



INVESTIGATION REPORT

“Report on the Community Resilience Innovation Program, Wollondilly Shire Council arising from a significant storm event at Picton in June 2016”.

CAVEAT

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1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 In consultation with the NSW SES, Council expedite its review its risk management strategies in relation to the flood Risk Mitigation Plan and explore if the flood card system can be administered across both organisations as a means of identifying properties in risk precincts of High, Medium and Low water heights (page 17)
- 2 That Council through its website, encourage residents and business operators to visit the NSW SES website with a view to developing personal or organisational disaster response plans (page 19)
- 3 That Council considers the web model utilised by Goulburn City Council and the all-hazards emergency information located on their website as a further potential safety and emergency guide to residents and business proprietors (page 18)
- 4 That Council creates a web link disaster management tab to list all of the combat agency links and the proposed toolkit (page 18)
- 5 That Council continues to liaise with the NSW Police and advocates for the continued implementation of the 'Living Alone' policy as developed by the NSW Police Force and consider its application to vulnerable residents (Page 19)
- 6 That Council includes in its community newsletter and Emergency Management Guide links to all combat agencies information regarding emergency management issues including Neighbourhood Safer Places (Page 19)
- 7 That Council raises the issue of spontaneous volunteering with the State Government and the application of insurance coverage and provision of PPE (Page 20)
- 8 That Council liaise with NGO and volunteer groups in the Wollondilly LGA and include a brief description of their available services on Council's website. As important, NGO and volunteer groups should consider and develop more effective communication strategies within the community (Page 20)
- 9 That Council continues to liaise with the Commonwealth and State Governments on the adequacy of health services during times of emergency response and recovery with a view to developing a more holistic and integrated approach to the delivery of those services (Page 20)

- 10 In Consultation with the South-Western Sydney Primary Health Network and South-Western Sydney Local Health District, Council assess the overall effectiveness of the Wollondilly Health Alliance to ensure requirements are contemporary and meet community mental health care support needs (Page 21)
- 11 That Council continues its discussions with relevant parties and stakeholders regarding the cleaning and maintenance of Stonequarry Creek (pp 21)
- 12 That Council continues with its maintenance program (Page 22)
- 13 That the Wollondilly Chamber of Commerce considers the development of a central register of the location of all gas cylinders that identifies the owners of property where the gas cylinder is located, together with the owner's contact and storage details within the property (Page 22)
- 14 That Council meet with telecommunications providers and Endeavour Energy to advocate for improved communication and power supply during emergency situations, so as to ensure effective communications and power supply are maintained during times of emergency (Page 23)
- 15 That Wollondilly Chamber of Commerce promotes the importance of adequate insurance coverage with local businesses (Page 23)
- 16 That Council advocates to the State Government and the Insurance Council of Australia the need for a comprehensive marketing campaign outlining the difficulties of non-insuring or under insuring homes and businesses and their contents (Page 23)
- 17 That Council continues to take a lead role and be the reference point for financial contributions at times of disaster, so as to ensure the receipt, accounting and equitable distribution of funds (Page 24)
- 18 That Council continues to make representations to lobby the NSW government regarding the streamlining of development application and planning processes with a view to a speedier resumption of business activity following a natural disaster event (Page 24)
- 19 That Council assists the SES to undertake an audit program of all storm water outlets to ensure they are serviceable and maintained. Further, that in consultation with the NSW SES, Council examines the issue of the supply and distribution of sandbags at a time of major flood crisis (Page 25)

- 20 That Council continues to support Local and Regional SES Controllers on the issue of recruitment of new members within the Wollondilly LGA (Page 25)
- 21 That Council continues to appoint a Community Liaison Officer to work the NGOs and charities at times of disaster and major crisis recovery events (Page 26)
- 22 That Councils' Community Resilience Committee annually co-ordinates a review and update of the Wollondilly Community Services Directory (Page 26)
- 23 That Councils' Community Resilience Committee considers the issue of a Recovery Framework (Page 27)
- 24 In consultation with the South-Western Sydney Primary Health Network and South Western Local Health District, Council refer to the Wollondilly Health Alliance the issue of well-being assessments and long-term needs identification for community mental health care support with a focus on significant disaster events (Page 27)
- 25 That council continue to utilise local media outlets where appropriate (radio and newspapers) as a means of effective communications with the local community at times of emergencies or disasters (Page 28)
- 26 That Council continues to give due consideration to the welfare of personnel during periods of emergency, crisis or disasters and review its existing HR policies (Page 28)
- 27 That Council supports the LEOCon to establish and position signage for the evacuation and emergency assembly points during the time of an emergency (Page 29)
- 28 That Council continue to work in collaboration with the commissioners NSW SES and Rural Fire Service to promote those services in the community and with a view to localised recruitment (Page 30)
- 29 That Council review an integrated mapping layer that includes information relevant to gas and electricity plants, schools, hospitals, aged care (including persons with special needs), special needs facilities and emergency service locations – police, ambulance, fire brigade, SES and RFS personnel (Page 31)
- 30 That Council in consultation with the State Emergency Management Committee's Working Group, further considers the effectiveness of the current

allocation of communications equipment and related protocols within the Local Emergency Management Centre Page 32)

- 31 That Council seeks the final written After-Action Report by the LEOCon, in respect of the storm event of 4-6 June 2016 (Page 33)
- 32 That Council consider the budgetary implications and related matters arising as a result of this Report and where appropriate seek funding through Federal and State agency partnerships and opportunities (Page 30)

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 In June 2016, a significant weather event impacted on the east coast of Australia. This event, known as an east coast low, went over several days and saw hundreds of millimetres of rainfall across metropolitan Sydney. This was not the first time that metropolitan Sydney had experienced such an event, however on this occasion the impact of the event spread to the Wollondilly Shire Council LGA, most notably, in the township of Picton.
- 2.2 The topography of Picton saw its CBD quickly inundated with storm water. Long-time residents noted that they had not seen that volume of rain in such a short period of time for many decades. Consequently, homes and businesses were inundated and significant damage occasioned to property. Fortunately, no lives were lost nor persons physically injured.
- 2.3 Communities in Australia who have experienced natural disasters are noted for their ability to respond to the disaster and focus on the requirements for effective response and recovery. Most notably whilst physical assets can mostly be recovered or replaced, the mental resilience of the community may take a lot longer to recover. Consistent disasters over time have the ability to erode personal and community resilience and confidence and it is on these occasions that the community looks for strong and decisive leadership.
- 2.4 In accepting its leadership role, Wollondilly Shire Council determined that if it were to provide better planning and greater preparation leading to more effective response and recovery arrangements, then it needed to turn to the community for its views – views that informed the Council's proposed Community Resilience Innovation Program (CRIP) and disaster response and recovery strategies for the future. Consequently, Council facilitated four community-based forums consisting of the general community, the business community, the not-for-profit and school's community, and, as important, the emergency services. This report outlines the issues emerging in each forum

and the consistent themes across each forum. It is this approach that forms the basis of our recommendations.

- 2.5 It is not a defeatist view to acknowledge that no plan can future-proof any community from natural or man-made disasters. Our expanding population and greater use of local facilities for residential living, recreation, sport, shopping or employment, sees greater use of local land. As Council engages in its planning arrangements for the best and most appropriate use of the land, so, too, it has a concomitant responsibility to plan for those occasions when a disaster strikes.
- 2.6 To this end, the work of federal and state-based agencies is useful, but local government, the closest of the three tiers of government to the people, needs to not only take account of the community's concerns and expectations, but as important, educate and prepare the community for the role that they too must play in the effective and timely response to disasters. It is a partnership that must be enduring and one that is critical to the survival of the community in the event of a disaster.

3. THE GENESIS OF THIS REPORT

- 3.1 Between 4 and 6 June 2016 an intense east coast low (ECL) was located along the entire NSW Eastern Sea Board. As a consequence of this significant weather event, heavy rain and damaging winds enveloped the northern and southern coastal areas of New South Wales, Sydney's northern beaches and the South-West metropolitan regions¹.
- 3.2 At a state level, the storm event resulted in more than 11,000 requests for assistance to the NSW State Emergency Services (SES). There were 310 flood rescues and 17 general rescues performed over this period. Unfortunately, two citizens lost their lives and considerable damage was occasioned to both private dwellings and businesses, and a consequent loss of personal property, assets and infrastructure. The Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) estimated the costs of the storm in excess of \$300M in NSW, to which is added the estimated cost of infrastructure repairs at \$17.5M².
- 3.3 As a consequence of this storm event, Natural Disaster Declarations were issued for 41 Local Government Areas, including Wollondilly Shire Council. The provision of these Declarations allowed the Commonwealth and State Governments to provide disaster assistance through the jointly funded

¹ The Bureau of Meteorology report that here had been only two other east coast lows with a not dissimilar impact this decade, namely, 2007 and 2015 ("About East Coast Lows").

² Report of the State Recovery Co-Ordinator, January 2017, p5.

Commonwealth-State Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA), to individuals, primary producers, small business and not-for-profit organisations³.

- 3.4 As a further consequence of the storm, the Prime Minister, the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP and the (then) Premier of NSW, the Hon. Mike Baird MP, visited Picton to gauge at first hand the impact on the local community.

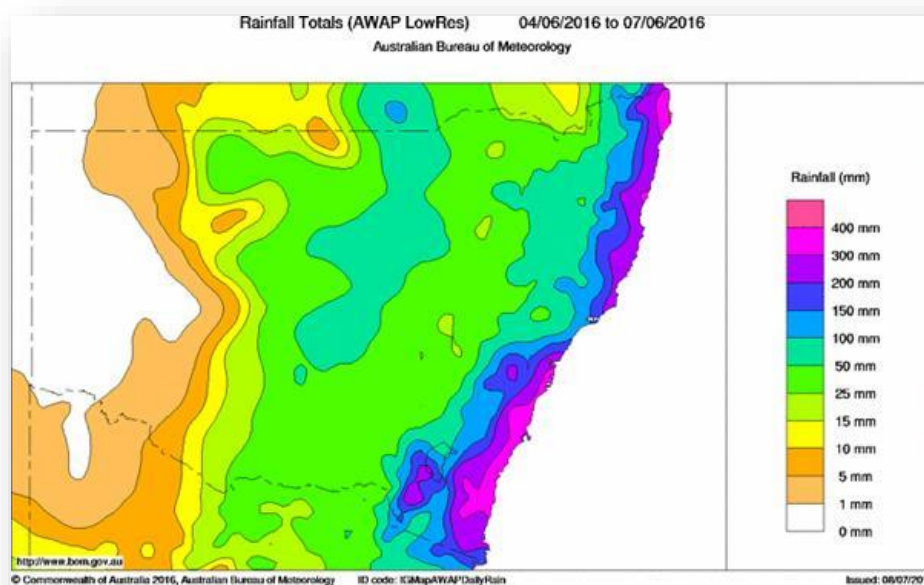


Figure 1: Rainfall totals between 4/6/16 – 7/6/16

- 3.5 On the 5 June 2016, the average rainfall across NSW was calculated to be the wettest day on record with a regional average of 73.11mm, surpassing the previous NSW-averaged record of 68.89 mm set on 19 January 1950. Also notable was the fact that previous extreme daily rainfall totals approaching this volume over eastern NSW all occurred in summer months and were all associated with tropical cyclones or former tropical cyclones⁴.
- 3.6 At a local level, significant damage to the central business district of Picton and adjoining residential properties was occasioned as a direct result of this weather event. Picton and its environs were heavily inundated with storm water with levels reported to be as high as 1.8 metres in some buildings. These levels, it has been said, exceeded the 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (1 in 100-year flood levels)⁵. It was reported that in a one-hour period to 6pm on the 5 June 2015, Picton (Stonequarry Creek) received 332mm of rain for the duration of

³ *Ibid*, p5.

⁴ *Opcit*, p11 (citing the Bureau of Meteorology as its authority).

⁵ 'Activate Wollondilly Discussion Paper 2017', Wollondilly Shire Council, January 2017, p7.

the storm event with 245mm recorded at the Picton Council Depot over three days⁶.

- 3.7 It has also been reported that 144 businesses in Argyle Street, Picton were directly affected by the storm with many closed indefinitely whilst renovations and refurbishments were undertaken. Similarly, 128 residents were also impacted with many residents losing all or a significant proportion of their possessions and personal effects⁷.
- 3.8 Beyond the town limits significant damage was also encountered on Wilton Road at Broughton Pass, between the townships of Wilton and Appin. As a result, Broughton Pass was closed due to a retaining wall failure that occurred on the 5 June 2016. Whilst the Broughton Pass reopened on 30 June 2017 the closure of the Broughton Pass (Cataract River) Bridge created an immediate and long-term impact on road users travelling to and from Appin via the Broughton Pass and across the Bridge.



Figure 2: Picton IGA store (Photo: News.com.au) and Broughton Pass damage (Photo: dailytelegraph.com.au)

4. RESPONDING TO THE EVENT OF 4-6 JUNE 2016

- 4.1 The overall effect of the storm event has been assessed against a number of indices including its social, economic, infrastructure and environmental impact.
- 4.2 The **social** impact of this event saw approximately 128 houses impacted in Picton and its immediate environs. The nature of the damage centred on storm damage, wind damage, leaking roofs and water inundation.

⁶ Report of the State Recovery Co-Ordinator, *ibid*, p10

⁷ 'Activate Wollondilly Discussion Paper 2017', *ibid*, p7.

- 4.3 In Picton, the Menangle Street (a major route to and from Campbelltown) was significantly impacted with 20 homes receiving over the floor inundation. St Anthony's Catholic School, Picton also received significant damage due to water inundation. The school was temporarily closed and alternate accommodation found for teachers and students.
- 4.4 The **economic** impact of the storm event in Picton estimated that 81 out of a total 144 businesses in the CBD, including not-for-profit agencies, were directly impacted and significantly damaged.
- 4.5 The economic impact across the state was of no less significance with areas of agriculture and aquaculture, including crop and stock losses, estimated to have cost \$38 million. Added to these figures must be the cost of re-establishment of those businesses, loss productivity and man-hours.
- 4.6 The **infrastructure** costs across the state were estimated to be in the order of \$10.580 million with significant losses to bridges, rail and road infrastructure.
- 4.7 The infrastructure damage in the Picton area was no less damaging and added to these costs is the cost experienced by businesses and families in maintaining near-to-normal routines in getting to and from various locations (work, school and business needs) through extended travel times. The closure of the Wilton Road Broughton Pass (Cataract River) Bridge, which carries a reported annual average daily traffic flow of 2,400 vehicles, was a major blow to the community.
- 4.8 The **environmental** costs were most noticeable in the coastal areas of the state, whilst the Picton area sustained damage due to soil erosion and the clean-up of debris in major areas, including the river area, as a result of various objects being washed down from properties due to the storm event⁸.
- 4.9 It must also be noted that the issue of insurance (adequacy and coverage) arose almost as quickly as the storm waters. The State Government appointed Mr David Owens APM as the State Recovery Co-Ordinator in respect of the storm event that had impacted on the state. His task was, amongst other things, to liaise with the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) regarding insurance-related matters. This matter is further outlined a paragraphs 4.16; 5.17.5; 5.18 and 5.19 of this report.
- 4.10 Against this background and whilst the combat agencies and Council focused on the response arrangements, so then the Wollondilly Shire Council moved to quickly establish its Local Recovery Committee on 6 June 2016. Subsequently Council established the Broughton Pass Task Force and the Picton Economic

⁸ Report of the State Recovery Co-Ordinator, Mr David Owens APM on the East Coast Low Event, June 2016.

Task Force both of which were designed, amongst other things, to restore community confidence and resilience.

- 4.11 Further, Council established the Wollondilly Recovery Information Point whose primary role was to provide much needed advice and reassurance to the affected community. A Social Recovery Committee (SRC) was also established to oversee the Mayor's Relief Fund. The purpose of the SRC was *"to provide specialised support and advice to the Wollondilly Local Recovery Committee in relation to social issues such as health, welfare, housing, transport, education and employment"*. Wollondilly Shire Council provided chairmanship and secretarial services to the SRC. (**Annexure 8**)
- 4.12 As well, Council established the Wollondilly Hotline for affected residents and during its operation some 146 calls were received⁹.



Figure 3: Wollondilly Information Centre

- 4.13 As combat agencies and the community moved to respond to the events of 4-6 June 2016, a further east coast low hit many of the same areas some 7 days after the initial event. This latter event impacted on the response and recovery effort, but did not daunt the resilience of the agencies or the community to maintain their focus toward restoring their respective communities to a level of normalcy. Very much then the lead in the effective response and recovery arrangements was that of a number of relevant Local Governments and in this regard Wollondilly Shire Council responded quickly to community expectations and needs.
- 4.14 Whilst this weather event and its aftermath has been the subject of other formal reports¹⁰ and agency-based reviews, the Wollondilly Shire Council sought to extend its understanding of what had occurred in its community and the social, familial, business and opportunity costs associated with the storm. Beyond the

⁹ The Hotline and Recovery Information Point continued until 24 June 2016, after which residents still had access to advice, information and assistance through Council and as it was needed. A series of web pages are available from Council's website to provide advice and information at <http://www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au/resident-services/storm-information/>.

¹⁰ Report of the State Recovery Co-Ordinator, *opcit*, p5.

services provided by Council it also established Disaster Welfare Services to co-ordinate outreach in affected residential areas to provide personal support, information and referral to other agencies¹¹.

- 4.15 The Council provided a number of other essential recovery-based activities, including the engagement of the Office of Small Business Commissioner and its Advisors to assist the 144 damaged businesses in the Picton CBD. Anecdotal reports indicated that 60% of businesses in Picton reported 100% losses and it was critical to assist owners and business operators in the recovery process.
- 4.16 As noted, the State Recovery Coordinator, Mr David Owens APM met with the General Manager, Risk, Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) to discuss, amongst other things, the contentious issue of storm -viz- flood debate. Subsequent advice from the ICA indicated that in Picton, all residential claims had been accepted and all but two of the commercial property claims had been accepted. Following public concern, on the 7 July 2016 representatives of the ICA, individual insurance company representatives, the NSW Ombudsman and Legal Aid held an information night for residents and business owners to speak directly to those representatives¹².
- 4.17 The traumatic nature of an event of this type had a predictable impact on the health and well-being of many people within the Wollondilly Shire and this was no more so than in the area of mental health. Given the occurrence of natural weather events of this type in NSW, it is encouraging to know that the Department of Health (NSW) conduct the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program whereby people who are in possession of a Health Care Card can be referred by their general practitioner to contracted mental health professionals and receive up to 12 sessions per calendar year free of charge.
- 4.18 Commendably, Wollondilly Shire Council also run the Wollondilly Health Alliance (WHA) program for its residents who, amongst other things, may be at low to moderate risk of suicide. Access to healthcare professionals is provided for unlimited sessions over a two-month period.
- 4.19 For postcodes 2571 to 2574 (all within the Wollondilly Shire Council area) between April and May 2016, there were 19 ATAPS referrals, of which 5 related to suicide prevention. By contrast, post the June 2016 storm event in the Wollondilly Shire Council area, there were 30 referrals to ATAPS, of which 16

¹¹ *Ibid*, p45.

¹² *Ibid*, p45.

related to suicide prevention¹³. Both initiatives at state and local level are welcome and supportive programs (**Annexure 7**).

- 4.20 The closure of Broughton Pass and the impact of the overall storm event remained an issue not only for residents, but Council as well. Council kept residents and businesses informed of progress toward the reopening of the bridge and related issues via its webpage at <http://www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au/resident-services/infrastructure/current-projects/broughton-pass-wilton-road/>¹⁴.
- 4.21 Two community-based appeals were established to assist local residents and businesses at this critical time in their personal and professional lives. By 6 July 2016, the Mayor's Relief Appeal had been activated and within a month of the flood \$137,000.00 had been raised¹⁵. Equally, Mr. Jai Rowell MP (Member for Wollondilly) established a Flood Relief Appeal, which was administered by the Lions Club.
- 4.22 As important, other community-based activities were generated to support friends, neighbours and colleagues at this critical time. And, whilst each of the abovementioned activities is commendable, Wollondilly Shire Council felt that from the perspective of community education, preventative action plans and a community-based general awareness perspective, they, as the elected representatives together with Council's staff, needed to do more.
- 4.23 The 'need to do more' is not solely focused on significant storm events such as that which impacted on the Wollondilly Shire over the 4-6 June 2016. Disasters may be caused due a range of factors including natural disasters (flood, bushfire, earthquake, landslide or storm), significant accidents involving human error (air, road or workplace), or, lamentably by the actions of criminal activity (terrorism). Planning and preparation at all levels are a critical requirement as to how the community, its representatives (combat agencies and governments at all levels), react and respond to those emergencies, and how those arrangements focus on individual and organisational resilience and recovery, and as important, the recovery of the wider community.
- 4.24 It is Wollondilly Shire Council's 'need to do more' that is the primary focus of this report.

¹³ Report of Mr Rob Moran, Team leader, Community projects and Events, Wollondilly Shire Council, 12 July 2017.

¹⁴ Report of the State Recovery Co-Ordinator, *opcit*, p46.

¹⁵ The Mayor's Relief Fund ultimately distributed \$232,000 in direct support of those affected by the storm event of 5 June 2016.

5. ACTIVATE WOLLONDILLY – DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INNOVATION PLAN

The Community Resilience Innovation Program (CRIP).

- 5.1 Having discussed the broad parameters of future emergency and crisis response and recovery planning, Wollondilly Shire Council endorsed a Grant Application to the Office of Emergency Management (OEM), Justice NSW. This task was referred to Mr Luke Johnson, General Manager, Ms Ally Dench, Executive Director, Community Services and Corporate Support, and Mr Rob Moran, Team Leader, Community Projects and Events for submission of the application.
- 5.2 On 26 September 2016, Council submitted a comprehensive application to OEM (**Annexure 1**) for funding under the Community Resilience Innovation Program (CRIP). This Program *“supports a range of locally-based projects designed to increase all-hazard disaster preparedness and build community capacity and resilience. CRIP projects are based on collaboration and partnership between local community organisations and emergency services agencies”*¹⁶.
- 5.3 The aims of CRIP are to:
- 5.3.1 Encourage local communities to engage in creative, community-focused activities that will enhance disaster resilience
 - 5.3.2 Develop effective partnerships and build networks between local community organisations, councils and emergency service agencies
 - 5.3.3 Foster ways to effectively engage the local community in emergency management and resilience building
 - 5.3.4 Share knowledge and lessons learnt about new approaches and models through project evaluation, and
 - 5.3.5 Support initiatives that can be integrated into current business and maintained in the longer term¹⁷.
- 5.4 The CRIP is administered by the OEM and funded jointly by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments through the National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Resilience (NPANDR) arrangements. Approval for funding rests with

¹⁶ Annexure 1, page 1 – “About the program”.

¹⁷ Opcit.

the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. On 24 January 2017 Council's application was approved.

Implementing the CRIP at a local level.

- 5.5 To give practical effect to the approval for funding through the OEM, Wollondilly Shire Council developed the 'Activate Wollondilly Discussion Paper 2017' (**Annexure 2**).
- 5.6 In her foreword to the Discussion Paper, Cr Judith Hannan, Mayor, Wollondilly Shire Council, flagged the importance of how Council, in collaboration with the residents and business community, should move forward. She proposed the conduct for four targeted Community Forums involving residents, the business community, non-government organisations (including schools and charities), and the emergency services (NSW State Emergency Services, NSW Police Force, Fire and Rescue NSW, Ambulance Service and Rural Fire Service NSW)¹⁸.
- 5.7 The overall benefit of Council's approach was to develop "*...a more co-ordinated approach to disaster recovery that meets the unique needs of the community, its topography and geographic spread*". As well, Council proposes to develop "*...a toolkit...that includes information, resources and strategies that will equip Council, stakeholders and residents with information that will guide them through steps or sequences that may save lives, protect their property and develop cohesiveness after a natural disaster*". Very much then and in the spirit of co-operation, Council saw the issues arising from the events of 4-6 June 2016 as a further opportunity to strengthen its partnership with all elements of the Wollondilly Local Government Area.
- 5.8 Ahead of the Forum meetings, Council circulated its 'Discussion Paper' (**Annexure 2**) to and within the community. In circulating the paper, Council sought community feedback on a number of key questions, including –
- 5.8.1 The community's appreciation of response and recovery arrangements
 - 5.8.2 The role of non-Government agencies in disaster recovery
 - 5.8.3 The role of the Wollondilly Local Emergency Management Committee
 - 5.8.4 The Wollondilly Local Disaster Recovery (LDR) Plan and knowledge of the Plan

¹⁸ Annexure 2, Mayor's Foreword, p3.

- 5.8.5 The role of the private sector in supporting disaster recovery
 - 5.8.6 The role of Council's sub-committees in disaster recovery
 - 5.8.7 Awareness of the Mayor's Relief Fund
 - 5.8.8 Effective communications at time of an emergency
 - 5.8.9 How well did Council perform as a result of the 2016 storm event
 - 5.8.10 What were the strengths and weaknesses of the LDR Plan, and
 - 5.8.11 What modification might be necessary to the Plan.
- 5.9 These questions sought to build on Council's appreciation of the community's initial feedback following the 4-6 June 2016 storm event¹⁹. Apart from the importance of the responses, Council sought to link those responses and its forward planning to the Wollondilly Shire '*Community Strategic Plan 2033*', in particular, Strategy IN4, "*Emergency Management: Plan for and assist in the community's response to emergencies such as bushfires and floods*"²⁰ and the Wollondilly '*Disaster Recovery Plan*'.

The Community Forums

- 5.10 A total of four 'Activate Wollondilly' community forums were held on –
- 5.10.1 7 February 2017 (residents)
 - 5.10.2 15 February 2017 (business community)
 - 5.10.3 21 February 2017 (community-based organisations and charities), and
 - 5.10.4 1 March 2017 (emergency services – first responders).
- 5.11 In total, 120 community members and agency representatives attended and there was a strong engagement within each group. Representatives of Nemesis Consultancy Group independently facilitated the forums²¹. Each session was open by the Mayor, Cr Hannan, and Council's senior staff²² actively participated in the discussions and responded to issues raised.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp17-19 inclusive.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p19.

²¹ Mr Ken Moroney AO APM, former Commissioner and Mr David Owens APM, former Deputy Commissioner, NSW Police Force, respectively. At different time both occupied the position of State Emergency Operations Controller, whilst Mr Owens has been appointed on a number of occasions as the State Recovery Co-Ordinator with emphasis on natural disasters.

²² General Manager Luke Johnson, Ms Ally Dench, Mr Rob Moran and Mr Michael Malone.

- 5.12 In her address to each forum, Cr Hannan welcomed participants and encouraged both their participation in the discussions as well providing a response to the questions posed in the Discussion Paper (**Annexure 2**).
- 5.13 Each Forum meeting was conducted at the Picton Bowling Club.
- 5.14 In reporting on each meeting, it is important to remember that the observations of various participants are but that, their opinions, observations and constructive comments. They must be viewed in that light and responses built into Council's forward planning arrangements as appropriate. Importantly, there are reoccurring themes across the various Forums and Council should be cognizant of those reoccurring or interrelated themes. Of equal note is the fact that Council is not responsible for every issue raised. There are clearly defined roles and responsibilities in response and recovery and they do not all fall under the rubric of Council's charter.

Community Forum – 7 February 2017

- 5.15 The key issues emerging from the Community Forum were identified as –

5.15.1 **Identification of residents at risk.**

A number of residents raised their belief that Council's employees and emergency service responders did not know or did not appear to know where the high-risk residences were located. This belief was based on their observation that affected residents did not see relevant personnel in the two days post the initial flood event. It was suggested that Council endorse a zoning concept with high-risk areas clearly identified and actioned at times of emergency response. The application of NSW SES "Flood Cards" as a model was considered appropriate. Questions were posed as to whether or not Council can make changes to its zoning laws so as to not allow buildings in flood affected areas or impose such reasonable restrictions as may be necessary, e.g. building heights. Equally, Council's ability to resume properties in flood prone areas to prevent development was also raised.

RECOMMENDATION 1: In consultation with the NSW SES, Council expedite its review its risk management strategies in relation to the flood Risk Mitigation Plan and explore if the flood card system can be administered across both organisations as a means of identifying properties in risk precincts of High, Medium and Low water height (page 17)

5.15.2 **Roadways.**

Community representatives commented on their observations that water in Argyle Street (the main street) was unable to run off and as a result, it washed back along the street and inundated properties. The sheer volume of rain falling at the time and increasing water levels compounded the situation. As well, a heavy volume of water descended from Margaret Street into the CBD area. The community representatives opined that in their view gutters and drains had not been adequately prepared in the eventuality of such an event. Council's representatives noted that gutters had been cleared before 4 June 2016 and the extraordinary weather event had exacerbated the situation.

The views expressed were noted.

5.15.3 **Development of a toolkit for residents.**

Community representatives expressed support for the provision of a 'toolkit' for residents and business operators wherein there were clear and unambiguous messages as to how to react in the event of a disaster or emergency. Similar information sheets are provided by the NSW RFS (Fire Safety and Evacuation Plan) and NSW SES (Storm Safe Guide).

RECOMMENDATION 2: That Council through its website, encourage residents and business operators to visit the NSW SES website with a view to developing personal or organisational disaster response plans (page 19)

RECOMMENDATION 3: That Council considers the web model utilised by Goulburn City Council and the all-hazards emergency information located on their website as a further potential safety and emergency guide to residents and business proprietors (page 18)

5.15.4 **Communications and media coverage.**

Community representatives raised their belief that compared to, say, a major bushfire period when there was adequate information flowing to the public by authorities and the media, this, they believed, was not the case over the 4-6 June 2016 period. They did not feel as though they were adequately informed as to the status of the storm event. Equally, they believed that key messages had to turn on the dual requirements of quality of information and its timeliness. The use of portable signs and Variable Message Boards was raised.

It was noted that the NSW SES (the lead combat agency in this situation) now have a Bureau of Meteorology expert in their Operations Centre during significant events of this type. Consequently, the SES webpage, including Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) maps, are updated. Council has the ability to

link its webpage to the SES webpage as a means of frequent updates and ensure adequacy of information flow to the community.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That Council creates a web link disaster management tab to list all of the combat agency links and the proposed toolkit (page 18)

5.15.5 **Information format.**

Whilst community representatives were appreciative of the various information technology sources available to update their knowledge, they acknowledged that in this instance there were periods of no power and consequently, no Internet access. As well, one of the major Telco's, Telstra appeared to have suffered damage to its site and there was no ability to make calls or access information. Further, whilst residents were appreciative of the Council's initiative in establishing the Council Recovery Information Kiosk, a number of them were not aware of this important communications and information asset. As well, views were expressed regarding the desirability of having a Council or Emergency Services representative attend their property for a welfare check on residents, in particular, those who may be in ill health or infirmed. Information could then be provided to residents of all relevant services and how to access those services.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That Council continues to liaise with the NSW Police and advocates for the continued implementation of the 'Living Alone' policy as developed by the NSW Police Force and consider its application to vulnerable residents (Page 19)

5.15.6 **Evacuation and Assembly points.**

Community representatives expressed their frustration at not being aware of emergency evacuation and assembly points and asked that Council closely examine this matter. In the event that the closest evacuation or assembly was cut off, residents sought advice as to alternate points where they might attend in their immediate area.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That Council includes in its community newsletter and Emergency Management Guide links to all combat agencies information regarding emergency management issues including Neighbourhood Safer Places (Page 19)

5.15.7 **Volunteers.**

Whilst the attendance of many volunteers from various locations to assist the response and recovery arrangements was commendable, the issue of their coverage under Public Liability insurance was raised. Council advised that volunteers were covered under the auspices of its Public Liability insurance policies. As well, residents raised the attendance of volunteers who assisted in clearing properties and whilst equally commendable, there was a need for greater co-ordination of effort and the need for the property or business owner being present when clean-ups were occurring. Instances of personal or sentimental property being thrown out by accident were mentioned.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That Council raises the issue of spontaneous volunteering with the State Government and the application of insurance coverage and provision of PPE (Page 20)

5.15.8 **NGO and volunteer agencies.**

Community representatives praised the actions of the various NGO and volunteer agencies at the time of and immediately post the storm event. This point further raised the issue that many residents were unaware of the role and functions that these organisations and agencies performed. They felt that the community would benefit from a wider awareness and appreciation of the roles that these groups fulfil in times of emergency.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That Council liaise with NGO and volunteer groups in the Wollondilly LGA and include a brief description of their available services on Council's website. As important, NGO and volunteer groups should consider and develop more effective communication strategies within the community (Page 20)

5.15.9 **Resource sharing and access to the Tip.**

Community representatives expressed their appreciation to Council on the prompt removal of rubbish and debris and the free access they were provided to Council's tip. They also commended the City of Sydney and Camden Councils for the assistance rendered to both the Wollondilly Shire Council, its residents and business outlets.

The views expressed were noted.

5.15.10 **Welfare Services.**

Whilst there was an understandable focus on the recovery arrangements, anecdotal evidence was that there were some residents who did not cope as well from a psychological point of view. There is an obvious need for the resources of the commonwealth and the state governments to work in close

liaison with the Council to provide for both the short and long-term physical and psychological needs of the community in matters of this type. It was acknowledged that Council did provide relevant services, but a review of the effectiveness of those services was, they believed, necessary.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That Council continues to liaise with the Commonwealth and State Governments on the adequacy of health services during times of emergency response and recovery with a view to developing a more holistic and integrated approach to the delivery of those services (Page 20)

RECOMMENDATION 10: In Consultation with the South-Western Sydney Primary Health Network and South-Western Sydney Local Health District, Council assess the overall effectiveness of the Wollondilly Health Alliance to ensure requirements are contemporary and meet community mental health care support needs (Page 21)

5.15.11 **Emergency Services response.**

Community representatives expressed a view that whilst they were appreciative of the responses provided by the emergency services (SES and Police), some were of the view that their visibility (which goes to reassurance of the community) could have been better. They were of the view that roads were not closed as quickly as they might thereby permitting vehicles, including sightseers, access to areas thereby hindering the response arrangements. They were also of the view that priority was given to businesses in Argyle Street, when there were equal priorities within the residential areas that had been heavily impacted by the storm. The issue of the adequacy of warning from the SES was further raised.

The facilitators of this Forum undertook to discuss the community's observations at the forthcoming Emergency Services Forum. (This action was subsequently completed).

5.15.12 **The cleaning of Stonequarry Creek.**

The issue of who bore responsibility for the general maintenance of Stonequarry Creek was raised and whose responsibility it was to maintain the creek to an appropriate standard. It was stated that the poor state of the creek prior to the storm event was a major contributing factor to the resultant flooding of the southern area of Argyle Street, and that the overall physical state of the creek along its length contributed to the position. Council officers acknowledged the complexity of establishing ownership of the creek which included, government, residents and council, and the

resultant obligations that individual and collective groups carried in this matter.

RECOMMENDATION 11: That Council continues its discussions with relevant parties and stakeholders regarding the cleaning and maintenance of Stonequarry Creek (pp 21)

5.16 The briefing notes relevant to this Forum are attached at **Annexure 3**.

Business Community Forum – 15 February 2017

5.17 The key issues emerging from the Business Community Forum were identified as-

5.17.1 **Water blockages.**

As part of the beautification of the main street, Council had erected sandstone blocks or cement borders around a number of trees. In the storm event of 4-6 June 2016, these blocks or borders acted as a 'dam' and impeded the flow of water away from the area. Further, there was anecdotal comment that Council's officers had difficulty in locating storm water drains to check on possible blockages. These drains need to be more clearly highlighted or defined.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That Council continues with its maintenance program (Page 22)

5.17.2 **Electricity and gas issues.**

Some present expressed the view that power was unable to be restored as quickly as it might due to reports of allegedly leaking gas cylinders in some locations. It was reported that FRNSW were unable to enter a private property where reports had been received that gas was leaking from an unknown device (cylinder) and that owners of the property were not readily available.

It is understood that FRNSW has no real power to enter and inspect unless there is an actual or suspected leak and they have been called. The expansive or widespread nature of LP gas tanks may make it impractical to develop and maintain a centralised register of owners and users.

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Wollondilly Chamber of Commerce considers the development of a central register of the location of all gas cylinders that identifies the owners of property where the gas cylinder is

located, together with the owner's contact and storage details within the property (Page 22)

5.17.3 **Communications.**

It was reported that the Telstra network failed during the storm event, whilst the Optus network maintained capacity. Business owners reported that residents received status reports via SMS messages from the SES and RFS, however business proprietors did not²³. Further, there were understandable losses of electricity over a sustained period of time, which resulted in additional difficulties for local businesses.

RECOMMENDATION 14: That Council meet with telecommunications providers and Endeavour Energy to advocate for improved communication and power supply during emergency situations, so as to ensure effective communications and power supply are maintained during times of emergency (Page 23)

5.17.4 **The cleaning of Stonequarry Creek.**

As with the community-based discussions on this issue, the business community expressed their concern and their perceptions of the impact that the state of Stonequarry Creek prior to the storm event had on the overall flooding situation.

This issue has been covered in recommendation 9.

5.17.5 **Insurance issues.**

Business operators reported difficulty in contacting their insurers, whilst others advised that the response from insurance companies varied from Company to Company. Most notably, this occurred where business abutted each other, but had different insurance providers. Reportedly, a number of businesses were underinsured. Business owners were encouraged to undertake an annual stock take and secure their records offsite to avoid loss of those records at a time of disaster. At the time of the Forum it was reported that 98% of businesses had been compensated and 4 were awaiting advice on settlement. Further, concern was expressed at the perceived inordinate delay of 13 weeks before Centrelink paid relief to employees.

It was agreed that businesses should maintain an asset register of stock, equipment and capital items.

²³ If this reported observation is correct it may have been due to the fact that residents were on the Council's register, whilst business owners, who resided outside of the area, were not on the register.

RECOMMENDATION 15: That Wollondilly Chamber of Commerce promotes the importance of adequate insurance coverage with local businesses (Page 23)

RECOMMENDATION 16: That Council advocates to the State Government and the Insurance Council of Australia the need for a comprehensive marketing campaign outlining the difficulties of non-insuring or under insuring homes and businesses and their contents (Page 23)

5.17.6 **Charities and fundraising.**

There was reported confusion over access to funds such as the Mayor's Relief Fund and the monies raised by Mr Jai Rowell MP, by the business community. Advice to the business community was that funds raised in these and other charities were for residents and not businesses. It was felt that the rules around access to charitable funds donated in times of disaster, needed to be better explained. Similarly, observations were made regarding the operation of a number of well-intended charities, and it was felt that ideally only one charity should exist for this purpose.

RECOMMENDATION 17: That Council continues to take a lead role and be the reference point for financial contributions at times of disaster, so as to ensure the receipt, accounting and equitable distribution of funds (Page 24)

5.17.7 **DA approval process.**

Business owners expressed frustration at the processes associated with development applications and the expeditious approval of same post a disaster event. Perceptions existed of discrimination within Council as to how matters were dealt with and approved or rejected. Business proprietors expressed their belief that there was a bias in favour of prioritising the preservation of heritage-listed buildings. Concern was expressed with delays in the post disaster period when businesses were seeking to return to a level of normality.

RECOMMENDATION 18: That Council continues to make representations to lobby the NSW government regarding the streamlining of development application and planning processes with a view to a speedier resumption of business activity following a natural disaster event (Page 24)

5.17.8 **Council's letter drop.**

The business community expressed its appreciation to Council for the letter drop on day 2 of the crisis. The letter and its advice were well received.

The supportive comments were noted.

5.17.9 **Preparedness.**

Concern was expressed regarding the size and capacity of the current storm water outlets. Those present emphasised the need for Council to strengthen its focus on the state of the outlets and ensure that they remain free of grass, undergrowth and debris. Further, sandbags were seen as an issue both in terms of supply and distribution. An appropriate plan needs to be developed for such contingencies.

RECOMMENDATION 19: That Council assists the SES to undertake an audit program of all storm water outlets to ensure they are serviceable and maintained. Further, that in consultation with the NSW SES, Council examines the issue of the supply and distribution of sandbags at a time of major flood crisis (Page 25)

5.17.10 **NSW State Emergency Services.**

Business representatives complimented the NSW SES on the role they played over the 4-6 June 2016 and in ensuing days. They noted however, that the SES Unit, Picton is located on the opposite side of the creek and there were reports of the Unit being isolated and unable to access the CBD, or return to the Unit Headquarters. Comment was made regarding the numerical size of the Wollondilly Unit and more needed to be done to foster and promote the SES with a view to recruiting additional personnel.

RECOMMENDATION 20: That Council continues to support Local and Regional SES Controllers on the issue of recruitment of new members within the Wollondilly LGA (Page 25)

5.17.11 **Appreciation.**

The business community extended a vote of appreciation to Mr Rob Moran and his team for the advice, guidance and assistance rendered during and post the storm event. This, together with the emotional support that was provided, was most welcome.

The congratulatory remarks of the community were noted.

The Forum notes of the 7 February 2017 are at **Annexure 4.**

5.18 It is important to note that one of the key issues for the business community forum was the delay experienced in resolving insurance claims. Whilst challenging for the general community who were similarly affected, but whose claims were resolved in a reasonable period of time, the business community experienced delays in resolving their claims. In such cases the timely resolution

of claims had a direct bearing on business continuity and, as important, the livelihood and income of business proprietors and their staff.

- 5.19 The comments regarding the expeditious resolution of insurance claims and, where relevant, development applications, are matters that need to be addressed by government and the insurance industry generally because of the observation of the impact that such delays have not only on business continuity or the resumption of business, but, perhaps more importantly, the physical and mental health well-being of those affected. Doubtless, this is and will continue to be a case where Council should continue to champion the cause of those whose life and livelihood are impacted in such circumstances.

The NGO and Charities Forum – 21 February 2017

- 5.20 The key issues emerging from the non-government organisations and charities forum were identified as –

5.20.1 **Council and Non-Government Organisations.**

Those attending this Forum were drawn from a cross-section of NGOs and charities based in and around the Picton area. They expressed their understanding that in a crisis such as that which occurred on 4-6 June 2016, the Council's immediate priorities were understandable. However, they felt that Council should consider the appointment of a Liaison Officer who could work with the NGOs and charities to facilitate a wider and better co-ordinated relief and recovery effort. They posed the question of the desirability of having a central register of support and charitable agencies where Council could call on them at times of need.

RECOMMENDATION 21: That Council continues to appoint a Community Liaison Officer to work the NGOs and charities at times of disaster and major crisis recovery events (Page 26)

5.20.2 **Services Directory.**

The Forum encouraged Council to consider the development of a community-based Services Directory that could be updated by all participating agencies and organisations, and maintained in hardcopy or electronic form.

RECOMMENDATION 22: That Councils' Community Resilience Committee annually co-ordinates a review and update of the Wollondilly Community Services Directory (Page 26)

5.20.3 **Council Recovery Plan.**

Forum participants sought access to Council's Recovery Plan. They were advised that the Plan is available on the Council's webpage.

The views expressed were noted.

5.20.4 **27. Recovery Registration Card.**

Forum participants reported that victims of the storm expressed frustration and angst at having to repeat their individual stories a number of times to different support agencies. This, the victims found was emotionally draining as well. The question of a Recovery Registration Card (similar to a Disaster Victim Identification Card) with all relevant particulars recorded therein should be developed for distribution to relevant agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 23: That Councils' Community Resilience Committee considers the issue of a Recovery Framework (Page 27)

5.20.5 **Co-Ordination of NGO and Charity Services.**

In the immediate aftermath of the storm it was reported that a number of NGOs and charities assisted impacted families or victims of the storm, but this activity was not co-ordinated to any degree between these groups. Whilst the issues of privacy were acknowledged, it was the express view of Forum participants that information exchange across agencies would have been useful. In some instances, there were reported instances of 'service hopping'.

The discussions were noted and this matter is covered in recommendation 18.

5.20.6 **Longer term recovery strategies.**

Whilst there was an understandable focus on the immediate needs of the general and business communities and the restoration of services, longer term planning was required when the support of Federal and State government agencies moved on from the community, but the residual issues remained for some time thereafter. The very nature of a significant crisis like that of the 4-6 June 2016 saw issues such as physical needs addressed, whilst infrastructure, accommodation and the psychological impact on individuals and the community remained for some time. Long-term recovery plans needed to acknowledge this point and Council were encouraged to liaise with the Office of Emergency Management, NGOs and charities to develop relevant initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 24: In consultation with the South-Western Sydney Primary Health Network and South Western Local Health District, Council

refer to the Wollondilly Health Alliance the issue of well-being assessments and long-term needs identification for community mental health care support with a focus on significant disaster events (Page 27)

5.20.7 **Disaster Victim Registration.**

Information was sought as to organisational responsibility for disaster victim identification (DVI). This was discussed and whilst this issue was not a critical issue on the 4-6 June 2016, or in subsequent days, the importance of the issue was acknowledged. Participants were advised that in such situations this was a functional responsibility of the NSW Police Force working in close collaboration with other agencies and that existing policies and procedures regarding DVI were deemed appropriate.

The views expressed were noted and covered by recommendation 20.

5.21 **Social Media.**

Forum participants noted the vast amount of information that was circulated via social media sites, most notably Facebook, regarding the storm and its aftermath. Some of this information was useful and informative, however a significant amount of the information was misleading and in part, incorrect. Participants noted the challenges of policing these social media sites. The greater use of local radio stations serving the Macarthur area were thought to be a better option and more reliable. The authoritative voice of a Council representative on local radio was deemed more factual than, say, speculative, questionable and unauthorised comments on social media.

RECOMMENDATION 25: That council continue to utilise local media outlets where appropriate (radio and newspapers) as a means of effective communications with the local community at times of emergencies or disasters (Page 28)

5.22 **Welfare of Council's staff.**

Whilst commending the actions of Council's staff under the direction of General Manager, Mr Luke Johnson, Forum participants noted the exceptional hours that many worked (reportedly up to 17 hours or more at a time) and Council were encouraged to develop appropriate human resource management practices that operated in support of staff in difficult and trying circumstances such as those during and post the June 2016 storm event.

RECOMMENDATION 26: That Council continues to give due consideration to the welfare of personnel during periods of emergency, crisis or disasters and review its existing HR policies (Page 28)

5.23 Evacuation Points.

Concern was expressed at the lack of signage relating to evacuation points and emergency assembly points, and as important, alternate sites. This was a view also expressed at the Community Forum of 7 February 2017. Both groups were of the same opinion that signage need to be enhanced both as these signs relate to their strategic location and their visibility.

RECOMMENDATION 27: That Council supports the LEOCon to establish and position signage for the evacuation and emergency assembly points during the time of an emergency (Page 29)

5.24 Elderly and People with a Disability.

Concern was expressed by the Forum regarding at risk groups within the community, namely, the elderly, or, say, people with a disability or the infirmed. Council noted the existence of Registers and encouraged their ongoing development where in times of emergency or crisis, checks could be made on the safety and well-being of vulnerable persons. The 'Living Alone' Register developed by the NSW Police Force and a Risk Register developed by NSW Health may serve as templates for such a document. The NGOs and Charities undertook to assist Council in the development and maintenance of an appropriate register.

The views expressed were noted and this issue is covered by Recommendation 4.

5.25 NSW State Emergency Services.

The NSW SES were encouraged to become more actively engaged in community education programs including active participation at sporting and cultural events, school liaison, service clubs and community-based activities, whereby the importance of safety, security and resilience in disasters or related events could be more effectively communicated. To this end, the Forum noted the small size of the Wollondilly SES Unit (some 8 in all) and encouraged NSW SES Headquarters to actively engage with the Council and the community with a view to facilitating community education awareness and recruitment.

The issues raised were noted and this matter is covered by recommendation 17.

The Forum notes of 21 February 2017 are at **Annexure 5**.

The Emergency Services Forum – 1 March 2017

5.26 The key issues emerging from the Emergency Services Forum were identified as-

5.26.1 **Growth patterns in the Wollondilly LGA.**

The Facilitators referred to available and public data that indicated that the Wollondilly LGA, like much of the Macarthur area, was undergoing extensive growth. Consequently, it was appropriate that Council and the Emergency Services engage in open dialogue to review disaster planning, preparation, and response and recovery arrangements. The events of the 4-6 June 2016 were a catalyst for this review, however the unpredictability of disasters or crisis issues reinforced the need for Council and the Emergency Services to constantly review and plan in order that its overall preparation, response and recovery arrangements were consistent with best practice.

The comments were noted.

5.26.2 **Ready access to qualified emergency service personnel.**

A number of agencies commented on the fact that the quick and developing nature of the storm event of 4-6 June 2016 and the subsequent inundation, took the community, including the emergency services community by surprise. Consequently, staffing numbers were not at an optimum level and agencies struggled to cope in the initial response period.

The broad notion of a reserve group of experienced and qualified personnel was raised and supported in principle, however, this is an issue for the state government to consider in terms of recruitment, retention, entitlements, uniforms, education and training and the unresolved issue that such employment may have on, say, superannuation entitlements for some. In the interim, recruitment to the Wollondilly SES Unit and RFS Unit was seen as a priority and Council is encouraged to work in liaison with the Commissioner, NSW SES and Commissioner, RFS on volunteer recruitment to local emergency services organisations. It was acknowledged that on the 4-6 June 2016 the nature of the storm event was geographically widespread across the Wollondilly LGA, and the local SES Unit did their very best to respond in the overall circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION 28: That Council continue to work in collaboration with the commissioners NSW SES and Rural Fire Service to promote those services in the community and with a view to localised recruitment (Page 30)

5.26.3 **Council's mapping system.**

Discussion turned to the issue of Council's mapping system and proposed enhancements that would support its functionality. This could be done by inputting additional information into 'Intramaps' and would include information relevant to gas and electrical plants, schools, hospitals, aged-care (including persons with special needs), special need facilities and emergency service locations (police, ambulance, fire brigade et al).

RECOMMENDATION 29: That Council review an integrated mapping layer that includes information relevant to gas and electricity plants, schools, hospitals, aged care (including persons with special needs), special needs facilities and emergency service locations – police, ambulance, fire brigade, SES and RFS personnel (Page 31)

5.26.4 **Agency awareness and effective communications.**

Whilst the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) had provided advice regarding the pending and subsequent impact of the east-coast low on the coastal areas of NSW, there appeared to be a paucity of information regarding the movement of the low inland and into the Wollondilly catchment area. The speed of the low coupled with sheer rain volume would appear to have initially overwhelmed the responding agencies (including the local community), before they were able to marshal all available resources and implement response arrangements. Questions were posed as to the adequacy of information flow to the local SES Unit (as the lead combat agency).

Mr Owens advised that a BoM expert has now been deployed to NSW SES HQ Operations (Wollongong) during major events or operations of significance and this would ensure an enhanced and timelier information flow at times of significant weather-related incidents.

The comments were noted.

5.26.5 **Effectiveness of communications.**

It was agreed that at the time of the storm event there were communications difficulties, which, at times, might be described as conflicting. With misinformation and the geography of the area involved, it took time to resolve and determine the true facts of a number of matters. Isolation of people was a key issue as were the overwhelming number of calls for assistance. It was acknowledged that the ability to marshal human resources impacted on the speed with which the Emergency Operations

Centre (OEC) was stood up. Technical communications were impacted when power was lost and the Telstra facilities were temporarily lost.

The LEOCon, Superintendent Hansen observed that there was a loss of communications at one point between the State Emergency Management Centre, Sydney and the Region Emergency Management Centre, Liverpool.

Co-ordination and maintenance of communications was seen as critical to successful outcomes. Equally, the effectiveness of communications at the time of major disasters was critical to how agencies responded to calls for assistance and as important, across and between each other. The relevance of a state-of-the-art Communications Centre was discussed in order that the EOC effectively discharge its responsibilities, including the management of the disaster or crisis.

RECOMMENDATION 30: That Council in consultation with the State Emergency Management Committee's Working Group, further considers the effectiveness of the current allocation of communications equipment and related protocols within the Local Emergency Operations Centre (Page 32)

5.26.6 **After action assessment by the LEOCon.**

The LEOCon, Superintendent Hansen, raised a number of issues, which he believes require attention as part of effective forward planning and preparation arrangements. His observations were that –

- The Emergency Services and Council's officers responded in a highly effective manner
- Whilst some of the response issues could have been actioned in a more timely manner, the overall circumstances of the weather event had to be considered
- Council responded in a most effective and timely manner in the way it directed and facilitated the recovery arrangements. Its acquisition of satellite phones was fortuitous and they provided welcome telecommunications assistance. The extension of these phones to the wider Emergency Services would be worthy of further consideration (Council and Police have been issued with them)
- The recovery processes were challenging given the amount of rubbish and debris that had accumulated or was placed on roadways or footpaths. Council responded quickly and health issues were avoided

- The issue of road closures viz road openings was a challenge with the need to balance Council's requirement to clean the affected area ASAP, and the need to prevent sightseers
- Whilst volunteers are well intentioned there is a need to both manage and know who is undertaking such work, their contact details and where they have been deployed. This is as much for their safety as anything else
- Media management was and always will be a challenge
- The 'Living Alone' Register was a concept worthy of reintroduction and expansion to include vulnerable members of the community
- Following the visit of prominent politicians, Natural Disaster Declarations were forthcoming. Whilst welcome in terms of the services that flow from such Declarations, this happened before Council were notified
- The use of the SES flood intelligence cards was most helpful, in particular, in determining appropriate evacuations sites
- Whilst there is a need to gauge the overall effectiveness of response and recovery arrangements during and post the storm event, future planning needs also to occur. To this end, in consultation with the Emergency Management Course Co-Ordinator, School of Public Health, Charles Sturt University, the LEOCon had designed an Operational Debrief Template (**Annexure 3**), and
- His analysis of the responses was not to hand at the time of the Emergency Services debrief, but will be reported by him to a future meeting of the LEMC.

RECOMMENDATION 31: That Council seeks the final written After-Action Report by the LEOCon, in respect of the storm event of 4-6 June 2016 (Page 33)

5.27 The Forum notes relevant to the 1 March 2017 are at **Annexure 6**.

6. AN OVERALL ANALYSIS OF ISSUES RAISED ACROSS THE FORUMS

- 6.1 The conduct of each of the Forums was useful for a range of reasons, nonetheless of which was the fact that it allowed the participants to highlight issues or concerns, acknowledge the appropriateness of actions taken or those actions that they believe might have been taken in a more expeditious manner. The Forums were never intended to be a 'blame exercise', rather, how might the community and its agencies better plan, be better prepared, respond as the circumstances permit and, as important, recover the community.
- 6.2 Importantly, Wollondilly Shire Council's actions in facilitating the Forums allowed the community a voice in reviewing what occurred at the time of and post the storm event of 4-6 June 2016. Equally, it gave a voice to the residential and business communities and the agencies that serve them. By any measure that level of community and local representative government interaction is to be acknowledged for what it is and should serve as a model for community-based co-operation.
- 6.3 In no order of priority there were some reoccurring themes across the Forums. These and other matters have been more widely touched on in this report, however key observations of participants are worth reiteration. Indeed, they form the basis of the recommendations of this report.
- 6.4 The reoccurring themes included the need for –
- 6.4.1 Council to develop an Awareness Register of people at risk, most notably isolated, aged, infirmed or handicapped persons, in particular, those living alone
 - 6.4.2 The clear marking of evacuation and assembly points and as important, alternate sites
 - 6.4.3 Ongoing Council-sponsored community education and awareness programs of what to do in times of disaster or significant crisis
 - 6.4.4 Clearly defined roles and parameters for volunteers who attend to assist the community in times of crisis or disaster
- 6.5 Council to develop an integrated management plan for NGOs and Volunteer Agencies in order to deliver a more effective and co-ordinated response to recovery arrangements

- 6.5.1 Council to consider the appointment of a Community Liaison Officer to work with NGOs and Volunteer Agencies at times of disaster and major crisis
- 6.5.2 Council to make representations to Telecommunications Carriers regarding the provision of ongoing services at times of disaster or major crisis. Further, that such discussions include the relocation of the Carriers' Base Stations and related equipment to higher and more secure grounds
- 6.5.3 Council to make representations to the utility companies regarding the provision and restoration of emergency gas and electricity supplies at times of disaster and major crisis
- 6.5.4 Council to make representations to the Insurance Council of Australia regarding the physical presence of Insurance Companies within the community at a time of disaster or major crisis
- 6.5.5 Greater co-ordination of charitable events (Mayor's Appeal etc) which seek to aid the recovery of the community. Further, that Council work with the NGOs and Volunteer Agencies on longer term strategies which continue long after the disaster has past
- 6.5.6 Council to make greater use of local media and radio as an information base to the community on issues impacting on the disaster or crisis, and those arrangements that Council and other relevant agencies have implemented in response to the incident and the recovery of the community
- 6.5.7 Council to consider the refinement of its DA processes with a view to expediting applications following a disaster
- 6.5.8 Council to closely consider the health and welfare needs of its personnel who are called upon to assist in the response and recovery arrangements impacting on the wider community
- 6.5.9 Council and the Emergency Services to work in close collaboration in the development or renewal of their emergency planning, preparation and response arrangements
- 6.5.10 Council to review the effectiveness of its Mapping System (Intramaps), and whether there is a need to redevelop the system in light of the events of 4-6 June 2016

- 6.5.11 Council to examine the operational effectiveness of its Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and whether it is feasible for Council and the Emergency Services to make an approach to the State Government to refurbish its EOC
- 6.5.12 Council make representations to the Commissioners, NSW State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service, to review the effectiveness of their operations within the Wollondilly LGA and with a particular emphasis on recruitment and retention of staff, facilities and equipment
- 6.5.13 Consultation between the Local Emergency Operations Controller and Council to review the 'Operational Debrief' arising from the storm event of 4-6 June 2016 and seek to implement all relevant and practical solutions, and
- 6.5.14 Council renews its efforts to negotiate with land owners and the State Government on the need to maintain Stonequarry Creek to a standard that is acceptable to Council.

7. THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

- 7.1 There can be no doubt about the importance of effective planning, preparedness, response and recovery arrangements when responding to disasters or events of major significance. We are fortunate in NSW that the agencies of government are actively engaged in a dialogue which ensures that as agencies they are individually and collectively able to respond at times of greatest need.
- 7.2 Of equal importance to these arrangements, is the requirement for timely and effective engagement of the community as to the role that they must play as part of the overall arrangements, and most importantly, their personal safety, well-being and protection. The most effective tool with which to engage the community is that of open and transparent communications. Knowledge is the key to an informed community; knowledge is key to survival in periods of natural or man-made disaster.
- 7.3 Informed knowledge allows the agencies of government, organisations, businesses and individuals to assess the risks, develop and implement an agreed response plan and, importantly, take such measures as are appropriate. In the case of federal, state and local agencies there rests a cadre of knowledge and skill which, when required, is able to be implemented not only on the basis of risk management strategies, but on the basis of strong and effective

partnerships. This may not always be the case with organisations, businesses or individuals who do not normally operate in this environment and it behoves agencies to build the body of knowledge in the broader community so important to response, recovery and resilience.

- 7.4 Depending on the nature of the disaster, so then agencies of the state have a lead role to play. That said, no one agency has a lead role when it comes to effective communications with the community in preparedness and resilience. Indeed, it is a matter of leadership and to this end local government has a critical leadership role to play in the context of community education and community engagement. Notably, this important requirement is what led Wollondilly Shire council to engage in this review.
- 7.5 Why then engage in community disaster awareness at local government level? Is this not, say, the role of state and federal agencies? The answer it may be argued is obvious in that people at the local level feel a greater affinity with their local Council than they do, say, with state and federal-based agencies. A comparative observation may be made of local newspapers viz-a-viz metropolitan or national media outlets, whereby anecdotal comment is that the local community place a higher level of trust in their local newspaper than they do in other media outlets. So, too, it may be said that the community have a higher trust in their local Council.
- 7.6 What emerged in the various forums conducted by Wollondilly Shire Council is that individuals, businesses and organisations want to be informed in the most expeditious way possible. Decisions at all levels will be made on the timeliness or immediacy of the information they receive and this may involve, preventing death or serious injury. Effective and informed community engagement therefore is critical to the way forward both as it relates to planning and response arrangements.
- 7.7 What then are the key elements of an informed Community Engagement Plan that both engage the community and enhance their knowledge and preparedness?
- 7.8 The key elements of such a Plan might include, but are not limited to –
- 7.8.1 Providing consistent messages to the community through Council's outlets (website, newsletters, community education programs, media communications etc)
- 7.8.2 Engaging in ongoing evaluation so as to gauge the effectiveness of Council's community awareness and education programs, and

- 7.8.3 Determining the focus of community-based awareness programs based on historical factors such as floods, bushfires etc.
- 7.9 Such plans are not new. Indeed, in its progress toward developing localised community awareness programs or initiatives, Wollondilly Shire Council should have recourse to existing complementary programs or initiatives.
- 7.10 These include –
- 7.10.1 **National Strategy for Disaster Resilience Community Engagement Framework Handbook** (a nationally agreed framework)
- 7.10.2 **Behavioural Insights Community of Practice** (organised through the Behavioural Insights Unit, Department of Premier and Cabinet)
- 7.10.3 **Get Ready Initiative** (a co-ordinated approach by the Office of Emergency Management, Department of Justice and combat agencies on preparedness messaging to the community)
- 7.10.4 **Hazard Specific Targeted Programs** (eg risk mitigation strategies such as the NSW SES Storm Safe Plan and NSW RFS Bush Fire Survival Plan – programs designed to enhance community awareness and resilience)
- 7.10.5 **Council Initiated Consultative Forums** (designed to provide the local community with both ongoing education on disaster awareness and preparedness, and as important, to provide community feedback to Council on those strategies that are most effective). Such Forums need clearly defined, roles and functions on the one hand, and as important, a defined purpose with clear Terms of Reference, and
- 7.10.6 **Community Engagement Mandate** (arising from the community-based forums and its own initiatives, Council should develop key and inter-related proposals or a mandate that ensures that it is best placed to respond to the communities needs and expectations at times of disaster. Further, that they act as the voice of the community in emergency management preparedness, response, recovery and resilience initiatives by developing strong networks with key federal and State agencies).
- 7.11 At the time of the preparation of this report, we are aware that the Office of Emergency Management, Department of Justice, is finalising the ‘*State-Level Emergency Risk Assessment 2017*’. We are sure that the document when approved for circulation will assist Council in the development of the various

initiatives it has proposed through its *Community Resilience Innovation Plan* or those that are recommended by this report.

- 7.12 Finally, there are a number of complementary policy documents that Council needs to consider in the finalisation of any proposals arising from this report and its recommendations. These include the 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*".
- 7.13 **RECOMMENDATION 32:** That Council consider the budgetary implications and related matters arising as a result of this Report and where appropriate seek funding through Federal and State agency partnerships and opportunities (Page 30)

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 It is a matter of fact that disasters can occur at any time. They may be as a consequence of a natural disaster (flood, bushfire, earthquake or similar occurrence), or man-made act (criminal or accidental). As critical as it is to plan for such contingencies, so, too, it is as critical to prepare the response and recovery arrangements should such an event or events occur.
- 8.2 It is also accepted that the one characteristic that communities look for at times of major disasters or significant events, is demonstrable leadership. The leadership to which we refer is to be found in the work of the combat agencies (Police, Fire and Rescue, Ambulance, SES, RFS Volunteer Coastal Patrol etc.) and how they respond to the particular emergency. Doubtless, their role is one of clear leadership that goes to reassure and provide confidence. As important as the work of the combat agencies is, so, too is the work of key support agencies such as Councils, in this case Wollondilly Shire Council.
- 8.3 The work of Councils in the emergency response and recovery environment must be based on the potential of what might occur. Doubtless, this is important, but, just as important are the practical lessons to be drawn from those disasters in which Councils have a hands-on role. In June 2016 Wollondilly Shire Council found itself in such a position when storms inundated the township of Picton and its environs. Fortunately, there was no loss of life, however, significant trauma, stress and loss of property was occasioned.
- 8.4 With a sense of community responsibility, Wollondilly Shire Council sought to understand what had occurred in its local government area, why it had occurred,

- the social, economic, business and personal impact the event had on its community, and, as important, what actions need to be taken to minimise the impact that such events have should, lamentably, such an event occur in the future.
- 8.5 It is accepted that adequate planning and preparation for natural or man-made disasters are key to the future. Equally, when such events occur it is necessary that such planning and preparation is reflected in timely responses by the combat agencies (including Council). Of further importance is how the same planning, preparation and response lead to the effective short and long-term recovery of the community. These four key inter-related factors – planning, preparation, response and recovery are germane to reassurance in the community and its resilience to move forward.
- 8.6 There is an accepted maxim that *'in order to look forward, one has to stop and look back over one's shoulder to see where it is we have come from'*. Wollondilly Shire Council, led by its Mayor, Cr Judith Hannan, fellow Councillors and senior staff, initiated four forums to engage with the community and *'look back over their collective shoulders'* to the events of 4-6 June 2016. Those forums were constructive, focused and provided the opportunity to enhance emergency planning and preparation requirements for the future. The deliberations of those forums have been reported and proposals or recommendations outlined to Council. Indeed, there were a number of reoccurring themes that emerged from these forums.
- 8.7 It is a matter for Council as to how it adopts the recommendations arising from the various Forums and its Community Resilience Innovation Plan. Equally, and due to the unpredictability of natural and man-made disasters there is important and complementary work being done by the agencies of government that should assist Council in the ongoing development of its plans.
- 8.8 Such plans can never be finite. Indeed, in the case of the Wollondilly Shire Council, with its expanding population and business development potential, so then its planning in the area of emergency and disaster response management will need to be based on enhanced risk management principles and strategies. The solutions are to be found in enhanced technology, agency co-operation, planning and preparation. Of these requirements, it will be the issue of community engagement that really goes to the heart of awareness, response, recovery and resilience. The community of the Wollondilly LGA should expect no less.
- 8.9 We commend our report and its recommendations to Council for further consideration.

K E Moroney AO APM
22 August 2017

D Owens APM

12. ANNEXURES

1.	Application for CRIP Grant
2.	Activate Wollondilly Discussion paper
3.	Community Forum 7 February 2017
4.	Business Community Forum 15 February 2017
5.	Not-for-Profit and Schools Forum 21 February 2017
6.	Emergency Services Forum 1 March 2017
7.	Wollondilly Health Alliance
8.	Wollondilly Social Welfare Recovery Sub-Committee
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