

BRISBANE GETS SERIOUS

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Brisbane City Council's floodplain management program received a significant boost in September, with a Taskforce on Suburban Flooding not only supporting what the City's flood engineers were already planning and doing, but urging them to do more and do it more quickly. It recommended ten high priority actions be completed or commenced next year.

The Taskforce was established by the Lord Mayor after local creek flooding in late 2004 caused significant anguish for local communities and widespread disruption across parts of the City. The Taskforce was chaired by Professor Colin Apelt of the University of Queensland and had representatives of community groups, industry bodies and professional associations who all had an interest in floodplain management. While Brisbane City Council staff provided significant technical input to the process they were not part of the Taskforce so as to ensure its independence.

Although creek and local flooding were catalysts for setting up the Taskforce, flooding from the Brisbane River, which runs through the centre of this city of one million people and devastated it in 1974, will also benefit from the findings in the report. Brisbane River flooding was investigated in 2003.

Professor Apelt told Floodplain Manager that the Suburban Flooding Taskforce worked well together and, although debate was vigorous at times and consensus was not always reached, there was an excellent spirit of commitment to providing better outcomes for the community.

He said the differences in views in the Taskforce seemed to arise when there was a divergence of opinion as to how best to maximise the economic benefit of floodplain development but minimise the damages from flooding.

The Taskforce acknowledged eleven key issues when developing the strategy including recognition of the social, ecological and economic values of floodplains, the need to consider all floods up to and including the PMF, the roles of local, state and federal governments in managing flood risk, and the responsibility of individuals and communities to act to reduce their risks.

Priorities

Its report recommended a strategy with three priorities for actions. There are ten Priority 1 actions which the Taskforce is recommending be completed or substantially commenced within the first 12 months. Priority 2 actions are to be completed between July 2006 and December 2009 and Priority 3 actions ideally should be undertaken over the period July 2007 to December 2016.

The Priority 1 actions are:

1. Provide for the voluntary buy-back of low flood immunity residences.

2. Review and strengthen, where necessary, land use planning controls in City Plan to ensure no adverse impact from flooding.
3. Review and strengthen, where necessary, development and building controls in City Plan to ensure no adverse impact from flooding.
4. Determine and establish an appropriate forum to consult with and provide feedback in respect of Council's flood risk management planning process and the implementation of Taskforce's recommendations.
5. Establish a Flood Information Database.
6. Investigate the establishment of local flood advice, forecasting and warning systems.
7. Develop external education programs to improve the Community's understanding of flooding.
8. Ensure a 'whole of catchment' process is undertaken when selecting Capital Works projects.
9. Review the creek and local flooding data needs of all stakeholders, including the community, and if necessary, upgrade current flood study procedures and modelling methodology.
10. Review Council's legal liabilities.

Each of the ten actions was further broken down into specific sub-actions with indicative budgets. These included structural and non-structural measures as well as flood preparedness and emergency response. It was at the level of the sub-actions that there were some differences in views among taskforce members. Where consensus could not be reached, a vote was taken on actions and the number for and against recorded in the report.

Technical information on flooding and flood management was provided to the Taskforce by experienced Council officers.

Next Steps

The report was tabled at the Council's Cabinet meeting in September and endorsed by the full Council in mid-November. The Taskforce recommendations map out a clear way forward and implementation of the report is being taken seriously.

With a population of more than one million people, Brisbane is the largest local government jurisdiction in Australia. This strategy provides the first opportunity in Australia for a consistent and co-ordinated approach to urban floodplain management across an entire capital city.