

2019 Monsoon Trough Rainfall and Flood Review

Report 3: 2018-19

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Overview

Since 2011, Queensland has been impacted by more than 60 significant natural disaster events resulting in loss of life and more than \$14.4 billion in damage to public infrastructure alone.

With a record 10 separate natural disaster events striking the state in 2018–19, the Queensland Government recognises that, as the climate changes, so too will the frequency and intensity of these events.

The Queensland Government remains committed to making Queensland the most disaster resilient state in Australia and strives to safeguard people, property and the environment from disaster impacts, while recognising the importance of empowering and supporting local communities to manage disaster risks, respond to events and be more resilient.

The Queensland Government has demonstrated a strong commitment to continuous improvement of disaster management arrangements through robust planning and preparations, and respect for the insights and expertise of the Inspector General Emergency Management (IGEM).

The Queensland Government is committed to improving our disaster preparedness, response and recovery to meet the challenges ahead.

Monsoon Trough Event

In late January 2019, tropical Queensland received an extended period of heavy rainfall as a result of an intense slow-moving monsoon and tropical lows. This event continued to affect Queensland until 9 February 2019.

Some locations, including Townsville, exceeded their average annual rainfall during the event, recording more than 2,000 millimetres of rain. The Gulf Country and North West Queensland, including long-term drought affected regions, also received record breaking rainfall, with some locations recording accumulated totals more than four times their normal February average.

The extreme rainfall caused major flooding across coastal locations, including the Herbert, Ross, Black, Haughton, Burdekin and Daintree Rivers and Bluewater Creek. Elsewhere, the rainfall also caused major flooding across the Gulf River catchments including the Flinders, Cloncurry and Leichardt Rivers. The longest river in Queensland, the Flinders River, recorded its most significant flood in at least 50 years.

The 2019 Monsoon Trough Rainfall and Flood event (Monsoon Trough event) was a disaster of national significance causing catastrophic damage and losses to communities across North, Far North and North West Queensland. Floodwaters 700 kilometres long and 70 kilometres wide covered 15,000 square kilometres in the Flinders and Norman River basins. In all, 39 Local Government Areas, covering 100 million hectares, were activated under

Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. These Local Government Areas make up 56 per cent of Queensland's land mass.

The Monsoon Trough cut off communities, devastated the livestock industry, left the freight industry at a standstill and destroyed infrastructure, homes and businesses. The cascading and compounding consequences of this event are yet to be fully quantified but the social and economic cost has been estimated at \$5.68 billion (source: Deloitte Access Economics).

The Monsoon Trough event involved 40,000 kilometres of local government roads; impacted 6,420 kilometres of State-controlled roads; caused damage to 307 kilometres of rail line, 10,000 kilometres of fencing, 1,000 kilometres of water piping and 15,000 kilometres on on-farm roads; and killed 500,000 head of cattle and 30,000 sheep. More than 66,250 calls were made to the Community Recovery Hotline.

The Queensland Government acknowledges that, tragically, several people lost their lives under varying circumstances during this event with devastating impacts on their families, friends and communities.

Review

In response to the significant impact of this event, and consistent with best practice, on 7 February 2019, the Honourable Craig Crawford MP, Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, requested the independent IGEM review the effectiveness of the Queensland disaster management system in its preparation and response to the Monsoon Trough event.

As an independent office, with expertise in disaster management, IGEM is best placed to identify the strengths of Queensland's disaster management system and any opportunity for improvement. IGEM recommendations will guide disaster management stakeholders in how best to respond to future events and strengthen confidence in Queensland's disaster management arrangements.

Findings and the Queensland Government Response

Overall, the Review found that disaster management arrangements were effective in preparing for and responding to the Monsoon Trough event. The Review also found Queensland's disaster management system has matured, with local leaders and agencies demonstrating the learning of lessons identified from previous events. In particular, the Ross River Dam operations were appropriate and effective given the nature and extent of the flooding.

Additionally, the Review identified a number of broad opportunities for improvement including: further work around public flood risk messaging; further development of localised online 'dashboards'; increased focus on disaster recovery in planning at the local level; revision of evacuation centre plans to better manage vulnerable persons; and further consideration of mechanisms to manage offers of assistance.

The Queensland Government is prioritising work towards the implementation of the Review recommendations ahead of the 2019–20 severe weather season, including strengthening evacuation planning, enhancing communication and public messaging, and improving collaboration and coordination in relation to requests for assistance.

The Queensland Government's Response to the Review recommendations is provided below. We commend the 2019 Monsoon Trough Rainfall and Flood Review Report: 3 2018-19 and the Queensland Government Response to all stakeholders.

Queensland Government Response to:			
<i>The 2019 Monsoon Trough Rainfall and Flood Review Report 3: 2018-19</i>			
Recommendation		Government Response	
1	Further work be undertaken to develop effective public flood risk messaging and community education materials that are easy to understand and tested with the community to ensure flood risk is understood.	Accepted	Queensland Government will continue to develop and provide relevant educational materials and resources to enhance the community's understanding of flood risk terms, through the Get Ready Queensland community engagement program and regional resilience action plans, as per the Resilient Queensland 2018-21 plan for delivering upon the Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience (QSDR).
2	State government agencies with key roles and responsibilities around disaster recovery provide increased support in the development of recovery at the local level (pre-event).	Accepted	The Queensland Recovery Plan is currently being reviewed in accordance with governance arrangements and the revised plan will note necessary local level support. The Plan is reviewed on an annual basis. The Queensland Government is undertaking a Recovery Planning and Governance Project which is designed to enhance understanding of recovery governance and assist local governments to develop recovery sub-plans. All local governments will be engaged in this process with a focus on those local governments impacted by the monsoon event.
3	Entities with disaster management responsibilities need to integrate the eight priorities identified within the <i>Emergency Management Sector Adaptation Plan for Climate Change</i> into their disaster management planning cycle.	Accepted	Queensland Government will consider how to incorporate relevant elements of the eight priorities identified within the <i>Emergency Management Sector Adaptation Plan</i> into relevant plans and projects.
4	Evacuation centre plans be revised to better manage vulnerable persons, including the safe storage of medications and providing alternate arrangements for evacuees with additional needs. (e.g. evacuation centre for aged persons).	Accepted	Queensland Government will continue to offer advice and make information available to assist Local Governments in further development of evacuation centre plans particularly regarding support to vulnerable people and the safe storage of medications.
5	As part of the annual Emergency Action Plan review for the Ross River Dam, consideration should be given to the potential impacts of operating the gate outside automatic mode and whether this event has provided any new information and learnings which can be incorporated into the Emergency Action Plan. This should occur prior to the 2019/20 wet season.	Accepted	Queensland Government has engaged with Townsville City Council on the review of the current Emergency Action Plan to ensure consideration of this recommendation.
6	A single point of truth be established for accurately capturing and reporting on disaster management group activation levels for any given timeframe.	Accepted	Queensland Government will assess and enhance the process for reporting and recording activation levels of local, district and state groups.
7	Councils, with the support of stakeholders, continue to develop and promote local disaster dashboards as the 'point of truth' for community information and messaging during disaster events. Greater use during recovery should be considered.	Accepted-in-Principle	Queensland Government will continue to ensure, where appropriate, information and messaging is integrated or refers to local dashboards for community messaging.
8	The provision of system-wide tools, education, guidance and testing for requests for assistance is strengthened to enhance understanding and outcomes.	Accepted	The Queensland Government will assess and enhance the Request for Assistance process, related form and training, with the view to identifying efficiencies and streamlining the process.

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Recommendation		Government Response	
9	Greater emphasis be placed on pre-planned and pre-determined arrangements between the Australian Defence Force and state and local agencies.	Accepted	Queensland Government will engage with ADF to discuss pre-planned and pre-determined priorities and planning considerations for future events including consideration of recovery principles.
10	Energy Queensland and local groups consider establishing formal arrangements that embed measures that assist evacuation plans to increase levels of safety.	Accepted	The Queensland Government through Energy Queensland will continue to work with Local Disaster Management Groups across the State to define the type of assistance that can be provided in areas requiring evacuation.
11	The Department of Housing and Public Works should be included within Local Disaster Management Group evacuation centre planning and plans and assist with decision-making around the relocation of evacuees from evacuation centres.	Accepted	The Queensland Government will develop and make available a tool box of resources to assist regional Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW) staff to more effectively engage with local groups. DHPW will also ensure appropriate representation across groups in the disaster management arrangements.
12	The progress of recovery for this event be reviewed incrementally over the next 2 to 3 years, with a formal, independent report provided on the effectiveness of the recovery after 3 years.	Accepted	Incremental review of the progress of recovery from this event will be reported against the North and Far North Queensland Monsoon Recovery Plan for the duration of the plan. A formal independent report on the effectiveness of recovery will be undertaken after 3 years.
13	Local groups should plan for and establish clear arrangements to effectively manage offers of assistance including the management of goods, services and volunteers.	Accepted	Queensland Government will continue work to review and update the current Offers of Assistance Policy.
14	Councils should formalise arrangements with entities that have the skills, capability and capacity to effectively manage spontaneous volunteers. These should be documented and integrated into planning and exercising.	Accepted	The Queensland Government will continue to work with Volunteering Queensland to further support its work with local governments, local disaster management groups and non-government organisations in developing and supporting good practice in building local capability to manage spontaneous disaster volunteers.