

Incorrect flood information from Bureau of Meteorology caused loss

Submission from property owner Victoria St Fairfield 4103. Please do not publish my name or full address. I am happy for you to publish Victoria St Fairfield, but not the street number or name.

I want to know why the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) was still giving incorrect information about the expected height of the Brisbane River on its official bulletins on the internet right up to 4:30am on Tuesday 11 January 2011.

I had been reading the bulletins after the major flood events at Toowoomba and Grantham on Monday 10 January 2011. My wife and I were very worried that the Brisbane River would break its banks in the city of Brisbane as all of this water from Grantham had to come past us at Fairfield on its way to Moreton Bay.

However, the BOM did not raise the expected levels for the Brisbane River at the Edward St gauge until after the 4:30am bulletin. The first bulletin to do this was the 9:30am bulletin. Even then the prediction was still well short of the mark – I think 3.5 metres.

The bulletin at around 9:30pm Monday 10 January 2011 listed very high flood levels from Laidley, Lowood, Lyons Bridge, Rosewood but only 3 metres at Edward St gauge. The midnight bulletin came out at around 12:45am and listed 1974 flood levels for all areas leading to Ipswich, but still only 3 metres at Edward St gauge.

Although this was alarming another BOM website had flood level readings for all gauge sites through the years. This showed that in 1996 the gauges from Laidley to Rosewood had 1974 flood levels, but the Brisbane River did not break its banks in Brisbane City.

The 4:30am bulletin was the same except the Edward St gauge had been increased to 3.1 metres. Still no warning from the BOM about was going to happen.

At 5:30 am I phoned the Brisbane City Council (BCC). They advised that we could expect water on our property at 8:30am on Wednesday 12 January 2011. I asked why 8:30am when the high tide was around 2:00pm on Wednesday. The officer told me that he didn't know, that was what they had been told by the BOM!!!!!!! He told me we could expect 0.8 metres at the lowest point on our property. That is our back fence and that would make the water under the floorboards of our lowset house.

We decided not to take the risk and started getting out what we could. We warned our neighbours and they started as well, some didn't believe there was a risk. At around 2 pm the street was evacuated. Everyone was told our side of the street would have 0.8 metres at the lowest point on their property. The people on the high side of the street were told they would have some water lapping over their property although they should be safe to stay the night, but to pack a bag just in case they had to evacuate. I know this because at 5:30pm I urged out friends on the other side of the street not to risk it and they evacuated. The water went at least 30cm over the floorboards of their highset house!!!!

Our entire house was flooded to within 60cm of the ceilings. Everything that was left in it was destroyed.

We also would like to know why the Wivenhoe dam was allowed by SEQW to get to the levels it did without major releases well before it was too late to safely let it out. It should have been drained in November.

I don't know why the BOM predictions were so flawed. Was it the modelling done after the Wivenhoe Dam was built wasn't worth the paper it was written on. Or was it because the BOM didn't factor in the real amount of water that was being released from Wivenhoe – especially on the Monday night?

In any event, the result was that people didn't have time to get out the maximum amount of personal belongings they otherwise could have. The other outcome was that people's lives were put at risk as they thought they would be safe in their home, only to find it was completely inundated.

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