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## Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry WWF submission for the interim report

### **The challenges for flood risk management in Queensland**

Floods are probably the most predictable of natural hazards. This means that good planning and appropriate development controls by local government can be effective.

Historically however, development controls have not effectively nor consistently managed flood risk in Queensland. With an estimated 100 000 plus properties currently at risk from a 1 in 100 year average recurrence interval flood, Queensland has the highest exposure to flood nationally.

Available legislation to deal with flood risk management is fragmented and covers a diverse range of issues. There is no overall state policy or guidelines for local government on how best to manage floodplains to reduce flood risks.

The above boxed text is taken from a Queensland Government discussion paper of 2002, *State Flood Risk Management Policy*. The paper identified the massive exposure Queensland had to flood impacts as well as the lack of policy or legal means to address this exposure. It canvassed options to address our flood risk and promoted in particular "the advantages of a comprehensive state flood risk management policy implemented through legislation."

Despite identifying the problem and what needed to be done, recommended reforms were not undertaken. Legislative reform did occur to require all new development to meet clear standards for flood immunity (State Planning Policy 1/03: Mitigating the Adverse Impacts of Flood, Bushfire and Landslide). Little action was taken to address the existing flood exposure. Recent events show that this flood risk exposure can have severe consequences.

The *State Flood Risk Management Policy* discussion paper does not by any stretch of the imagination contain the answers to all the Commission's terms of reference. It does however show that many of the problems, and even solutions, are known.

The lack of reform means that recent and soon to be enacted State legislation is continuing a flawed approach to flood risk management and is expanding flood risk danger zones. WWF is calling for sweeping changes to Queensland's laws to better protect the community and the environment from future floods.

### **The link between flood and environmental management**

The floods have had a significant impact on the environment, as is recognised by the Queensland Government establishing the environment as one the subject areas of the six lines of reconstruction under the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. WWF is a member of the sub-committee advising



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on the environmental recovery, rehabilitation and resilience, and therefore is pleased to provide this submission to the Inquiry.

The Inquiry's terms of reference do not directly address environmental impacts. However, managing flood risk is inextricably tied to environmental management. Wetlands, rivers, coastal zones and bushland provide significant flood buffers to protect us from riverine and tidal flooding. When we develop these areas we destroy their flood mitigation functions, and often locate buildings in flood risk zone as well as increase downstream flooding. In our second submission we will expand on how poor land use planning and development assessment has resulted in a significant increase in the regularity and extent of flooding.

WWF is commissioning work which will describe the increased flood flows that have arisen from urban and rural development and the associated alteration to wetlands and vegetation cover. The scope of the work will also include options for landscape rehabilitation actions we can take to reduce flood risk. The findings from these consultancies will be used to make recommendations regarding land use planning and legislative changes that are needed to better protect life, property and the environment.

### **Recommendations for flood preparedness for next wet season**

Between now and the next wet season there will have been significant flood recovery and rebuilding activity. It is important these activities are undertaken so that they will protect communities from any future flooding. The significant investment in rebuilding must ensure that we do not repeat mistakes of the past by re-establishing poor infrastructure and practices that will be vulnerable to floods.

Whilst Brisbane, and in particular Wivenhoe Dam, has received much of the media attention, the Inquiry is to address all areas that were affected by flooding. Importantly, flood preparedness actions will need to be taken statewide not just in those areas of recent flooding.

#### **Education and extension**

- There should be a broad communications campaign (incorporating TV, radio, internet, newspaper and direct mailouts) undertaken to supply information on rebuilding, avoiding further environmental damage and flood preparedness.
- Community liaison officers should be established to advise on undertaking recovery and rebuilding actions to mitigate future flooding impacts and to inform on general measures to be better prepared for the next wet season.
- All government funding for flood recovery should be accompanied by information on how best to rebuild and avoid environmental damage as well as contacts for further information.

#### **Legislative and development controls**

- Rebuilding of sensitive uses should not occur in flood prone areas, unless sufficient steps are taken to achieve an acceptable level of flood risk.
- Infrastructure, agricultural operations and buildings should not merely be replaced but should be built to meet contemporary design standards for flooding and environmental outcomes.
- State government legislation or local government approvals that would increase development in flood prone areas should be put on hold until the findings of the Inquiry have been released.



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- Mining companies should be required to revise their drainage and flood detention designs to ensure the mass failures and illegal releases of water do not re-occur.
- The re-establishment of roads and rail, and the building of drains and levees (in attempt to mitigate floods) must be assessed to ensure they are designed based on a full understanding of the hydrological consequences, and are not just addressing local flooding issues.

#### **Flood risk mapping**

- There must be an immediate review of local and state government flood risk mapping so that there is a consistent and sufficient approach to identifying flood risk areas in Queensland, taking into account the potential for increases in frequency and intensity of storm events in some regions due to climate change.
- Those residences, infrastructure and businesses uses located in flood risk areas should be notified and provided with information on how best to prepare for and respond to potential floods.
- Any flood rebuilding or general development in these areas must only go ahead with strict conditions which ensure acceptable flood risk.