

Surat community meeting – 22 March 2011

Summary of discussion

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the Shire Hall in Surat. Fourteen residents attended the meeting, including council representatives and local landowners. The meeting received apologies from three currently flood-bound residents. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Surat residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

- Flooding of outlying areas and the distance between townships meant that some local landowners had to look outside Surat for assistance and were caught between Roma and St George SES groups.
- Local support was essential as Maranoa Regional Council and Roma SES were effectively shut off for several days.
- The usefulness of the SES hotline was raised. The need for local knowledge and adequate training was highlighted, as well as timely responses when local residents were placed on hold while using mobile phones.
- The need for accurate information about road conditions was highlighted.
- There are concerns about the effect of levees on surrounding properties. Additional powers were called for the local council to remove parts of levees to reduce effects on adjacent properties.
- Official channels to advise of river heights were not accurate, although local ABC radio reports assisted. Frequency of updates was raised, commenting that updates once a day at critical periods was not sufficient.
- Downstream from Surat and Weribone station also suffered from a lack of warning because several unmeasured streams enter the river between the two gauges. Effect of Beardmore Dam on properties along the Balonne and impact of local levees was discussed.
- Roads conditions were still affected. The capacity of local council to make timely road repairs was raised.
- Insurance payouts had been received for damage to cars only – properties suffering from damaged infrastructure were not covered under the policy.
- Vermin including snakes, mice and rats being driven into town presents a major community health issue.
- There was no mobile phone coverage and in some cases landlines were out for several weeks.
- Volunteers are hard to find in smaller towns. Regional Councils find it hard to access volunteers as well.
- Locals also felt ignored in comparison to Condamine upstream. It was said this was not a case of jealousy, but merely asking for attention so the 'powers that be' were aware of their plight.