

Minutes

Minutes of the Floodplain Management Committee Meeting held Friday 28 April 2017

Venue:

Mt Warning Room, Murwillumbah Civic Centre

Time:

9.00am

Present:

Cr James Owen, Danny Rose, Steve Twohill, Brenda Hannigan, Stuart Russell (arrived 10:30am) David Oxenham (arrived 11am) (Tweed Shire Council), Martin Rose (Office of Environment & Heritage), Wayne Pettit and Peter Mair (NSW State Emergency Service), Felicia Cecil, Robert Quirk, Max Boyd, Samuel Dawson, Mike Allen

Apologies:

Lindsay McGavin, Doreen Harwood, (Tweed Shire Council), Dion Andrews.

Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Moved: R Quirk

Seconded: M Boyd

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Floodplain Management Committee meeting held Friday 24 June 2016 be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings of that meeting.

Business Arising:

The following item was noted as an outstanding action from the previous meeting, as adopted by Council at the 21 July 2016 meeting:

2. ABC Coverage

That Council formally invites management of ABC North Coast radio to receive a briefing on the flood situation in Tweed Shire, with the aim of improving coverage of flood events by the station. This briefing should include the SES Regional Controller.

Agenda Items:

1. Welcome to New Committee Members

Danny Rose welcomed Committee members following last year's Council Election and formation of new advisory committees. Members were provided with a copy of the Terms of Reference for the Committee (copy attached to minutes).

Danny Rose briefed the committee on the roles of Council and the Committee in floodplain risk management. The NSW Floodplain Development Manual sets out the framework for floodplain risk management in NSW, and it is important that Council follows the Manual to ensure that decisions are made (or not made) in “good faith”, to maintain indemnity provisions of the Local Government Act. A hard copy of the Manual will be provided to Committee Members. The Manual is available electronically at <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/floodplains/manual.htm>

The Committee discussed the roles and responsibilities of the State Agencies (OEH and SES) represented at the meeting, as well as the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology.

The Committee was provided with copies of the Tweed Valley and Coastal Creeks Floodplain Risk Management Plans, which were adopted in recent years, and provide the framework for ongoing floodplain management in these catchments.

2. Debrief and Discussion on March 2017 Flood

The Committee held extensive discussions on the recent record flood for the Tweed Valley and Burringbar/Crabbes Creek catchments.

This event was particularly notable given the volume of rain that fell, that the rainfall was so widespread and affected all arms of the Tweed River, and rose and fell so rapidly. The event's rainfall and river gauge information was reviewed (copy attached to minutes).

Danny Rose and Steve Twohill ran the Committee through the timeline of the event, including when and where the rainfall occurred, the sequence of warnings being upgraded through the day, and the eventual overwhelming of road and levee infrastructure in South Murwillumbah and surrounds. Overall it was felt that the flood behaved in accordance with previous flood studies, and in most locations from Tumbulgum upstream was similar in magnitude to the modelled 1% AEP or 1:100 ARI flood. There was discussion about whether the failure of the Tweed Valley Way road embankment at Blacks Drain and/or the South Murwillumbah Levee near Colin Street contributed to flood damages in the Buchanan St industrial area.

The Committee noted with sadness the 6 deaths that were associated with the flood event.

It was clear that the initial forecasts and warnings issued by the BoM, who are the legislated authority for these products, underestimated what eventually occurred. The BoM have advised that extreme rainfall events of this nature are difficult to predict, like flash flooding and severe thunder storms. The BoM were unable to predict the severity of flooding until rainfall had actually fallen, and they endeavoured to update warnings accordingly. This aspect will require further analysis and discussion between BoM, OEH, SES and Council.

The Committee discussed measures needed to raise community awareness and communication during flood events. Max Boyd emphasised the need for a local radio broadcast out of Murwillumbah to collect and relay local flood information to the community. That way the warnings would mean something to people. Felicia Cecil, Mike Allen and Robert Quirk agreed that localised warnings and flood information is needed and their respective organisations had elevated these concerns to Council and State Ministers. Wayne Pettit discussed community awareness measures that have been successful in

Lismore and will pass on consultant reports to Council. The Committee noted that Facebook groups and social media played an important role in this flood event, and seemed to attract more attention than most conventional media. While it is difficult to verify the accuracy of such information it appears to be the preferred communication method for large sections of the community and needs to be better explored.

Council and the SES noted issues with isolation around their operations due to the flood. Council's Buchanan Street Depot was isolated and then inundated by the flood, with severe losses of plant, equipment and buildings. Due to previous landslips at the Murwillumbah headquarters, the SES had relocated resources to a storage area in South Murwillumbah, so was similarly impacted. Permanent resolution of SES accommodation was stressed as a priority, and Cr Owen agreed and said that this was advancing.

The limitation of SES resources in such large events was discussed. There is a high reliance on volunteers, with only 7 paid staff to cover 6 Local Government Areas. 500 flood rescues were carried out across Tweed-Richmond. Max Boyd questioned why there is such a discrepancy between Rural Fire Service funding and that for the SES. The Committee noted that the SES Act is currently being reviewed and things might change in the future.

The agricultural sector was hard hit, and Robert Quirk explained that the losses were now only becoming apparent as sugar cane began to rot. On top of damage to the mill, the flood will severely impact on the next harvest due to all of the rubbish and debris that has been strewn through the cane fields. Delays, wide scale burning and damage to equipment is likely. The industry is requesting ongoing assistance to fund rubbish removal beyond the normal clean up period. Robert Quirk also requested clarification from Council as to necessary processes for upgrading infrastructure such as high level cane pads. He will write to Lindsay McGavin for advice.

Danny Rose and David Oxenham discussed the scale of road damage sustained across the Tweed road network. Almost 1500 road defects have been recorded by inspections across the valleys. The first couple of weeks were spent restoring road access to many isolated rural areas.

Max Boyd requested that Council reviews the road level upstream of the Dulguigan rural levee, as this seems to have been the point that the flood breached and caused severe damage. Steve Twohill will action a review.

NSW Floodplain Management Grants closed in late April, and in response to the flood Council had submitted 7 applications:

- Voluntary House Purchase in South Murwillumbah and Bray Park
- Voluntary House Purchase in Burringbar, Mooball and Crabbes Creek
- Voluntary House Raising in South Murwillumbah and Bray Park
- Voluntary House Raising in Burringbar and Mooball
- Flood Warning System to upgrade Tumbulgum Gauge for forecasting by the BoM
- Flood Warning System to install additional river and rainfall gauges upstream of Burringbar and Crabbes Creek.
- Flood study for South Murwillumbah basin to identify obstructions to flow, examine levee overtopping, and recommend floodway improvements

Council acknowledges the increased scale of grant applications, and is lobbying other State and Commonwealth agencies to provide partnership funding to fast track these projects.

It was fortunate that Council was well enough advanced in its floodplain risk management to have the FRMPs available, as all of the above projects were previous recommendations of these plans. This should assist in seeking funding from Government, and allow such quick turn-around of the applications.

The Committee thought that now was the time to make sure that the event's magnitude was accurately recorded and communicated by means such as markers on power poles. This needs to be coupled with a key message that the flood could have been bigger – the rainfall fell in just over 24 hours, and a few more hours would have likely seen the Murwillumbah CBD levee overtopped.

Moved: Max Boyd

Seconded: Sam Dawson

RECOMMENDATION that Council installs/updates flood markers around impacted townships to record the March 2017 flood height. Options include updated flood signage and markers on power poles.

Moved: Robert Quirk

Seconded: Peter Mair

RECOMMENDATION that Council notes and supports the applications made to the Office of Environment and Heritage for the 2017-18 round of Floodplain Management Grants for:

1. Voluntary House Purchase in South Murwillumbah and Bray Park
2. Voluntary House Purchase in Burringbar, Mooball and Crabbes Creek
3. Voluntary House Raising in South Murwillumbah and Bray Park
4. Voluntary House Raising in Burringbar and Mooball
5. Flood Warning System to upgrade Tumbulgum Gauge for forecasting by the Bureau of Meteorology
6. Flood Warning System to install additional river and rainfall gauges upstream of Burringbar and Crabbes Creek
7. Flood study for South Murwillumbah basin to identify obstructions to flow, examine levee overtopping, and recommend floodway improvements

3. Future Meeting Dates

The Floodplain Management Committee generally meets quarterly. Council admin will circulate potential dates to Committee members for future meetings in July and October 2017.

General Business:

4. Building on the Floodplain

The Committee briefly discussed floodplain development issues. Generally all contemporary development performed well during the March flood, given it approached the 1% AEP flood, which is used as the design flood level. New developments such as Uki Hotel and

Murwillumbah IGA escaped serious damage. The biggest planning issue appears to be unlawful alterations and enclosures below flood level in all of the riverside villages – there were enormous damages in these areas which had obviously adapted into habitable areas. Industrial commercial development in South Murwillumbah was badly affected. The long term policy of Council is to allow these non-habitable land uses to occur below the design flood level, however over the life of the industrial estate there has been a shift in the kinds of activities and levels of investment in these businesses. Jobs that used to be performed manually with relatively cheap tools are now performed by valuable machinery which is not flood compatible. This needs to be reviewed in light of this event.

Council no longer allows rezoning and subdivision of floodplain land unless there is permanent self-evacuation capability. Sterilisation of flood prone land is contrary to the NSW Floodplain Development Manual and State Government Policy.

5. Community Education

Given the discussion at previous meetings and specifically in the briefing on the March 2017 flood, Felicia Cecil requested that the Committee concentrates on developing a community education / awareness program. Danny Rose will include this as an agenda item in the next meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Floodplain Management Committee will be held in July 2017 – date to be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 12.20pm.