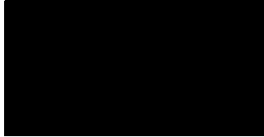




THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF QUEENSLAND INC.  
Established 1905

Patron: Her Excellency The Governor of Queensland  
Ms Penelope Wensley AC



3 March 2011

**SUBMISSION BY NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN QUEENSLAND TO  
QUEENSLAND FLOOD COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY**

This submission will address (a), (c) and (f) of the published terms of reference.

(a) As the events leading to the inland tsunami which affected both Toowoomba (flowing westward) and the Lockyer Valley (flowing eastward) were from unprecedented weather conditions, no preparation undertaken in previous flood events across Queensland would have been adequate. It appears that the rain was falling at such a rate that early warning advice in these areas would not have been humanly possible.

Hopefully, hydrologists will, as a result of that event, now be better able to predict the outcome of similar atmospheric conditions and weather synopsis.

It is acknowledged that there was an excellent response by the emergency services and the bravery of the SES and independent Queensland heroes was the main factor in so many lives being saved. It is regrettable that any lives were lost at all. However the result could have been much worse.

In the aftermath of the tsunami, when the waters reached the Brisbane River and affected the people in the Brisbane area, some of NCWQ members state that the Daily Alerts from the Lord Mayor were very helpful.

(b) Will be addressed in a submission which closes on 4<sup>th</sup> April.

(c) This section will be addressed in part only.

Dot points cannot be adequately addressed individually by this submission. However we would like the following to be acknowledged. It appears that the SMS messaging system worked in some situations and not in others, and was early rather than too late. However there were some areas (or situations) where no SMS or any kind of warning was received by the people.

People who knew of the impending trouble were walking the streets to inform others – whether the news received this way sparked action cannot be determined. Some of those who had signed up for the BCC early warning system on their mobiles received nothing. The cause of SMS not being received could have been from several causes (e.g. mobile not turned on or not on the person at the time the message was sent, or even a mobile poor reception area which do exist despite assurances to the contrary), but the real facts of non-receipt of this newly established warning system cannot be ignored.

By way of a suggestion to this enquiry, it must be acknowledged that the cyclone warning system on radio and television works very well. In the Canberra bushfire catastrophe, what we recognise in Queensland as a cyclone warning siren was used by the ACT Government as a general emergency warning. Because of the repetition on the radio and TV every 15 to 30 minutes, the rapid spread and direction of the fire threat was made known to all. A similar affect could have been obtained with respect to the floods and we would recommend that this be considered as an ‘emergency warning’ to be used in all emergency situations not just the current usage, as it appears it was only used for this purpose by ABC radio. A different outcome may have been obtained if the same thing had been adopted here by all media.

(d) This will not be addressed in this submission.

(e) Please see comments under (a) as the weather conditions at the time have been described as a one in one hundred year event, and as such, there was no precedent set or management plan which would have adequately allowed warnings in those areas.

(f) It is impossible for a layperson to address this section adequately as the SEQ Water Manual of Operational Procedures for Flood Mitigation at Wivenhoe Dam and Somerset Dam (Revision 7 November 2009) is a redacted version that has been amended to remove material that may be of concern in relation to the security of critical infrastructure.

However, it should be noted that the manual states that Wivenhoe is a central core rock fill dam. Dams of this type ‘are not resistant to overtopping and are susceptible to breaching should such an event occur’. ‘Somerset Dam is a mass concrete dam. Such dams can withstand limited overtopping without damage. Failure of such structures is rare but when they do occur, they occur suddenly without warning, creating very severe and destructive flood waves’.

With all this information in the Manual, the question then must be asked why Wivenhoe was allowed to increase in volume from 102.4% full on 5<sup>th</sup> Jan to 188.5% full on 12<sup>th</sup> Jan, and only then was water released. It must be acknowledged that an increase in volume of 86% in seven days is unprecedented given the 10 year drought, but with the manual so adamant that

overtopping not be advisable for both types of dams and that collapse of either would be catastrophic downstream, there appears to have been, at best, no understanding of the meaning of the technical data in the manual, or at worst, gross incompetence.

Major flooding affected thousands of homes because of slow reaction in keeping the dams below 100%. It is acknowledged, however, that a decision has been made in hindsight to retain a level of 75% in Wivenhoe during the wet season, to allow some leeway should some similar weather event occur. However, as at the time of writing this submission, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2011, Wivenhoe is still exceeding this publicly advised level, being at 84.5% and the advertised planned release of water has been stopped. With global warming and its subsequent unknown weather changes now appearing to be upon us, perhaps regular reviews (12 monthly at most) of both the human performance and procedural outcomes should be the norm rather than the exception, thus negating the need for an enquiry being necessary after an event.

A further submission on the balance of the enquiry will be submitted by the National Council of Women Queensland before the advertised closing date for the remainder of the terms of reference.



Lyn Pysden  
Legislative Advisor  
National Council of Women Queensland  
3 March 2011.

For



President  
National Council of Women Queensland

