Flood Review Submission

The enquiry asks for submissions on the June flood event, though in the case of the Dasher and Minnow Catchments (sub-catchments of the Mersey Catchment), multiple flood events took place between June and October, ranging from severe to minor. At times, two flood events could take place within a three day period, with none of these recorded as there is no functioning river monitoring equipment along either river system. As a result of this lack of equipment, no warnings were issued for the specific catchments, only the Mersey. What is happening in the Dasher and Minnow catchments impacts significantly on the Mersey, and it is of great importance that in the future, some monitoring of river levels can be recorded to better predict the downstream impacts that could occur. It is totally pointless restoring river reaches downstream, when the upper sub-catchments are badly degraded and not being restored, as the downstream impacts will continue to occur. Restoration should take a ‘top down’ approach, apart from initial fencing replacement for stock control.

During the multiple flood events, many bridges and roads were washed away or damaged, stream courses were altered, significant bank loss, tree and vegetation loss, fencing loss, and high levels of sediment deposition in stream channels and on pastures took place. The impacts continue as newly formed pebble bars in the streams divert water along banks which continue to erode and contribute to tree loss.

Some landholders along the Dasher were unable to leave their property for days due to bridge wash-outs, and it was sometimes weeks before they could again access to their property by vehicle. It often required the landowner to replace the bridges at their own cost, as no assistance was forthcoming. At no time did any agency check along these properties to find out if the landowners were in need of assistance, and attempts to call the Flood Recovery Taskforce 1800 number were futile, with calls not being returned when messages were left.

During the first flood the whole communities of Beulah and Lower Beulah were trapped by flood waters and bridge losses. All four access roads to the communities were subjected to bridge loss, or significant damage to bridge access. In addition to the inability to leave properties or townships, power was cut and phone lines were washed out. As many areas in the catchments have little if any phone reception, there was no means to communicate or find out what was happening. Most internet services were unavailable due to the power outage, and the only communication available was by battery radio. The news was inadequate in informing landowners of what was happening, when access would be restored to their communities, and information on further weather and flood predictions for the region. The Kentish Council website did eventually list all the bridges out and road closures in the area, but were slow to update the site when roads were re-opened. The Police website was better at providing information, but again the site was sometimes slow in updating with which roads were open. This resulted in a lot of frustration when travelling back and forth to town, often causing many more km’s to be traversed un-necessarily.

A meeting with flood affected landowners was arranged by Cradle Coast Natural Resource Management (CCNRM) on the 11th August as a result of landowners contacting them in the hope of receiving assistance. The meeting was well attended, although little help was available. Those who attended gave contact details, and many site visits took place combining members of CCNRM and Mount Roland Rivercare Catchment Incorporated (MRRCI) in these visits. I am attaching a spreadsheet of works required that has been constructed as a result of these, and many other site visits.

The plight of many landowners along the Dasher and Minnow Rivers has still not been addressed, with significant bank losses causing on-going issues. One of these is river access to freshwater fishers, which is apparently the landowner’s responsibility. It is unsafe for people to access the rivers at many locations due to the significant undercutting of banks. How is a small landholder to fix this problem when river works are expensive, difficult to undertake due to wet floodplains, and requires the direction of people skilled in river restoration works.

It has been five months since the first flood event and landowners still have no access to assistance. Why is there no government assistance for these landholders? One volunteer organization BlazeAid helped assist some landholders fix fencing along the Dasher River, and Conservation Volunteers Australia are assisting four landholders along the Dasher during November and December in clearing/fixing fencing, raking gravel and silt off pastures and clearing up woody debris. It is shoddy situation when the only assistance to so many landowners is from non-government organizations.

An overview of the impacts that have taken place is being prepared in the hope that restoration can take place in the near future. I hope to have this completed very soon. Impacts that require attention include:

* Significant bank restoration and stabilisation in many locations
* Woody debris and trees need to be removed from the river channel/pastures
* Huge volumes of gravel and silt require removal from pastures
* Newly formed pebble bars in the channel require work to improve river flows and prevent further bank degradation
* Fencing still requires replacing or clearing of organic debris
* Infrastructure such as bridges and roads are still in need of repair on private land

In summation, response to many landowners who suffered impacts from the floods was slow, and many had no response at all. There was a general feeling of confusion as to who to get to help or who to inform, and many landowners still have no idea how to get help to repair damage. There was no initial impact assessment of the Dasher and Minnow Catchments and assessments only started taking place as a result of the meeting with CCNRM and the initiating of report making by MRRCI. Should flood events take place in the future, a Rapid River Assessment Form has been constructed for MRRCI to enable a few individuals to complete a whole river assessment within a few days, to give an overall view of the size of the disaster. It would not give a monetary value, but an estimate of funding required could be made from the data collected once placed in a spreadsheet (such as the one attached).

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Beulah