

Balonne Shire Council

2021-22 Southern Queensland Floods Local Recovery and Resilience Plan

Endorsed by the LDMG on 7 September 2022



Recovery narrative

About our community

Located approximately 500 kilometres west of Brisbane in South-West Queensland, Balonne Shire covers an area of 31,152km² and has a resident population of 4,286 persons (2021). The Balonne Shire is bordered by Maranoa Regional Council in the north, Western Downs and Goondiwindi local government areas in the east, and Paroo shire in the west. The Shire rests on the border of New South Wales and serves as a bridge between the expanse of the great outback to its west, and the Great Dividing Range and capital city to the east. St George is the hub of the Shire and sits at the intersection of six highways providing connectivity and services for the transportation of goods and services to outlying areas and serves as a central meeting place for residents and the travelling public. Major towns within the shire include St George, Thallon, Dirranbandi, Bollon, Nindigully, Mungindi and Hebel.

Numerous Traditional Owner Groups span across the Balonne Region and these groups are acknowledged.

Agriculture is the main industry sector in the region notably: cotton and grain production, cattle, sheep and goat grazing and horticulture (grapes, onions, blueberries, carrots & garlic). Additionally, the Shire is within the agricultural catchment of emerging agtech and agscience centres of Toowoomba and Goondiwindi and tourism, small industry, and retail are growing sectors.

Balonne Shire boasts a unique and relaxed lifestyle, strong community values and diverse natural landscapes.

About the disaster event

Severe weather events have impacted the Balonne Shire between November 2021 to May 2022.

1. Central, Southern and Western Queensland Rainfall and Flooding (10 November – 3 December 2021)
2. Southeast Queensland Rainfall and Flooding (22 February – 5 April 2022)
3. Southern Queensland Flooding (6 - 20 May 2022)

Significant human and social, economic and road and transport impacts occurred across the Shire as a result of these three major events. The townships of Hebel and Dirranbandi experienced extensive isolation during this period. Hebel was isolated from Dirranbandi for a total of 64 days between 1 December 2021 and 17 May 2022 and Dirranbandi was isolated for a total of 10 days. Additionally, many individual properties across the shire were also isolated for extended periods of time which extended beyond this timeframe.

Closures were seen across all major roads to the shire including the Castlereagh Highway, Carnarvon Highway, Moonie Highway, and Balonne Highway. Major Road closure impacts included:

- Castlereagh Highway between Dirranbandi and Hebel was intermittently closed for a total of 64 days between 10 December 2021 9 June 2022; and
- Castlereagh Highway between St George and Dirranbandi was intermittently closed for a total of ten days during the period 21 December 11 March 2022.
- Bollon Dirranbandi Road closed for over 50 days since November 2021

The Balonne Shire Local Disaster Management Group was activated for a period of 301 days during the 2021/2022 disaster season.

Local Recovery Group

Chaired by: Mayor Samantha O'Toole

Supported by: Ron Petterson - Local Recovery Coordinator and Recovery and Resilience Taskforces (Sub-Groups): Human and Social, Economic, Environment; and Infrastructure (Buildings and Roads and transport)

Key stakeholders

Balonne Shire Council, Balonne Shire community members, Australian Red Cross, Care Balonne, Lifeline, Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DSDSATSIP), Department Energy and Public Works (EPW), Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES), Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), Queensland Police Service (QPS), Rural Fire Services Queensland (RFS), State Emergency Services (SES), Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA), Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR), Department of Environment and Science (DES), Department of Resources (DR), Department of Education (DoE), Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), Queensland Health, AgForce Queensland, Churches of Christ Care Warrawee Aged Care Service, Sunwater and Ergon Energy, Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (SDILGP).

Recovery objectives

- 1 Immediate response and ongoing recovery activities ensure the community has access to psychosocial support services.
- 2 Immediate response & recovery activities ensure the community has access to financial support services.
- 3 Immediate response & recovery activities ensure road safety issues are addressed, damaged road furniture replaced, and roads are re-opened.
- 4 Implement an effective & efficient process to enable, essential public infrastructure, council-owned facilities, and recreational areas to be cleaned, repaired or replaced in line with protocols.
- 5 The environmental restoration and protection (prevention of the spread of weeds) program has been developed, implemented and progress monitored effectively.
- 6 Response and recovery activities ensure primary producers have access to financial support services to restore/rebuild businesses.
- 7 Response and recovery activities ensure businesses have access to financial support services to restore/replace infrastructure.
- 8 Identify and promote funding opportunities to ensure holistic community-led recovery and resilience-building initiatives across all recovery pillars.
- 9 Develop, implement, and monitor a strategy to attract tourists to the region.
- 10 The community and visitors are participating in sports, community and/or recreation meetings and/or events.
- 11 The community has access to essential grocery supplies and medications during the response and recovery from flooding.
- 12 Implement an effective and efficient process to enable human and animal welfare (Japanese Encephalitis) concerns are identified and addressed in line with protocols
- 13 Holistic community-led and resilience initiatives have been identified, developed, implemented and progress monitored.
- 14 Identify and promote funding opportunities to strengthen the region's recovery and resilience capability and mitigate future potential public safety risks for future disaster events.
- 15 Advocate / Seek funding to engage a Local disaster Officer to work with the LDMG on Disaster Management and Recovery

Measures of success

Human and Social

- Coordinated outreach calls and/or visits to isolated individuals/communities have been completed, human and social and financial impacts have been identified and referrals were made to relevant partner agencies where required.
- Students and staff have returned to school.
- Community members have:
 - returned to school
 - returned to work.
 - accessed financial assistance where required.
 - accessed psychosocial support where required.
 - accessed essential food and fuel where required.
 - attended essential appointments (medical/allied health); and
 - recommenced participating in health services, aged care and nursing home outings, programs, and activities.
- Community and visitors support and participate in sporting, community and/or recreation meetings and/or events.
- Community and visitors are accessing sporting, community and/or recreation clubs.
- Council and public facilities and venues have reopened and are being accessed by the community and visitors.
- Youth-specific mental health and wellness programs have been implemented and are being accessed by youth.
- Community-based mental health intervention and wellness programs have been implemented and are being accessed by community members.
- Alternate delivery models for services and support have been identified and implemented and are being accessed by relevant clients.
- Recovery and resilience-building initiatives and projects have been identified, implemented and are being monitored.
- Debrief has been held and lessons identified incorporated into relevant policies and procedures in preparation for future events.
- Holistic community-led recovery and resilience-building initiatives have been identified, implemented and are being monitored.
- Community debriefing has been held and lessons identified incorporated into relevant policies and procedures in preparation for future events.

Economic

- Economic impact on businesses, agriculture and tourism have been ascertained and opportunities to promote/drive economic recovery have been implemented.
- Financial assistance has been secured through activation of extraordinary funding measures and is being accessed by primary producers and businesses as required.
- Industry has identified and accessed information on funds, grants, and loans available from government and other entities.

Economic (cont.)

- Industry has identified and accessed information on funds, grants, and loans available from government and other entities.
- Strategies implemented to reduce logistical barriers (including transportation) have been successful.
- Holistic community-led recovery and resilience-building economic initiatives have been identified, implemented and are being monitored.
- Businesses and industries have access to information on funds, grants, and loans available from the government and other entities.
- Financial advisory support services are being accessed by community members.

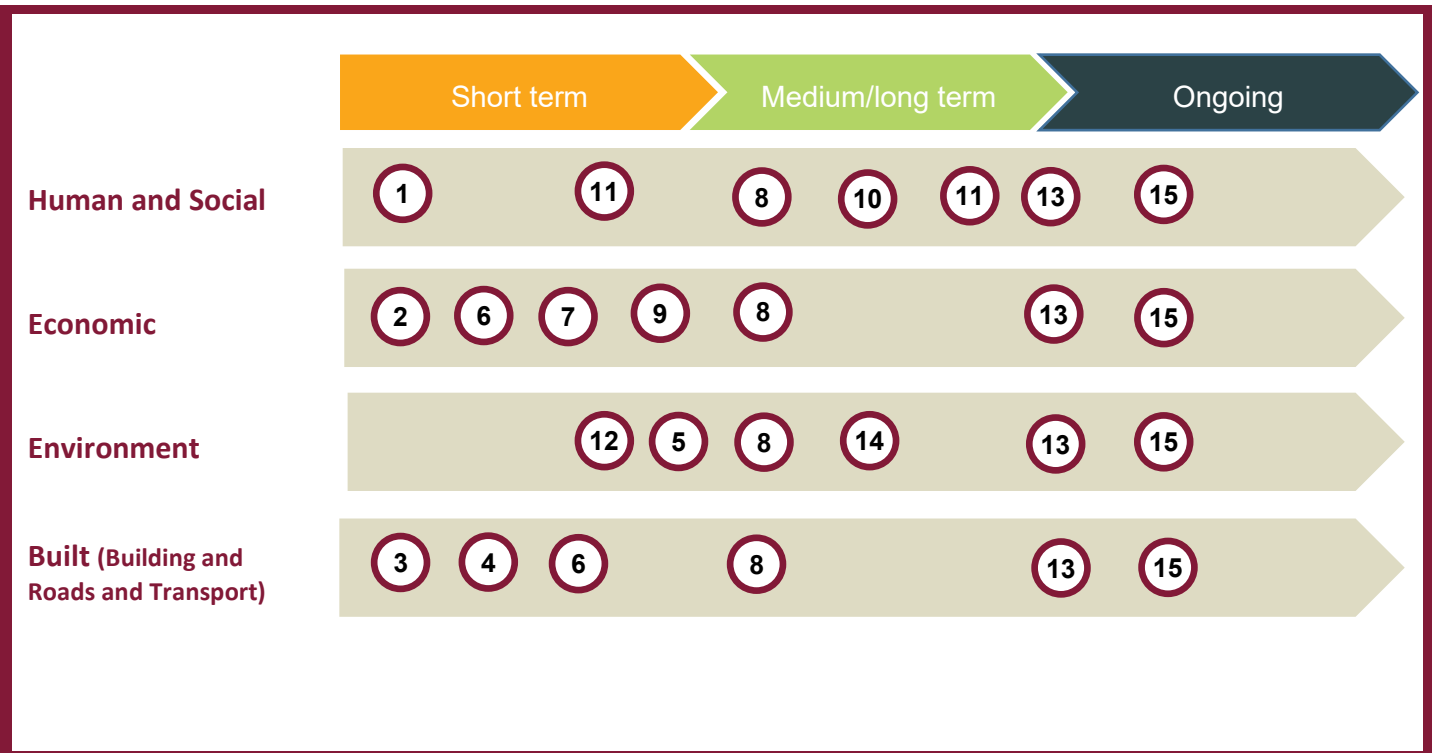
Environment

- Damage assessments have been completed, environmental impacts have been identified and mitigation strategies developed and implemented
- Environmental hazards have been mitigated through the provision of appropriate information (including hazardous waste disposal, biosecurity measures, and safe vegetation clearing)
- Vector control measures to address insect infestations have been implemented and there is a reduction of mosquitoes and sandflies across the shire.
- Green and timber wastes (flood debris) on properties across the shire have been removed and appropriately disposed of.
- Power has been reconnected to Council assets including shelters, park lights and electric BBQs along the Balonne River, St George.
- Flood warning system across the region has been upgraded and is fully integrated and operational and reporting accurate and timely data.

Infrastructure (Buildings and Roads and transport)

- Damaged property including sheds, fences and machinery and equipment have been repaired and/or replaced.
- Roads are open and operational after emergent works and full repairs have been completed.
- Andrew Nixon Bridge, St George has been reopened and is fully operational.
- Damaged road furniture has been repaired and/or replaced.
- All Public infrastructure has been repaired and/or replaced and is fully operational.
- Road pavement, culvert and drainage infrastructure across impacted areas have been repaired and/or replaced and are fully operational.
- Betterment applications are submitted (if applicable) for known trouble hotspots to lessen effect in the future.
- Levy banks have been repaired and are fully operational.
- SW rail line has been repaired and is fully operational.

Recovery timeframes



Human and Social

- Cumulative psychosocial impacts on the community as a result of drought, COVID-19 and the 2020 flood event, exacerbated by three 2021/22 concurrent flooding events, leading to flood-related job losses, increased financial stress due to flood-related reduction in income and/or work hours and increased living expenses.
- Other psychosocial impacts on the community include:
 - prolonged isolation for townships of Hebel, Dirranbandi, Thallon, Mungindi and Nindigully and surrounding rural properties as a result of flood-related road/highway closures;
 - students and staff unable to attend Hebel and Dirranbandi schools causing students to miss an estimated 50 days of in-person schooling as a result of flood-related road/highway closures;
 - Thallon State School was disrupted due to flash flooding and Levy closure impacting access to the school for students and staff;
 - parents having to apply for leave and/or work from home to look after children as a result of Hebel, Dirranbandi, and Thallon State School closures;
 - restrictions to essential food supplies and fuel due to flood-related road closures and transport vendors/transport unable to access Dirranbandi and Hebel;
 - flood impacts exacerbated existing disadvantages in the community resulting in an increased need for psychosocial support services;
 - disruption to the provision of in-home and centre-based services and support; and
 - community members unable to attend work or essential appointments (medical/allied health) due to flood-related;
- Loss of community connectedness due to:
 - the cancellation/postponement of:
 - sports and community meetings;
 - sports and recreation events;
 - community events;
 - health services, aged care, and nursing home outings, programs, and activities; and
 - gatherings for religious worship.
 - closure and/or restrictions to:
 - Council and public facilities and venues such as libraries, Visitor Information Centres, BBQ facilities, public swimming pools and public toilets;
 - sporting, community, and recreation clubs;
 - recreational areas and camping grounds across the shire; and
 - tourist attractions and tours across the shire.
- Potential public safety risks resulting from:
 - gaps in flooding warning system:
 - misinformation regarding river heights/peaks due to no river gauges in smaller tributaries.
 - reliability issues with manual gauges due to transient population, corporatisation of land holdings and loss of local knowledge
 - river gauge infrastructure owned by various agencies (BoM, Council, Depart. of Natural Resources).

Economic

- Loss of income/profits for:
 - Agriculture industries due to:
 - cotton gin closure resulting in staff layoffs;
 - increase in costs to dry the cotton that is salvageable;
 - cotton harvesting halted due to extended periods of flooding;
 - loss of product due to flood inundation into harvested cotton bales;
 - loss of and/or devaluation of crops (cotton and grain) and inability to get product to market;
 - weed impacts resulting in additional herbicide costs;
 - delays in freight delivery creating challenges for meeting commodity requirements due to damaged SW rail freight railway line;
 - reduced areas available for grain and cereal planting for winter cropping due to inundation and saturation of paddocks
 - reduced grain and cereal harvest impacting producer and contractor cash flow; and
 - seasons pushed back impacting the flow of workers north to south.
 - Primary Producers due to:
 - stock losses due to:
 - deaths resulting from cattle escaping from paddocks where fences were destroyed; and
 - disease (long-term effects).
 - animal weights below saleyards charts for optimal return resulting in significant losses;

Economic (cont.)

- lack of access to and from feedlots due to flood-related road closures; and additional vet-related costs due to outcalls, and veterinary products/treatment.
- Increased financial burden for:
 - Agriculture industry due to:
 - damaged/destroyed fencing.
 - damaged/washed out internal access roads.
 - loss of topsoil; and
 - damage to on-farm plant and equipment.
- Flood impacts exacerbated financial stress on individuals and families due to:
 - being isolated and not being able to travel to work due to flood-related road closures.
 - not being able to work on properties due to road closures and inaccessibility to paddocks;
 - pockets of acute disadvantaged individuals and family members due to increased cost of living; and
 - inability to attend work due to home-schooling requirements.
- Interest accrued to small businesses and primary producers due to late payments resulting in cash flow constraints and financial pressure.
- Building maintenance repairs due to inundation in Dirranbandi
- Council due to damage and/or loss of public infrastructure.
- Increased freight costs for primary producers and small businesses due to diversions and road closures on state highways.
- Small businesses are unable to move products in or out of areas due to transportation impact and lack of drive-through consumers.
- Tourism and related businesses as a result of road closures across the shire due to lack of staff/customers, accessibility to businesses and goods and cancellation of sporting and community events;
- Levy closures at Thallon isolating townships impacting business income
- Freight/transportation companies are not able to use state highways due to flood-related road closures and diversions.
- Contractors unable to work due to widespread flooding of fields and road closures.

Environment

- Minor loss of quality agricultural soils across the shire due to flood waters.
- Topsoil losses and soil fertility (organic losses)
- Weed transfers occurring in riverine areas during flooding.
- Increase in weeds and green waste (flood debris) in river systems across the region.
- Public health and biosecurity concerns due to the increase of mosquito and sand-fly populations.
- Disconnection of power to Council assets including shelters, park lights and electric BBQs along the Balonne River, St George.

Infrastructure (Buildings and Roads and transport)

- Repeated removal and reinstallation of St George River Foreshore equipment such as BBQ and other infrastructure due to floodwaters.
- Repeated inundation at Mungindi Barwon River Park requiring removal and reinstallation of equipment such as BBQ and other infrastructure due to flood waters.
- Damage to levy banks due to repeated flooding and repeated closures and openings.
- Penstocks leaking in the Mungindi levy causing damage, requiring repair work.
- Damage to road pavements, culverts, and drainage infrastructure to many council roads.
- Damage to local roads as a result of floodwater. Several local roads/streets repeatedly closed between 1 Dec 2021 and 10 June 2022.
- Several state roads were closed across the region for the duration of the event as a result of flood waters across the road including;
 - Moonee Hwy – St George to Westmar
 - Carnarvon Highway – Dirranbandi to St George
 - Carnarvon Highway – Dirranbandi to Hebel
 - Balonne Highway between St George and Bollon
 - Mitchell Hwy
- Additionally, 20 roads required emergent works and through the Reconstruction of Essential Public Assets, a further 90 roads required more reconstructive works. (However, inspections, assessments and submissions are still being finalised so this increase in number)
- Fencing on properties damaged/destroyed.
- SW rail freight line damaged as a result of floodwater.

Human and Social

- In partnership with relevant local service provider's coordinate:
 - outreach calls/visits to individuals/communities isolated from flood waters to assess human and social impacts and provide access to psychosocial and financial support services when required; and
 - recovery support education sessions for community members.
- Provision of essential food and fuel supplies to Dirranbandi, Hebel and Bollon as required.
- Coordinate an event debrief with Council staff and LDMG to inform plan updates and processes.
- Identify and coordinate recovery events for identified communities to promote community connectedness.
- Coordinate community debrief to ascertain what worked well and what needs improvement
- Identify and implement youth-specific mental health and wellness programs.
- Deliver community-based mental health intervention and wellness programs.
- Re-open roads to enable students and staff to return to Hebel, Dirranbandi and Thallon State Schools, parents to return to work and community members to attend essential appointments (medical/allied health).
- Identify and implement alternate delivery models for services and support.
- Reschedule and promote:
 - sports and community meetings;
 - sports and recreation events; and
 - community events.
- Recommence health services, aged care, and nursing home outings, programs, and activities.
- Reopen:
 - Council and public facilities and venues such as libraries, Visitor Information Centres, BBQ facilities, public swimming pools and public toilets;
 - sporting, community, and recreation clubs;
 - recreational areas and camping grounds across the shire; and
 - tourist attractions and tours across the shire.

Economic

- Assess the economic impact on businesses, agriculture and tourism and promote opportunities to drive economic recovery.
- Secure financial assistance through activation of extraordinary funding measures for primary producers, small businesses, and not-for-profits.
- Industry has identified and accessed information on funds, grants, and loans available from government and other entities.
- Ensure barriers to logistical issues (including transportation) are reduced.
- Promote positive news stories about the local economy and market stability/recovery.
- Stimulate tourism through identification and promotion of funding opportunities to impacted businesses.
- Work with primary producers, small businesses, and relevant agencies to develop business/industry recovery implementation plans.
- Engage with local community groups and impacted businesses to identify support requirements and implement programs and support services.
- Promote and support financial advisory support services.

Environment

- Immediate reconnection of power to Council assets including shelters, park lights and electric BBQs along the Balonne River, St George
- Undertake damage assessments to ascertain impacts across impacted areas.
- Undertake weed assessments to identify transfers occurring down riverine areas.
- Inspect and reopen recreational areas and camping grounds across the shire.
- Implement and monitor mosquito fogging program.
- Obtain and provide biosecurity advice and safety measures for monitoring and reporting cases of Japanese Encephalitis in horses, and other animals.
- Obtain and provide biosecurity advice and safety measures for the prevention of the spread of weeds and pests from vehicles entering properties for recovery works.
- Monitor stock routes for potential biosecurity issues.
- Connect with NRM groups to manage weeds and pests and remove green waste along the riverine environment.
- Obtain and provide biosecurity advice and safety measures for the prevention of the spread of weeds and pests from vehicles entering properties for recovery works.
- Inspect and remove green waste along the riverine environment and roadways.
- Improve the resilience of the flood warning system across the region:
 - review, update and implement flood mapping and modelling to inform the response to potential flooding as well as the council works programs.
 - review of flood warning infrastructure – river and rain gauges, cameras etc. to identify any gaps in the network and ensure best practice in terms of river and rain forecasts and planning.
 - work with the BoM to ensure local knowledge is incorporated into flood forecasting and classifications, and to restore confidence in BoM warnings for future events.
 - review flood warning classifications and update where required, in conjunction with BoM, and other entities such as Sunwater, as well as disaster management agencies, generational landholders and residents
 - translate classifications into locally understood landmarks and locations and communicate updates widely through the community.
 - map important community assets considering updated models and classifications
 - Investigate funding opportunities to upgrade existing gauges, install new gauges and automated road signs and cameras

Infrastructure (Buildings and Roads and transport)

- Undertake damage assessments across impacted areas.
- Conduct emergent works and repairs to regain access.
- Repair and/or replace damaged road furniture.
- Repair and/or replace damaged fencing.
- Inspect and re-open local and state roads and local streets.
- Inspect and re-open Andrew Nixon Bridge, St George.
- Inspect, repair or replace public infrastructure (St George River foreshore).
- Review and repair damage to levy banks.
- Inspect, repair and/or replace road pavement, culvert and drainage infrastructure across impacted areas.
- Identify opportunity to increase disaster resilience of known trouble hotspots (roads/highways) to maintain community and supply chain connectivity during disaster events.
- Liaise with SW rail freight line operator to reopen rail lines.
- Inspect and reopen Andrew Nixon Bridge, St George has been reopened and is fully operational.