

Submission to the Queensland Flood Commission of Inquiry

As a resident of Theodore since 1954 I present this submission as my personal experiences of the 2010/2011 flood event.

1 Preparation and planning by federal, state and local governments, emergency services and the community.

At the beginning of December 2010 I had no direct knowledge of any preparation and planning in relation to flooding in the Theodore area.

As the disaster unfolded I quickly became aware that all facets of government and the emergency services were very well organised to the extent that I marvelled at how well the situation was handled. The obvious point is that while authorities were well prepared for emergencies, I for one had no knowledge that preparation.

I began to become involved in preparations to sand bag and secure our house with a river level of 14.2 metres being the likely maximum as that was the approximately the height reached during the record flood of 1956. We were able to keep track of the Dawson River height via the BOM website and at 14 metres the water level at our house corresponded with the expected level. During the Monday night the level rose rapidly in conjunction with an obvious roaring of water which was the flash flood from Castle Creek. As this was unexpected and we had no warning, our house was flooded to a level of 70cm throughout and we were evacuated by boat at approximately 4.30am Tuesday morning.

2 Private Insurers and their responsibilities

As I was aware of the possibility of flooding, even though the Banana Shire Council advised me that there were no "Design Flood Levels" for the new subdivision where we built, I had made sure that we were covered for flood events with Suncorp Insurance. From the very first contact with Suncorp which was at 3.30am on the Tuesday morning of the flood we have had a very positive response. I made a claim by phone from Moura, our evacuation centre, as soon as I could on the Wednesday after arriving in Moura. Except for some understandable difficulties making phone contact and having to wait for replies due to the escalating number of areas affected by disasters, I have nothing but praise for Suncorp Insurance as they have been helpful, pleasant and ever willing to ensure that our claim is settled to our satisfaction. At this stage Suncorp are paying for the rental property we are temporally occupying, they have settled our contents claim and builders arrived here on 30/03/2011.

3 The response to the 2010/2011 flood events.

The March 2010 flood came and went as the floods have in the past. The only issue we had was that the street drainage was exposed to be inadequate. Subsequent representations to Banana Shire were largely ignored until toward the end of the year a council representative visited Ninth Avenue and agreed that the drain into Castle Creek needed a one way flap valve to prevent water being pushed into the street. During the Christmas flood the water backed up into Ninth Avenue threatening the underground power supply necessitating the disconnection of power approximately twenty four hours before the street was flooded from the Dawson River and Castle Creek. The response to the threat of flooding during and at the end of December 2010 was really well organised with the combined efforts of the S.E.S, Fire and Rescue, Police, Banana Shire Council, Theodore District Health Council and many volunteers working in unison to prepare the town for the flood.

4 Measures to manage the supply of essential services.

Other than the loss of power earlier than necessary due to the poor design of the street drainage in Ninth Avenue Theodore, I cannot comment on this subject except to say that the measures taken after the water receded seemed reasonable and adequate allowing most residents to safely return to town and begin the recovery in stages.

5 Adequacy of forecasts and early warning systems.

Until the flash flood in Castle Creek I had been able to monitor the River levels to the extent that I was well aware of the implications for our own situation. Coupled with the regular meetings called by the management group, I was satisfied that the situation was well monitored and had given me time to seal all the doors and the lower extremities of our house. Unfortunately the only warning we had of Castle Creek flooding was a deep roaring noise during the Monday night and the rapid rise of water above the window sills of our house at which stage we were evacuated by boat manned by a volunteer.

6 Implementation of systems operation plans for dams

This is not really applicable to Theodore except to say that a study should be conducted to evaluate the usefulness of having a dam constructed at Nathan Gorge between Theodore and Taroom.

7 Land use planning.

This point I cannot comment on except to say that after the record 1956 flood there was a serious push to have Theodore moved away from the river flats to higher ground. This very sensible idea gradually faded into oblivion. I would suggest that it is now too late to make such a move although shifting us all to Moura would solve two problems as it would make Moura more viable and give Theodoreites a flood free home!

8 Control of members of the community who want to run things for themselves

At the Commission of Inquiry meeting held here in Theodore much mention was made of the lack of support for those folk who decided to be billeted in the Alaire Heights area and at the Theodore Aerodrome. Being one of the evacuees who followed the directions of the authorities, I can only say that our safety and all our needs were well catered for in the disaster plan. It might be that those who think they can look after themselves without such planning would actually be a liability in such a crisis causing extra work and creating problems that could be avoided.

9 Distribution of donated goods.

During our stay at Moura we were given free access to whatever donated goods were available with no restriction. Moura volunteers worked tirelessly to make a wide variety of goods available. I think this worked really well as the mountain of donations were rapidly dispersed and well appreciated by us as we only had the bare minimum of clothing and personal items. On return to Theodore much the same system continued under the auspices of the wonderful Red Cross volunteers. When the control of the donations was passed on to local volunteers there was an attempt to control who was entitled to what goods with those that had insurance not being allowed to have items that the volunteers deemed should be covered by insurance as well limiting the amount of goods. While this move might seem admirable, it did nothing but create animosity as well as allow the stockpile of donated goods to continue to grow. As far as the benefit of being insured is concerned, we found it difficult to convince the organisers that having insurance wasn't doing anything at that stage to keep our clothes washed or provide food and clothing. A later donation scheme organised by the RSL was more successful because the goods were arranged in the local RSL hall and left for all to access as we wanted to. This allowed more of the donations to be taken thus reducing the stockpile. The distribution of donated goods by an independent authority rather than well meaning local people would help maintain harmony .

The comment by one local about the poor reception she received from the Red Cross when trying to register at Theodore was a personal comment the like of which I have not heard before or since from anyone else. The ever smiling, pleasant, helpful Red Cross Volunteers, along with so many others helped all to maintain a positive attitude to our plight.