

SUBMISSION TO THE QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

by

Malcolm Mackellar B.A., M.A., Ph.D.

SUMMARY

This Submission requests that the Commissioner recommend that at Warwick

- (a) the Wallace Street Bridge across the Condamine River be replaced with a higher level flood-proofed bridge and,
- (b) Resehill Road be flood-proofed from Grafton Street to Victoria Street and,
- (c) Wallace Street, Rosehill Road, Rose Street, Hawker Road, Thornton Street, Ogalvie Road, and Glengallen Road, in the configuration depicted by a broken red line on the attached map, be reformed wherever necessary to take heavy interstate road transport vehicles and,
- (d) that when the New England Highway would otherwise be closed by flooding, it be re-routed via the streets mentioned above.

STATEMENT OF REASONS

The reason for this Submission

1. This Submission is made because on 27 December 2010 the Condamine River overflowed its banks and closed the New England Highway where that highway crosses that river within the city of Warwick. This was the only place in the Southern Downs in Queensland where the 2010-2011 floods closed the New England Highway.

The basis of this Submission

2. In accordance with Section 3 of the Terms of Reference, of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry, this Submission is a request to the Commissioner to make recommendations to improve the preparation and planning for future flood threats from the Condamine River where this river passes through the city of Warwick.

The New England Highway

3. The New England Highway is the main thoroughfare from Sydney to Brisbane via the Southern Downs of Queensland. Considerable interstate traffic flows along this highway every day and night. A closure of this highway can therefore cause catastrophic traffic delays, not only to the people of Warwick, but also to interstate freight and travellers.

4. On the attached map, the New England Highway can be seen as an unbroken red line, entering the city of Warwick from the south. It proceeds due-north as Wallace Street, until its junction with the Cunningham Highway, shown here as Wood Street. It then takes a right-angle due-east turn and continues as Wood Street until it makes a left-angle turn due-north again as Albion Street. It then crosses the Condamine River as Helene Street, and as it passes over the rail line it changes its name again to Alexandra Drive, and continues then as the Cunningham Highway. Notwithstanding all these name changes, throughout its greater length from Newcastle in NSW past Toowoomba in Queensland, this thoroughfare is known as the New England Highway, and will be so referred to in this Submission, except when it is simply referred to as "the highway".

5. At Warwick, the highway assumes double importance at its intersection with Wood Street, because from this point onwards, it merges with the Cunningham Highway, and continues under that name to Brisbane. Together with the Pacific Highway, the Hume Highway and the Bruce Highway, the New England Highway is one of Australia's major thoroughfares, with one of its most important junctions here at Warwick.

6. Any disruption to the flow of traffic along this highway at Warwick could cause a major national communication disaster. Such a disruption did occur at Warwick on 27 December 2010 when the highway was closed by flooding. For this reason the Commission is invited to consider recommending measures to prevent future closures by flooding of the highway here at Warwick.

The closure of the highway on 27 December 2010

7. On 27 December 2010, the floodwaters of the Condamine River closed over the New England Highway at the Madsen Bridge on Albion Street, so high that no vestige of the bridge could then be seen. As all other bridges across the Condamine at Warwick were at a lower level than this bridge and had earlier been flooded, the flooding of Madsen Bridge closed the New England Highway to all traffic and Warwick was isolated by road until the floodwaters receded.

FLOOD-PROOFING THE NEW ENGLAND HIGHWAY FROM FUTURE FLOOD CLOSURE AT WARWICK

The Madsen Bridge

8. Since it was the flooding of the Madsen Bridge which closed the New England Highway and isolated Warwick from the north, logic would suggest that raising the height sufficiently above flood level of this bridge and its approaches would flood-proof the Highway from future flood closure at Warwick. Indeed, it would, but these renovations could only be done by closing the highway at this river crossing. As there is no other suitable and convenient crossing of the Condamine at Warwick for continuous heavy interstate vehicle traffic, long delays and traffic snarls via unsuitable detours and inferior bridges would cause residential inconvenience and catastrophic interruptions to the New England Highway arterial thoroughfare. Far better to flood-proof the highway at the Wallace Street Bridge, because during the reconstruction of this bridge, heavy vehicular interstate traffic could continue to flow across the Condamine, uninterrupted at Madsen Bridge, as it does now.

The Wallace Street Bridge

9. The crossing of the Condamine where Wallace Street joins Rosehill Street is a low-level narrow bridge, subject to inundation during periodic flooding of this river. Compared to the Madsen Bridge, this is currently a minor crossing of the Condamine, with infrequent traffic flow. However, it offers excellent opportunity for improvement, with minimum disruption to residents because this part of Warwick is sparsely populated. In fact from the Condamine river north to Victoria Street, Rosehill Road on both sides passes through open farmland. Opportunities offer here for the replacement of this low-level bridge with a high-level bridge, and the raising of its approaches above flood level.

Temporary re-routing of the New England Highway through Warwick.

10. All of Warwick north of the rail crossing at Rose Street is above the flood-plain, and with minor road-surface engineering wherever necessary, this part of Warwick could host a re-routed New England Highway via Rosehill Road, Rose Street, Hawker Road, Thornton Street to Ogilvie Road, and thence via Glengailan Road back onto where the original Highway departs Warwick northwards.

11. The advantage of this route for the New England Highway is that any reconstruction work necessary would only cause minimum disruption to the people of Warwick. This is because this part of Warwick is sparsely populated. For example, there are some houses along this route, but the greater part of its length consists of wide streets passing by open farmland or other open land clear of building development.

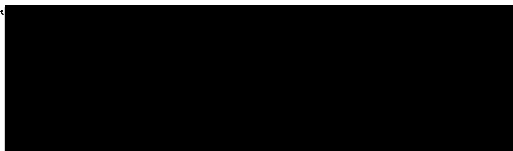
12. Such a re-routing when the New England Highway might otherwise be closed at the Madsen Bridge would give inter-state and heavy vehicular transport a clear flood-proof run in a straight line from Bracker Road in the south to Hawker Road in the north, thereby by-passing the Warwick CBD at the same time. Whilst residents along some of the streets mentioned might not like heavy interstate transports rumbling past their homes, this would only be a temporary inconvenience for them during flood-times.

Conclusion

13. The purpose of this Submission is to ensure that we will be properly prepared next time the New England Highway is closed by flooding at Warwick.

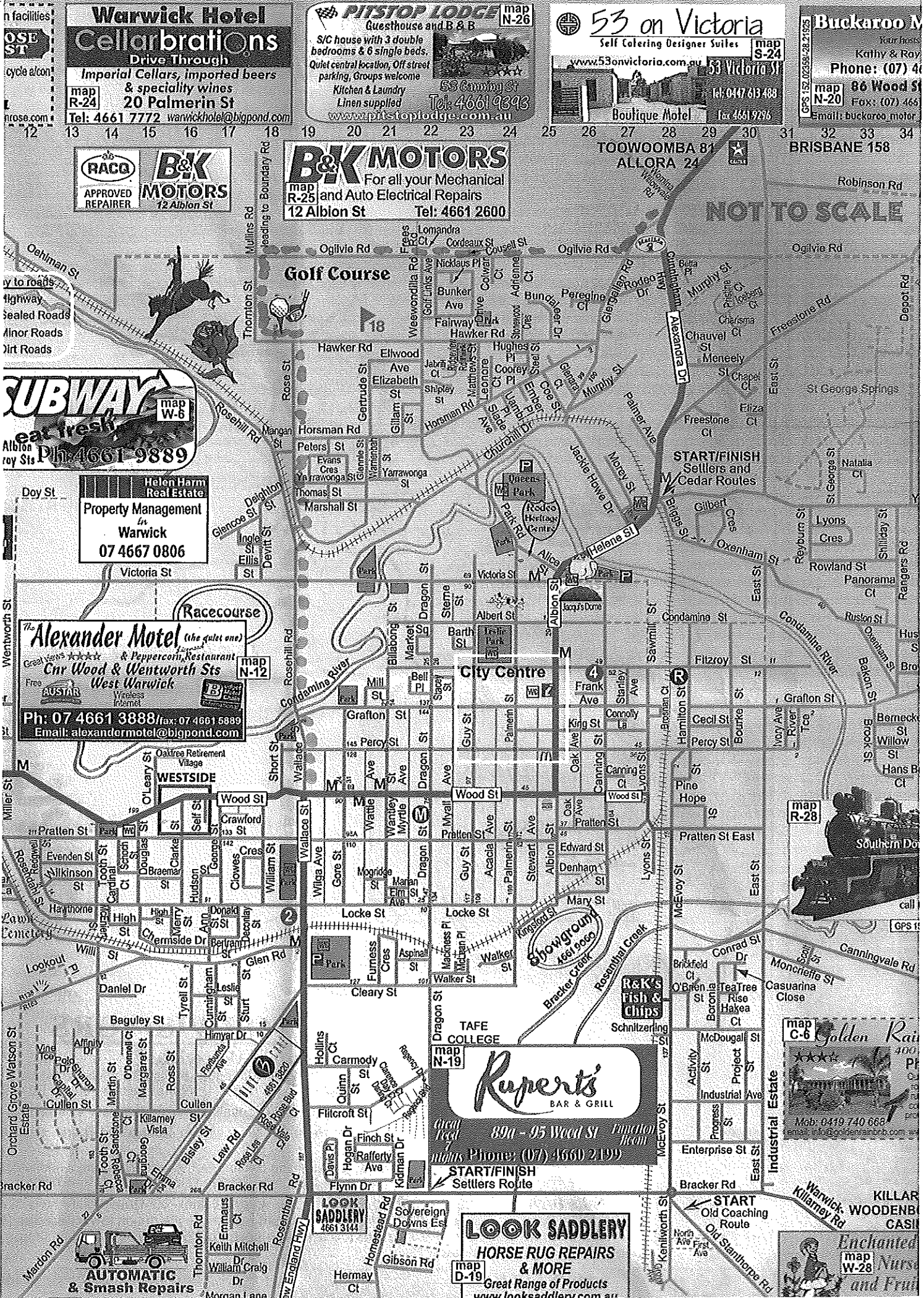
14. These are therefore my suggestions for flood-proofing the New England Highway at Warwick, so that when the next flood comes, interstate travellers and commerce will pass without let or hindrance across the wide flood-plains of the Condamine River and that the great arterial thoroughfare of the New England Highway will remain open at all times.

15. I ask the Commission to take these suggestions into consideration in its report.



Malcolm Mackellar
B.A.(UQ), M.A.(UNSW), Ph.D.(CDU).

17 March 2011



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