

Southern Downs
REGIONAL COUNCIL

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14 MAR 2011

IN DRM

Our Ref: RPF:MES

10 March 2011

Commissioner Justice Holmes
Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry
GPO Box 1738
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Commissioner

Re: Flood Inquiry Commission

The Southern Downs Regional Council provides the following comments in regards to the recent flood events in this region:

1) Flood Preparation and Planning

Council took part in Emergency Services Queensland (EMQ) Exercise Orco in late 2010. This provided a desk top exercise as to how Council and the SES would respond to an extensive rain/flood situation. The lessons learnt regards gaps in our response to such an event were assessed and changes introduced to better prepare for such an event.

EMQ should be commended on their forward planning for this type of event noting the higher than expected rainfall predicted for the summer season. Staff closely monitored BOM reports in the lead up to the Christmas break and a general invitation to staff was issued in regard to their availability in the event of a flood. Roughly 70 staff made themselves available if required. A list was prepared indicating name, address and contact numbers.

2) Response Arrangements

Two flood events were experienced in Warwick and Killarney on 28/29th December, 2010 and 11/12th January 2011; while one flood event occurred in Stanthorpe on the 11/12th January 2012.

Co-ordination between Council and all emergency service agencies worked well and two evacuation centres in each town were operated. In both towns the community was divided by floodwaters so evacuation centres on both sides of the river/creek had to be established.

No serious injury or loss of life occurred and only one case involved an air lift from a rural property to the west of Warwick.

3) Essential Services

In the Warwick area treated water supply was always available but Council did experience problems via in-undation of the Stanthorpe Sewage Treatment Plant and isolation from the Killarney Sewage Treatment Plan resulting in warning being issues to residents to boil water before drinking as a precautionary measure. Also the small towns of Pratten and Wallangarra experienced break downs in the local water treatment plants and again similar warnings were issues until such time as testing proved the water safe for consumption. Generally power and telecommunications were available throughout the region.

4) Forecasting and Early Warning Systems

There is a long established BOM monitoring system in the Condamine Catchment and a recent installation in the Severn River/Quart Pot Creek in the Stanthorpe area.

The Condamine system worked well in the first event, 2 monitors failed in the second event, and obviously in the second event BOM staff were very busy due to flooding in the major urban centres so Council was unable to seek ready advice from that agency.

The system used in Stanthorpe operated but as it is relatively new there is no historical data available as yet which can be used to predict flood levels. Overall Council considers the systems are a vital tool in flood prediction and management.

5) Water Storage

The major water storage in this area is Leslie Dam (11kms west of Warwick) operated by Sunwater. Discharge from that storage resulted in flooding of the Cunningham Hwy west of Warwick which has occurred before on those rare occasions when a release must be made.

Council has met with Sunwater since the event to improve communication channels to both improve upon notice regards potential highway closures and also to recognise that significant outflows from the dam may result in flood waters in Warwick not receding as quickly due to the water from the dam flowing into Sandy Creek which joins the Condamine River further west of Warwick.

6) Areas of concern

- a) Cross border communication – There needs to be improved communication between government agencies in relation to road conditions/closures. During the first event in Warwick nearly 1,000 people were in the evacuation centres. A large number of those in the southern evacuation centre had travelled through from New South Wales that day only to find the roads cut at Warwick.

Queensland Police, when made aware of the numbers arriving put in place arrangements at Stanthorpe to warn people and deter them travelling further and thereby make use of the accommodation in that town.

Advice from Qld Transport and Main Roads representatives based in Warwick is that there is no co-ordination between the two states regards road condition warnings.

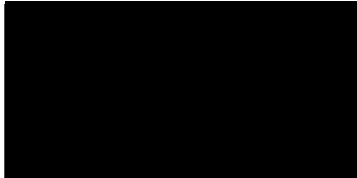
- b) Amalgamation of local government areas created an initial problem when the Stanthorpe area flooded. The co-ordination centre at Warwick was already in operation and a second centre had to be established at Stanthorpe. Fortunately experienced staff at Stanthorpe were available and the QPS took charge of the situation. Improved preparation for a dual event will be carried out in the near future.

7) Areas of New Knowledge

- a) The Queensland Fire Service – Rural Fire Service has an exceptional communication network in small rural communities that provided a very effective means of communicating with residents in those areas.

De-brief sessions have now been held at a District level as well as at a local level, for the two events in Warwick and one in Stanthorpe and plans have been put in place to further improve on how similar disasters will be dealt with in the future.

Yours faithfully



Chief Executive Officer