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Submission to Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

As a home owner impacted by the Brisbane Floods, I wish to make the following comments, observations, and recommendations.

Wivenhoe Dam Level

The issue of the level of the Wivenhoe Dam just prior to the flood is of greatest concern. The evidence has shown that the dam operations procedures were not adequate nor appropriate in the context of the Brisbane Flood. With the predicted rain levels from the BOM, the Wivenhoe Dam should not have been left at 100% capacity.

During the wet season the level should have been reduced to 50% to cater for the increased rain. At that level, the flood would not have occurred in Brisbane. During the drought, Brisbane residents proved that they can handle even lower levels.

The dramatic increase (to 190%) in the Dam level over the days before the flood was also not addressed immediately - resulting in decisions being made too late with dramatic consequences. The decision making process over those few days needs to be investigated with surgical precision.

The most significant strategic issue for the Wivenhoe Dam is its dual objectives of "flood mitigation" and "water reservoir". These dual objectives will always be in direct conflict and will severely impact on the safe operation of the Dam. The Wivenhoe Dam must be reverted back to its only prime operation of flood mitigation.

Overall, the reliance on the Wivenhoe Dam on flood mitigation has taken "mythical" proportions. Even the BCC Markers erected on the 25th anniversary of the 1974 Flood allude to the "excess capacity" of the Dam to stop future floods. Effective emergency planning requires multiple approaches to disaster mitigation.

Local Mitigation Strategies

The flooding that occurred in our local region of Yeronga (the western area bounded by the Brisbane Corso, Orsova and Hyde Roads) was flooded from behind. The water did not break the banks of the Brisbane River. The flood water entered through the storm water drains via Goodwin Park then around the back following the parklands then into the residential areas.

This area is a natural flood plain and serves a key service for dissipating waters. However, when there is too much water, it then acts as a catalyst to flood residential homes.

One measure that the authorities should now consider seriously is the use of levees to mitigate floods. Levees can be built as high earth hills around the flood-plain areas that back onto residential areas. In our case, for our local area, a levee around the back of parklands (that span from the Brisbane Corso partly to Hyde Road) would have stopped the flood. See that attached figure for an example of the levee location.

Obviously, such proposals need to consider a wide range of factors, but should now be seriously considered as part of localised flood mitigation options across Brisbane.

Emergency Alerts

The operation of the Australian Early Warning Network (EWN) also needs to be reviewed. The EWN had sent SMS messages on the 5th Jan predicting "possible flooding", then on 8th Jan "localised flash flooding", then on 9th Jan more "localised flash flooding", then on the 11th Jan (8:37AM) there was "local flooding possible".

Clearly on the 11th Jan parts of Yeronga (ie The Esplanade) and Fairfield (ie Fairfield Rd) were actually flooded. However there was never any EWN message indicating this. In fact, there was no EWN message to evacuate the areas on Tues 11 Jan at all - even though the Police were on the streets warning local residents. The next alert was sent on the 18 Jan.

The EWN system should be capable of sending localised message for evacuation purposes. In this case, the system - and the processes that support the system- failed to notify residents of the impending disaster. A community needs to have confidence in the warning systems for them to rely on taking action in the future.

Recommendations

The experiences from the flood can only be described as catastrophic - both physically and emotionally - to the resident of Brisbane. We need to ensure that lessons learnt from this experience are not lost and we as a community can grow stronger and more resilient.

The following are recommendations from my experiences:

1 - Wivenhoe Dam levels for the Wet Season needs to be set to a significantly lower number.

2 - Widenhoe Dam must revert to the primary operation of flood mitigation only.

3 - Emergency Alerts system and procedures needs to be reviewed to support greater clarity and timeliness in messages.

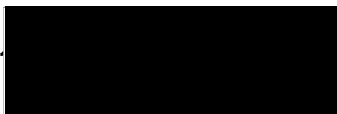
4 - Criteria for evacuation messages need to be reviewed.

5 - Local flood mitigation strategies need to be undertaken for all areas impacted by the floods.

6 - Levees should be considered for areas that could have resisted the flood impact.

I look forward to a successful outcome from the Commission that reduces the possibility of floods in the future and addresses increased local flood mitigation.

Sincerely yours,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Dr Renato Iannella.

Dr Renato Iannella

ATTACHMENT

Possible Levee Location in Yeronga

