

Mr. Brian Edmonds  
Assistant Director Operations and Resources  
Flood Review Team

Mr Michael Perkins  
214 Shale Road  
Latrobe  
Mobile: 0417 592 992  
Email: calthorpeholsteins@gmail.com

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Submission to Independent Review of Flood Events June 2016

Dear Sir,

I am the Managing Director of a family dairy farming business on the southern boundary of the Latrobe township, taking in large areas of the river flats in the region. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June this year, we received a record flood event that has seriously damaged our productive land, on farm productive and flood mitigation infrastructure, and directly resulted in the loss of 48 high genetic value dairy heifers. Our insurance has covered some repairs to irrigation equipment, however our total losses and damage have been estimated to be beyond \$600,000.

As such, there are several questions that we believe the Inquiry should seek answers to.

1. Failure of early warning systems.

While flooding was expected on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of June, the expected rainfall was given a generic indicator by the Bureau of Meteorology of "in excess of 80mm". Furthermore, the flood warning level on the Mersey was still only at the Moderate rating into the early evening of Sunday the 5<sup>th</sup>. I received the emergency broadcast phone call at approximately 9:00AM on Monday the 6<sup>th</sup>, just over eight hours after my home was completely surrounded by water, something that has not occurred since the 1970 floods, that were exacerbated by the damming effect of the Latrobe branch line. This lack of warning was the primary reason for our stock losses, by the time that we became aware of the extent of the flooding, we had no access to the area of the farm where the heifers were situated. In a moderate, or even the major flood seen in 2011, those heifers would have been safe in the paddocks that they were in.

*Was the lack of warning for local communities indicative of a systemic problem with extreme weather forecasting and/or emergency warning systems?*

2. Kimberley Railway Bridge.

We received anecdotal reports from friends on the up-river side of the Kimberley Railway Bridge that the river level dropped significantly in the late evening of June 5<sup>th</sup>, possibly coinciding with the collapse/washing out of the bridge, which is partially constructed in a weir-like structure.

- Given that this would effectively behave like a dam break, and with the particularly large volumes of water involved, we would ask that this be looked at in the context of exacerbating the damage that occurred down-stream.

My recollection is that just prior to 1:00AM on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, the flood changed dramatically from a normal, moderate flood, to what seemed to be a tsunami of water, as we were awoken by our toilets and drains rapidly backing up and the noise of the water quickly surrounding us.

3. Water storage management and cloud seeding.

The charts supplied on the Hydro Tasmania website for the water levels at Lakes MacKenzie, Rowallan, and Parangana indicate that the levels did not change significantly following the rain

event in May that broke the drought. Furthermore, the three lakes were kept at unusually high levels through Summer and Autumn due to the wider hydro-electric system's water shortage.

- Does flood mitigation, and protection of downstream populations and infrastructure more generally, factor into Hydro Tasmania's risk management and general resource management processes? Are there assessments made as to Hydro's performance towards stakeholders in individual catchments other than by Hydro itself?

4. Critical damage of a major flood levee on our property threatening road infrastructure.

On the farthest Northern, (down-river), point of our property on the western bank, the Mersey river deviates from a straight run, slightly to the North East. At this point, a flood levee was built many years ago to protect sections of the Railton Road, Mersey Main Road, Coal Hill Road, and several residential properties in the area due to the river's ability to enter Ballahoo Creek through a small tributary.

The June flood has utterly destroyed this levee, and approximately 3Ha of our land in the process by means of rapid, extreme erosion, and the deposition of a massive amount of river shingle across the entire area. Furthermore, the top soil and other silt from up-river was forced onto our neighbour's property just below our boundary, effectively blocking the secondary channel running parallel to the river. The effect of these two factors and changes to the bed of the primary channel has been that even smaller, more normal floods are forcing water into the offending tributary of Ballahoo Creek, resulting in several subsequent road closures on the three roads originally protected by the levee, as well as damage to temporary and permanent repair works on Railton Road and Mersey Main Road on at least two occasions since the original flood.

Furthermore, the water moving into those areas has meant that our neighbours, Malcolm and Robyn Bramich, have been too fearful to begin work on repairing their home, due to the property being consistently threatened during the Winter by floods that would normally not have concerned them.

Our ability to rectify this situation is virtually non-existent. The sheer scale of the damage in this area is beyond our farm machinery's capabilities to rectify, and following the losses already experienced, we have no capacity to fund repairs via contractors. Environmental and Water Management legislation and management within the relevant departments also appears ill-equipped to deal with this sort of environmental damage. We have been told by several local and state bureaucrats that even if we could conduct remediation, we would probably be refused permission. Aside from this, it is not our responsibility to protect public infrastructure when we are not the cause of the vulnerability, yet both the State and Federal governments have remained silent on this particular issue, despite being made aware of it as soon as the extent of the damage was realised, within a fortnight of the event.

- Who is responsible for decision-making and remediation of river banks and flood mitigation infrastructure?
- Why has no action been taken, at any level of government, to rectify what appear to be critical gaps in flood mitigation and containment infrastructure caused by the major flood on June 6<sup>th</sup>, despite five full months of assessments, and obvious instances of further damage to public and private infrastructure?

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Flood Review, I hope that the information provided will be considered, and prove useful to the Review Team. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require more information.

Regards,

Michael Perkins.