

Grantham community consultation – 15 March 2011

Summary of discussion

Background

The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry held a community meeting at Grantham on 15 March 2011. Forty-six residents attended the meeting, with apologies received from many residents who were unable to attend. The following summary is an overview of the issues raised with Commission staff by Grantham residents. It is not meant to represent the views of the community as a whole.

Issues arising

What were the strengths of your community identified after the flood event? What worked well?

- During the flood event, and immediately after, local Grantham residents took on leadership roles, conducted rescues and provided medical attention and help to one another.
- Some individuals in the community risked their lives to save others. Several people used whatever equipment they had to rescue and assist, particularly elderly people and others less able to evacuate themselves.
- Local knowledge enabled community members to effectively monitor and support their neighbours. Community spirit was high in the immediate aftermath of the flood with residents supporting one another.
- For the first five days after the event, the community relied upon itself for help. Locals successfully organised and managed the Grantham State School upper level school rooms as an evacuation centre. Nearby communities such as Helidon also provided practical help.
- Community meetings created a hub of support, where locals shared stories as well as practical information.
- Some participants reported that rescue helicopters worked well to evacuate people in the immediate aftermath of the event.
- The local Rural Fire Brigade played a large role in saving people before the brigade itself was isolated by floodwaters. The State Emergency Service also evacuated many people safely.
- For those with internet access, the Queensland Police Service's Facebook page was a good source of information on the day of the floods.
- The Australian Defence Force, police and prisoners provided valuable help in the clean up effort. In particular, the Australian army was well coordinated and was able to triage requests for assistance.
- The community appreciated the kindness of strangers in providing help and supplies after the event.

What did not work well or what could have worked better?

Before the event:

- The lack of early warning for the people of Grantham about the flood was raised as a concern.

- There was at least one broken flood gauge in Sandy Creek before the flood event that would have affected accuracy of information received by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology.
- Residents had little information about what to do or where to go in the event of a flood.
- Concerns were raised about the amount of debris and bamboo in the creek and river systems surrounding Grantham which could have helped to reduce the impact of the flood.

During the event:

- The timeliness of the rescue helicopters was raised as a concern, and the fact that media helicopters in the air over Grantham could not provide assistance to residents. The event occurred during daylight, which allowed people to take action (a night flood would have been even more disastrous). However, in the evening, the rescue effort was hampered by rescue helicopters that could not fly after dark.
- Lack of local knowledge of some rescue workers reduced their ability to provide timely assistance.
- Lack of adequate rescue equipment hampered timely rescues, particularly boats to rescue people from the floodwaters. Residents would have liked more emergency service personal and equipment. Lack of capacity of official rescue equipment to take pets as part of the evacuation was distressing to residents who wanted to stay to look after their pets.
- The fence along the railway line did not have any gaps and the keys to the newest locks on the fences had not been provided to residents. This made it difficult to access higher ground.
- The absence of culverts on the local railway line limited the release of floodwaters to areas outside the town.

Immediately after the event:

- The timing of outside ground assistance was raised as a concern. People were stranded on roofs with children and no assistance arrived until late in the day after the flood. People had to evacuate themselves through remaining floodwater.
- The need for police and other agencies to share information about missing persons and deaths was highlighted. One resident was informed a number of times about a death from various agencies, and some residents were still recorded as missing persons after having informed different agencies on a number of occasions that they were safe.
- Medical assistance was needed immediately for some people in the evacuation centre formed in the local school. The only assistance available for some time was from a local resident who had some first aid training but who also had been evacuated.
- The need to identify where people should be evacuated to, taking into account local ties to an area, was highlighted.
- Lack of electricity, internet or phone services for some time after the event hampered communication and residents' ability to obtain information about the current situation.
- Concerns were raised about the length of time residents were prevented from returning to their homes to deal with rotting and/or damaged items.
- Concerns were raised about road blocks not effectively restricting access to areas. Some media and other people were able to make their way into Grantham before residents were allowed back.
- Lack of communication with evacuation centres outside of the Grantham area hampered communication about the management of the area for people still in the evacuation centres.
- The issue of timeliness of settling insurance claims, lack of knowledge of about insurance cover, as well as lack of clear information from insurance companies about the process and their entitlements was raised.