

South-west Queensland community meetings 22-25 August 2011 Summary of discussions

Taroom – 22 August 2011

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the Taroom Town Hall. Sixteen residents attended the meeting, including a local councillor, and representatives of the police, ambulance, national parks and local landowners. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Taroom residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

- Taroom was not inundated by floodwaters in the 2010/2011 floods but was isolated for long periods of time because the floodwaters cut access roads.
- Some outlying residents were isolated for longer periods of time than town residents.

1. Helicopters

- Local councillor Vaughn Becker noted that the Shire Council had concerns that the centralisation of tasking for helicopters will cause greater problems for the use of helicopters in big flood events.
- Whilst centralisation may be necessary in the south-east, more remote areas found the procedures to obtain helicopters time-consuming. They felt that local control of helicopters would allow them to be assigned more quickly and effectively.

2. Disaster management structure

- The previous Taroom Shire (before amalgamation) was able to account for all residents within the shire when the emergency procedures were in the control of council. Whilst this is reflected in the current disaster management procedures (for example, local disaster management groups), concerns were raised that the Taroom and Wandoan district could be somewhat neglected. It was noted this was not as a result of the newly amalgamated Banana Shire Council actions, but rather a result of the police boundary overlap with district disaster centre boundaries.
- The issue of miscommunication in the disaster management structure was highlighted by a local resident who recounted the circumstances of a family being isolated on a roof and not assisted by helicopters for some time. All helicopter rescues were required to be sent through Gladstone and Rockhampton (both 250 kilometres away) which delayed responses. The family were rescued by local residents, under torrid conditions.

- Representatives from the local ambulance raised concerns that they were limited in how they could be involved in the response to flooding, despite having training and skills that would assist. Ambulance personnel were limited to intervening when a serious injury occurred. They sought more allowances to get them involved.

3. Communications

- Taroom sits between the Rockhampton and Toowoomba branches of the ABC. While they receive the Toowoomba ABC broadcast, the town now lies in the Gladstone district disaster centre area and within the Rockhampton ABC broadcast area.
- Residents raised concerns that they could only access issues related to their area through the Toowoomba ABC broadcast. This is currently being assessed by council.

4. Land planning

- Concerns were raised that the construction of new mines on the Dawson floodplain south of Taroom could seriously affect the town and change the flood course.

5. Other

- As Defence is selling off its Unimog fleet, a suggestion was made that local councils should seek to purchase them for local rescues. It was noted that they were very effective in the flood events.
- Concerns were raised about how donations were managed. In particular that they could be managed more effectively and that council management of the goods donated took up a great deal of the council's time.

Roma – 23 August 2011

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the Roma Cultural Centre. Five residents attended the meeting, including the council Chief Executive Officer, Mayor and local residents. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Roma residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

1. Land planning

- Certain developments have caused concern with local residents who believe industrial and residential estates have been built over old floodplains. This is seen south of Bassett Lane and along Edwardes Street.
- Residents who contacted the Inquiry since the visit spoke of higher levels than previously seen in tributaries of the main creek, Bungil Creek, which was the source of the major flooding.
- The railway to the south of town is also affecting residents on Station Road and motels in the vicinity of the Warrego Highway.

- The council is awaiting the results of its flood mitigation study. This study will be the main document used to design better protection for the town. By incorporating the information of affected residents into the study, it will hopefully provide a better outcome. There are proposals to lift certain houses and implement levees and culverts.

2. Insurance

- Concerns were raised that insurers were not paying out to Roma residents and many residents were not informed of the flood clause when buying contents insurance.
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Charleville – 23 August 2011

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the Raceview Complex. Eighteen residents attended the meeting, including the council Chief Executive Officer, Mayor, district disaster coordinator and residents. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Charleville residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

- The construction of a levee along the banks of the Warrego River eight years ago has protected the town from river flooding. However, Bradley's Gully in the middle of town is the main source of flooding in recent times.
- Residents and businesses next to the gully have been badly affected and measures are being identified to mitigate future floods.
- A lack of alternative accommodation is affecting people affected by floods and some have had to leave town.

1. Disaster preparation and response

- Concerns were raised that money being spent by the Queensland government to send personnel out to different shires should be better spent on bolstering SES and local disaster management group resources. Local knowledge is key.
- SES resourcing and recruitment is getting tougher in smaller, remote communities. Many members are transient and it is difficult to create a core group of volunteers.
- Charleville's roads were open and could have resupplied the eastern and northern part of the state if the State Disaster Centre were more aware of the situation around all of Queensland. A Hercules was organised to resupply Charleville but the local disaster management group had to inform the State Disaster Centre that they were fine and it was not necessary.
- Bradley's Gully has a separate catchment to the Warrego River. It is quite short and steep meaning that gauges would not provide much warning to the town.

2. Land planning

- Residents in the centre of town are badly affected by flooding from Bradley's Gully.
- Flood mitigation is necessary for future flood events but may exacerbate effects of flooding.
- There is a need to clarify what Q100 means for the township.
- The levee along the banks of the Warrego River is viewed by some to affect the flow of Bradley's Gully floodwaters by restraining the water in the township. They believe the floodwater from the gully should be diverted above the town so that it does not enter the town proper.

3. Insurance

- Several residents have not been paid out for their insurance under their policies.
 - The construction of the levee banks allowed people to get insurance for the first time (similar to what occurred in Goondiwindi).
 - One resident claims to have had his premiums reduced after claiming from last floods.
 - One couple has an insurance matter with the Financial Ombudsman Service.
 - Insurance companies should be involved in increasing community awareness of flood mitigation (similar to what occurs with insurers and crime prevention measures).
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Cunnamulla – 24 August 2011

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the Shire Hall. Eight residents attended the meeting, including the council Chief Executive Officer, Mayor, district disaster coordinator and residents. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Cunnamulla residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

- Cunnamulla has a levee bank encircling the entire town and was not directly inundated by floodwaters.
- Outlying residents were affected more directly through isolation and stock/land damage.

1. Disaster preparation and response

- A lack of helicopters made resupply and overall disaster response more difficult.
- The need for local gauges to accurately provide warnings is still a major issue.
- Local police received many calls regarding the road closures in the region – due to Department of Transport and Main Roads and RACQ website failures.
- Council is concerned at the costs involved in implementing disaster management measures. Smaller regional councils have a very small rates base with which to pay for such measures.

- The level of staffing required is also hard to quantify for other funding applications and schemes.
- Recruitment and retention of SES crews is also of great concern.

2. Insurance

- Considering the town is 'flood-proof' due to its long standing levee, obtaining insurance is not an issue.
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Warwick – 25 August 2011

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the Council Chambers. Thirteen residents attended the meeting, including the council Chief Executive Officer, SES and local residents. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Warwick residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

- Low-lying suburbs in Warwick and Stanthorpe were hit with flooding.
- Local council assisted the community and stranded travellers with two evacuation centres on either side of town.

1. Disaster preparation and response

- The area needs better reporting on road conditions.
- They identified to the need to be able to enforce action against sightseers who impede disaster response. Southern Downs council has an effective road closed process in place where the wording on the street signs can be enforced by local police and offenders are fined in the Magistrates Court.
- There is a need for a flood to occur to train for a flood. The SES finds it difficult to re-create conditions necessary for proper swift water training. Funding previously provided that enabled people to train at the coast to practice in tidal areas has been cut.
- Local volunteer response has been successfully managed by council and promoted for future events.

2. Insurance

- Some concerns were raised about the response of insurers by some residents.

3. Land planning

- Bridges crossing the Condamine in Warwick are believed to hold back water and exacerbate flooding along the river.
- There are also some concerns that some emergency response buildings are built on flood prone land both in the Southern Downs and other parts of state.