

Rolleston community meeting – 28 March 2011

Summary of discussion

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the Memorial Hall in Rolleston. Thirteen residents attended the meeting, including council representatives, SES personnel and local landowners. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Rolleston residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

1. Road conditions

- Springsure – Rolleston Road (Dawson Highway) is generally cut off in times of flood; the Injune Road (Carnarvon Highway) and Rolleston – Blackwater Road are also cut off for long periods at a time, including for 31 days during recent flood events.
- The town is at a critical crossroads for the region but the roads are far from flood-proof, which affects the economy of the entire region.
- Information supplied by RACQ and the Department of Transport and Main Roads was largely inaccurate due to the time lag for road conditions being reported.
- Local graziers cannot take cattle to market due to the state of the roads in the surrounding areas.
- There is a need for the Roma – Emerald (Carnarvon/Dawson highways) to be upgraded to be a more effective main road link for Queensland.
- Where there are road closures, they need to be policed if they are to be effective.
- In the recovery phase, the council allowed residents to fix their own driveways and assisted them to do so. Photographs of before and after the repairs were required to be provided to the council, with the council providing financial compensation to those residents accordingly. This worked well and meant people could get back into their houses quicker.
- Isolation – the community was cut off for three weeks in the main flood event but there have been long periods of isolation over the past two years.
- Since roads have been reopened they have had few tourists come through as they have not been made aware of road re-openings.

2. Governance and protocol

- There were some issues with attempting to organise fodder drops in the area and there was confusion about how to organise the fodder drops.
- Producers were sent bills for the fodder dropped, after the delivery occurred.

- No-one coordinated the drops to begin with. Locals reported to the local disaster management group, which reported to Emergency Management Queensland which directed the query to Agforce, which contacted the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) in Rockhampton.
- Agforce was never in a position to carry out the organisation of the fodder drops but there should have been a protocol in place which was widely known to all stakeholders.
- Permission for fodder drops had to be sought from Brisbane which took time and caused delays.
- When approval was granted, the responsible DEEDI officer in Rockhampton organised the fodder drops in a quick timeframe.
- The fodder drops were free in 2008 but they had to be paid for this time. What is the reason for this?

3. Communications issue

- ABC radio was vital in getting news out to the community.
- Two-way radios were useful during the flood conditions.
- Phones and email did operate for some time but eventually crashed under the heavy volume of traffic.
- The internet was unavailable for weeks at a time. It also took a long time to get technicians out to fix the broken power lines.

4. Insurance

- It took some banks more than a month to come out to the community to assess the damage – there needs to be better ways to inform insurance companies of the extent of flooding in Queensland and areas worst affected.
- The categories of funding and financial assistance do not make any reference to compensation for landowners for lost revenue; furthermore, those claiming need to outline the full extent of the damage to their properties, not just the amount they are seeking in assistance.
- There is a clear need for there to be a way of informing residents about what flood measures and heights mean in practical terms, in the context of their town (for example, if five metres means the water will cover a certain landmark).

5. Other

- The Central Highlands Regional Council played a significant role and organised 35 food drops with the help of the Police Service.
- The Police Service worked closely with the community throughout the event.
- Email and phone contact was maintained for a lot of the time.
- The power company was well organised and assisted in getting a helicopter through to the town in horrendous conditions.

- Arcadia Valley residents were isolated for longer periods of time than Rolleston residents.
- It was difficult trying to find personnel as the major events occurred in the midst of the holiday season.
- Local knowledge proved invaluable throughout the event – the town was able to run its own disaster group, and with help from the council in Emerald, the system worked well.
- In order to sustain its workforce, especially workers who could not return to town, a mining company transported food from Sydney.
- A clearway should be made through the trees on both sides of the river to facilitate the evacuation of people via boat.
- There needs to be a focus on the mental health of isolated residents affected by the floods, particularly rural areas that were isolated for periods of time.
- Workers and outlying properties saw themselves cut off from families during flood events, which exacerbated the pressure and anxiety felt by families.
- There were issues with the availability of aviation fuel for helicopters used during the floods. Depots need to be developed and be easily accessible in times of flood. Allowances need to be made so that in times of disaster, helicopters are able to use regular fuel.