

**Consideration of the Auditor-
General's Report 16: 2015-16**
Flood resilience of river catchments

Report No. 10, 56th Parliament

**State Development, Natural Resources and
Agricultural Industry Development Committee**

July 2018

State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee

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Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

Auditor-General's report/ the Report	Auditor-General's Report 16: 2015-16 – Flood resilience of river catchments
BRCFS	Brisbane River Catchment Flood Studies
DNRME	Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
QAO	Queensland Audit Office
QRA	Queensland Reconstruction Authority

Chair's foreword

This report presents a summary of the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee's examination of the Auditor-General's Report 16: 2015-16 – Flood resilience of river catchments.

The committee's task was to consider the Auditor-General's findings in relation to the effectiveness of flood resilience activities in the Bremer, Lockyer, Mid and Upper Brisbane River catchments since the 2011 Queensland floods. The committee also examined the progress in implementing recommendations from the Auditor-General.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Queensland Audit Office, the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority for their assistance with the committee's examination.

I commend this report to the House.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "C. Whiting". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "C".

Chris Whiting MP

Chair

Recommendation

Recommendation 1

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The committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly note the contents of this report.

1 Introduction

1.1 Role of the committee

The State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee (committee) is a portfolio committee of the Legislative Assembly which commenced on 15 February 2018 under the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* and the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly.¹

The committee's areas of portfolio responsibility are:

- State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning
- Natural Resources, Mines and Energy, and
- Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries.²

According to s 94(1)(a) of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, the committee has responsibility within its portfolio areas for:

The assessment of the integrity, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of government financial management by:

- examining government financial documents, and
- considering the annual and other reports of the Auditor-General.³

1.2 Role of the Auditor-General

The Auditor-General is an independent statutory officer appointed by the Governor in Council under the *Auditor-General Act 2009*. The Auditor-General is supported by the Queensland Audit Office.⁴

The Auditor-General undertakes both financial audits and performance audits of public sector entities. Financial audits provide an opinion on the financial statements of public sector entities, whilst performance audits address important aspects of public services, examining efficiency and effectiveness.⁵

1.3 Referral of the Auditor-General's report

Standing Order 194B provides the Committee of the Legislative Assembly shall as soon as practicable after a report of the Auditor-General is tabled in the Assembly, refer that report to the relevant portfolio committee for consideration.

A portfolio committee may deal with this type of referral by considering and reporting on the matter and making recommendations about it to the Assembly.⁶

On 19 April 2016 the Auditor-General's Report 16: 2015-16 – Flood resilience of river catchments was tabled and referred to the Agriculture and Environment Committee of the 55th Parliament.⁷ As part of their inquiry that committee held one public briefing and three public hearings, and received 10 submissions from a range of organisations. That committee did not report before the dissolution of

¹ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 88 and Standing Order 194.

² Schedule 6 of the *Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly*, effective from 31 August 2004 (amended 15 June 2018).

³ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 94(1)(a).

⁴ *Auditor-General Act 2009*, ss 6, 9.

⁵ See Queensland Audit Office, <https://www.gao.qld.gov.au/our-role> (accessed 20 June 2018).

⁶ *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, s 92(3).

⁷ Queensland Parliament, Record of Proceedings, 19 April 2016, p 1064.

Parliament on 29 October 2017. The report was referred to the State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee on 3 May 2018.⁸

1.4 Examination process

The committee received a public briefing on the Auditor-General's report from the QAO, the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (DNRME) and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA) on 11 June 2018. A transcript of the public briefing is available from the committee's webpage.⁹ The list of witnesses who appeared at the public briefing is at Appendix A.

2 Examination of the Auditor-General's report

2.1 Audit background

During major rainfall events Queensland's river catchments can become a source of flooding.¹⁰ Flooding is historically the most destructive and expensive natural disaster in Australia with average losses estimated at \$377 million a year (between 1967 and 2005).¹¹ Queensland properties make up around 35 per cent of all Australian properties at risk of flooding.¹²

Mitigation measures can minimise the impact of floods. Flood resilience means preparing for and managing potential hazards to minimise flood impacts.¹³ The integration of flood resilience activities at a river catchment level is important. It may be the case that a council would best achieve benefits to their communities by spending some of their resources upstream, in a different council area.¹⁴ However this is complicated by the fact that council and river catchment boundaries do not line up.¹⁵

2.2 Audit objective and reasons

The Auditor-General's report was a performance audit to determine the effectiveness of flood resilience activities in the Bremer, Lockyer, Mid and Upper Brisbane river catchments.¹⁶ The audit examined whether effective governance arrangements were in place, flood preparedness was informed by an understanding of flood risks, and flood risks were effectively managed.¹⁷

The audit was undertaken following the significant flooding events in Queensland of 2011 and 2013.¹⁸ The Auditor-General told the committee:

This audit was on our strategic audit plan for a number of years before we conducted it. It was included in our strategic audit plan as it was suggested as a topic of interest for parliament through the parliament's finance and administration committee at that time. The finance and administration committee wrote, 'The condition of river catchments has a critical bearing on the magnitude and speed of downstream flooding during extreme weather events' and proposed that QAO examine whether best-practice approaches were being followed in the management of catchments for the upper reaches of the Brisbane and Bremer rivers.... We

⁸ Queensland Parliament, Record of Proceedings, 3 May 2018, p 1000.

⁹ See <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/SDNRAIDC>.

¹⁰ Queensland Audit Office, Flood resilience of river catchments, Report 16: 2015-16, (QAO, Report 16), April 2016, p 1.

¹¹ QAO, Report 16, p 1.

¹² QAO, Report 16, p 1.

¹³ QAO, Report 16, p 1.

¹⁴ QAO, Report 16, p 2.

¹⁵ QAO, Report 16, p 1.

¹⁶ QAO, Report 16, p 70.

¹⁷ QAO, Report 16, p 70.

¹⁸ QAO, Report 16, p 1.

audited the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the former Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, and four councils: Ipswich City Council and the Lockyer, Scenic Rim and Somerset regional councils.¹⁹

2.3 Audit conclusions

The Auditor-General outlined his conclusions to the committee:

In general, we found a positive increased effort and spending on flood resilience by the four councils within their own council areas. There remained, however, an overall lack of accountability and shared responsibility. We concluded that the integrated catchment was missing and was needed to achieve greater resilience.²⁰

On the issue of understanding flood risks, the Auditor-General told the committee:

We concluded that the state government and councils better understand their flood risks and are better prepared than they were in 2011. This is because they acted to identify flood risks, primarily through the analysis of historical and recent flood information, local knowledge and flood maps and studies. However, in the four catchments no one entity was responsible for leading and coordinating cross-boundary risks, priorities and activities. This meant that neither the contributing entities nor the broader public had a consistent, clear and comprehensive understanding of what needed to be done and how it would be achieved and by whom.²¹

The Report concluded that the Brisbane River Catchment Flood Studies (BRCFS) represented a significant step forward for government in identifying and assessing flood risks across the Brisbane River catchment.²² The BRCFS investigated regional-scale flooding on the Brisbane River floodplain, caused by substantial rainfall across the Brisbane River catchment. The BRCFS comprises over 2,900 pages of technical information, computerised models, maps and charts, and is used to understand Brisbane River flooding risks. The Report also found that whilst councils were now responsible for approving and monitoring the construction and modification of levee banks, they were inhibited in effectively fulfilling this responsibility because they have not obtained the resources, capabilities or historical data.²³

2.4 Audit recommendations

The Auditor-General made four recommendations:

We recommend that, in the absence of stand-alone catchment management authorities, the Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning:

- 1. Fulfil its obligation under the State Disaster Management Plan to drive the enhancement of flood resilience in the four catchments by:*
 - coordinating flood resilience activities and funding at a state and catchment level*
 - developing strategies and plans, in consultation with the four councils and relevant entities, to effectively identify, assess, priorities and manage catchment scale flood risks using an integrated catchment management approach*
 - assessing the capacity and capabilities of the four councils and supporting them as necessary in building flood resilience in the catchments and in their local areas.*

¹⁹ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 1.

²⁰ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 1.

²¹ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, pp 1-2.

²² QAO, Report 16, p 2.

²³ QAO, Report 16, p 4.

2. *As a matter of priority, establish what funding is reasonably required and complete all elements of the Brisbane River Catchment Flood Studies.*

We recommend that the four councils:

3. *develop floodplain management plans in accordance with Recommendation 2.12 of the Final Report of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry*

We recommend that the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the four councils:

4. *work together to effectively and economically regulate levee banks.*²⁴

2.5 Response from agencies and entities

In accordance with section 64 of the *Auditor-General Act 2009*, a copy of the audit report was provided to the entities involved with a request for comment. Responses were received from the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) on behalf of the Government, as well as Ipswich City, Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim and Somerset Councils. A summary of the responses is shown in the table below.²⁵

Audit Recommendation	Recommendation 1	Recommendation 2	Recommendation 3	Recommendation 4
	<i>DILGP fulfil responsibilities</i>	<i>Fund and complete the BRCFS as a priority</i>	<i>Councils to develop floodplain management plans</i>	<i>Work together to regulate levee banks</i>
Queensland Government	Agree	Agree	n/a	Agree
Ipswich City Council	No response	No response	No response	No response
Lockyer Valley Regional Council	Non-committal	Non-committal	Agree	Non-committal
Scenic Rim Regional Council	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
Somerset Regional Council	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree

2.6 Committee consideration

In considering the Auditor-General's report, the committee held a public briefing with the QAO, DNRME and QRA on 11 June 2018. The purpose of the briefing was to inform the committee of the key issues raised in the Auditor-General's report and to assess the progress in implementing the four recommendations.

The committee asked the QAO about their analysis of the progress in implementing the four recommendations. The QAO advised:

We have written to the agencies to ask them to provide their self-assessments, which they provided to us earlier this year. The self-assessments varied between the agencies in terms of where they reported their progress at, but across-the-board it was generally that they had

²⁴ QAO, Report 16, p 4.

²⁵ QAO, Report 16, pp 50-69.

*partially implemented the recommendations that we had made and they were still working to progress the recommendations.*²⁶

2.6.1 Recommendation 1 of the Auditor-General

Recommendation 1 related to enhancing flood resilience through three actions: coordinating flood resilience activities at a state and catchment level; developing strategies and plans to manage catchment scale flood risks using an integrated catchment management approach; and assessing the capacity and capabilities of councils and supporting them as necessary.²⁷

2.6.1.1 Coordinating flood resilience activities at a state and catchment level

The QRA advised the committee that it had fulfilled this recommendation by publishing the *Strategic policy framework for riverine flood risk management* in 2017.²⁸ The framework sets a framework for the delivery of flood resilience activities and details roles and responsibilities.

The QRA is also coordinating flood resilience activities by administering a program which provides funding to councils across Queensland.²⁹

2.6.1.2 Developing strategies and plans to manage catchment scale flood risks using an integrated catchment management approach

The QRA outlined how the authority was, through the BRCFS, implementing this recommendation, by using an integrated catchment planning approach to develop a flood management plan. The QRA updated the committee on the timings of the BRCFS:

*... the Brisbane River flood study was released publicly in May 2017. It is being used to inform the development of a Brisbane River strategic flood management plan... and is currently due to be completed in late 2018, with public release in early 2019.*³⁰

2.6.1.3 Assessing the capacity and capabilities of councils and supporting them as necessary

The QRA advised the committee that it was assessing the capacity and capabilities of councils:

*The Strategic Floodplain Management Plan has been developed in close consultation with the four local governments and also other agencies working and operating within that catchment. The recommendations, which are currently in development, will support local capacity and also capabilities.*³¹

Committee comment

The committee notes the significant progress that has been made with the delivery of a number of actions. Work such as the BRCFS has contributed to improving flood resilience within Queensland since the 2011 and 2013 floods. The QRA is making a significant contribution through the delivery, coordination and support for flood resilience activities, such as through the administration of a program that delivers funding to councils.

2.6.2 Recommendation 2 of the Auditor-General

Recommendation 2 identified a need to 'establish what funding is reasonably required and complete all elements of the Brisbane River Catchment Flood Studies'.³²

²⁶ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 2.

²⁷ QAO, Report 16, p 4.

²⁸ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 7.

²⁹ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 7.

³⁰ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 7.

³¹ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 7.

³² QAO, Report 16, p 4.

The committee was told that funding required for the BRCFS was in place.

An original \$5 million budget was set to deliver the Brisbane River Flood Study and also the Strategic Floodplain Management Plan... The total flood study was approximately \$3.5 million, leaving \$1.5 million to deliver the actual Strategic Floodplain Management Plan and technical evidence report. QRA has secured an additional \$750,000 through the National Disaster Resilience Program to deliver on that piece of work.³³

The committee was also told that the BRCFS would be completed and published by early next year, and that it would include over 1,000 pages of technical work.

That is where we have a number of work packages, as I mentioned before – the land use plan; looking at structures; looking at disaster management, community information and education. That is all proceeding relatively well... We will see the public release of the work, being a technical evidence report. It will have more than 1,000 pages of detail. The Strategic Floodplain Management Plan... will be released early next year.³⁴

Committee comment

The committee recognises the importance of the Brisbane River Catchment Flood Studies, which will increase the knowledge and understanding of flood related risks in the Brisbane River Catchment. The committee notes that the required funding has been put in place and the final elements of the Brisbane River Catchment Flood Studies are due for publication early in 2019.

2.6.3 Recommendation 3 of the Auditor-General

Recommendation 3 was addressed to the four councils covered by the audit. It stated that the councils should develop floodplain management plans in accordance with Recommendation 2.12 of the Final Report of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry.³⁵

The QRA provided the committee with an example of this recommendation being implemented.³⁶ The Wide Bay Burnett Regional Organisation of Councils, in partnership with a number of other councils and agencies, has developed a catchment-scale flood resilience plan. The *Burnett Catchment Flood Resilience Strategy*³⁷ is designed to guide how councils and others in the area should work together at a catchment level to reduce flood risk and increase resilience.

Committee comment

Whilst the committee did not directly seek evidence from the four councils, the committee notes the evidence provided by the QRA regarding floodplain management plans. It is clear from the evidence that progress has been made in implementing this recommendation, with the Burnett Catchment Flood Resilience Strategy being one example. Further work is underway to continue to develop and improve floodplain management across Queensland, for example through the completion of the BRCFS.

2.6.4 Recommendation 4 of the Auditor-General

Recommendation 4 outlined that the DNRME and the four councils covered by the audit should 'work together to effectively and economically regulate levee banks'.³⁸ This resulted from a finding that

³³ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 7.

³⁴ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 13.

³⁵ QAO, Report 16, p 4.

³⁶ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 9.

³⁷ Available at: <http://www.qldreconstruction.org.au/BCFRS>

³⁸ QAO, Report 16, p 4.

councils had 'not obtained the resources, capabilities or historical data need to fulfil their regulatory obligations'.³⁹

With regards to implementing this recommendation, the DNRME informed the committee that it had consulted with a range of stakeholders including the four councils, the Local Government Association of Queensland, the South East Queensland Council of Mayors and relevant state agencies. The DNRME outlined to the committee that it is now undertaking further work, using a specialist consultant, to deliver a range of tools to support councils in fulfilling their responsibilities:

*A specialist consultant, BMT Pty Ltd, has been commissioned to deliver a program of works including the following components: the data gaps, identification to support levee assessment, planning and compliance, communication materials and the development of the database. BMT commenced these works in May 2018 and the project is due to be completed in the third quarter of 2018.*⁴⁰

The committee asked how the levee approval process would work, with the DNRME advising:

*The levees have been categorised based on the risks they pose on properties or people... For category 2 [levees], local governments are the assessment manager. We do provide codes and guidelines and support in terms of how those codes and guidelines could be implemented, but responsibility for assessing a category 2 application remains with the council.*⁴¹

The committee also discussed climate change, asking whether councils accepted climate change as an issue that needed to be prepared for and if climate change was taken into consideration with the regulation of levees. The DNRME advised that in response to council feedback it has started to update guidelines and codes to include climate change impacts, for example by considering adjustments to levee design.

*It is our intention that, as we update the guidelines and the codes, the need to consider climate change effects will be brought in as part of recommendations through those guidelines and codes. Essentially, it will be done through undertaking some level of sensitivity analysis to see what the potential impacts of climate change could be as it relates to implementing or coming up with levee design.*⁴²

Committee comment

The committee notes the changes in 2014 that saw councils responsible for approving and monitoring the construction and modification of levee banks. The committee is satisfied that the DNRME has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to better understand the issues faced by councils, and that work will soon be completed to deliver a range of components to assist councils in fulfilling their responsibilities.

2.6.5 Other issues raised by the committee

The committee discussed a number of other issues related to flood resilience during the public briefing.

2.6.5.1 Resilience activities

The committee explored what other activities were underway across Queensland to promote flood resilience. The QRA advised:

We also have a strong focus on land use planning. Land use planning is our best capability for dealing with future risk. We also need to deal with improved disaster management with the

³⁹ QAO, Report 16, p 4.

⁴⁰ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, pp 5-6.

⁴¹ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, pp 8-9.

⁴² Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 12.

*new information that we have. Improved community information, education and awareness are also very important.*⁴³

2.6.5.2 Planning schemes

The committee inquired as to whether floodplain management was considered as part of state planning provisions. The QRA advised that significant progress had been made, with planning scheme amendments taking into account flood hazard and flood risk:

*It has been the focus through our Brisbane River work.... That sets a very contemporary framework for consideration by councils of amendments to their planning schemes in terms of taking into account flood hazard and flood risk along with a number of other considerations such as economic, environmental and social issues. Compared to where we were back in 2010-11, we have come a long way.*⁴⁴

The DNRME added that other organisations and professions are responding and reacting to recent flood events:

*... we have a number of professional engineering bodies that are making changes to what engineers need to consider as they do all sorts of work... It is even stepped up to the level of what it means to be a good engineer... Part of being a good engineer is building things that are resilient and building things that can be recovered quickly.*⁴⁵

2.6.5.3 Infrastructure design and planning

The committee explored how state departments and agencies responsible for building infrastructure that may be flooded or alter the flooding risk of different areas are engaged so that flood resilience is not diminished. The QRA stated consideration for flood resilience would be included at the detailed design stage, and that funding guidelines also now required agencies to take natural hazards into account:

*Also, we are seeing now that in funding guidelines, for example, agencies are required to get an appreciation of, or certainly take into account, the influence of natural hazards. The conversation is also switching to taking into account future climate risk in the design and location of pieces of infrastructure.*⁴⁶

2.6.5.4 Communication of warnings

The committee asked whether work had been undertaken with respect to the communication of warnings when a time-critical event is imminent. The QRA advised that they had undertaken research to better understand the views of the community. A significant percentage of those surveyed indicated that they would not act on a warning message to evacuate:

*Probably one of the most surprising things to come out of our survey of the community was that a significant number, approximately 30 per cent of people... would not act on a warning to evacuate a residence... There is work to be done in both areas still, but certainly as part of our ongoing focus we will be looking at some of those community attitudes as well.*⁴⁷

The QRA subsequently provided further evidence to the committee regarding the results of their survey. The survey showed that 33 per cent of survey respondents in the Lockyer Valley and Somerset

⁴³ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 8.

⁴⁴ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 10.

⁴⁵ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 10.

⁴⁶ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, pp 13-14.

⁴⁷ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, p 11.

Regional Council areas would not evacuate under any circumstances, whilst in the Brisbane and Ipswich City Council areas the figure was five per cent.⁴⁸

2.6.5.5 Approaches taken in other jurisdictions

The committee examined whether approaches taken in other jurisdictions, either domestically or internationally, could assist with flood resilience planning in Queensland. The QRA advised that through their review of approaches taken domestically and internationally, they concluded that there no single approach would be suitable across Queensland. Instead the QRA focusses on delivering fit-for-purpose solutions which are influenced by the local community:

I know that some of the conversations have been about the establishment of catchment management authorities. The clear lesson that we are getting from councils and communities throughout Queensland is that there are a range of models for delivery here... Our approach is to listen to the local community, listen to local councils, listen to local mayors and listen to state agencies to really get an understanding of what is really important for that particular community.⁴⁹

Committee comment

The committee notes that a range of actions to strengthen flood resilience are taking place in Queensland. It is clear that a significant and varied range of actions have already been implemented or are planned to be implemented. The committee acknowledges that a one size fits all solution is not appropriate for Queensland. Instead locally specific fit-for-purpose solutions are best placed to deliver improved flood resilience.

This work will contribute to making Queensland a more flood resilient state. The committee acknowledges the efforts of all organisations and agencies involved in this important work.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Legislative Assembly note the contents of this report.

⁴⁸ Queensland Reconstruction Authority, correspondence dated 15 June 2018.

⁴⁹ Public briefing transcript, Brisbane, 11 June 2018, pp 10-11.

Appendix A – Officials at public briefing on 11 June 2018

Queensland Audit Office

- Mr Brendan Worrall, Auditor-General
- Ms Daniele Bird, Deputy Auditor-General
- Mr Darren Brown, Director, Performance Audit

Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy

- Mr Saji Joseph, Director, Water Programs, Water Policy
- Ms Amanda Downes, Executive Director, Operations Support, Natural Resources
- Mr David Wiskar, Executive Director, Water Policy

Queensland Reconstruction Authority

- Mr Brendan Moon, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Graeme Milligan, Executive Director, Risk Management Reduction and Mitigation