

4th April 2011-03-11

Beryl Spencer,
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Dear Sirs,

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

SUBMISSION to Part (c and g):

c) all aspects of the response to the 2010/2011 flood events, particularly measures taken to inform the community and measures to protect life and private and public property, including

- immediate management, response and recovery
- and the adequacy of the community's response

g) all aspects of land use planning through local and regional planning systems to minimise infrastructure and property impacts from floods

My life experience is that my involvement in farming, business, community volunteer and as Chair of the local chamber writing the flood plan for the CBD of Gympie in 2006.

We had many years experience in coping with flood events during our years as both owning buildings and be small business people.

During those challenging years, and thankfully at times we would have quite a few years break from floods, we learned a little about the importance of not only effective, efficient evacuation but also the re-building process that is vital to having a future in business.

Flood damage CAN be minimised with innovative flood planning!

The key points of the Flood plan for the Gympie CBD were:

1. Preparation and flood readiness through relevant information
2. Orderly evacuation with assistance of SES and Police
3. Rebuilding with suitable materials and equipment
4. Back into business ASAP

G. minimising infrastructure and property impacts from floods

Rebuilding with suitable materials and equipment

As I watched much of the activity of "cleaning up" following the Brisbane floods, in particular, I was shocked as the waste, lack of knowledge of what to do etc., and how to rebuild.

While keeping in mind that 'time is money' and the key to the future is re-opening business, sometimes short term answers do not produce long term sustainability of business.

Business EG: Some of the waste consisted of 'dumping' perfectly good cafe equipment such as plates, cutlery and some of the furniture. The furniture can easily be cleaned down in many cases and the other equipment could have been washed and sterilized (if it was thought necessary). Refrigerators and Freezers can also safely be dried and tested and reused, not to mention stainless steel sinks, benches and so on.

WASTE and cost: huge cost impact on business on top of the 'days out of business'.

Building materials: It seems for many that gyprock is the building commodity of choice and yes it is good, looks good and can be applied quite quickly, however next flood, you will be throwing it out again. More appropriate and long term sustainable building materials would be brick, split block, and Fibro type products and the use of oil paints which don't tend to wash off in water.

Mobilizing equipment: Heavy equipment such as refrigerators, ovens can be put on 'heavy duty rollers that lock in place when not in use, then serve to 'roll out' in time of flood or disaster. This assists fast efficient evacuation.

Access: good access is vital to both the evacuation process and the re-entry process.

Planning: A priority over and above that, will avoid the huge cost impact from floods is that Local Governments revise all future planning to new buildings. There should not be any further building permits given to build either commercially or residential in flood plains, on river and creek banks and gullies.

Using wasteland wisely: It is possible that some industrial estates could successfully be built on low land where there is appropriate access for evacuation, and in outer lying areas.

As mentioned above Local Government planning is a key to minimising the cost impacts of floods. Again the use of suitable building materials for re-building in flood prone areas is the key to the future of families who are unable to re-locate.

(C) the adequacy of the community's response.

As this does not express whether this refers to "community response during the floods" or "community response following the floods, I wish to cover the "aftermath"

My experience in the Gympie region has been that even though there is 'loads of goodwill' during and for a time following a disaster, this often wanes, sometime within a year and the ability of the community to really change the future and be sustainable in community capacity, is all but lost.

Great possibilities: This is about rebuilding our State and Nation from the grass roots. There exists an 'opportunity of a lifetime' to rebuild our State on the "goodwill" that exists. BUT it needs to be captured, nurtured, and led forward into the future. This is about building community capacity. It is about vision and seeing the bigger picture, about ownership, it is about possibilities and innovative ideas developing into projects with real outcomes.

While rebuilding the bricks and mortar, and transport infrastructure is vital to the future, it is of little value if peoples' lives are not re-shaped and re-established into community's capacity, if farming communities are not thriving. This indeed is the fibre that connects a community and holds it strongly together.

It is an inter-connection between generations, between various sectors and between business and community and may be assisted through the support of 'seed' government funds from all levels of Government.

I cannot stress too strongly, people must be empowered to make this happen, Governments of whatever level cannot.

May I take the liberty here, of sharing a little of the "Traveston Experience" There is NO intention here to suggest that either the non building of the Dam was right/wrong but simply to use this as an example. During the 2 ½ to 3 years of the "Traveston Experience" I worked with Major Gen Peter Arnison and also Graham Newton and many other Government officials. I think it was tough for all concerned BUT I hope I learned some valuable lessons.

Whether a disaster is initiated through a Government decision or a Natural disaster, there are many parallels and lessons to be learned. SO I am taking the liberty of including some diagrams that I used during the “Traveston Experience” in working towards re-connecting the community.

Sadly:

- the anger level was too great for many,
- the decision caused generational dislocation, families separated, “home” was no longer “our home” , a place of security
- discouragement and negativity was everywhere.
- outsiders were brought into the area as Community Development leaders. They weren’t local, didn’t belong, didn’t own the issues and didn’t feel the personal pain or loss that was rampant at that time.
- after Government input of (perhaps) millions of dollars, the region is still struggling..the capacity building didn’t really develop.

As I have watched the Ipswich meeting in the last few days, I have a real concern that the anger level is moving towards ‘too great’ for some. Some were feeling dislocated, out of their “home environment” and discouraged.

In spite of this, I have noticed several potential leaders in groups and believe, given support they could well be the ones to take committees forward, and not necessarily the appointment of Community Development Officers as was mentioned in the PM press release.

It is these people who have ownership of the region and with assistance could move forward.

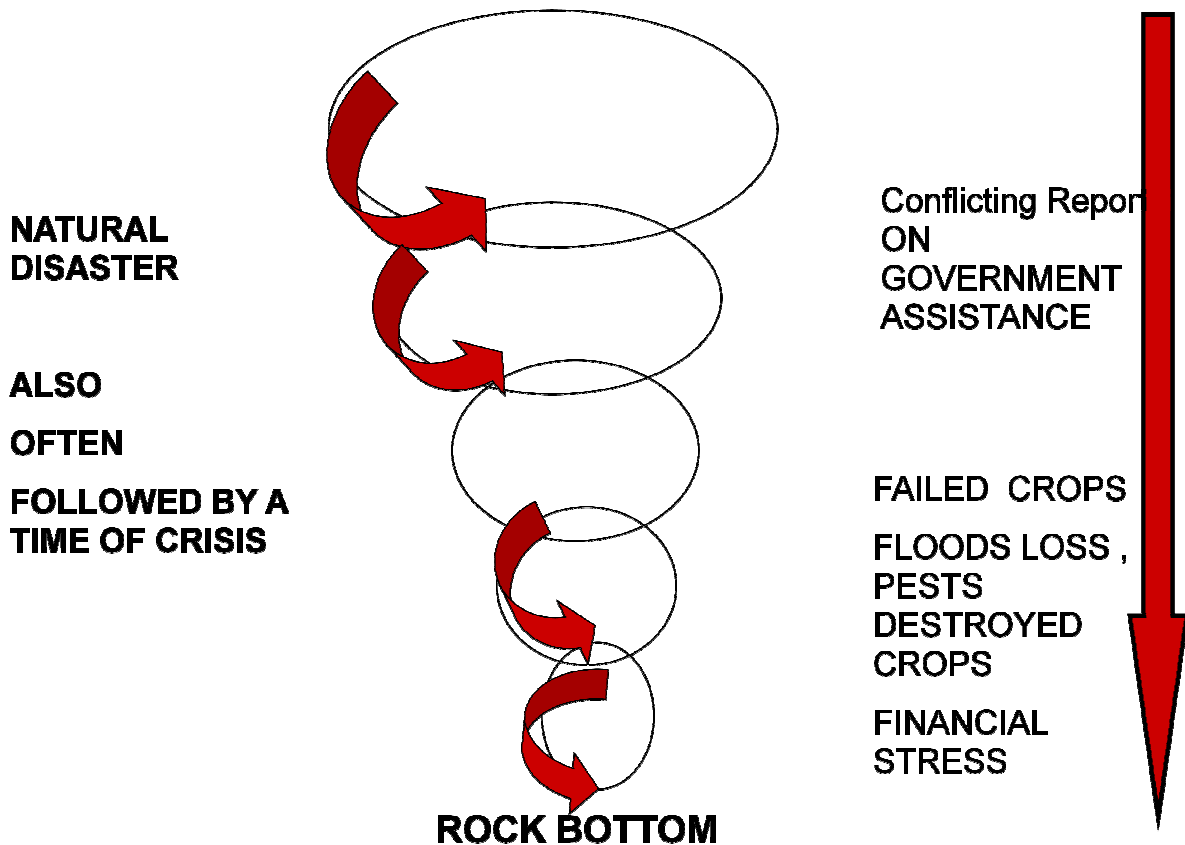
The future of re-construction and re-vitalisation:

This MUST not follow some of the past efforts of using highly paid Community Development officers.(the Traveston Experience) I believe there are many capable leaders within our communities who could lead their communities forward. Governments could be involved initially by providing costs of meeting halls etc and secretarial support to initially compile data from meetings. These forums could follow the pattern of Premier Anna Bligh’s Rural Women’s Symposiums BUT MUST be *genuinely community led* and report on needs possible projects that then could attract ‘seed’ funding. The old adage is very appropriate: Feed a man fish and he’ll live for a time, teach him to fish and he’ll live for a lifetime. This is an opportunity to ‘teach lifelong skills’ for the communities of the future.

Below is a diagram of the downward spiralling impacts of disaster on a community. Often they are allowed to spiral downward till people reach the ‘bottom of the well’ of hopelessness stress, depression that may well develop into varying levels of mental disorders. Intervention is needed across the state. I believe that many communities are about ‘halfway’ between being healthy and unhealthy. It is time to ACT!

Many farmers have no hope of income for up to 18 months and no real way of caring for their families after years firstly, of drought and now devastating floods.

NATURAL DISASTER:



Rock bottom = Dislocation, discouragement = unhealthy communities.

You will have heard the story of the “donkey in the well”. An old badly injured donkey fell down a well and the farmer and his mates decided the best thing to do was to fill in the well with soil. Sadly they started this process and chatted away as they went. Suddenly they heard some noise coming from the well. They old donkey knew his time was not over and with every shovel of dirt; he took another step up the well. The farmers quickly formed a human chain and pulled him out. This speaks for itself. Some people are at the bottom and need the human hand up.

Summary and Submission:

That the work of the Task Force would include the following:

- The Taskforce to initiate a forums (service groups and various voluntary groups, business sector, an open invitation) with a facilitator. (Perhaps similar to Premier Bligh’s Rural Women’s Symposiums)
- People must be kept informed of:
 - funding possibilities (from Premiers Fund)and how it is being managed
 - Government initiated improvements in managing disasters (ownership)
- Initiate Secretariat assistance to support community groups through Local Government (Some funds)
 - people given opportunity to express their hopes and visions for moving ahead
 - These to be recorded and workshopped to gauge what is possible with short and long term goals and actions in place.

- identify possible leaders.

MOVE ON AND RE-BUILD OUR STATE.

Recommendations:

1. *I ask that the Queensland Flood Commission Inquiry strongly consider the summary and the actions that I have proposed and work towards implementation of appropriate actions in a genuine effort to minimise future flood damage and the cost to the state.*
2. *I ask the Queensland Flood Commission recognise that the real future of our State is about people. (I know there has been talk of this BUT) I ask that you consider the issues and suggestions that I have offered. We must re-build; re-connect the fabric of our communities.*
3. *I ask that the Flood Commission, in accepting the responsibility of re-building and re-vitalising the state of Queensland recognise the opportunity of COMPILING a 'Blueprint for the future... following disaster ', from submission that work.*
4. *I ask that the Queensland Flood Commission recognise that there must also be close collaboration between Local, State and Federal Governments to minimise financial outlay while maximising the benefits to communities.*
 - a. *That the emphasis of funding be on outcomes and NOT long processes*
 - b. *Every funding MUST have a tangible and visible outcome.*

*Yours Sincerely
Beryl Spencer*