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Kenmore
QLD
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24 April 2011

To The Queensland Floods Commissioner,

In the January 2011 floods, like many others, my home was inundated to just below the ceiling.

There are several points I'd like to raise to contribute to the current inquiry:

- 1) Given my location, and in the knowledge that we were heading for a severe wet season, I did my best to prepare for the possibility of flooding. I contacted the SES about accessing sandbags, only to be told they were only available in the context of an emergency. As a practitioner in the field of futures thinking I found this a bewildering arrangement. I can appreciate the possible reasons for this policy, but am not convinced that a blanket approach on this is entirely productive.

Although they ultimately served me no good purpose, I pursued alternative arrangements and filled many sandbags to have on hand.

On Tuesday 11 January, although I had sandbags my neighbours didn't. Having access to a ute I offered to collect sandbags for them from Newmarket. This experience reinforced to me the reasons why I had tried to plan ahead:

- It was dangerous to be on the roads.
- I simply contributed to the traffic problem that was developing.
- The cue at the SES proved to be a futile enterprise to persist with.

I eventually turned around and came home. Having sat in the cue waiting for sandbags, and then traffic, my ute overheated and broke down. I achieved nothing for my neighbours and delayed my own capacity to pack up my home.

It would be great if there was the opportunity for people to plan ahead (e.g. access sandbags) if there's a severe wet season predicted – particularly for those known to live in very flood prone areas.

- 2) At 7am on Tuesday 11 January I had a call from my neighbour. She indicated that a woman further down the street had received a call from the SES saying that there was a wall of water coming for us. Given the events in Toowoomba the afternoon before, this information was far from useful. I didn't know whether I had time to pack up my house or whether I should get in my car and get as high as I could within minutes. I can't know whether the information that was related to me is exactly what the SES volunteer communicated, or whether it was accompanied by any other information, but it concerned me that only one person was given the information and it was so lacking in useful detail in terms of timelines and implications.

I rang the 132 500 SES number and was greatly impressed. I received extremely useful information that reinforced what they were able to tell me reliably and what they couldn't

confidently tell me. The information was specific to my location and gave me a good sense of what I had time to do/not do. Based on this experience, I'll definitely use this service again with confidence.

The comparative inadequacy of the knowledge of the local SES again became apparent on Thursday 13 January. A second peak was predicted and a local SES representative came to our neighbourhood and told us that this was going to occur and the level it was likely to reach on the Brisbane River in the city and at what time. When we asked what this might mean for us, on a creek, 12km from the city, he said he didn't know. I appreciated his honesty and his efforts to assist us, but essentially the information was of no use to us.

Given that I was able to receive such useful information, that was specific to my location, by ringing the SES, I wonder whether there are ways to ensure this type of information is communicated to local communities proactively through SMS alerts.

- 3) I've been told that when the Wivenhoe Dam was built it was built for the sole purpose of flood mitigation. If this is correct, I don't know when its use was changed to include *both* flood mitigation and community water supplies. I also have no awareness of whether those who were living in flood prone areas were ever informed of this change.

I do appreciate the need for Brisbane to have such a water supply given its growth over the past decades. Even so, it's clearly evident that by Wivenhoe Dam having dual functions there are clear challenges in balancing the water supply, safety, and (unfortunately) political demands of the situation.

I wonder what systems will be implemented to ensure the tension between these factors is better managed in the future than it has been in recent times.

- 4) I fully appreciate that any system to increase the current BCC voluntary buy back scheme for homes in flood affected locations would be a very costly exercise and may not be taken up by all those who might be eligible if criteria were broadened. However, when I draw upon my background as a foresight practitioner, I'd like to think that we can bring a long range view to this issue.

Just because it's too expensive to achieve a significant outcome on such a big issue within 1, 2, 5 or 10 years, doesn't mean it shouldn't be a goal to be achieved over the next 100 or 200 years. That might seem comical, but sometimes processes just need to be started and chipped away at. Future generations might thank us (from a financial and a social perspective) for having the courage to think and act beyond the next 10 years.

Nothing makes me more sad than to think that even if I move on from my current home, at some point in the future, someone else *will* endure what I and my neighbours have over the past months, and will continue to live with for a long time to come. As much as I love my home and have no *desire* to move from it, unless it's ultimately removed from its current location, it will flood again. It may be in 6 months time, it may be in 60 years time. Either way, the consequences will be significant.

I hope that any plans that are made as a result of the current inquiry will consider what we can achieve both in the long term and the short term. Please – let's not throw out the big things that might take time to be achieved.

- 5) I find it intriguing that information about flood frequency continues to be reported using expressions such as a '1 in a 100 year flood'. As a community we have poor knowledge of how statistics work. The use of such terms does nothing to overcome the inadequacy of this knowledge.

In formal documents (e.g. Flood Wise Property Reports) it would be great to see new standards set for expressing this information in a more meaningful way – i.e. every year a specific property has a 1% chance of flooding; every year there's a 20% chance that a flood of certainty severity could occur etc.).

Similarly, guidelines could be provided to the media on the very same issue.

I would hope that this approach might increase our community's understanding that floods (or any other natural events) can come at us as often as they might. Just as it's possible for 6 heads to appear in a row when a coin is tossed.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. I wish you well in the critically important work you are carrying out for the future of Queensland.

Kind Regards,

Gretchen Young