



Goondiwindi
REGIONAL
COUNCIL

REGIONAL
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at its best!



November 2021 Flooding & Rain Event Local Recovery Plan

Background

About the community

The Goondiwindi Regional Council area covers almost 20,000 km². The region's three larger towns of Goondiwindi, Inglewood and Texas are the primary hubs for a number of diverse communities, while the towns of Yelarbon, Toobeah, Bungunya and Talwood play important roles in the social and economic lives of our rural residents.

The Goondiwindi region is a commercial hub of a vast agricultural and pastoral sector producing cotton, grain, dairy, wool, poultry, beef, lamb and pork for domestic and overseas markets. The region is rich in history, home to a thriving country culture and renowned for its agricultural excellence.

About the disaster event

Between 10 November and 3 December 2021, large parts of Central, Southern and Western Queensland experienced heavy rainfall and flooding. There has been significant disruption to communities, including damage to private and public property.

In Inglewood, Texas and surrounding areas within the Goondiwindi Regional Council area, buildings were inundated with flood water and towns and rural properties were isolated. Damage assessments undertaken by the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services identified 60 commercial and industrial properties that sustained some level of damage and water ingress as a result of the floods.

State highways were closed from 30 November 2021, with some not opening until the week commencing 13 December 2021 due to significant damage. The railway line was also damaged, interrupting the vital link to port for the export of agricultural commodities.

On 30 November 2021, the township of Inglewood was evacuated, and an evacuation site was also established at the Goondiwindi Showgrounds for Yelarbon residents. Coolmunda Dam reached capacity and was spilling excess water.

Approximately 900 instances of psychological first aid were provided to members of the community from the Inglewood Recovery Hub. Key themes include assistance with re-establishing lost property, realisation that recovery will take a long time, concern about the weather and potential for future flooding, and support for businesses and rural properties. Approximately 58% of the population of Inglewood received emergency hardship funding assistance of some sort.

Queensland's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) received widespread reports of damage to primary producers and the agriculture sector, with the most significant and widespread damage around Goondiwindi. Consensus of departmental officers, industry groups and local government is that the impact is cumulatively around 20 percent of the value of production.

Recovery

Key Recovery Stakeholders

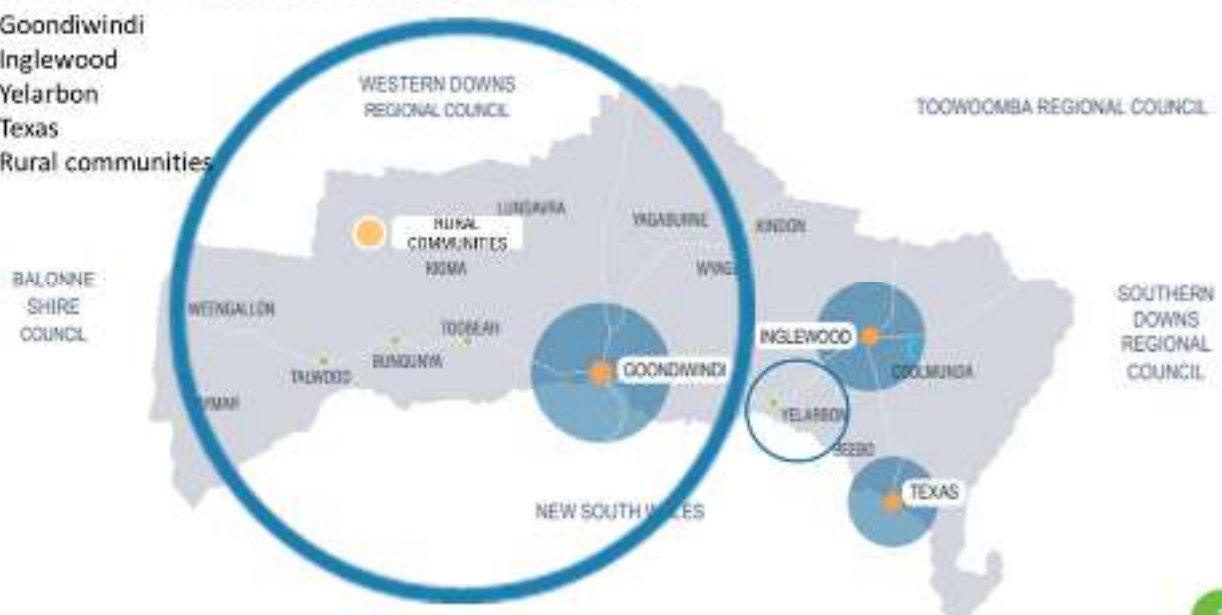
- Goondiwindi region community members, in both towns and rural areas
- Council, state and federal government agencies including QRA, QRIDA, DAF and DCHDE
- Community groups, non-government organisations, volunteer groups
- Local businesses, Chamber of Commerce and trade associations
- Rural industry and member groups

Areas of operation

Due to the wide-ranging impacts of the event, planning for recovery from the flooding is being approached from across the region in five areas of operation. This reflects both the similarities and differences identified in each area in terms of recovery and reconnection impacts and needs.

GOONDIWINDI REGIONAL COUNCIL LOCALITY MAP:

- Goondiwindi
- Inglewood
- Yelarbon
- Texas
- Rural communities



Recovery themes

Recovery planning to date has identified recovery tasks and objectives across all pillars of recovery, and five themes have emerged for the recovery of the region and the projects and activities being identified.



- Infrastructure: roads, sporting fields, on-farm infrastructure, levee, homes
- Community information: related to preparedness, evacuation, vulnerable community members, insurance awareness
- Social and economic: small business, rural sector, community connectedness
- Flood risk management: modelling, flood classifications, flood warnings
- Agriculture: on-farm support, financial counselling, business continuity planning, riparian erosion and weeds and pest management

Infrastructure

Framing the problem

State highways were closed from 30 November 2021, with some not able to be reopened until mid-December due to water over the road and significant damage.

- Cunningham Highway: Inglewood to Goondiwindi; Inglewood to Millmerran;
- Gore Highway: Goondiwindi to Millmerran
- Leichardt Highway: Goondiwindi to Moonie
- Barwon Highway: Goondiwindi to St George; Inglewood to Texas.

Damage was also identified on council operated roads. In some instances, damage was exacerbated on council roads by an increased amount of heavy loads and traffic due to closure of highways.

Extensive railway track damage – Sandy Flat turn, Toobeah, before Yelarbon to Inglewood and Goondiwindi to Thallon.

Damage to / destruction of internal roads on rural properties, as well as access roads to critical water and sewerage infrastructure.

Some parts of the levee in Goondiwindi suffered from erosion and slippage, and understrength pumps in some instances put pressure on the system.

The council-owned and managed dog fence received damage and requires clean up and inspection to determine the extent and the way forward to manage this important pest control measure.

Flood damage to sporting and recreation facilities such as the Goondiwindi Motorcycle and Golf Clubs, the sporting association facilities at Gilbert Oval, and the Texas racecourse, including rails and support buildings.

Addressing the problem

- Undertake assessments across impacted areas to ascertain damage extent.
- Inspect and re-open roads and bridges to a safe standard while assessing full reconstruction requirements.
- Repair and/or replace damaged road furniture and signage.
- Determine opportunities for increasing disaster resilience in the road network.
- Undertake reconstruction monitoring of homes and businesses assessed in the immediate response phase as damaged.
- Clean and/or repair damaged council owned fences at critical infrastructure sites.
- Undertake repair and resilience works on levee in Goondiwindi.
- Determine resilience building projects for critical infrastructure.

Community information and education

Framing the problem

Stresses were identified related to the speed and timing of evacuation of homes in Inglewood, particularly vulnerable community members with no access to a support person. The timing of the evacuation at night while it was still raining, and confusion at the evacuation assembly point, contributed to the distress associated with the evacuation.

Further, the related situations where Yelarbon and Texas residents evacuated, and the potential flooding in Goondiwindi township, all highlighting the need for better community understanding and ownership of disaster preparedness and response.

There was confusion around 'mixed messaging' regarding flood/ flood gauge levels due to lack of confidence in modelling and flood warnings, particularly in relation to the levee in Goondiwindi and evacuation requirement in Inglewood.

In the early relief stage of the event, confusion and stress related to insurance for small business owners in Inglewood in terms of under-insurance or not insured for flood. Of the respondents to the small business survey after the event, only 20% were confident that they had the appropriate level of insurance related to flood events.

Addressing the problem

- Strengthen volunteer and community groups' capacity and capability through disaster preparedness, response and recovery education and training and reviewing and updating roles and responsibilities.
- Work to identify vulnerable community members' profile across the region and provide support to enable self-recovery through better preparedness for natural disasters.
- Strengthen community members' resilience through disaster preparedness education and training including flood warning classifications, evacuation planning, Get Ready Qld, facilitating community exercises and disaster preparedness community information days.
- Review and update Goondiwindi Regional Council Local Recovery Sub-plan and include a process for supporting vulnerable community members across the region.
- Coordinate an event debrief with Council staff and LDMG to inform plan updates and processes.

Social and Economic

Framing the problem

There have been cumulative and compounding psychosocial impacts on the community as result of many years of drought and COVID-19, exacerbated by recent flooding. Things like increased financial stress due to reduction in income and/or work hours, and loss of community connectedness due to the cancellation or postponement of sporting, cultural and community events and meetings have been identified in relation to the flooding.

In addition, isolated properties and closed and damaged roads has meant loss of income/profits for not only the property owners, but for transportation companies, tourism, hospitality and accommodation industries and associated businesses.

Goondiwindi Regional Council may also need to respond to delays in residential development works and contracts due to sites being flooded, and lack of access to material i.e. gravel, impacting on capital projects' timelines.

Addressing the problem

- Strengthen relationships with community groups through the identification of community leaders.
- Develop and promote project/s that provide a legacy of this flood event for future generations.
- Coordinate community events to promote community connectedness and social inclusion.
- Liaise with local/state agencies to develop and implement tailored financial mentoring program for small businesses and rural community members.
- Promote events to attract participation from community members and tourists.
- Promote and support fundraising opportunities for sporting, community and recreation clubs.
- Support small businesses, tourist attractions and associated businesses across the region.
- Assist businesses and industry to identify and access information on funds, grants, and loans available from government and other entities.
- Support the development of person-centred emergency preparedness with vulnerable community members, in conjunction with local community care providers and responsible state agencies.

Flood risk management

Framing the problem

There is a high degree of mistrust and lack of confidence from the community in relation to flood warnings, and decision-making around evacuations and levee overtopping. Rainfall forecasts provided approx. 2 weeks before the major flood event suggested a significant Inglewood and Goondiwindi flood event, which didn't occur. This earlier rainfall prediction influenced the effectiveness of the messaging two weeks later when similar rainfall totals were predicted.

Lack of notice for the Inglewood flood event and subsequent evacuation was a major frustration for council and the community, and this combined with previous experiences in the region have limited confidence in forecasting flood events over about 10.2m in Goondiwindi.

Although modelling was done as recently as 2015 for Inglewood, other townships in the region including Goondiwindi have not had updates to reflect multiple recent flood events. In addition, a lack of modelling in relation to any possible breaches of the Goondiwindi levee led to community stress in incorrectly anticipating a 'tsunami' of flooding in town if the levee was breached in any capacity.

Addressing the problem

- Review, update and implement flood mapping and modelling – including LIDAR - to inform response to potential flooding as well as council works programs.
- Review 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 in light of updated models and classifications.
- Ensure that a vulnerable community member profile is created to ensure that planning and preparedness at an individual level can be supported, in turn effecting positive change in disaster response and recovery in the community.
- Employ multiple engagement tools – e.g. videos, animations of flood models - to help the community understand and take ownership of their own preparedness for flooding events and evacuations.

Agricultural sector

Framing the problem

Many of the producers in the region have suffered from cumulative disasters, including the Southern Queensland Severe Weather event in early 2021.

The impact of these intense rainfall and flooding events has caused significant productivity losses and damage, including:

- Destruction/damage of crops, and reduced crop yields.
- Erosion and loss of topsoil, damage to waterways, infrastructure, and exposure of root systems.
- Destruction of infrastructure including fencing, irrigation and pumping equipment, dams, roads and sheds.
- Waterlogging and crop losses from root diseases, drowning of plants and rotting of roots. This has occurred in horticultural crops and cotton.

This event occurred at the tail end of the winter cropping season when approximately 10 percent of the crops remained to be harvested—the bulk of which were in southern parts of the state. Reports have been received on stock losses in parts of the Border Rivers area, and floodwaters moved rapidly through some cotton properties, causing erosion on expensively laser levelled fields.

There is risk of biosecurity impact due to movement of weeds/seeds, and of herbicides, insecticides and weed seeds being washed into river systems.

More broadly, there is increased financial burden for the agriculture sector due to disruption to supply chains, employment (farm/feedlot labour), and disruption/losses for businesses that provide products and services to the sector.

Addressing the problem

- Secure on-farm support for individual impacted producers to be ready for future flooding on their properties.
- Ensure weeds and other environmental issues are monitored and addressed in conjunction with responsible state agencies.
- Provide access to financial counselling, business continuity planning, and other required programs for rural and primary production businesses.
- Secure financial assistance through activation of extraordinary funding measures for primary producers.
- Industry has identified and accessed information on funds, grants, and loans available from government and other entities.
- Develop and implement a tailored financial mentoring program for producers and rural industry businesses in conjunction with responsible state agencies.

Addressing the Problem - Recovery objectives

1. Ensure community has access to support services (psychosocial and financial).
2. The community is well informed of, and has access to, accurate and up-to-date information in preparedness for future events.
3. Review response, evacuation and recovery plans to ensure that lessons are learned and incorporated into future activities.
4. Community engagement is undertaken to enhance awareness, confidence and understanding of flood warnings, disaster management plans and processes.
5. Implement effective & efficient process to enable sporting facilities and recreational areas to be cleaned, repaired, and reopened.
6. Ensure small businesses, agriculture and primary producers, tourism, retail, accommodation, and food service providers have access to support services to restore/rebuild businesses.
7. Ensure agricultural support businesses and primary producers have access to support services to restore/rebuild businesses.
8. Environmental restoration and protection (prevention of spread of weeds and pests, revegetation) program has been developed, implemented and progress monitored.
9. Ensure flood modelling, warnings and classifications are reviewed and updated where required, and include local knowledge inputs.
10. Identify and promote funding opportunities to ensure recovery and resilience-building initiatives across all recovery pillars can be delivered.
11. Social resilience initiatives have been identified and developed.
12. Critical infrastructure is restored, and opportunities for resilience identified.