

NSW FLOOD INQUIRY

GPO Box 5341

Sydney NSW 2001

Pottsville NSW 2489

Dear Members, Re: Tweed Shire Council Property No.

“Elizabeth Grove” is a complex of 45 houses and 15 of them were inundated by floodwater. This complex was built in the early 1990’s. It was previously a part of a Wetland (swamp) area, part of which surrounds us today. It was built up so there is a 70cm retaining wall on the southern and northern sides of the complex, with the wall being lower on the western side. Coronation Avenue properties back onto the northern side of our development.

I’m 75 and I’ve lived here since 1999. In the mid 2000’s there was a flood but the water only covered our road to the top of our kerb and guttering. However, Coronation Avenue was flooded. During another time of MUCH rain, water covered the road up to our letterboxes. Both times the water had oozed from the stormwater drains and come in our back gate. (See attached Location Diagram)

I believe this complex was flooded on 28th March 2022 due to:-

- The HUGE amount of rain. In January I recorded 275mls and 665mls in February. From 22/3/22 to 28/3/22 I recorded 525mls with 285mls of those 525 falling on 27th & 28th March. I realise that this was an unprecedented event.
- The drainage system we have was coping with the 2000 residents in Pottsville in 1999 but there must now be about 10,000 residents relying on an inadequate drainage system. Note: - The nine stormwater drainage pits along our road were the first to overflow again in the 2022 flood.
- There was a large High Tide at 7.30pm on 28/3/22.
- The Creek overflowed and had nowhere to go – see next item.
- There has been MUCH development which has changed/hindered the natural flow of water in this area i.e. Black Rocks By The Sea (a housing development), a School with a LARGE cement car park and the Ambulance Station. The Ambulance Station was built over the watercourse which has always taken excess water, especially during a High Tide and large amounts of rain.
- Housing plots are small with buildings being allowed to fill the land, leaving small gardens to cope with the absorption of any rainfall.
- The Tweed Shire is a flood zone yet I am unaware of any flood mitigation work being carried out in Pottsville:

cont’d

Timeline of what happened in "Elizabeth Grove" Pottsville on 28th Feb./1st Mar.:-

- 3.30pm – there was a large amount of water on Crown Land on southern side
- 5pm – water was oozing from the 9 stormwater drains in our complex
- I phoned SES for sandbags – Job No.
- SES attended to inspect/said no sandbags/ left/ came back with a few empty bags. They said high tide was at 7.30pm and water should be receding by 9.30pm
- Many residents began to evacuate but I had nowhere to go and I couldn't leave my 85 year old neighbour who also had nowhere to go – her family were flooded
- 8.30pm -9pm Crown Land water breached our 70cm retaining wall on southern side
- 9pm – toilet bowl had filled
- 9.30pm – I called SES for evacuation for myself and my elderly neighbour
- 12.30am – I called the SES AGAIN for evacuation – request was logged
- 2.30am – water stopped rising – my house was totally surrounded by water
- 3am – we decided no one was coming for us so we tried to sleep
- 2.30pm – the water was receding

Observations:

- The water was rising slowly, i.e. until it came over the southern retaining wall
- As the water rose over the road, it went between the houses and flowed over the northern retaining wall – into the properties on Coronation Avenue
- There were fish in the water so it was definitely from the creek

Changes that need to occur before the next flood:-

- The drainage system of coastal villages needs upgrading
- The SES need much more funding to increase volunteers, supplies and equipment
- SES call centres need to be upgraded – I had to make 4 calls before I got through to an operator as 3 times a recording said "Please hang up and call back later."
- An SES call centre is needed in the Northern Rivers area
- Creeks need to be dredged
- Every village/suburb should have a designated Evacuation Centre
- Booklets (with a fridge magnet) advising what to do in an Emergency, need to be in every household (I referred to one which was issued by the Gold Coast City Council)
- Communications – I am on Telstra 3G and I didn't lose coverage, whereas others on 4G & 5G had NO coverage throughout the flood. I've been told 3G will be obsolete within a year. Why? It worked well for me in an emergency.
- Internet service went down also. What can be done re Communications?
- Flood INSURANCE should be made more affordable

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To protect people/property during FUTURE FLOODS:-

- Local Councils should only approve development that will not interfere with natural watercourses.
- No structures should be built on any existing Crown Land
- All new buildings should be elevated OR ground level should be waterproofed
- Plots of land for houses need to be larger OR buildings should be smaller, thus allowing for bigger gardens for water absorption.
- All creeks along the Tweed Coast should be dredged and kept maintained.
- Flood Mitigation must happen along the Tweed Coast. My crazy suggestion is to identify the natural watercourses, lay large drainage pipes to channel the water to large, deep dams on farming land, with farmers having the use of the water, of course. This drainage system should be constructed so that it is effective in times of huge amounts of rain as well as flood events. It may even negate the need to upgrade the size of the pipes in the drainage system which would be both time-consuming and expensive.

I agree with Mick Fuller that "No two floods are the same" as I grew up with floods in Bourke. However; floods are different because of what is done (and not done) by people.

After a Flood:-

My final points are as a result of interaction with affected residents.

Emergency Accommodation This was a major issue for many persons

Counsellors, with training in dealing with clients following a disaster, need to be available in greater numbers. My idea is for the NSW Government to recruit many retired people who live in flood-prone areas (but flood-safe houses), who would be willing to study in their spare time online, with support offered to assist them through the process. Then they would be on-call to assist the hundreds of people in need during the first few weeks following a disaster.

Insurance Companies need to be lobbied to make the Claim process less stressful. I believe they need to provide their clients with a 'plain English', step-by-step guide, as to what they will do and what the client has to do following a flood event.

Sincere Thanks! Thanks to the local 'mud army' who worked a whole day in our complex to clear-out houses. Thanks to the Army who were tasked to remove flood-affected household goods. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this document.

dated 12.04.2022

"ELIZABETH GROVE" - POTTSVILLE

NAME OF DEVELOPMENT, IF ANY
ELIZABETH GROVE

ADDRESS FOR SERVICE OF NOTICE
POTTSVILLE BEACH 2489

