

PRESS RELEASE

THE FLOOD WAS PREDICTED - SO WAS THE ROYAL COMMISSION

By Whistleblowers Action Group Qld Inc 30 January 2011

More than fifteen years ago, flood professionals in the State Public Service predicted that another 1974 flood would come to South East Queensland about this time.

They also predicted that there would be a Royal Commission.

2013 ± 2.5 years is how they expressed the year that it was likely to occur – in lay terms, this means that another 1974 flood would come sometime during the five wet seasons from 2010/11 to 2014/15. That prediction eventuated

The prediction about the Royal Commission has also eventuated. That prediction was based on what the flood professionals saw that local and state governments were doing, or failing to do, with the hydrologic and hydraulic information that the flood professionals were presenting to government.

A lot of this information and expertise has been lost since the two decades of flood studies that followed the 1974 floods. The Queensland community needs to recover this vital information.

This loss of information occurred with the natural retirement of men and women, 40 years or older, who worked on the flood studies in the two decades following 1974. This loss of information was exacerbated further by:

1. The alleged rough removal of hundreds of senior public servants from government agencies upon the election of the Goss government;
2. The alleged mistreatment of whistleblowers who came forward with disclosures about flooding and development matters after the Fitzgerald reforms were perceived to have been implemented;
3. The politicization of the public services at State and local government levels, through such changes as the loss of tenure for Senior Executive Service and other principal appointments, and through the role played by ministerial advisors;
4. The ‘de-engineering’ of the public service agencies involved in flood engineering;
5. Circumventions of the Freedom of Information Act, and the tactics used to deny knowledge of relevant issues

“These professionals are unlikely to have confidence in the Flood Commission as it is presently structured,” Mr Gordon Harris, President of Queensland’s Whistleblower organisation, said today. “This is the Forde Inquiry without Forde – most other players are the same, including Premier Bligh who commissioned the 1998 Forde Inquiry as Minister for Families.”

“We need a Fitzgerald type inquiry, one that follows the disclosures. But we also need more protection for whistleblowers. Protection did not occur for the police whistleblowers in the Fitzgerald Inquiry, such as Inspector Col Dillon, at the hands of the post Fitzgerald Queensland Police Force,” Mr Harris said.

“We do not need another Forde type of Inquiry, one that limits itself to restricted terms of reference and political interference, as did the Forde Inquiry when clear allegations of cover-up by State Government came before that Inquiry. Bans on any inquiry into the role of the State Government in wrongdoing and maladministration, including cover-ups, regarding flooding and development issues, cannot be allowed to occur again,” he said.

The creeks in the Toowoomba region are not the only flood situations in Queensland where there may be serious risk to life. Other situations are alleged, for areas housing greater populations, populations dominated by the young and by the retired, concentrated in layout, subject to sudden night flooding, with minimum prospects for evacuation.

“Current situations must be identified. Knowledge of the role of government developers and private developers in generating these situations is vital to efforts to arrest such risks and return the community to acceptable levels of hazard from flooding.” Mr Harris said.

The Whistleblowers Action Group recommends that a prominent whistleblower, with appropriate experience from these post 74 flood studies, be placed on the Commission.

To this end, Whistleblowers Action Group is writing to Premier Bligh and Mr Langbroek, Leader of the Opposition, to seek the appointment of a whistleblower with eminent credentials for any review of flood management in Queensland to the Royal Commission.

We are seeking bipartisan support to such an appointment because the involvement by such whistleblowers in flood management in all parts of Queensland, after the 1974 floods, included service under governments of both the Labor and Coalition Parties.

When it became known that one flood professional, code-named ‘*Warrior*’ by the public service bureaucrats, had blown the whistle on the Queensland Government, numbers of hydrologists, scientists, engineers and economists approached *Warrior* with their concerns about particular decisions by Government agencies involving water engineering

The community can benefit from that same dynamic, if those flood professionals with knowledge of the risks in place, have sufficient confidence in the Commission to come forward.

The 2010/11 wet season is only the first season of the predicted window of wet seasons when major flooding is likely to occur. If we have entered a period where major flooding has an increased likelihood, it behoves the Queensland Government to do its best to obtain all ‘lost’ information, in some cases, from officers who may have been severely mistreated by the system which they served and to which they had offered their expertise.

“There are other choices,” Mr Harris claimed today. “We support calls by the legal profession in this State for a restructure to the Flood Commission, but for stronger reasons.”

It is noted that Tony Fitzgerald, prior to his famous Inquiry, completed a formal opinion for the Brisbane City Council on improving flood mitigation and control legislation, according to information given to the Group. When a Commissioner between 1987 and 1989, he went beyond the original terms of his Inquiry. This the Forde Inquiry failed to do with serious allegations against the Government. Fitzgerald followed the disclosures made to his Inquiry. Enough was not done, however, to protect, post the Fitzgerald Inquiry, the police who made his Inquiry a success.

“We cannot make that mistake again.” the President of Whistleblowers said. “We are seeking bipartisan support for a whistleblower to go onto the Commission”.

POC: President Gordon Harris, through the Secretary on 07 3378 7232