

Gin Gin community meeting – 30 March 2011

Summary of discussion

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the RSL Hall in Gin Gin. Fifteen 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 Gin Gin residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

1. Road Conditions

- Roads in the local community are taking a long time to be fixed and local economy is suffering as a result. The council has explained that funding has been obtained but the widespread damage sustained by the road system will take time to mend.
- Locals are annoyed that motorists were stopped further up the highway during the flood event. Motorists should have been stopped near Gladstone (which could handle the large volume of travellers) rather than be allowed to travel through to Gin Gin, stretching the resources of the town once they were trapped there.
- RACQ and Main Roads road information systems were criticised by locals, who said there was too long a delay between events occurring and their being reported.
- Replacing damaged culverts has been affected by delays in obtaining fishery clearances as the waterway is a designated fishery zone. Red tape has halted plans to quickly fix the situation.
- 'De-mained' roads and old forestry roads were used to provide emergency back roads out of affected communities and may need to be looked at as viable alternative routes in future.
- There were allegations that some back roads were not used due to their unstable surface, and it was questioned whether they could have been opened to vehicles to avoid congestion in Gin Gin.
- Signposting needs to be accurate so that local emergency authorities and GPS systems have the same naming systems. There was some confusion during the flood event, especially for ambulances.

2. Resource strain

- Due to the large number of travellers stuck in town (in excess of 1000 vehicles), measures were taken to support the travellers and locals.
- Panic buying took place and locals could not access food; an audit found that 2 days' worth of food could not be restocked on shelves quickly enough.
- Supplies were brought in and pavilions opened at the showgrounds to provide shelter after the RSL Hall became too crowded.
- The Salvation Army assisted in holding large scale barbecues to feed travellers and over 50 local volunteers assisted in running emergency facilities.

- The town was effectively cashless once telecommunications (ATMs) closed down.
- The SES worked very well given the conditions but requires more manpower and resources as they were spread too thinly across the region. Current resources available to the local SES are simply inadequate to cover the geographical area.
- The argument was put forward that with better equipment and more resources, more people would be encouraged to join as an SES volunteer.

3. Communications

- At one stage, there was no phone (mobile or landline), internet or CB radio in town to communicate with outside authorities. Residents climbed local hills to obtain limited mobile phone coverage and independent emergency services lines were used for communication.
- Many areas surrounding Gin Gin simply have no phone connection and are known in the community as 'black spots' – this hampers efforts to inform authorities where assistance is required.
- Media outlets should be part of the local disaster management group or its sub groups, so that media messages are accurate and consistent and assist in managing the flow of information to residents.
- There was almost a complete lack of communication lines available on 30 December 2010 and it was lucky that the local councillor was able to patch into a council emergency management meeting using a Telstra technician's satellite phone.

4. Early warning systems / catchment issues

- Many locals feel the current gauges are in the wrong place and rely on old flood data.
- The effect of the Paradise Dam needs to be factored into new hydrographical models and predictive flood heights as it appears to have mitigated some of the flood effects.
- Some requests for evacuations could not be met due to lack of information on flooded areas and the implementation of evacuation plans being left too late.
- Regarding council amalgamations, some locals believe that the centralised structure of the new regional council (based at Bundaberg) ignores the needs of those in smaller towns and localities which were once looked after by localised shires.

5. Disaster management governance

- The local councillor has instigated for the area a local sub group of the local disaster management group to assist in disaster management in the locality.
- This is a local innovation but has not been ratified by the council or by the local disaster management group.
- The members of the sub group met to try and manage the situation in the town and its immediate surrounds. The sub group needs to be formally recognised by the council so that local knowledge in crises is acknowledged and localised action can take place quickly.
- Urgent requests for medical supplies were made to a senior officer of the local disaster management group in Bundaberg, but were declined – it was thought the road from Bundaberg to Gin Gin was too risky.

- With assistance from the local police officer in charge, the local councillor organised for a truck to drive from Gin Gin to Bundaberg and back to collect the required medial supplies (especially insulin).

6. Insurance

- One insurer was upfront from the beginning (even before the flood event) about its policy not covering floods, but still sent out assessors to ensure this was the case. Those involved appreciated the transparency in this process.
- Some residents reported that other insurers also provided adequate information about their level of cover.