

From:
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: flood submission
Date: Friday, 20 May 2022 9:39:03 AM

Thankyou for giving me the opportunity to tell my story.

I have 4 key issues that I would like to address with regards to the flooding in Murwillumbah

The first and most important issue to me personally is the stormwater pumps in Commercial Road Murwillumbah on Lavender Creek (also referred to as Murwillumbah Creek). I have a an auto and industrial electrical repair business located in a short distance from the CBD and we are protected by the North Murwillumbah levee wall. In a flood event when the river rises and the stormwater flap valves are submerged, the stormwater cannot flow into the river and backs up. At this point we rely on the pumps to pump the stormwater out. We have flooded four times in a little over 10 years, 24/01/2012, the following year on the 25/01/2013, the 31/03/2017 and the 27/02/2022. On each of these occasions the pumps have failed. In 2012, 2013 and 2017 there were power outages and although the pumps come on automatically when the water level in Murwillumbah Creek reaches certain heights, after a blackout when the power is restored the pumps don't restart automatically and need to be reset manually.

The morning after the 2017 flood I checked if the pumps were working, the weren't. I was about to leave when a council worker arrived to reset the pumps. I waited there while he got them started. What I didn't realise at the time was although the motors started, the pumps weren't pumping. By late afternoon the flood waters had only gone down about 80mm in 10Hrs. I went down and checked the river and there was no discharge from the pumps ,even though the motors were working. By the next morning the river had dropped enough for the storm water to drain off.

After the 2017 flood a community meeting was held at the Murwillumbah Services Club to discuss the flood. At this meeting I raised the subject of the pumps failing and I was told (as well as all those at the meeting) that the pumps were working. I insisted that they weren't working and was the told to sit down because that sort of talk would jeopardise everyone's insurance claims.

Back to this last flood now. On the 27th of February I noticed the stormwater drains backing up again so I checked on the pumps. The pump motors were working but there was very little discharge into the river. When the pumps are working correctly there are two jet streams of water visible in the river, even when the pump discharge flap valves are submerged. These jet streams extend 5 or 6 metres into the river.

There is a 1800 number displayed on the pump station, which I rang to report that the pumps weren't working. I received a call back from Council soon afterwards. The man I spoke to assured me the pumps were working, the display on his computer showed them working at 23 percent. I told him 23 percent wasn't good enough because the storm water was about 50mm from entering my workshop. He rang the fitters and then rang me back and explained that nothing could be

done until the water went down. Again the water in the CBD area didn't go down until the river dropped enough for the storm water to drain off. We could not get back into the workshop until the 2nd of March.

This year flood water started entering our building just on dark on the 27th of February and we were inundated with 1.6m of sewer infested water that did not finish draining out until the following Wednesday morning the 2nd of March. We tried frantically to lift all our customers jobs and tools up to a higher level in our workshop but had to leave the building when the water became too deep and it was unsafe to be there any longer. It was around 0.6m deep when we left at 1:30am. The following morning I went back into the workshop in the daylight to retrieve my insulation tester and the water was 1.2m deep. At that time the river had not breached the levee wall. The water in the workshop peaked at 1.6m, which means that when the river breached the levee the water level only increased by 0.4m. I can't help but think that if the pumps were working and the storm water system was empty when the river breached the levee wall 0.4m of water would perhaps not have impacted the CBD at all.

While I was at the Flood Recovery Centre I spoke to the Tweed Shire Council representative who booked a job number for someone to talk to me. When I received the phone call from Council, I was told that the figure of 23 percent was nonsense as they have nothing that could monitor the percentage the pumps were working at. He finished the conversation by telling me that the information he had in front of him indicated that the pumps worked to their full capacity for the duration of the event. This is after he had told me they had no way of measuring the percentage that the pumps were working.

I would like to also add that the second rain event on the 29th of March 2022 the pumps failed again. Fortunately the rain stopped in time, the water was lapping at my door but didn't come inside. In the morning when I checked the pumps the motors were running but there was only a slight discharge from the pump discharge flap valves. (At the time the flap valves were visible because the river wasn't up) I checked again at lunch time and they weren't pumping. At 3:00 PM I went back with the intention of videoing the motors running and the pumps not working so I would have evidence that they weren't working. But when I got there they were working, the flap valves were submersed at this time and there were two big jet streams out into the river. This was really bizarre that they started working.

It seems to me that council are too quick to deny the failure of the pumps, I'm not seeking compensation for flooding I would just like to be confident that the pumps will work next time.

I hope this inquiry has enough power to investigate the operation of the pumps. To look at the data and determine the performance of the pumps efficiency, also if there are warning alarms in the event of a failure. Most flood events are a result of cyclonic weather and high winds resulting in downed power lines, electric pumps really aren't the answer unless they have a standby generator to kick in when there is a blackout. Alternatively diesel pumps would be an option.

The second key issues I would like to bring up concerns the building up of land in the flood plains. I've been told by the owner of the building which I rent that when he built it in

1993 he was limited to the height of the floor level. Since then when the new Community Centre directly opposite us was built, they raised the block of land. When the new Centre Link building was built in Wollumbin Street they built up the block of land as well. The hockey fields at the end of Nullum Street have also been raised. I have also heard that when the development application was submitted to build on the corner of Nullum Street and Prince Street The Council required that the block be raised. Each time the land is raised more storm water is displaced and adversely affects all the other properties. This should be stopped not only in the Murwillumbah CBD but everywhere there is a flood plain. If a new flood level has been determined then the building should be built to meet the new standard, not raising the block of land.

The third issue I would like to raise is the river bed. Prior to the 2017 flood it was commonly known that you could walk across the river near the Commercial Road boat ramp at low tide. After the 2017 flood at low tide the bed of the river was exposed. So in 2017 if the river bed built up for example 1 metre the North Murwillumbah levee wall is about 6 metres, but if the river bed is 1 metre higher it will only take a 5 metre rise in the river to breach the 6 metre levee wall. Council have opposed dredging the river because they have “modelling” which suggests dredging will not make any difference. I don’t understand how their modelling is arrived at, but my way of thinking is if you have a funnel that can sustain a set flow rate without overflowing and then you reduce the output spout the funnel will overflow. Similarly if you take a 200 litre drum you can pour 200 litres of water into it without it overflowing if you were to take the same drum and half fill it with gravel and try to pour the same amount of water into it will overflow.

I believe that if a channel was dredged from the weir near Bray Park in Murwillumbah through to the mouth of the river the aggregate would be a saleable commodity to offset the cost and the river may be healthier as a result. Admittedly the high tide would hold the flood waters back to a degree but the outgoing tide would allow more water to escape. I think it also a possibility that the flow through a channel could have a siphoning effect and draw more flood water out.

My final issue I would like to mention is the Clarrie Hall Dam. At the meeting post 2017 flood the dam was mentioned and council’s response was the dam was never built for flood mitigation, only for water storage. Even if this is correct I don’t see why the dam couldn’t be used for flood mitigation to some extent. I think this should be investigated as a possible tool in future floods.

Thankyou for allowing me to have my concerns heard.

Yours Sincerely,

Murwillumbah resident.