Angela O'Malia
[redacted]
8th March 2011

**Submission to Inquiry Queensland Floods**

This submission relates to the Terms of Reference section **f) implementation of the systems operation plans for dams across the state and in particular the Wivenhoe and Somerset release strategy and an assessment of compliance with, and the suitability of the operational procedures relating to flood mitigation and dam safety**

The floods that occurred on the 12th January inundated thousands of homes, including my own family home in Chelmer. Prior to purchasing my home 6 years ago I, like many of my neighbours were led to believe Brisbane would never see floods such as those occurring in 1974. Sadly, history has repeated itself and I no longer have confidence in the SEQ Water's ability to mitigate any flood potential for Brisbane.

**Concerns are as follows:**

**Planning**

1. Failure by SEQ Water to proactively respond to predictions of an active La Nina weather pattern which warned of heavy rain and likely flooding for the duration of the wet season.

The Bureau of Meteorology warned of an upcoming La Nina weather pattern of unprecedented strength prior to the summer of 2010. Heavy rainfall events in October which necessitated water releases from Wivenhoe prompted warnings of probable flooding over the coming summer. Lord Mayor Campbell Newman predicted in December a flood of 1974 proportions was likely to occur, and Council prepared an emergency response accordingly.

- *I would like to ask the Inquiry why the SEQ Water Dam Operators did not release water to 75% or less of FSL in September 2010 prior to the onset of the wet season?*
- *Further, I would ask for clear modelling to show the extent of flooding across Brisbane had the Dams been at 75% FSL in December/January?*

**Outdated manual**

2. The SEQ Dam Operating Manual has not been updated since the former El Nino weather pattern that brought much of Australia into drought. The emphasis

throughout the Operating Manual is to preserve the FSL at 100% capacity to ensure the supply of available drinking water.

I refer to Sections 3.1 of SEQ Manual of Operational Procedures for Flood Mitigation at Wivenhoe Dam and Somerset Dam "*Retain the storage at Full Supply Level at the Conclusion of the Flood Event"* and 3.5 "*There should be no reason why the dams should not be full following a Flood Event"*

Clearly, the policy to maintain the dams at 100%FSL in the context of an active wet season must be reviewed immediately.

The SEQ Wivenhoe Dam Annual Report 2009/10 was written during the former El Nino weather pattern and also emphasises the primary strategic intention of SEQ Water is to build and preserve the drinking water supply for Brisbane during drought.
There is little emphasis in this report on the function of flood mitigation.

- *I respectfully seek a review of the policies and procedures of the Wivenhoe Somerset Dam Operating manuals with inclusion of proactive strategies to release water storage capacity prior to each La Nina wet season based on available weather forecasts and modelling.*
- *Further, I would ask for an interim policy change to reduce FSL to 75% prior to the summer of 2011 until any findings from this commission are fully implemented.*

**Water releases**
3. Allegations raised in the Australian newspaper suggest that the Brisbane flooding was a result of the large and unprecedented releases of water on Tuesday 11 January when the dam had reached 190% capacity.

Experts have written that the limited water releases during the weekend of 8-9 January seriously compromised the dam's ability to store the large inflows over that weekend, thus prompting the larger releases on the 10-11 January. SEQ Water has not publicly released information on the decision making processes that took place over that period.

- *I would ask that the Inquiry review the experience and skill of staff rostered over the weekend of 8-9 January, their delegation authority and communication processes within SEQ Water.*
- *Why weren't larger volumes of water released prior to the weekend of 8-9 January and why weren't larger releases continued throughout that weekend?*

**Fuse plugs and capacity reduction**

4. The Australian newspaper also states on the 5-6 February 2011 that the recent upgrade to Wivenhoe fuse plugs has further reduced the flood mitigation capacity of the dam. A follow up article on 2 March 2011 suggests that this equates to a reduction of 600 gigalitres, or the equivalent of Sydney Harbour.

- *Why then, was FSL maintained at 100% after the introduction of these fuse plugs and consequent reduction in storage capacity?*

**Flood mitigation**

5. Wivenhoe Dam was originally built for flood mitigation in response to the 1974 floods but over time has developed a dual purpose for water storage, thus compromising the full potential for flood mitigation.

- *I would ask that this Inquiry produce some definitive solutions for long term flood mitigation in Brisbane and not repeat the mistakes of recent decades by compromising the functions of our dams.*

**Governance**

6. The State Government in its recent portfolio shuffle has now given the governance of the Wivenhoe Dam to three different Ministers.

*The Hon Stephen Robertson – setting dam levels, retail distribution, drought proofing
* The Hon Rachael Nolan- setting dam levels, retail distribution, drought proofing
*The Hon Kate Jones- flood mitigation and water release.

- *I would like to express my concern over this portfolio split and to emphasise the dangers of decision making across three Ministers in the event of another flood. Consensus would be difficult and prolonged as ministers have competing agendas. The result could have catastrophic consequences on flood prone Brisbane residents.*

In summary, I strongly believe that the inflexibility of policies and practices as determined by the SEQ Manual of Operational Procedures for Flood Mitigation played a significant role in contributing to the January flood event for urban Brisbane. I look to this Inquiry to objectively review these policies and procedures to determine if in fact, the Operating Manual and decision making processes during this rain event were contributors to the flood. I would hope that we will not repeat mistakes of the past, yet take this opportunity to improve policy and processes to ensure that Brisbane is protected from future flooding and our dams are operated at optimal effectiveness.

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