

Queensland Flood Recovery Brief

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Hawker Britton

The floods in Queensland over the past month have collectively been the most significant natural disaster ever to face the state. The cost of rebuilding is expected to be in the many hundreds of millions.

With the state now in a rebuilding phase, this occasional paper sets out the two principle streams of the Government's response thus far.

Queensland Reconstruction Authority Board

On Wednesday, January 19 the Premier announced the establishment of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority Board. The Authority will ascertain the extent of the damage caused by the floods, and coordinate the state wide rebuilding program. The Premier said the Authority will manage the enormous task of rebuilding and repairing infrastructure in more than 60 flood affected communities across Queensland. Through legislation, it will have the necessary powers to implement all recommendations made through the Authority Board.

In the flood affected areas the Authority will co-ordinate both government and non government organisations to deliver the necessary services to assist in the rebuilding. Local governments and communities will be dealt with individually to ensure every aspect is taken into account to ensure the communities recover fully.

Those appointed to the Authority include Major General Mick Slater as chair and Co-ordinator General Graeme Newton as CEO. Both have valuable experience in infrastructure and planning.

The Authority will work with the Housing Recovery Units to assist displaced Queenslanders to find temporary accommodation. Early estimates by Housing Minister, Karen Struthers suggest 28,000 properties have been impacted by flooding to some degree, with 1780 homes inundated.

Commission of Inquiry

At the same time, a Commission of Inquiry will be headed by Queensland Justice Cate Holmes, as Commissioner, with Deputy Commissioners Jim O'Sullivan, a former Queensland Police Commissioner and Phil Cummins, an international expert on dams. The Commission's terms of reference include looking at the events of the disaster, community preparedness and possible future strategies to prevent the extent of the damage reoccurring.

An interim report is due by 1 August 2011 on matters associated with flood preparedness to enable early recommendations to be implemented before next summer's wet season. The final report is due by 17 January 2012

The Commission will be asked to inquire into and report on:

- The preparation and planning by federal, State and local governments; emergency services and the community for the 2010/2011 floods in Queensland.
- The performance of private insurers in meeting their claims responsibilities.
- All aspects of the response to the 2010/2011 flood events, particularly measures taken to inform the community and measures to protect life and private and public property, including: immediate management, response and recovery; resourcing, overall coordination and deployment of personnel and equipment; adequacy of equipment and communications systems; and the adequacy of the community's response.
- The measures to manage the supply of essential services such as power, water and communications during the 2010/2011 flood events
- Adequacy of forecasts and early warning systems particularly as they related to the flooding events in Toowoomba, and the Lockyer and Brisbane Valleys.
- Implementation of the systems operation plans for dams across the state and in particular the Wivenhoe and Somerset release strategy and an assessment of compliance with, and the suitability of the operational procedures relating to flood mitigation and dam safety.
- All aspects of land use planning through local and regional planning systems to minimise infrastructure and property impacts from floods.

In undertaking its inquiries, the Commission is required to:

- Take into account the regional and geographic differences across affected communities.
- Seek public submissions and hold public hearings in affected communities.

The Commission of Inquiry is also required to make recommendations which it considers appropriate, feasible and cost effective to improve:

- The preparation and planning for future flood threats and risks, in particular the prevention of the loss of life.
- The emergency response in natural disaster events.
- Any legislative changes needed to better protect life and property in natural disaster events.

To discuss these measures further, please contact your Hawker Britton consultant.