

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Wednesday, 18 May 2022 9:08:53 PM

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## Your details

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<b>First name</b>	Paul
<b>Last name</b>	Taylor
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<b>Postcode</b>	2484

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## Submission details

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<b>I am making this submission as</b>	A member of the general public
<b>Submission type</b>	I am making a personal submission
<b>Consent to make submission public</b>	I give my consent for this submission to be made public

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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<b>Your story</b>	<p>I am a 30 year resident of Murwillumbah and a ex Tweed Shire Council employee who ceased working as a Senior Dam Operator at Clarrie Hall Dam and Water Treatment Operator at Uki and Murwillumbah in 2005 after 11 years. Previous to that I worked in the Water Supply Dept at the Brisbane City Council for 12 years. I am currently a Union official with the Qld</p>
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Division of the CFMEU and have many dealings with SUNWATER and SEQWater, the Qld entities responsible for Dams, the storage, treatment and distribution of water across Qld. The recent flood in April 22 that Murwillumbah and surrounding districts experienced was indeed an exceptional event that miraculously didn't do as much damage in the Tweed Valley as Lismore experienced.

Firstly I wish to refer back to the extreme Flood Event in Feb/Mar 2017 that claimed the lives of several people in our community and to highlight to this Inquiry the deplorable preparedness, response, blame shifting and deceitful way the Tweed Shire Council Management team conducted themselves.

This is important because you would expect invaluable lessons would have been learnt post the 2017 Flood as it broke records decades old.

Some Facts

- Murwillumbah is a town that floods.

The longterm custom was to park the Council Fleet of Trucks, Plant and Machinery in the high parts of the town so as there is the ability to respond post the inundation...in 2017 this didn't occur and the \$40 million fleet were inundated.

What this meant was post the flood the community were left to begin the cleanup themselves.

The roads and streets were covered in thick slimy mud that made navigating dangerously treacherous and in fact contributed to the death of the mother and two children who skidded off the road into the flooded Tweed River at Tumbulgum.

whom I had publicly been calling out for a complete derelict of duty on his and Council's management teams behalf.

Among my complaints against Senior Council Officials is the fact that many including Mr Oxenham don't live in the Tweed Shire. Not a crime in itself but the problems that arise because of this fact are plain to see.

These people including Mr Oxenham reside on the Gold Coast and the custom is in the face of an upcoming flood event they ensure they are heading north up Tweed Valley Way so as to not get trapped away from their homes and families for what could be days.

After the floods subside they drive back into town to survey the carnage and start the process of orchestrating the clean up etc.

These "experts" have never experienced living through a major flood event.

They monitor the Floods remotely ....

That's not living through the event and is not the same as experiencing it first hand.

It's not the same as being a metre from the raging Tweed River that is roaring loudly and flowing way faster than you can imagine.

Thankfully after several days the neighbouring City of the Gold Coast Council and other NSW Councils provided plant and machinery to begin the enormous task.

Whilst the affected community members fought for years with Insurance companies for some sort of relief and payments the TSC's claim was approved in next to no time.

Bewildering but true when you consider someone high up in Council thought it more important to get home rather than direct the Plant and Machinery be moved to higher ground.

Remembering we were well warned what was coming as the ex cyclone and then rain depression was tracking down from north QLD for the previous week.

Anyway to rub salt into the community's wounds later in 2017 the Tweed Shire Council Management self-nominated themselves for a NSW Govt Flood Response Award and you guessed it....

THEY BOUGHT Y WON.



That'll do me.

As someone who has spent 25 years + as a public servant predominately in the Water Sector I was staggered that a Council that was either directly or at worst indirectly responsible for the deaths of 3 innocent people as well as the few others that drowned in Sth Murwillumbah during the Event were publicly lauded for their deeds. They even failed to deliver sand for sandbagging to the local Murwillumbah SES Headquarters because of the decision to close business early on the Thursday 30/03/17 and staff simply dispersed.

That's inexcusable from a Local authority that is supposed to have its community's interests foremost in its heart.

All of my howls of protests were ignored and I was simply labelled a s...t stirrer by Mr Oxenham and other Council Engineering staff.

Come February 2022, again the Rain Event was similar to 2017 in that any average weather watcher was tracking its path south and all BOM predictions were for the Tweed Valley to prepare for a major flood.

What eventuated dwarfed 2017 and its impact is still being felt.

Again TSC work teams were nowhere to be seen in the lead up....the customary practice of placing Road Closed / Flooded signs across the Shires roadways simply did not occur.

This I allege was a direct result from the some criticism against TSC which was contained in the Coronial Inquest of the 3 Tumbulgum deaths....

TSC blamed the community for ignoring or removing the signs where the accident occurred. Ignoring the fact that thick slippery mud was still covering the roads causing several accidents across the region.

So during this flood no road signs were present at places where they always were in previous floods. ( see attached Photos )

As a old Dam Operator I cant help myself when these events occur.

My wife thinks I am mad but I acknowledge I

revert to my old ways and monitor the Tweed River Gauges on the BOM site day and night. The Clarrie Hall Dam levels I was witnessed in 2017 ( 64.50 m approx AHD )were staggering but the April 27 2022 levels at 11.00PM were higher than I had ever seen.( prob highest on record i believe) and it was still raining heavily with more than 300 mm predicted overnight. I had grave fears the Dam may fail. By lunchtime on Mon April 28/04/22 the Dam level was over 66.00 metres and rising. Thats 1.50 metre higher than I had ever witnessed. It peaked mid afternoon at just under 67.00 metres.... 2.50 metres higher than I think it ever had been. I wasn't then surprised at the devastation downstream to the village of Uki and Bray Park and eventually Murwillumbah. What does surprise me is how hundreds of people didn't perish.... Its was an absolute miracle. Whilst this was unfolding I tried contacting friends who I believed were in danger to varying responses. I dont have any answers and am in no way a expert but I do have a few suggestions going forward. Murwillumbah needs a Command Centre.... It needs to be manned by experienced experts in various fields.... Dam and River Monitors, Emergency Service co-ordinators, Media Outlets etc. We cannot be left to fend for ourselves ever again.... For heavens sake the SES had two flood response crafts in active because the majority of the volunteers were unvaccinated so therefore not able to partake. The SES needs an overhaul.. If you want to be a volunteer you must be highly trained and fit... similar to lifeguards. You dont see old, fat unfit lifesavers at the beach so the SES needs to lift its game and it may well



attract a better quality volunteer.

I know that sounds harsh but that's because it is.  
Tweed Shire Council needs to lift its game.

The old requirement to be employed at a local Council and being a resident of that said Shire needs to be reintroduced at the Senior levels of Management.

Council needs teams on the ground that are flood ready to respond post the event.

Trained and equipped.

Sorry for the rant but this community has seen many smart experienced people who have grown up in the Valley or moved here after completing different work careers who have been ridiculed and ignored by an ignorant arse covering Engineering Dept within the TSC. What that does is causes people to take a backseat and instead of being embraced by Council who would only benefit the Community with their experience they and their experience is lost, sometimes forever.

Though not impacted myself I have many friends who will in some cases never recover fully from what happened this year.

These floods cause Trauma and it is probably only an example of what an uncertain future in a Changing climate may look like.

I hope it was a 1:1000 year event and don't wish to go through anything similar in my lifetime.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide a submission and don't hesitate to contact me if need be.

Thanks

Paul Taylor

## Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#)

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<b>1.1 Causes and contributing factors</b>	Extraordinary Rain event....it was a record breaking flood the likes we may never see again hopefully.
<b>1.2 Preparation and planning</b>	Tweed Shire Council not up to task and more interested in self promotion and atse covering. A Emergency command centre in Murwillumbah well manned with Experts not know alls.
<b>1.3 Response to floods</b>	No obvious co-ordination from Govt Authorities Trained Rescue teams .... Lifesaving NSW may have some input.
<b>1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery</b>	Trained Flood Response teams. Review of SES organisation locally. Neighbouring Council Management teams to assist in each others events ... regardless of the QLD NSW divide. Arrangements Similar to the Qld water authorities providing the Tweed Shire Council potable water to service the community as happened during this years flood.
<b>1.5 Recovery from floods</b>	Local, State and Federal Govt's slow to co-ordinate. Why is it that Large Mining Companies can quickly build Camps all across our nation and in very remote regions that accomodate their FIFO workers. They are sewerred with reticulated water with air con and large common areas and kitchens and take no time to erect..... Yet months after these floods people are still living in tents and cars. This is not good enough in 2022 Australia. It can be done.
<b>1.6 Any other matters</b>	Forget the fake mantra that "We are a resilient mob". Yes we dust ourselves off and go again but I dont think a community gains anything if we dont

learn from the past and prepare for the future.

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## Supporting documents or images

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### Attach files

- [907D6C9B-55A2-47BA-9909-1962E4977D64.jpeg](#)
  - [E940B9C9-E5CD-410E-85AB-671F588109CD.jpeg](#)
  - [1A2404E6-F5E1-4649-8F82-85A0CACB8C36.jpeg](#)
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IDN60231

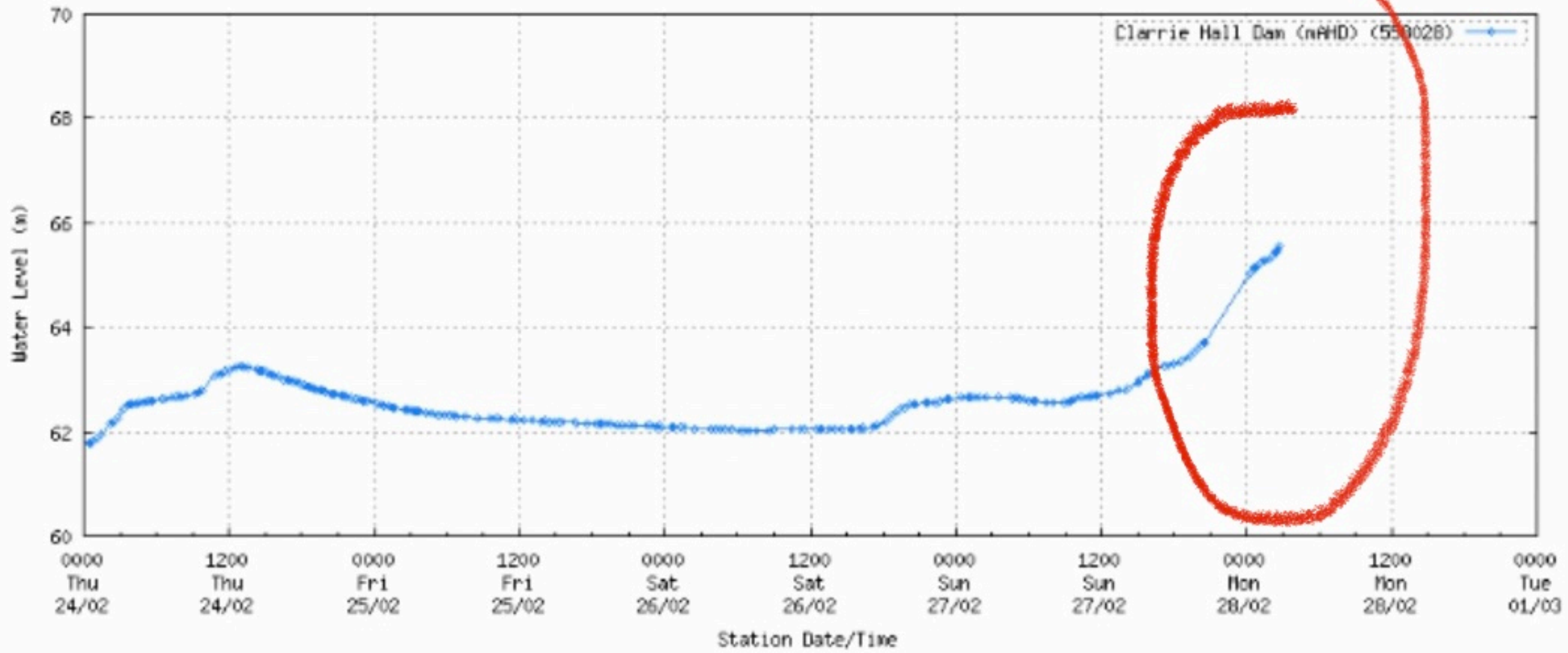
# Latest River Heights for Clarrie Hall Dam (mAHD)

Issued at 2:45 am EDT Monday 28 February 2022

[About river height plots](#) | [About this Plot](#)

**Station details:** Station Number: 558028 Name: Clarrie Hall Dam (mAHD)

Data from the previous 4 days.





IDN60231

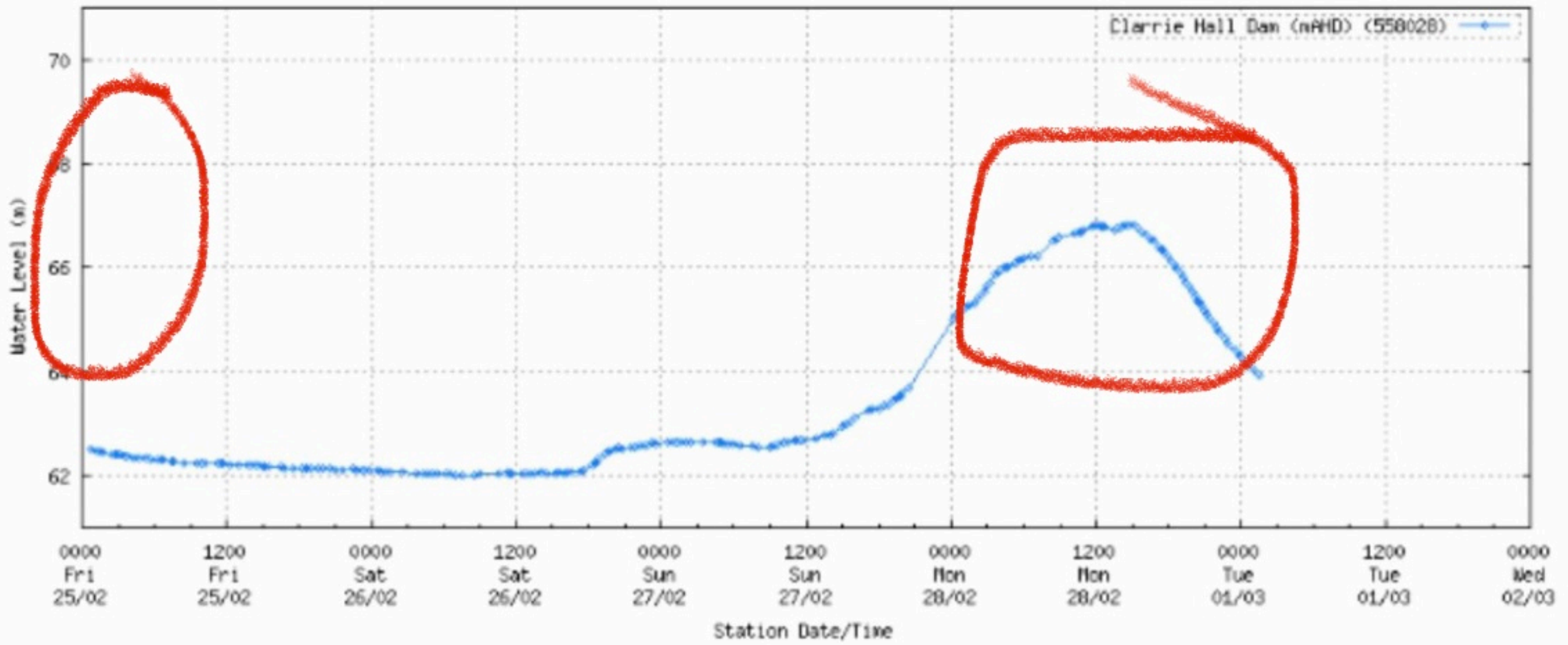
# Latest River Heights for Clarrie Hall Dam (mAHD)

Issued at 2:16 am EDT Tuesday 1 March 2022

[About river height plots](#) | [About this Plot](#)

**Station details:** Station Number: 558028 Name: Clarrie Hall Dam (mAHD)

Data from the previous 4 days.







IDN60231

## Latest River Heights for Clarrie Hall Dam

Issued at 6:15 pm EST Sunday 2 April 2017

[About river height plots](#) | [About this Plot](#)

**Station details:** Station Number: 558028 Name: C

Data from the previous 4 days.

