

1. The response to the 2010/2011 flood events, particularly measures taken to inform the community and protect life, private and public property

Preparedness: I am concerned that the Queensland Government was slow in recognising the looming threat of a major flood in the Brisbane and Bremer Rivers. The long range forecast was for a very wet summer but this advice was not acted on soon enough. The soils in the catchment were saturated from heavy rainfall in spring and December. I understand resources were stretched with the floods on the Darling Downs and Central Queensland. However, the danger signals for SEQ were already there and early warning of the potential for severe flooding in SEQ should have been recognised. The assumption that the Wivenhoe dam would protect Brisbane from a major flood was never valid. Full dams never prevent major floods and the Wivenhoe does not include the catchments of the Bremer River and Lockyer Creeks. Wivenhoe dam probably reduced the flood height in the Brisbane River by 1.5 to 2.0 metres.

2. Land use planning

Building on flood plains: The lessons from the 1974 floods have not been heeded. I am particularly concerned about the development on flood plains that has occurred in Brisbane and Ipswich, which has caused an escalation in the cost of the flood damages, and in some cases potentially changed the local hydrology. New estates such as Mandalay Fig Tree Pocket have been built below the 1974 flood level. In the lower Bremer River around Karalee and Bundamba, flood levels were higher than 1974 floods.

Devastating floods in South Queensborough Parade, Karalee:

I am particularly concerned that the extensive in-filling of the Bremer flood plain for the recently built CitySwitch Business Park acted as dam, blocking the spread of the flood water and forcing the water levels to build up in the Queensborough Parade neighbourhood. This development may have caused the 2011 flood to be much higher than the 1974 levels, and well above the 2011 levels experienced upstream in the Ipswich CBD. I and many other residents made a submission to the Ipswich City Council at the planning stage alerting of the dangers of building on an Industrial flood plain.

As a background, my wife and I bought a property in South Queensborough Parade Karalee in 1980. The information we received was that the 1974 flood went 1 metre deep over the highest point on the property. We build a highset, 2 level house above this level. We sold the property in 2005 and moved to Indooroopilly. We revisited the property and neighbourhood after the flood. The 2011 flood went 1 metre deep into the upstairs bedroom, approximately 3 metres above the informed 1974 flood level. The neighbourhood of 24 homes was devastated. The only road out was under the Bremer River bridge crossing of the Warrego Highway. This road cut on Tuesday morning and people were trapped between the 4 metre high sound barriers along the Warrego Highway and the rapidly rising Bremer River. A request in the 1990s by the local residents to the Main Roads Department for an emergency exit was not acted on.

There was no escape for the residents on the Tuesday night as the floodwaters rose rapidly. Fortunately, one resident with a four wheel drive was able to lead a convoy of vehicles out through sodden cow paddocks as the flood waters raced across their properties. Those who stayed had to be evacuated early the next morning in flood boats. In total, 230 homes were flooded in Karalee.

*I request that the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry conduct an independent investigation of the causes for the extremely high flood levels in the lower Bremer River and the potential hydrological impact of the CitySwitch Business Park. There should be a review of the background to the planning decisions which approved this development, and the hydrological reports (if any) which informed the approval process. This should be conducted independent of the Ipswich City Council which is not impartial in this matter. It is also requested that the Main Roads Department build an emergency flood access road out of South Queensborough Parade,*

Future Vulnerability. Over the past decade, the dominant agenda at all levels of government has been development and growth, without adequate consideration of the risks and vulnerability of the region to a future more extreme climate.

The lessons learnt from the 2011 floods need to be recognise the future vulnerability of SEQ to increased frequency and severity of climate extremes. The frequency of hHigh intensity rainfall events such as experienced in Toowoomba and Lockyer Valley on January 10-11 this year will increase in the future. Local and state governments need to take advice from climate change scientists and climate change science. Climate change projections warn Queensland will experience a more extreme climate in the future, with an increasing frequency of severe droughts and floods. Queensland government and local governments needs to recognise this vulnerability and start developing planning and adaptation strategies to minimise the impact of these climate extremes. Our research at the School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management, The University of Queensland, shows that local governments in SEQ are very slow in developing climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. The Queensland government is also slow in recognising the risks of climate change.

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