

24th February 2011

SUBMISSION TO QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY

LAND OWNER: DOUGLAS CLAUDE BRUCE & CHERYL ANN McDADE

PROPERTY ADDRESS: [REDACTED] HARLIN QLD 4306

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION: [REDACTED]

We have resided alongside the Brisbane River at Harlin since May 2008 with our 5 acre property bordering directly onto the river.

As we are very new to this area, considering many of the "locals" have lived here their entire life, and having seen our landscape change so dramatically since Boxing Day 2010, we feel it is now cause for concern.

The major reason for purchasing the property was the beautiful vista of the surrounding Harlin countryside, and obviously being able to view on a daily basis the gorgeous lush green vegetation on the banks on the Brisbane River. As the countryside was in drought when we arrived at Harlin, this did not deter us as the Brisbane River even then looked beautiful meandering down the watercourse.

We have had good rainfalls since June 2008 and with the purchase of an extra 25,000 litre water tank this has allowed us to have sufficient water for our home use. The Brisbane River has risen on several occasions, which for us at the time was quite exciting. We realized this meant that the Wivenhoe Dam would be receiving the same as the upper reaches of the Brisbane River, which in turn meant that the Brisbane water supply was increasing as well.

From the back patio of our home, we are able to sit and watch the river rise and fall before our eyes. Although novices, it was of particular interest to realize that the river could "go up" quite steadily but then "go down" ever so fast – as if someone had "put the plug in" and released it allowing the water to be "sucked back down the plug hole" even faster. During all of these events, nothing changed with the course of the river nor on the banks – in fact, the vegetation grew back greener than ever. The animals returned to the waters edge including cows, deer and birds (especially the pelicans).

The rain we received in October 2010 resulted in the Brisbane River rising to the highest level that we had seen since arriving here. Again, with the control that was occurring at Wivenhoe Dam the levels were up and down before our eyes. As there was controversy at the time with the water from the dam to be released into the ocean, and being pumped to Toowoomba with costs involved, we sent an email on 10th October 2010 to Anna Bligh outlining our disgust with these arrangements.

A reply from the Premier's Office was dated 13th December, 2010, which really meant nothing.

20th December 2010: From as early as this date, when flooding occurred again in Kilcoy, we have all been on our own "flood alert". Unfortunately, the situation changed dramatically from Boxing Day evening December 2010 – not just 9th January 2011. From the beginning of December 2010 due to a substantial amount of rain, the upper reaches of the Brisbane River had an abundance of water.

26th December 2010 (Boxing Day Evening): All during the night, we could hear sounds that resembled "canons going off". It was not until daylight that we realized that the high river banks on the other side of the river were falling in – this was to increase dramatically and continue until late January 2011.

New Years Weekend 1st January 2011: Obviously during the week, "the plug" had been pulled out again at Wivenhoe Dam and the water receded once again. We are left with a totally different outlook of the river.

Where there was once beautiful green vegetation, we were now viewing nothing but gravel and sand – the other all washed away. Where there was once a gradual grassy descent down to the waters edge for the animals to drink from, now is an approximate 50' high or more cliff-face!! But, this was only the beginning!!

Sunday 2nd January 2011: We could see that the landowner opposite us had lost all of his irrigation pipes and we were concerned from him. We drove over to his property and went down to the river with him – we were shocked even then at the devastation that had taken place. We were also able to view from this side that the banks of our property were stable.

This is when we learn of the operation of the gravel extraction plant in the Harlin reach of the Brisbane River (@ Sinnamon Lane) and the effects it has had in this area. It was explained to us that in 2005 the Government indicated: "it was considered that the extraction of material from the site within the permit terms and conditions would be unlikely to detrimentally affect the interest of the adjacent landowners".

Friday 7th January 2011: Extremely heavy rain from the previous day with no relief on Friday, in fact even heavier. The Brisbane River has risen yet again and at this stage higher than ever before. There was one beautiful huge gum tree on the waters edge opposite us, among many others. This was our "indicator" to how much further the river had risen from previous deluges. Now the river was even further up and behind the gum tree (which we had never seen before) and the river was violent.

We notify the landowner opposite of what is occurring re his electricity pole for his irrigation and he in turn makes contact with Energex. Those wires are then disconnected by Energex.

We also understood from T.V. broadcasts that flooding had occurred in Withcott. No mention of the upper reaches of the Brisbane River.

At approximately 9.00a.m., and due to our concern with the rain not easing and the Brisbane River continuing to rise, we rang Channel 9 at Mt. Cootha. Speaking to a reporter by the name of Andrew, we requested that Channel 9 come and "do a story on the upper reaches of the Brisbane River so you would know what could happen to Brisbane". He rang me back within 5 minutes after speaking with his boss and advised us that they were on their way to Withcott to cover the floods there and would hopefully be able to visit us just after lunch.

That never happened.....even at that stage, all we heard about on the news was the floods occurring everywhere else in Queensland, and we felt at the time that Brisbane and the Queensland Government should know what was happening in "their own back yard". It was to be a warning!! And not just for the Wivenhoe Dam and below – has it been forgotten that the **Brisbane River starts way above the Wivenhoe Dam!!** But of course, we are not officials, we only live here and see firsthand what is occurring.

Sunday 9th December 2011: 12 inches of rain since Friday. Our water guide crashes into the water early morning – the gum tree goes before our eyes. The electricity poles are dragged into the river. The river banks continue to crash into the river. By the end of the day, the river has gone over the 50' high banks, spilling across into the opposite paddocks for kilometres – as far as the eye could see. The river is huge, angry, with waves, debris, trees, bales of hay. And later animals. The Brisbane River Bridge at the D'Aguilar Highway/Brisbane Valley Highway intersection (at approximately 3.30p.m.) was close to going under (see attached photos). I believe this did go under later in the evening.

From approximately 5.00p.m., the Brisbane River rose swiftly before our eyes. Speaking to the landowner opposite our property on the telephone (who was stuck in Brisbane), we advised him the river had gone over his banks and into his property while we are speaking to him. At this stage, we realize that we need to put some plans in place ourselves and commenced to evacuate from our home.

Still there is no mention on the T.V. news about the upper reaches of the Brisbane River. Why is this? We make our own arrangements. Approximately 40 people isolated in Harlin. Never heard about that either. Photos taken up until 7.15p.m. with the water level still rising before our eyes. The power goes off at approximately 11.00p.m. – and stays off until Thursday 13th January 2011 (approximately 12.30p.m.).

The Brisbane River by this time is approximately 15 metres outside our fence, water raging down its course taking everything in its way. The sound and smell never seems to go away.

Monday 10th December 2011 (approximately 4a.m): Miracle – the water has gone down several metres, but not at a safe level. How does this happen..... of course, “the plug” has been taken out again!!!

But what was before our eyes was only the beginning of the sight of the landscape opposite us. It was heartbreaking. Even then we realized all the gum trees plus lush trees and bushes that had been so thick on the sides of the banks were gone. All the fences and gates - vanished. The river was now nearly double in its width from previous. All the way downstream, the river banks still crashing into the water – again as far as we could see.

Tragedy: We are contacted by a friend in Bundaberg to advise us of what has happened in Grantham/Toowoomba. Their concerns were that we were in for a bad night from advice that they had received. It is hard to fathom that we receive news from Bundaberg of what is happening in our area, but not from within or around area.

Tuesday 11th January 2011: Without warning and no rain, the Brisbane River rises again – up and over the banks. How does this happen.....of course, “the plug” has been put in again at Wivenhoe Dam. Obviously Brisbane is in danger, but it is too late. No-one in authority has heeded what the country people of the Brisbane River Valley have been predicting.

The fear now is even greater as the Brisbane River is enormous, so much water and the cause for concern now is to only being able to imagine what occurred in Grantham. And this could happen to us! With the river rising as nightfall was approaching, making a good decision was becoming harder by the minute as leaving Harlin was out of the question – we were isolated!! We prepare again to evacuate, but luckily the river does not quite reach the same level – a metre below Sunday night. I guess that was to make us feel safe!!

No electricity, Telstra mobile telephones unstable (“no service), Telstra home telephone unstable (2 nights in a row), no sign of S.E.S. Harlin is totally isolated from Kilcoy, Toogoolawah and Esk. We do not exist. Discover our only contact with the outside world is our car radio.

Brisbane has been flooded.....why was the water not slowly released from Wivenhoe Dam commencing back in October 2010?? Was it statistical information to see how much water could be stored in it!

An elderly Harlin lady of 83 years, who has lived here her entire life, has never seen this damage occur to the Harlin reach of the Brisbane River. Does this say something!!

Wednesday 12th January 2011: How is it possible that the Brisbane River can be in flood one moment, and by 4.10p.m. on this day be receding so rapidly.? This is not natural flow, it is controlled by human intervention.

Still the current is continually slamming into the opposite banks, roaring down from a different direction.

Thursday 13th January 2011: Power back on at approximately 12.30p.m. On contacting Energex, we were advised that it would be back on possibly on Friday 14th January around 12.00p.m. Generator back on, but unbeknown to us, the power was already on. Obviously, Energex were not updated either.

Saturday 15th January 2011: Brisbane River @ Harlin receded even further. The devastation is unbelievable. The Brisbane River has now totally changed its course, and after continually slamming into the opposite banks has left nothing but bare 50' high (or more) brown cliffs. I believe approximately 100 metres of land has eroded back into the properties for kilometers along the river. There is no vegetation, including both sides of the river – just gravel, sand and silt. As the fences and gates have vanished, now it is dangerous for the animals to graze on these properties – it is dangerous for humans to walk along the edges of their property to inspect as the cliffs still continue to fall.

Instead of the river water that we previously viewed, we now only see gravel and sand. What a coup for the Sinnamons Lane gravel extraction plant at Harlin.

Friday 21st January 2011: Shayne Neumann (Labor M.P. for Blair) meets Harlin residents re damage and loss of their land.

CONCLUSION:

1. Why were the upper reaches of the Brisbane River ignored by the Government?
2. Why was water not slowly released from Wivenhoe Dam from as far back as October 2010?
3. Why was the Brisbane River flooding from above the Wivenhoe Dam ignored by the media?
4. Why is the Wivenhoe Dam operated only with the view of saving Brisbane?
5. Why was water to the Wivenhoe Dam allowed to rise to such a dangerous level?
6. Why is input from the local community, from residents who have lived here all their life, ignored?
7. Have regular inspections been undertaken of the quarry site at Sinnamons Lane, Harlin, to ensure compliance with the conditions of the granted authorization – as assured by Stephen Robertson (MP) in May 2005?

When asked by my work colleagues at Caboolture “how we fared during the flood”, my response is:

“As you drive over the hill above the Brisbane River Bridge (from Kilcoy), it appears as though excavations have been blown through to make way for a double lane highway”.

Let us hope that the information gathered from the folk that live in these areas is taken seriously, and therefore in the future, not have a repeat of this catastrophe to the Brisbane River Valley.

Regards

Bruce & Cheryl McDade

ATTACHMENTS

1. Copy of Email to The Premier of Queensland, Anna Bligh – dated 10th October 2010
2. Copy of Letter from Office of the Premier – dated 13th December 2010
3. Copy of letter from Stephen Robertson (MP) to Brisbane Valley/Kilcoy Landcare Group Incorporated – dated 27th May 2005
4. Copies of photographs

bruce & cheryl mcdade

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 10 October 2010 9:28 PM
To: 'thepremier@premiers.qld.gov.au'
Subject: Water to Toowoomba

Dear Anna

I have never heard of anything so ridiculous as letting our precious water go to the ocean – for goodness sake, use some common sense and pipe it to Toowoomba immediately. Why is there so much greed in this world today that allows this to happen – if they want it, they have to pay for it!! We live with the Brisbane River as our front yard at Harlin and can see immediately how much water is going down to the dam.

No wonder Labor has so much trouble winning their elections with people like this in Parliament/Councils making these irrational decisions

We feel common sense prevails here and you can be assured there are many more in the community who feel the same way, Anna.

Regards
Queensland Tax and Rate Payers
Cheryl & Bruce McDade

[REDACTED]
HARLIN QLD 4306
[REDACTED]



Office of the Premier

For reply please quote: MC/SDB - TF/10/24158 - DOC/10/164970

13 DEC 2010

Mr Bruce and Ms Cheryl McDade

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Dear Mr and Ms McDade

Thank you for your email of 10 October 2010 concerning water wastage. I have been requested to reply to you on the Premier's behalf.

* { To ensure Toowoomba can make the most of the recent rains, the Honourable Stephen Robertson MP, Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade has guaranteed that there is no limit to the amount of water that can be transferred to Toowoomba while Wivenhoe Dam is spilling. Minister Robertson wrote to Councillor Peter Taylor, Mayor of the Toowoomba Regional Council on 15 October 2010, advising him of the decision to suspend the variable water charges when water was being released from Wivenhoe Dam during this summer wet season.

A { I am advised that under this revised arrangement, the water pumped from Wivenhoe Dam to Toowoomba would not be required to be released from Cressbrook Dam downstream for environmental purposes. The recent rains have assisted to provide the local environment with water flows so Toowoomba is able to store the extra water while it can, without adversely affecting the surrounding ecosystems.

Toowoomba residents only ever pay the capital maintenance and operational cost of the pipeline, but with this revised arrangement, the charge for infrastructure has been waived, so the water is free.

The 38km pipeline has the capacity to transport the equivalent of Toowoomba's annual water usage and provides the Toowoomba Regional Council access to the South East Queensland (SEQ) Water Grid, while retaining its bulk water assets and associated infrastructure.

With the pipeline from Wivenhoe Dam in place, Toowoomba is now connected to the SEQ Water Grid and will benefit from this \$7 billion investment in infrastructure that secures SEQ's water supply.

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* { One of the key objectives in the operation of Wivenhoe Dam spillway is to provide controlled and safe release of flood water. This operation and the operation of all Seqwater's dams are covered by the Dam Safety Management Program which is endorsed by the State Government's Dam Safety Regulator.

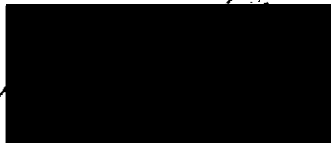
* { The volume of water transferred to Toowoomba in no way impacts or negates the need to operate the Wivenhoe Dam spillway, as this operation is for the safety of South East Queensland, in compliance with the Dam Safety Management Program.

While the drinking water compartment of Wivenhoe Dam at 100 per cent full can store 1.2 million megalitres, the dam also has a flood capacity over and above the space for drinking supply. Wivenhoe Dam's flood capacity is equal to 1.45 million megalitres, or three times Sydney Harbour, a capacity that provides mitigation against flooding downstream. In the 1974 flood, 50 per cent of the flood water that impacted Brisbane came from up stream of where Wivenhoe Dam is now built and 50 per cent came from the catchment below the dam wall. Wivenhoe Dam has been designed to store and safely release a quantity of water equal to the volume that was upstream of the dam wall in 1974. }

Water is transferred from Wivenhoe Dam to Cressbrook Dam via the Toowoomba Pipeline, as per Toowoomba Regional Council's instructions. The Toowoomba Regional Council owns and operates the Toowoomba Pipeline, which was constructed with a State Government contribution of \$112 million to the \$187 million cost of building the pipeline. The pipeline can provide up to 43 megalitres per day if it operates 24 hours per day.

Again, thank you for bringing this matter to the Premier's attention.

Yours sincerely




Senior Policy Advisor



Queensland
Government


Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton

Minister for Natural Resources
and Mines

Ref M/05/00290 GP
CTS 02696/05

27 MAY 2005



Dear Mr 

Thank you for your letter of 23 April 2005 concerning gravel extraction in the Harlin reach of the Brisbane River.

I can confirm that a development permit was recently granted under the provisions of the *Integrated Planning Act 1997* authorising the extraction of quarry material from the bed of the Brisbane River at Sinnamon's Lane, Harlin. The development permit authorises the extraction of a volume of 5052 cubic metres of material from the river.

Matters considered in making this decision included --

- the physical integrity of the watercourse, including bed and bank stability;
- the condition of the watercourse;
- the effects to bed and bank integrity caused by previous quarry material extraction at the site;
- the volume of quarry material remaining in the watercourse at the site;
- the findings and recommendations contained in the Riverine Quarry Material Management Plan for the Upper Brisbane River, Lockyer Creek and Buaraba Creek; and
- the concerns of adjoining land owners about the potential for further extraction of quarry material at the site to cause degradation to the bed and banks of the watercourse.

During a site inspection undertaken on 17 December 2004, officers of my Department noted that there was bed lowering evident within the watercourse in the vicinity of the proposed extraction site. Concerns were also expressed by the adjacent land owners that continued extraction of quarry material from the site could lead to the migration of the low-flow channel of the watercourse.

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It was subsequently decided that it would be appropriate to grant a development permit to authorise the extraction of only a *limited* quantity of quarry material from the site subject to a number of terms and conditions. The decision was made for a number of reasons, including the facts that –

- there was a large extant deposit of quarry material remaining at the site;
- the extraction volume authorised under the development permit is within the sustainable extraction limit (11,000 cubic metres/ annum) for the Upper Brisbane River. Hence, there will be a net accumulation of quarry material in the watercourse over time;
- there had been significant replenishment of quarry material at the site following each medium to large flood event in the watercourse;
- the possibility of an abrupt change in the course of the stream at the site would be minimised by limiting the extent of extraction in order to retain a large section of undisturbed deposit, which would then act as a buffer zone;
- the bed lowering evident upstream in the watercourse upstream was the result of the previous large- scale extraction of quarry material from the watercourse. It would be unlikely to be further exacerbated by the relatively minor extraction volume authorised by the new development permit;
- no native vegetation would be destroyed by the extraction of quarry material from the site; and
- the terms and conditions of the permit clearly limit the extraction of material from the site, and will ensure that compliance with the permit terms is enforceable.

With these conditions in place, it was considered that the extraction of material from the site within the permit terms and conditions would be unlikely to detrimentally affect the interests of the adjacent landowners.

My Department will undertake regular inspections of the extraction site to monitor the bed and banks of the river and to ensure compliance with the conditions of the granted authorisation.

Should there be any evidence that the extraction of the quarry material is detrimentally affecting the integrity of the bed and banks of the river, my Department will give due consideration to either amending or cancelling the authority to extract quarry material from the site under the provisions of the *Water Act 2000*.

I also confirm that it is unlikely that further extraction of material from the site will be authorised, after the currently authorised works are completed. Further extraction from the site would be considered only if there was a significant flood event in the watercourse, which resulted in the replenishment of quarry material at the site.

I trust this information clarifies the situation. Should you have any further enquiries, please contact [REDACTED] South East Region, of my Department on telephone [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP