they review anything related to flood

preparation? I will read the commission's report with interest to see how these questions are answered.

People have died as a result of these floods, thousands of people are still homeless (my relatives included), their homes gutted and uninhabitable. In my view this is the result of successive State Governments that have neglected the proper planning for the increase in population in the south east corner. The lack of planning and preparation is simply not acceptable. It has caused untold suffering and hardship for thousands of people. Australia is not a third world country and we should be able to do better than this. **Wivenhoe Dam was already too full when the rainy season started.**

There was obviously also not enough preparation and planning for the financial impact of any floods either, as the first thing the Premier of the State did was to put out a request for Queenslanders to dig deep and donate to her relief fund. For a disaster of this scale, those affected need more than some quick relief fund donations being shackled together, ad hoc, depending on the good nature of the general population. Where was the financial planning? The State Govt had taken out no insurance for State assets and had to go cap-in-hand to the Federal Govt. People who were traumatised, homeless, not knowing whether their own insurance was going to cover their residential losses had to put up with the unseemly brawl that ensued between Gillard and the Queensland Councils about basic infrastructure. Gillard was quibbling about definitions just as much as the insurance companies that she complained about. There was no system in place to cover the financial fallout from the floods. This ad hoc dependence on donations is just primitive, inefficient and unacceptable. **Future financial planning for rebuilding and reconstruction after such disasters needs to be better organised.**

b) Performance of Private Insurers....

Surely this type of event, because of its scale, is too big for commercial insurers to handle? Is it possible to investigate the possibility of a permanent disaster relief fund (government-run insurance fund?) to obviate the knee-jerk reaction we saw from the Premier in January when she called for donations. There are, apparently, approximately 4 500 homes in Brisbane that are uninhabitable because of the floods. It is difficult to see how the Premiers Relief Fund, dependent on donations, is

going to be of enough assistance to so many homes that require complete reconstruction internally. **More adequate insurance/financial provision needs to be made for disaster relief.**

For example, how are the people in my relatives' street (Logan Avenue, Oxley) going to be able to get back on their feet? Nothing is happening in Logan Avenue. At present, nearly three months after the flood, only three or four homes out of 18 are being re-done. Most of the people there are receiving no assistance from insurance (some probably had no insurance, others have insurers who have refused their claims). These people have also been told that they will be getting nothing from the Premier's Fund because their homes were not totally demolished by the flood waters.

I keep seeing reports in the media of the exact same situation in other suburbs; Goodna seems to be mentioned the most. If fellow Australians have been thrown into hardship and financial distress by the January flood, it is not acceptable for them to be left in limbo like this. There is obviously a great need for a permanent disaster relief fund.

c) All aspects of the response to the 2010/2011 floods

The community's response was first class – people were very supportive of each other. Emergency services were excellent.

d) Measures to manage the supply of essential services.

Excellent.

e) Adequacy of Forecasts and Early Warnings.

The flood alert from the authorities did not go out soon enough. I did not hear the Premier's statement to the media that "the situation had taken a turn for the worse and the flood threat was more serious than

first thought” until 9 am on Tuesday 11 January. Many other people would have been in the same situation. By then, after phoning family members all across Brisbane, my suburb (Karana Downs) was completely cut off and we had to make do with whatever provisions we had.

- f) All aspects of systems operation plans for dams across the state and in particular the Wivenhoe and Somerset release strategy.

Having spoken to people who live close to Wivenhoe Dam, and having read various news reports that raise queries about an unresponsive dam operators’ office at Wivenhoe (was there even anyone on duty?) the weekend before the floods, I am left wondering who was in charge at Wivenhoe during the week before, and also over the weekend just prior, to the floods. Is the commission able to ascertain this?

It seems that the release of water from Wivenhoe came at just the wrong time. It coincided with torrential rains. Surely with all the expert opinion available to the State govt, from specialist hydrologists, the bureau of meteorology and dam engineers, we should, in the area below Wivenhoe, have been able to avoid the scale of flood waters that surged through the area in January this year. Releasing large amounts of water from Wivenhoe in the week of the 11 January can’t possibly have been helpful to the residents living below Wivenhoe. It may well have been necessary to release water from Jan 11 onwards in order to save the dam. It appears we came close to the dam wall being breached which could/would have resulted in catastrophe. **My question is: Why was the situation allowed to get to that point?**

In Summary:

Warnings about the impending floods went out too late for many people to move household goods and possessions to higher ground.

There has been inadequate financial planning for the rebuilding of both state assets and privately owned homes.

There has been inadequate investment in infrastructure for securing the water supply for SE Queensland.

In addition, we have always been told that the system in place to prevent a repeat of something like the '74 floods was Wivenhoe Dam.

Well, the system failed.

I look to your commission to identify the flaws which led to that failure.

Yours faithfully,

HV Kleinau (Mrs)