

**SUBMISSION
TO
QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY**

BY RE REID

Adequacy of community's response – Brisbane flood peaking early 13 January 2011

I submit that individuals and the community should be strongly encouraged to take much more responsibility for protection of their own property when floods threaten.

My opinion is that the efforts of many people to secure their property, particularly movable property including vehicles, were inadequate.

When it became obvious late on 11 January and early on 12 January that there would be flooding along the Brisbane River and its tributaries downstream of Ipswich, and predictions were for higher levels than 1974, our household:

- Checked predicted flood levels on our block on the Brisbane City Council web site and found that the predicted 1 in 100 ARI flood was approximately 1.3 m below the lowest point on our land.
- Revised our understanding of 1974 flood levels on the property based on a flood stain on an unpainted wall behind the hot water system and discussion of information previously supplied by former neighbours who were in the area in 1974 and agreed that the 1974 flood had come approximately 0.3 m through the lowest level of our home (we were not here in 1974).
- Moved all furniture and effects, except one large, heavy item, from the lowest level of our home to the highest level, about 3 m above, and placed the large item on blocks about 0.8 m above floor level.
- Moved all movable items except the piano and white goods from the second level, about 0.3 m above the 1974 flood level, to the home of an acquaintance living on higher ground using his daughter's utility, and placed the piano on blocks about 0.3 m above floor level.
- Made contingency plans to move white goods to the highest point in the back yard and cover with a tarpaulin.
- Made contingency plans to block the toilet on the lowest level with soil in a plastic bag to prevent it spilling sewage directly into the house.
- Made contingency plans for evacuation by placing tools for removing palings from the back fence at hand with torches.
- Attempted to seal doors on the lower level with plastic sheeting, blocks, soil and duct tape (I doubt this would have been successful for more than a few centimeters of water, peaking only for an hour or so, when it may have been possible to collect leakage with a mop and bucket).
- Moved vehicles to higher ground.
- Equipped ourselves with water, food, torches and a gas light and cooker, and maintained a watch on flood levels which reached the bottom of our drive. When levels started to fall about 1:30am on 13 January, we notified immediate neighbours, who had evacuated, that their homes were safe.
- Marked flood peak levels on a number of public utility poles in the area.

I believe that damage to vehicles, furniture and personal belongings would have been appreciably reduced had more householders considered their situation late on 11 January or early on 12 January and taken actions similar to those listed above.

I submit that the Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Government should have been much more proactive in encouraging people to consider their situations during the afternoon of 11 January and the morning of 12 January, and to act to minimise damage to their property.

Implementation of the systems operation plans for the Wivenhoe and Somerset dams

I submit that management of releases from Wivenhoe and Somerset dams was probably adequate.

In relation to Wivenhoe Dam releases around the time of the flood, I raise the following issues:

- There had been complaints about the closure of Colleges Crossing as a result of releases from Wivenhoe in the days leading up to the flood.
- Wivenhoe dam is partitioned into a water supply storage and a flood mitigation reservoir above this. It is easy to contend, with hindsight, that water levels should have been reduced to below full supply level in the days leading up to the flood. Nevertheless, releases from water supply storages should be managed on the basis of water in the storage and rainfall that has actually fallen in the catchment that will produce a known amount of runoff. To do otherwise is to invite a water supply shortfall. Weather predictions are just that, and are frequently not accurate.
- While water levels in Wivenhoe dam came to within some 0.9 m of activating the emergency spillway, I believe few people appreciate the additional volume of water that would have been required to activate the fuse plugs. As levels rise, the area of the storage increases so that a very large additional volume would have been required to activate the emergency spillway. Also, it is my understanding that the probability of Wivenhoe Dam reaching levels that would activate the emergency spillway is much lower than that stated in some alarmist media reports.
- Even with the emergency spillway activated, Wivenhoe dam will act as a 'choke' no flood flows down the Brisbane River, and will reduce the peak but prolong the duration of downstream flooding.

I submit that the present actions by SEQ Water to maintain water levels in Wivenhoe Dam at around 75% of full supply capacity is short-sighted and may result in South-East Queensland going into the next drought or dry spell with a part-empty storage. I believe that storage capacity dedicated to providing water supplies should at all times be kept as full as water demand, including environmental requirements, allow.

If South East Queensland now goes into a dry spell or a severe drought with Wivenhoe Dam lower than it would have been without the present 25% level reduction, I trust that SEQ Water will commence augmenting supplies with Class A recycled water at a dam level well above the 40% where, I believe, this augmentation is planned to commence, and will re-commence supplementing supplies from the Tugan desalination plant at no additional cost to consumers.

I have no objection to this submission being placed on the public record though I request that my email address be kept confidential.

Robert E Reid
Fig Tree Pocket
11 March 2011