Chinchilla community meeting – 21 March 2011 Summary of discussion

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at the Chinchilla Cultural Centre auditorium. Ten residents attended the meeting, including council representatives, disaster assistance groups and the Chamber of Commerce Secretary representing 130 businesses. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Chinchilla residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

- Local disaster management systems worked well. Local stores were well-stocked, flood recovery centre well manned with volunteers and overall good community support.

- Use of helicopters in the flood events was highlighted. Local resource companies lent assistance with their helicopters but red tape, paper trails and the time taken to approve their use was an issue.

- Time to re-supply the town was an issue. Four days were required and there were miscommunications regarding the size of the supply required.

- It was said that early warning systems needed to be better. Unprecedented flow and loss of gauges upstream from town meant there was reliance on local landowners across the district in supplying river heights to council as flood gauges were lost in the flood.

- The importance of SES personnel who had detailed knowledge of the district was highlighted. Additional training should be provided for this. Large flood boats with draughts were too deep to be effective in shallower waters. Watercraft had to be seconded from locals to carry out effective operations.

- Extensive mobile phone coverage was lacking and the landlines were also cut, in some cases for weeks.

- The need for accurate information about road conditions was highlighted.

- Concerns were raised about enforcement of usual road restrictions that were breached because of the need to respond to emergency situations.

- People using private boats caused bow-waves that caused water to enter houses. Restrictions may be useful in future.

- The ability of disaster management personnel to enforce restrictions on media access may be useful to limit the intrusion on privacy of individuals in emergency situations.

- The use of social media websites sometimes caused unnecessary panic because it relayed incorrect information.

- Insurance was major source of concern. In one case, two neighbours with the same level of inundation and the same insurance policy saw one of them have their claim paid out, the other person's was rejected.