

# **AFTER ACTION REPORT**

***“Report to the Wollondilly Shire Council arising from the conduct of various community-based training programs designed to enhance the knowledge of public sector agencies and the community on emergency and crisis management response and recovery arrangements”.***

**CAVEAT:**

This After-Action Report has been prepared for the Wollondilly Shire Council and the Office of Emergency Management NSW and may be the subject of legal professional privilege or contain copyright material of Nemesis Consultancy Group Pty Ltd, Wollondilly Shire Council or the Office of Emergency Management NSW. Any issues including disclosure, copying or forwarding is unauthorised. Reproduction or distribution of this After-Action Report in whole or part is NOT PERMITTED unless authorised in writing by Nemesis Consultancy Group Pty Ltd, the Mayor, Wollondilly Shire Council or the Executive Director, Office of Emergency Management, Department of Justice NSW.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Recommendations	Page 3
Executive Summary	Page 4
Genesis of this After-Action Report	Page 5
The East Coast Low of 4-6 June 2016.	Page 5
Community Forums 2017.	Page 6
Community Engagement	Page 7
Wollondilly Emergency Management Guide	Page 7
Community Engagement in the recovery process	Page 7
Conclusions and recommendations	Page 9

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Wollondilly Shire Council present this After-Action Report to the Office of Emergency Services NSW
2. That the Mayor and senior representatives of Wollondilly Shire Council meet with the Region Emergency Operations Controller, Assistant Commissioner Peter Thurtell (NSWPF), to discuss Council's approach to emergency and crisis management planning, preparation, response and recovery arrangements and with a view to emphasising closer collaboration and co-operation between the emergency services, and
3. That Wollondilly Shire Council be encouraged to continue its community education projects in all aspects of emergency and crisis management most notably in the critical area of community engagement.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Planning and preparation are the inevitable key drivers for the successful outcome of any endeavour and this applies to every enterprise be it one of personal achievement, or a business or corporate enterprise. This observation is certainly the case for local government given its key role in emergency and crisis management planning and preparation.

Coupled with the requirements for advanced planning and preparation are the equally compelling requirements for how agencies, organisations, and most notably, the community, respond to and recover from an emergency or major crisis. The key to ensuring a range of successful outcomes thereby lessening the impact of the emergency or crisis and enhancing the speed of the response and the recovery is, and remains one of engagement.

The engagement we refer to is a holistic engagement.

Firstly, there has to be an effective and integrated engagement by and across the emergency services. There is no alternative to that requirements.

Secondly, there has to be effective engagement with the community for it is they who are more often than not impacted by major emergencies and crisis and it is they who will respond to, for and in support of each other in order to resume normality as soon as it is possible. The key to engagement at both levels is the Local Government Authority or Council.

Consistent with their commitment Wollondilly Shire Council have sought to engage the emergency services within its geographic area of responsibility and as important, its community at all levels. They have facilitated and conducted public forums whereby the four key principals of emergency management – planning, preparation, response and recovery have been their motivating force. Notably, they have engaged in wide range of community education programs to keep their constituent audience informed and involved.

This After-Action Report seeks to build on the work already undertaken by Council. We commend the Report and its recommendations for further consideration.

K E (Ken) MORONEY AO APM  
9 July 2018

D (David) OWENS APM

## GENESIS OF THIS AFTER-ACTION REPORT

### The East-Coast low of 4-6 June 2016

Between the 4-6 June 2016 an intense east-coast low was located along the entire coast of New South Wales. As a consequence of this significant weather event, heavy rain and damaging winds impacted on both the north and south coast areas of the State and reached inland to metropolitan areas of Sydney, most notably, Picton in the Wollondilly Shire Local Government Area (WSLGA).

East coast lows are not unknown in this State with the last reported event being in 2015 and in 2007. Fortunately, on the occasion of the 2016 event no lives were lost albeit that significant damage was occasioned to many parts of the state including coastal erosion, loss of buildings (due to destructive winds, storm and rain damage) and reported incidents of loss of livestock. Notably, the Insurance Council of Australia estimated the cost of the consequent flooding at \$300M in NSW alone, to which must be added the cost of infrastructure repairs at \$17.5M.

The agencies of the State and Local Governments were marshalled to provide a timely and immediate response to the emergency whilst the relevant agencies of the Commonwealth Government assisted in the all-important aspects of recovery.

As advised, the Wollondilly Shire Local Government Area suffered structural damage to roads, businesses and houses in the CBD of Picton. Outlying areas also suffered damage including the loss of the use of the Broughton Pass Bridge for over 12 months. This effectively severed the towns of Appin and Picton and the disruption was felt both at a personal and professional level.

Within the Picton CBD it was reported that in a one-hour period the area of Stonequarry Creek received 332mm of rain and many buildings experienced inundation of water up to 1.8 metres.

Post this significant weather event, reporting in terms of the flood and its impact on the WSLGA was measured in terms of its social, economic, infrastructure and environmental impacts and reports prepared by WSC to the agencies of Government, and as important, the community, reported against this criterion. As critical as it was to report to the community, so to was the importance of gauging whether or not community expectations had been met in terms of Council's actions immediately in aftermath of the flood event.

The premise behind many questions at that time was the underlying and critically important question of not only understanding what had occurred, but, equally, what had been the real impact on the community in terms of the social, familial, business and opportunity costs of this event. The adage "*you don't know what you don't know*" was a motivating factor for Councillors and Council's staff to understand that should another natural or man-made disaster occur and be of similar or worse proportions, then Council had to develop a clear and unambiguous understanding of what had occurred – at all levels. Such an approach is

appropriate and fits within the broader parameters of *Plan, Prepare, Respond and Recover*, the four key principles that underpin effective emergency and crisis management arrangements.

### **Community Forums 2017**

Consistent with its approach of understanding what happened and thereby plan for the future, WSC adopted the understandable and commendable approach of seeking the comments and observations of a variety of community groups. Funding for the various fora was obtained under the aegis of the Community Resilience Innovation Program (CRIP), Office of Emergency Management (Department of Justice NSW).

Nemesis Consultancy Group P/L (Nemesis) was appointed to facilitate each Forum and provide a report to Council with recommendations.

Consequently, a number of community forums were held on –

- 7 February 2017 (residents only)
- 15 February 2018 (business community)
- 21 February 2017 (community-based organisations and charities), and
- 1 March 2017 (emergency services and first responders).

Overall, some 120 persons attended the fora and each forum was addressed by the Mayor, WSC Cr Judith Hannan and attended by Council's senior staff. Arising out of each forum, a number of suggestions were made by participants for WSC to further consider and, if appropriate, implement.

On 22 August 2017, Nemesis provided a report to WSC outlining the issues discussed at each forum and made 32 recommendations to WSC for its further consideration. Key to those recommendations was (and remains) the critical importance of community engagement in the planning, preparation, response and recovery arrangements to effective emergency and crisis management. The latter issue therefore forms the basis of this After-Action Report.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – THE KEY TO THE FUTURE

Both in the lead up to and post the events of the 4-6 June 2016, WSC had done much in terms of its overall preparedness for an emergency or crisis. Notwithstanding the planning that each and every community and the agencies of the Commonwealth or State (including Local Government) engage in not everything will go according to the very best of plans. Planning and preparation are and will remain a work very much in progress at every level and complacency in this regard cannot be permitted.

Consistent with this broad theme and briefed on the expectations of the community, WSC commenced a review of its emergency and crisis management arrangements. This review focused on the planning that had already been approved by WSC and reinforced by the recommendations arising out of our report of 27 August 2017 to Council.

Community engagement at all levels was seen to be the key in addressing not only the issues of 4-6 June 2016, but, as important the need to be prepared and more ably respond to any emergency or crisis whatever the time or circumstance. Complacency or ignorance on the part of the community in any future circumstance (like that of 2016) needs to be overcome and to this end Councils have a critical role to play. Community engagement in the emergency environment is not nor can it ever be a one off.

### Wollondilly Emergency Management Guide

Consistent with their role in ensuring that their emergency and crisis management arrangements remain contemporary and the community remained informed, WSC developed and provided critical information packages to residents of its LGA. One key document is the “*Wollondilly Emergency Management Guide*”. Written in simple but succinct terms, the document informs residents (including the business community, schools and charities), what role they should play in preparing, planning and responding to an emergency or crisis. This and other relevant documents<sup>1</sup> are available free of charge from Council’s offices and are also located on their website – [Wollondilly.nsw.gov.au](http://Wollondilly.nsw.gov.au)

### Community engagement in the recovery processes

Our report of 27 August 2017 (pp36-37; recommendation 32, p39) identified the ongoing importance of community engagement. WSC confirmed this approach through its ongoing engagement with the Office of Emergency Management NSW and the receipt of CRIP funding to conduct a number of additional community-based forums.

On the 28 March 2018, 18 April 2018 and 30 May 2018, Nemesis was engaged by WSC to facilitate workshops each with an emphasis on the importance of recovery (within overall

---

<sup>1</sup> *Wollondilly Resource Recovery Toolkit – ‘A Plan for the Wollondilly Local Community Recovering from an Emergency (May 2016) and Council’s “Create Wollondilly 2033 Community Strategic Plan, Delivery program and Operational Plan”.*

emergency crisis management arrangements). Senior representatives of WSC also attended and added their expertise to each workshop.

The workshops were reasonably well attended by members of the community, business community and on most occasions by representatives of the NSW Police Force, Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Service and Fire Brigade.

Whilst the principal focus of each workshop was recovery from an emergency or crisis, different scenarios were presented to each workshop. The scenarios were –

- A bushfire impacting across the WSLGA (28 March 2018)
- A fire in business premises located in the Picton CBD and where asbestos was known to be located within the building (18 April 2018), and
- A heavy storm and flooding arising from an east-coast low weather event (30 May 2018).

Each workshop provided participants with an appreciation and understanding of –

- The role of the Recovery Committee within emergency and crisis management arrangements
- An overview of recovery arrangements in NSW
- Response arrangements viz recovery arrangements and lines of responsibility and accountability including at what point recovery commences (understand the context, complexity, co-ordination requirements, effective communications and capacity building), and
- Debrief and feedback from participants.

The workshops were not regarded as a replacement for a full field or desktop exercise. Rather, they were specifically designed with community engagement in mind and with a specific reference on recovery from an emergency or crisis. Participants expressed their appreciation for the content and focus of the workshops and also expressed a view that it enhanced their specific knowledge of recovery arrangements. Notably, this was an observation of SES and RFS participants, whose traditional engagement in an emergency or crisis is that of response.

Finally, the Community Forums (2017) and the more recent Recovery Workshops (2018), have emphasised the approach announced by Cr Hannan in her preamble to the Community Forums, namely, “...(we need) *a more coordinated approach to disaster recovery that meets the unique needs of the community, its topography and geographic spread*”. This remains a constant theme for the future of the WSLGA.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Conclusion

It is over 2 years since a significant weather event impacted on the Wollondilly Local Government Area, most notably, the town of Picton and its environs. Consistent with its approach to learn from that event and as part of its preparation for another emergency or crisis of complementary proportions, Wollondilly Shire Council has engaged in an important education program – education of the community (including its various agencies and representative groups) and itself.

The approach adopted by WSC has been to conduct a series of Community Forums (2017) and more recently Emergency and Crisis Management Workshops with a particular emphasis on recovery (2018). Council's proactive approach is to be commended and is consistent with the equally important aspects of planning and preparation for an emergency or crisis.

The challenge for WSC, and indeed every LGA, is to ensure that knowledge remains current both within its own expert group and within the wider community. The projected growth patterns for WSC are an indicator that planning and preparation in all aspects of emergency and crisis management arrangements must remain constant themes. Equally, developing skill and competence in the areas of response and recovery to an emergency or crisis is of similar importance. To this end the Emergency Services must actively engage with Council and there can be no room for complacency on the part of the Emergency Services that they are the custodians of all skill and knowledge.

The latter observation is not a complaint or criticism of the local emergency services either as it relates to the events of June 2016 or the Community Forums 2017. It is a statement that is solely designed to emphasise the importance of collaboration and partnerships. The community of the WSLGA would expect no less; they are entitled to no less.

### Recommendations

1. That Wollondilly Shire Council present this After-Action Report to the Office of Emergency Services NSW
2. That the Mayor and senior representatives of WSC meet with the Region Emergency Operations Controller, Assistant Commissioner Peter Thurtell to discuss Council's approach to emergency and crisis management planning, preparation, response and recovery arrangements with a view to emphasising closer collaboration and co-operation amongst the Emergency Services agencies, and
3. Wollondilly Shire Council be encouraged to continue its community education programs in all aspects of emergency and crisis management, most notably in the critically important area of community engagement.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist in this matter.

