

RATHBURNIE ESTATE NATURE REFUGE

Upper Brisbane River Valley.

1st August, 2011.

FAX. 61.7.3405.9750.

Ms J. Moynihan,  
Executive Director,  
Queensland Floods Commission of Enquiry,  
G.P.O.Box 1738,  
BRISBANE.

Q. 4001.

Dear Ms Moynihan,

SUBMISSION REFERENCE 1551695. (15/3/11)  
INADEQUATE CATCHMENT FLOOD MAPPING DATA.  
YOUR LETTER REF. 1607738 (18/5/11)

In forwarding the Commission the above information available to me since my late husband purchased this property 180 river miles from the estuary of the Brisbane River in 1932, I felt obliged to be constructive rather than seeking to lay blame for the January 10-11 events.

However in listening to the Reports following the release to-day of the Commission's preliminary findings, I feel obliged to bring certain points to the Commission.

1. SOMERSET DAM. This is a concrete wall designed to hold back a calculated weight of water in its design. The weight of silt is some 40% heavier than water; and both dams on the upper Brisbane River Catchment are subject to heavy siltation.

In my original Submission, I enclosed a SUBMISSION TO "SOMERSET FUTURES", enclosing "A Fluvial Audit of the Upper Brisbane River by the Australian Rivers Institute of Griffiths University which supported my contention.

2. WIVENHOE DAM. This is an earth wall built on an active seismic fault (confirmed to me by the University of Queensland.) It is apparent this fault extends up the upper Brisbane River (During the 1939-45 war period, my late husband was told a tremour of 4 occurred during his absence on war service at Mt.Stanley, some 12 k.m. upstream of "Rathburnie".)

No doubt the Dam Engineers had these facts at the back of their minds when faced with the dilemna in January last!

3. UPSTREAM OF WIVENHOE - UPPER Brisbane River.  
Enclosed is copy of a letter written to the Weather Bureau on 24th December, 2010, which expressed my concern that our December rainfall had exceeded all records since 1932 purchase of "Rathburnie " ; and requesting more automatic gauges be installed up Cooyar Creek rising in the Bunya Mountains. To date this has never been acknowledged by the Weather Bureau.

3 UPSTREAM OF WIVENHOE DAM (cont.) DECEMBER/JANUARY "!!!.

However, a cloudburst up Gregor's Creek (which enters the upper Brisbane River between Harlin and Toogoolawah) washed out power poles and caused an outage of electricity <sup>ON</sup> (9/1/11.) in the whole district - so automatic gauges would have been useless as a warning of river rises upstream; and unless one had battery radio, this form of communication would also have been useless. We have no mobile reception in the hilly country of the catchment headwaters - 500 ft. above sealevel, with a fall of seven feet to the mile in the watercourse; cloudbursts rush downstream.

Houses are located on the highest ledges above the watercourses; but fences and farm infrastructures (e.g. windmills, irrigation pumps and suction and underground piping etc) must be located on the irrigated flood plains above the watercourse but below these ledges.

Livestock are locked off these areas and irrigation pumps removed as a precaution when rainfall indicates flooding is likely; and this was done in the wettest December 2010 on record, and plans for Christmas were cancelled accordingly.

4 THE DELUGE. 11/1/2011.

About midnight on the night of 10/11/1/2011 a cloud built up overhead with abnormal sheet lightning and frequent fork lightning, and in the darkness it seemed to rest on the top of the hills behind the homestead. The rain "roared" down the gullies - next day we measured 8" had fallen in the two hours and the rain had battered the gardens soil into 'concrete' like surfaces which later had to be ripped up and treated with gypsum.

5 THE DAMAGE. At daylight we surveyed the damage. The water covered the whole of the flood plain and reached the foot of the ledges on which the buildings were located - never before known since the property was purchased. It had already fallen 1 meter by daylight; but took some 2 days before we could see some of the damage that had occurred by this wall of water which had swelled from the downpour which started on the upper reaches of the eastern branch of the headwaters initially.

Our 18' Windmill which had stood in all other floods, our power pole serving the underground bore and another serving the homes and other structures had been snapped off at ground level, fences were non-existent and about 18" of silt covered the lucerne flats with logs, trees and other debris on top. The river banks were badly eroded with lovely gum trees some 200 years old (estimated) washed out, underground irrigation mains and power poles had been washed away, and the river had cut a wider course. Later we found as the water further subsided that all 30 or so concrete causeways had been destroyed or badly damaged - never before seen in previous floods. ⊗

1/8/2011.

(\*) These causeways are located on the partly bitumen road running upstream from Linville - crossing each bend of the river which winds around the hills whilst the road runs roughly in a straight line to serve the homesteads on each bend.

An ex-Army visitor crossing No.1 Causeway (now destroyed) remarked "it was like a war zone".

5. DAMAGE (CONT.) With Government approval we contracted a bulldozer/truck contractor to erect groins across the wide stream to divert the new river course from removing more than the estimated 2 ha. of alluvial lucerne flats; and are awaiting a hydrologist from S.E.Q. Catchments' advice as to final design necessary.

Altogether the costs of repairs will amount to approximately \$300,000 plus loss of income from the silt destruction of lucerne paddocks; and our Insurance has rejected the claims as "Floods" are exempt, although the damage was caused by this abnormal deluge not by what had always been considered "normal" floods even in 1974.

6. FORECASTS. People in the T.V. interviews were blaming the Weather Bureau. I understand a recent publication in "Nature" attributed these cloudbursts to a "chimney of cold air stretching into the high atmosphere and affecting what otherwise would have been rain depression lows to bring on the "dumping" downpours.

With livelihoods depending on sale of lucerne hay, we are very conscious of the uncertain weather forecasts. Recently we delayed cutting hay on another higher part of the property as the weather was forecast to bring 5" of rain to the s.e.Q. only to find it missed us and reached northern N.S.W. with resultant flooding there instead.

Please do not lay the blame on the Weather Bureau and the Dam Engineers who did not heed their supposed warnings. These deluges came out of an otherwise normal wet season scenario with no warning in the sky as darkness fell.

I trust you will find these comments of some value in your deliberations.

Yours truly,

(Mrs.) V.D. BURNETT (AGED 84)  
TRUSTEE - ESTATE G.C. BURNETT (DECD.)

P.S. We had no access until causeways were temporarily repaired on 27/1/11, no telephone (washed out of riverbed beside each causeway) until 30/1/11 and no electricity until 4/2/2011.

TELEPHONE  
FACSIMILE

RATHBURNIE ESTATE NATURE REFUGE

Upper Brisbane River Valley

24th December, 2010.

The Bureau of Meteorology,  
FAX. 3239.8687.  
Brisbane.

Dear Sirs,

AVOCAVALE - 180 RIVER MILES FROM ESTUARY  
OF BRISBANE RIVER AND 2 RIVER CROSSINGS  
BELOW THE JUNCTION OF COOYAR CREEK AND  
THE UPPER BRISBANE RIVER.

"Rathburnie" was purchased by my late husband Graham  
Campbell BURNETT in 1932, when the sale advertisements  
quoted an annual rainfall of 40".

However since then, rainfall records taken at 9 a.m.  
each morning have given an average rainfall of 30"  
with 10 falls over 40" since then, the highest being  
45.5" in 1978.

This year to date we have recorded 55.5" to date and  
this has seen 8 days of sunshine in December, the rest  
being clouded. The amount of cloud cover is abnormal  
in my 55 years living here; and whilst I Realise the  
S.O.I. and M.J.O. have probably come together to give  
higher rainfall than normal, it seems logical to  
conclude that the discharge of sulphur from the volcanos  
in north and south hemispheres (in addition to human  
carbon/sulphur emissions) is the cause of the excessive  
cloud cover, and the trees this year have dense canopies  
which when respiring could release more rain from the  
clouds?

Living as we do below the junction of the eastern and  
western Branches of the Upper Brisbane River (which  
has Lords living at "Mt. Stanley" and an automatic rainfall  
gauge to indicate what likely river rises could occur  
and reach us in 12 hours, there are insufficient residents  
on the lower reaches of Cooyar Creek (which carries much  
more water from its source in the Bunya Mts. downstream)  
to give us any indication of river rises likely to cut  
us off by stream rises (two of which have reached 12 ft.  
this year). This is especially important to the Lions  
Camp Duckadam at Avocavale which caters for guests up  
to 100 persons.

Could you instal a rainfall automatic guage somewhere  
up Cooyar Creek to solve our problem please? There are  
over 30 causeways crossing the upper Brisbane River  
from Avocavale upstream and many families are affected  
by unforeseen flooding.

It would also help if Regional Radio at Toowoomba could  
then give this reading as well as that for "Mt. Stanley"  
in their morning Country Weather Report.

With best Wishes for the Festive Season from the isolated  
custodian of "Rathburnie" - river 5 meters over causeway 3

*Lynn  
Brisbane River  
Cabinment  
plan too.*

*(58.36-2010  
December  
Total) (X)*

*11/1/11  
x Causeway  
1200m but  
could refer  
me to Lib...*

*Also as the record shows Dry we have been predicted  
by word over  
January 8.*

Yours truly,  
Mrs. V. D. BURNETT. (aged 83)  
Trustee - Estate G.C. Burnett Decd.

*(X) 23/12/10. Also letter  
for full weather record!  
also more relevant  
fellows 10 to 15 pm  
rise and 11/1/11*

AVOCAVALE.

Upper Brisbane  
River - towards  
Causeway 3 on Mt. Stanley Road.

11/1/2011 Downpour  
Storm.

Looking upstream -  
Lucerne flats erosion.  
No trees left other  
than one old gum.

Note white irrigation  
delivery mainline  
left hanging over  
watercourse which  
used to run on left  
side of photo.

Avoca Creek from  
bitumen road up  
rise to Lions Camp  
Duckadang (once  
an Aboriginal  
Camp from middens  
found. Also  
there was a gum  
tree with bark  
canoe scar, lower  
down this road.



properties

FIVE hours on horseback leading a pack horse through big country intersceted by deep creeks and rough mountainous terrain was a task which didn't phase Stewart Ebborn from Linville.

Avoca and Mt Stanley families isolated by the record floods in early January had been resupplied by private helicopter drops until early last week.

But when it became uncertain when the next aerial resupply could be undertaken, Stewart Ebborn volunteered to ride in with groceries and mail.

In describing the sort of country that Stewart rode into last Saturday, contract musterer John Dohle from Linville said it was a "bit like a jigsaw puzzle".

"You really need to know where things are otherwise it's really easy to get bushed," John said.

This was not a problem for Stewart Ebborn, 61, who has been mustering in that country all his life.

An added incentive for his resupply ride was his daughter, Fiona who lives on one of the isolated properties with her husband Duncan Williamson and sons, Jack and Tom.

Stewart's ride took him across Monsildale Creek, Squirrel Creek, Avoca Creek and then up a mountainside where he reached a long spur that brought him out to his final destination.

An hour into the ride, he dropped mail and supplies to the Clarksons at Avoca Vale and then continued north to the Williamson's Highfields property at Mt Stanley. There he



Stewart Ebborn on his arrival at Highfields at Mt Stanley. Photo: FIONA WILLIAMSON

was met by the Lord families and Ron Dumling.

Asked what the country he rode through looked like after the flood, Stewart said the damage he saw could only have been caused by a wall of water:

"The grass is nice and green but the creek beds have drifted and the banks have been torn out by the water."

It was a flood that Stewart says was bigger than any he has seen before.

"There's trees ripped out or pushed over along the creek - it looks to me like a big wall of water came down at some stage during the flood - nothing else could have caused that sort of damage."

In the country around Moore and Linville and further north, the flood that older residents talk about is the one which washed through in 1955.

"I believe this flood was bigger than that," Stewart said.

"In 1955, I was a kid living in Linville with my family and I remember where the water reached back then - this flood was definitely bigger."

And there is some evidence that the flood may have surpassed the biggest known flood in the Upper Brisbane River - the second flood of February 1893. The first flood was caused by rain that fell from January 31 to February 3, in 1893 - but the highest rainfalls occurred in the Stanley River Catchment. The second flood that year broke the rainfall records in the Upper Brisbane River Catchment in the days leading up to February 17.

"I was talking to Dan Hall who has

rainfall records back to 1893 and he seems to think the flood up here this year was bigger than the second flood in 1893.

"Up at Highfields, Fiona recorded 172mm (688pts) in one night and further up they measured 180mm (720pts) that same night."

There is still one family, Kenneth and Gail Davis, who remain totally isolated.

"They live on the Eastern Branch of the Brisbane River and some of the cement culverts up there have been completely ripped out - there's nothing left of the crossings at all.

"And everywhere in the creeks and the river there are great drifts of sand and gravel and in some places the course of the water has changed completely.

"The flood has caused havoc."

The damage to fence lines is also beyond what Stewart has witnessed before.

"In some places the fences have been pushed over but in others there's nothing left at all."

All the properties in the Mt Stanley and Avoca areas remain without telephone landlines. Power was restored to most homes last Friday.

"We lost power in Linville on the Sunday night (January 9) and the landlines went on Monday (January 10)," Stewart explained.

"We've got the power back now at home (Alicevale just north of Linville) but there's still no landline and we're told it could be quite some time before they're fixed."

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