

# Gayndah community meeting – 30 March 2011

## Summary of discussion

### Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the RSL Hall in Gayndah. Three residents attended the meeting, including a former councillor and a family whose house had been flooded. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by these residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

### Issues arising

#### 1. *Early warning system*

- Following council amalgamations in 2008 a more comprehensive flood plan was suggested to the council but it was never officially adopted. The study for this had been based on the major flooding of 1942. It was suggested that the new plan wasn't adopted at the time because it would have had a bearing on development in the town.
- In relation to warnings, locals suggested that the council could have doorknocked people to warn them about the impending floods.
- The lack of accurate information was a problem; the information hotline for Department of Transport and Main Roads was inaccurate and of little use to residents.

#### 2. *Recovery*

- There was a lot of help in the town and good direction from elected officials, with great community spirit demonstrated by residents.
- The local councillor kept in contact with residents throughout and provided good information about progress.
- Council paid for the removal of garbage which assisted people greatly in the clean up of their homes.
- There were some mixed messages coming from the SES: initially they would not shift furniture for people but this later changed.
- On the day of the flood, the town only had one elderly man who was part of the SES. Others arrived from neighbouring areas, and they were younger and provided great assistance.
- The police gave locals a bit of leeway and were very supportive of the community in the recovery phase.
- QBuild officers are waiting on the go-ahead from the Department of Communities before they can start to work on the flood-affected houses that were eligible for financial assistance measures. People are having difficulty understanding the process and why it is taking so long to have their homes repaired.
- Members of the community managed to remove displays from the town museum and move it to higher ground. The police assisted greatly in that they enabled this to happen.

### **3. Infrastructure / essential services**

- Roads – locals had to make phone contact with each other to find out which roads were open and which were closed. There did not appear to be a central repository for this information.
- Many roads continue to have a 15 tonne load limit which is hampering the movement of stock and the fruit industry, which is the lifeblood of the area. The roads need to be fixed as a matter of urgency to mitigate against further economic loss for the area.
- Attendees stated that the council was aware of flood issues in the town and mentioned one instance where a local was required to build a wall as flood mitigation at his property.
- Ergon was on site fairly quickly after the event.
- Sewerage – there are issues with the sewerage plants being in low lying areas which were flooded. The discharge then flowed through to the low lying houses which created further concerns among residents about the possible effects of contaminated water.
- Lack of town water after the event. The hospital ran close to running out of water and the community was not adequately informed they were on level 3 water restrictions.

### **4. Insurance / financial assistance**

- One insurance company told a family on several occasions that they were covered for flooding under their policy. They knew that they were in a flood prone area and had previously sought assurance that they were covered. The meeting was told they have since had their claim rejected by the insurance company and have been denied access to certain records.
- They insured with the company in August 2010. The company took 10 weeks to make the determination they were not covered and that they would not be receiving a payout. The family believed that the time taken to reach a determination was too long. Since the flood event the family has changed insurers to a company that does cover floods.
- The Queensland Government has not been timely in getting back to locals about the provision of assistance. Locals have contacted them on several occasions and have yet to hear back or be assigned a single point of contact to address their queries about possible financial assistance. The whole process has been frustrating and has taken too long.

### **5. Communication**

- Warnings – there was a lack of accurate communication about the possible extent of the flooding and its effects on the townspeople.
- Tourism – the media is starting to put visitors off, especially as the information it is providing about the region is inaccurate. There is concern that this will harm the economy of towns that rely on tourists and that the media should not be exaggerating the extent of damage to towns in the region.
- The phone lines to the police communications centre were terrible. The matter was raised directly with the Police Commissioner when he visited the area.
- Mobile coverage with one of the major mobile phone carriers is reasonably good in the area.