

SUBMISSION TO
QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Introduction

This submission addresses the management and operations of the North Pine Dam on Tuesday, 11 January 2011.

While I have no personal knowledge of such management and operations, publicly available information is that at 9.00am on Monday, 10 January 2011, that Dam was at 103.9% capacity (approx. 222,659 megalitres); at 9.00am on 11 January it was at 105.3% (approx. 225,660 megalitres); and at 9.00am on 12 January it had dropped to 101.8% (approx 218,159 megalitres).

I recall that it continued to rain after 9.00am on 11 January. Later that day there had to have been a release of at least 7,500 megalitres from the North Pine Dam into the North Pine River.

My Personal Experience

I live on a three acre property (with river frontage) on Wyampa Road, Bald Hills, next to the Deep Water Bend Reserve. I also conduct a number of business ventures from that property. Mine is one of four properties in that area. All were inundated by flooding when the Pine River broke its banks on the afternoon of 11 January 2011.

In 16 years of residence at Wyampa Road, I have never seen the river break its banks. I have also been told that neither in 1974 nor in 1988 did the North Pine River flood my property. But on 11 January the flooding river inundated the whole property - all offices, storage sheds, work sheds, garages, vehicles and other equipment to a depth of 1.2 metres, while the houses (being on stumps) were still flooded some 0.2m - 0.35m above the floorboards.

Because of business operations at my property, staff were working on site throughout the day from 7.00am, but none of those staff recall receiving any warnings (be it by telephone, door knocking, or otherwise) prior to the flood that day.

I knew that 11 January would see a king tide in the Pine River, with its peak at about 1.30pm at the pile light; the peak upstream at Deep Water Bend is usually some 20 minutes later.

Though working away from home that morning, driving back at about 1.00pm I found that Wyampa Road had been closed (by Queensland Police) at the point where it crossed over the Gateway Motorway. I spoke to a policeman at that checkpoint; the road had been closed at about 12.50pm and the reason for and duration of closure advised to me was to the effect of "*until the king tide danger is over*". Police never suggested any alternative or additional reason for the closure.

That explanation is curious. The king tides on 11 January 2011 were 1.78m at 1.31am and 1.95m at 1.32pm. They were not major king tides; some days later king tides of 2.14m, 2.65m and 2.62m were predicted and/or experienced. That said, it seems the Police believed the explanation they were passing on; the policeman closing Wyampa Road left between 2.00pm - 2.15pm, after the peak of the king tide.

As a resident of Wyampa Road, the Police allowed me to proceed. Wyampa Road was completely driveable, though some water was visible off the road in the wetlands. I reached my property at about 1.10pm.

Some time around 2.00pm, I recall looking at the river and saw that the tide had been going out for about 10 minutes. The peak of the king tide did not break the river banks at Deep Water Bend, and I saw nothing out of the ordinary about the river level at that time.

At about 3.00pm, my son-in-law commented that the tide was coming up again. That was not possible; the rise could only have been from an alternative cause (such as a water release from the North Pine Dam?).

From that time, the water rose far too rapidly to save anything at the property. Wyampa Road was flooded by this post-king tide event at about 4.00pm, and the water over the road continued to rise for about another two hours; by 5.00pm the water was about 1.0m over the road.

SES staff arrived at our property by boat at about 5.00pm - 5.30pm, urging people to evacuate. My daughter and son-in-law departed in that evacuation. My neighbour and I stayed, but only because we had our own boats. We evacuated the property by boat at about 6.00pm.

My estimated property damage bill from the floods is in the range \$450,000 - \$650,000, and may yet rise higher. However, at the property at that time I had two 8 tonne trucks, with very large trays and fitted with hoists. I believe that if I had been given a minimum two hours warning (remembering that the water did not cover Wyampa Road until about 4.00pm) that the river would break its banks, and flood my property as it did, then my staff and I would have been able to load the majority of equipment into trucks and other vehicles on site and then evacuate the property by road.

Other Information Gathered

From my daughter talking to other parents of children attending the Bald Hills State School, I believe that either Police or SES personnel door-knocked areas of Bald Hills to advise residents of the possibility of flooding. I understand that Rushworth Street and Kyeema Crescent were two such areas door-knocked, while another may have been Bracken Ridge Road – but I do not know at what time that door-knocking occurred, and what explanation was given to residents. I believe I can obtain the names and addresses of some of those door-knocked, if necessary.

If areas of Bald Hills more than a kilometre from the Pine River were door-knocked, why were the four properties at Wyampa Road, on the river, not similarly warned?

Only well after the event have I also become aware that the B105 website carried a flood update at 12.58pm on 11 January 2011 that said, in part "*Low lying areas in Strathpine, Bray Park, Bald Hills, Caboolture, Caboolture South, Bellmere and Brisbane Riverside suburbs are being evacuated*".

No part of Bald Hills was more low-lying than Wyampa Road, but no one tried to evacuate us before 1.00pm, or at any time before the Pine River broke its banks.

I also think it significant that the king tide had been receding for about an hour before upstream flood waters from the North Pine River reached Deep Water Bend. It gives

rise to an inference that any release of water from the North Pine Dam that day was planned sufficiently in advance to avoid coinciding with the tidal peak. But if that level of planning was possible, why was it not equally possible to communicate warnings of the release and its possible consequences to all residents many hours (and certainly prior to midday) before the release took place?

The SEQWater website says that QBWSA (trading as SEQWater) is a Queensland State Government body, and is the manager of the North Pine Dam.

Conclusion

This submission asks the Commission of Inquiry to investigate:

1. Whether preparation and planning by SEQWater, for a release of some 7,500 (or more) megalitres of water from the North Pine Dam on 11 January 2011, was adequate.
2. As any such release was a response to rainfall in the North Pine Dam catchment area in the days preceding the release, whether SEQWater's efforts (if any) to inform the community, and to protect private property, ahead of that release were adequate?
3. If appropriate systems operation plans for the North Pine Dam were in place before 11 January 2011, whether the implementation of such plans was reasonable and adequate in all the circumstances?
4. If information, road closures and/or evacuation warnings were given to the residents of Bald Hills by Police, SES and/or other State Government bodies, the timeliness of SEQWater's notice of the water release to such bodies; the explanations given to Police, SES, etc about the cause of any danger (it could not have been merely a "*king tide*"); the timeliness of the response by such bodies in warning the community; and (if there was such warning) why the whole of the community at risk was not warned.