



AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr DA Pegg MP (Chair)
Mr AJ Perrett MP
Mrs J Gilbert MP
Mr R Katter MP
Mr JE Madden MP
Mr EJ Sorensen MP

Staff present:

Mr R Hansen (Research Director)
Mr P Douglas (Principal Research Officer)

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT NO. 16 2015-16: FLOOD RESILIENCE OF RIVER CATCHMENTS

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2016

Brisbane

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Committee met at 9.35 am

CHAIR: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. I declare open the Agriculture and Environment Committee's public hearing. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today. I am Duncan Pegg, the committee chair and member for Stretton. With me today are Tony Perrett, the member for Gympie and our deputy chair; Julieanne Gilbert, the member for Mackay; Jim Madden, the member for Ipswich West; and Ted Sorensen, the member for Hervey Bay. The other member of this committee is Mr Rob Katter, the member for Mount Isa.

The purpose of this meeting is to assist the committee in its examination of the Auditor-General's report to parliament No. 16 of 2015-16 titled *Flood resilience of river catchments*. The report was referred to the committee on 19 April for examination. I remind those present that these proceedings are similar to parliament and are subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may not participate in proceedings and may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

Hansard is making a transcript of the proceedings which we intend to make available on our website. Those here today should note that the media might be present so it is possible that you might be filmed or photographed.

CHARLTON, Councillor Mike, Deputy Mayor, Moreton Bay Regional Council

DAWSON, Ms Diana, Council of Mayors—South East Queensland

McDONALD, Mr Jim, Councillor, Lockyer Valley Regional Council

OLAH, Mr Peter, Executive Director, Council of Mayors—South East Queensland

WHELBAND, Ms Belinda, Lockyer Valley Regional Council

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite each of you to make an opening statement or you might want to appoint a spokesman.

Mr Olah: Thank you, Mr Chair and members. I will lead off for the group if that is okay. We thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and discuss with you the regional council viewpoint around this inquiry's terms of reference and more broadly around the management of catchments across the SEQ region.

I think the committee will be well aware of the two major flood events that occurred in this region in 2011 and 2013. They were definitely catalytic events in the way that the broader SEQ community and its components and the councils and mayors of this community think about catchment management. It became very apparent very quickly at that point that a process which involved dealing separately with the symptoms of inefficient or ineffective catchment management was not working. Dealing separately with flooding, stormwater management, erosion, siltation and all the other issues around the safety and quality of drinking and agricultural water has not worked as well as it should. There may not be enough resources in this space and what resources there are are probably not being spent optimally.

In the SEQ region there are more than 240 organisations involved in funding, designing or delivering projects into the catchments. That in itself is not necessarily a problem. The problem is that they are not doing it, or have not consistently and historically done it, to any single plan. Often the process has been piecemeal. It has been based on capacity to bid and has not necessarily been based on the greatest need or the greatest efficiency.

The response of the council of mayors, which represents the 11 mayors and their councils across the SEQ region, over the last few years has been to look at a whole catchment management approach across the region capturing all those components. Rather than dealing with the symptoms, deal with the integrated causes. Those causes in a natural system like our catchments cross political and other boundaries. They certainly do not take note of electorate or council boundaries.

The end result of that is a process called the Resilient Rivers Initiative that involves the councils of this region; the major organisations in the catchments such as Seqwater, SEQ Catchments, Healthy waterways, Queensland Urban Utilities and Unitywater; and for the last couple of years also involved directly the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

We have been delivering some key outcomes, and I will table and distribute the regional strategy for the Resilient Rivers Initiative. This is a document that effectively looks at a 10-year horizon of what is required for efficient and effective catchment management across the region and sets some high-level targets around that. You will note that the participants in the process are at the bottom of the front page of the document.

CHAIR: Is leave granted to table that document? There being no objection, leave is so granted. Please continue, Mr Olah.

Mr Olah: I will also table a second document at the same time so that we can move through this a little more rapidly. The second document is the first of the catchment action plans being prepared under the Resilient Rivers Initiative. It is for the Lockyer catchment areas and was launched last week. There are another five catchment action plans either completed, ready for launch or underway. The aim is to have catchment action plans for each of the 19 catchments across the region addressing that longer term strategy.

CHAIR: Is leave granted to table that document? There being no objection, leave is so granted. Please continue, Mr Olah.

Mr Olah: Thank you, Mr Chair. At the core of it, the Resilient Rivers Initiative is not just about floods. It is not just about siltation and erosion. It is not just about safety and security of drinking or agricultural water. It is not about quality water in the bay. It is about all of those things. What it strives to do—and we are very thankful for the collaboration of all those partners—is to move us towards a mature catchment action and catchment management model.

The truth is that SEQ has some very special needs in this area and what works here may not work in other parts of Queensland. We have a large, mostly urban community built onto flood plains. That is not going to change. Most of our catchments are open, privately owned catchments. That makes us very different from the other major urban centres across Australia, and that is not going to change. We have in that context possibly a greater need for coordinated catchment management, but in fact the reality is that our catchment management model was significantly behind those in other states.

Our objective is to move that along and, most importantly, to look at the identified works in these catchment action plans as they come along. They are at the rear of that document. These are works that are necessary as priority works, not just to maintain our catchments at a degrading level, which is what the current process does, but to move them to a sustainable level in an economic, environment and social sense. That is what the Resilient Rivers Initiative is about.

It is in this context—my apologies for the long prologue—that we have looked at the report of the QAO into the catchments covering four of our member councils, and we were fortunate enough to have been consulted by the QAO through their process. Our submission details our position around this and it is a position agreed by the mayors of the region. We feel that they have in the QAO report accurately described the illness and reasonably accurately described some of the fixes. We do have some concerns with one or two of their recommendations.

Primarily whilst the recommendations for action are right, in an environment where the heads of power are spread across any number of agencies, the place of authority and responsibility may not be the same place. Where you have a competitive funding model not based on need but on capacity to bid and deliver, you are not going to achieve an outcome. You will only achieve best outcome if you do it with an integrated catchment management model.

Our second concern with the recommendations is the recommendation to introduce the Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning as another major head of power into catchment management in the region. We work closely with DILGP on many areas, such as planning and infrastructure. They are a good agency, but there are already too many cooks spoiling this broth. What is needed is a convergence of authority rather than a further dilution of authority and responsibility.

We ultimately need to move towards a single catchment management plan and an approach that converges those authorities so things can happen on the ground. What we are talking about here is not that complex. The works that are needed across SEQ's catchments are being done around the Brisbane

world successfully. Even the quantum of money required, as long as they are spent consistently, are not that great in the context of whole of government. They are certainly not in the sort of quantum that is required on the Great Barrier Reef, for instance, but it needs to be done consistently and it needs to be done in a way that is convergent rather than divergent.

That is our position. We agree with many of the prescriptions in the QAO report, but we feel that the introduction of another bureaucracy, for want of a better term, into the mix does not move us towards that integrated model that every one of the submissions you have received advocates. As different as those submissions are, the one consistent point is that integrated catchment management has to be at the centre of fixing this. Dealing with floods and dealing with the other things separately will not work.

I would like at this point to hand you over to Councillor McDonald. Obviously, the Lockyer Valley suffered the greatest brunt of those flood events we spoke about. It is a community that is still in the recovery mode from that. He can tell you a little about the impacts in his community and what his community feel the appropriate responses are.

Councillor McDonald: It is a really wonderful privilege for me to be able to speak with you today. The baseline of that privilege is because we are still dealing with the trauma associated with the floods whereas people in the broader area are not having that close contact with people who have suffered in many ways from the floods. It is very heartening that the Audit Office and this committee is looking at these issues. I think it is almost the perfect good storm—the Agriculture and Environment Committee looking at agricultural security and the impacts of floods. It is very timely.

One of the things from the flood of 2011 that we now scientifically know from the geomorphological studies that Associate Professor Jacky Croke and Dr Chris Thompson, through their research programs and the 30 doctoral papers that they have put out, is that we look at the catchment and agricultural areas in a completely different light. If you see alluvial soil there has been a flood that has at one stage or other spewed across that area. When you look at the Lockyer Valley region it is a long distance from the creeks where that alluvial mud is seen.

That is a really important point. It is an important point when considering flood plain management and catchment action plans and how inextricably interwoven they are. When you look at the agricultural areas with a different set of eyes you know that at some stage or other there have been powerful floods like the one in 2011 when people lost their lives. It is just that we have not been here for that long to actually appreciate that. That is a really important aspect to this issue.

I know that through government processes there are opportunities for transformational change. Regularly that is from critical incidents like the big floods that occurred in 2011 and 2013. It is also when dollars come along. I think of NHT 1, National Heritage Trust 1, the sale of Telstra, and the investment in NRM that occurred then and then NHT 2 and the investment that occurred then. There were massive works undertaken. That leadership in funding also led to transformational change. I would suggest that leadership in funding now from local, state and federal government would be a huge transformational change effort that is right upon us and a great opportunity before us.

As Mr Olah said we have a number of catchment action plans already done. Ours in the Lockyer, which we are very pleased to table here today, is ready to go. I am very excited by the catchment action plan, not because it wants to return everything to a pristine environment before settlement but because it wants to integrate agriculture and the economic benefits that we have with improving the water quality and riparian areas as well as flood plan management. We have a number of projects that are ready to go in that space. We are looking forward to that leadership in funding that is coming along. I know that it will be coming along.

The other area of transformational change is obviously legislative, whether that be through a head of power such as, as has been suggested, catchment management authorities or another control. That will also give us a level of certainty that that integrated approach to the catchment management will happen.

I would like to reinforce one of the other points that Mr Olah made which is that 75 per cent of our land in the Lockyer is under private ownership. Whatever works are going to occur to improve our catchment has to involve a very big community engagement exercise. There are a number of agencies and volunteer groups that are very well placed to do that, and local government is very well placed to that do that in terms of the interaction that we have with our community.

Particularly in regional areas of Australia there is a large distrust in government and government and bureaucratic processes. I think we need to be sensitive to that very big community engagement effort that needs to occur to see that on-ground works occur and make sure that that point source protection occurs. I am not sure whether the committee is aware of the New York model

where it was suggested that there would be a \$5 billion or \$6 billion investment needed for filtration upgrades to be able to cater for the water needs in New York, but, in fact, they invested \$1.5 billion in the upper catchment to make sure that the water quality was of such a standard when it got to the residents that it was far less costly to treat.

That sort of model could work with the cooperation that we have already through the Resilient Rivers Initiative and the mayors coming together and committing to pay for studies and work that is happening in that area. I was very heartened to hear the Lord Mayor when he came up to the Lockyer a couple of weeks ago to assist launching our catchment action plan say that the ratepayers of Brisbane and broader South-East Queensland have to be in this space and thinking about how we are going to protect the region. For an agricultural community like the Lockyer Valley, with 38,000 people and producing 25 per cent of Australia's agricultural fresh fruit and vegetables, it is heartening to know that we are actually all in this together. That sort of leadership is something that we are very pleased to hear. We look to the future with a great deal of optimism. I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Councillor McDonald. Councillor Charlton, would you like the opportunity to make an opening statement?

Councillor Charlton: I am here at the direct request of our mayor. He was unavailable to come, but he gives this issue and this committee and this presentation significant status. He asked me personally to come along.

I am very supportive of both Mr Olah and Councillor Jim McDonald's comments. We already have a track record of looking at a similar approach to what we are talking about here in the region. In fact, we were one of the first councils to create and complete a complete water cycle management plan. It talks about stormwater but also water usage, flooding and all those sorts of issues. We have won a number of planning awards for that. This is a rollout of that concept.

I think it is very important that we have a holistic approach. Anything that we can do to bring together that bigger picture catchment view through South-East Queensland I think is very important. While we are looked upon as an urban area, in the Moreton Bay region we have some significant agricultural interests, particularly around berry growing through Driscoll's and a number of others. We are a significant producer and provider of berries into the Australian and international market. We also have significant avocado production up around Bellthorpe as well as a number of other agricultural industries.

Our town planning documents are keen to support and protect those agricultural industries over time. In fact, we have taken a stand around some of the urban growth patterns in the South East Queensland Regional Plan because we think it is very important to learn lessons from the past, particularly around planning, urban footprints, population growth and the distance for which food needs to travel and where jobs are provided and a broad range of jobs.

For every hour that the field heat stays in berries after they are picked before they processed they lose one day shelf life in the supermarket. In planning terms, making sure we can facilitate that instead of looking at an application to put a cold room in a rural area instead of industrial area as somebody trying to get land cheaper is an industry imperative. Applying that type of approach to flooding and managing our catchments we think is very important. We are very supportive of this.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Councillor Charlton. We will now move on to questions. Mr Olah, what funding do SEQ councils allocate to flood resilience work and related to that do SEQ councils and departments evaluate the flood resilience activities they undertake to see if they are effective?

Mr Olah: I cannot give you a precise figure in terms of flood resilience allocations. Clearly council is one of the major landholders and stakeholders in terms of community benefit and community risk. In most cases, the allocation to flood resilience is hard to separate from their broader catchment management allocations. It is fair to say that councils in this region would be amongst the largest funders of works within the catchments. The measure of success is variable. Probably the most important public measure is the annual Healthy Waterways report card which looks at the quality of water. That does not necessarily measure the exposure to risk. That may be a gap that needs to be dealt with in the future.

That said, the fact that the mayors have chosen to go down this route of the Resilient Rivers Initiative says that there is an underlying assumption that the current spend is not as efficient as it could be. I guess the first principle of resilient rivers is that before we even get the extra funding in—and the extra funding is important—let us at least spend the funding that is already in the pool from the three tiers of government in a concerted, directed way towards areas of greatest need.

The fact that Lockyer is the first of the catchment action plans to be launched is a clear message. There is a reason for that. It is a clear example of the many issues that affect and blight different parts of this region. Moreton Bay, for instance, as a council is not necessarily party to the QAO report because it is exclusive to the catchment that covers four councils and yet the Moreton Bay Regional Council is exposed to the outcomes in the bay every day, and the economic, social and environmental impacts of that.

The reality is that spending the money not where the symptoms occur but where the greatest value in terms of fixing the illness is and doing so in the right order along a critical path is vital. Once you have that line up—and that is what these documents are about—you can then assess where the gap is and start filling that gap with new funding from the three tiers of government.

Mr PERRETT: Thank you for coming along today. I want to look at land use planning and the approach from individual councils. Perhaps Mr Olah may be able to give an overview on that. Is there an existing approach right across the south-east in respect of land use planning or are councils still adapting and adopting their own processes? I will give a little background. I had 12 years in local government, and most of those as deputy mayor, in Gympie. I have a fair deal of experience with the issues that we are discussing today. There were always some challenges in and around not only what councils wanted to adopt but particularly what the community wanted. I wonder where councils sit across the south-east in respect of land use planning?

Mr Olah: The shape of population growth in SEQ is ultimately controlled to an extent by the SEQ regional plan of the day. That is the head planning document to which each council responds utilising its local planning instruments. There is a consistency from that point of view. In terms of what is within those local planning instruments, they obviously address local needs and go through local consultation processes. The most important factor though is this: the truth is that most of our catchments are open catchments. They are privately owned in one way or another. A lot of the projected growth, especially in terms of greenfield population growth, in this region is towards those catchments. That is inevitable based on the fact that that is where the land is. There is an economic imperative to get the catchment management right because at some point, if you keep growing into open catchments and you do not address how you manage those catchments, you are going to hit a brick wall.

Certainly, the linking up of this process around resilient rivers and integrated catchment management into that overarching planning is vital. We are heartened that the draft SEQ regional plan recently launched incorporates some references to resilient rivers. We believe there is a way to go. We will be having some input into that process while it is open for public consultation. Certainly, that integration into both the regional plans and the local plans is important.

Councillor McDonald: Would you mind if I expand on that?

Mr PERRETT: Absolutely. I am keen to hear about this.

Councillor McDonald: One of the common conversations that we have in our community is that we do not want to see what happened in Redlands happen in Lockyer. That is a really great case study in comparison. Our community knows that agriculture is the backbone of our economy. Good quality agricultural land is very valued and very well protected. We have a lot of sandstone ridge country that can grow houses and the like; it is not as good for agriculture. We look forward to those limited growth opportunities, but the No. 1 land use planning issue for us is to keep the good quality agricultural land so that we can continue farming and farming to a very high degree.

That is it in a nutshell about land use planning. Following on to make sure that that land use continues and that good quality agricultural land is there, the outcomes from the big flood study gave us a lot of scientific rigour around exactly what should happen and should not happen in different areas. We all may have a different opinion about how we should fix up creeks and rivers but, when we go as a collective and look at that specific section of creek or river, we all share the view, 'Yes, that should be cleaned out' or, 'Yes, that should have riparian treatment,' and we all agree on that. When you talk about the whole area, there are so many different opinions but, when you stand on the side of the creek, you actually all agree. With the scientific outcomes of that big flood study overlapped with farmers and decision-makers looking at the area and coming up with a plan for it, there are some really optimistic opportunities ahead.

Councillor Charlton: Mr Deputy Chair, I share your passion around land use planning. In part answer to your question, if I have interpreted it correctly—is there, for want of a better term, a coordinated or consistent approach?—I think there is more now than ever before because of the

approval system we have for our town planning documents which have to go before the state government. There is a fairly rigorous process, whereas, when I first started in planning back in 1994, there was not that level of state scrutiny, that state involvement.

We as a council worked tirelessly at a staff level with the Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning around our plan, which we adopted in December last year and came into force on 2 February this year. As part of that planning document and the lessons that were learnt from the tragedies and the disasters through Lockyer in 2011 and the recommendations of the Floods Commission of Inquiry, we are if not the first one then one of the very early adopters of some very difficult decisions around land use planning and around the technical assessment of flood mapping.

We have spent a lot of time—I cannot give you a dollar figure for which I apologise, but I am sure we can supply that if the committee would like it—and money on our flood mapping, our catchment managements and the application of the latest laser LiDAR—I am not sure what that acronym stands for, but it is a laser survey—to the point that the survey that we had done on the Lower Pine River Catchment last year was four hits per square metre, whereas the previous one was two hits per square metre. That is the degree of accuracy in some of this technology and where we are going. That, can I tell you, has given some of our landowners some grief. I have some residents who have been negatively impacted by the new zonings, but we are committed to continuing to work through that.

I believe there will always be a desire for independence in local government when it comes to planning. As a practitioner, I support that because we are very close to our communities, as you are well aware. The South East Queensland Regional Plan is the first plan that has gone out for draft consultation—in previous iterations it has been delivered and that has been it; it has been final—and I think that is a really good step forward. The other biggest issue we all have is that the community does not understand land use planning. Their view of how it should work and how it needs to work are poles apart. I do not have an answer to that one.

Mr PERRETT: My supplementary question was about flood mapping and what you just indicated and whether councils had that in place prior to 2011 and the catalytic events that Mr Olah mentioned in 2013. There is some resistance within communities and there needs to be some strength from councils. I saw this in Gympie when flood mapping came in. Your land use planning is now informed by certain flood heights, be it Q50 or Q100. Has it moved on to that point now that most councils have adopted that sort of scientific basis to inform their planning?

Councillor McDonald: Absolutely. In Lockyer we have spent many hundreds of thousands of dollars on flood mapping. We have been fortunate to get assistance from both the state and federal government to assist us with that. Just prior to the 2011 flood we completed our first regional flood mapping for that area. We did not have time to put that in place and we did not know the extent of the devastation that occurred in 2011. We have introduced a temporary TLPI—temporary local planning instrument—with new heights that take into consideration really the worst of the worst. That has negatively impacted on a lot of people, but for 4½ years now we have been strong as a council and made sure that that TLPI was in place.

Mr PERRETT: Was that information available through the Queensland Reconstruction Authority? Is that primarily where it came from?

Councillor McDonald: We funded that through SKM—

Mr PERRETT: You funded that independently.

Councillor McDonald:—the original engineers who did that. It was very fortunate that there was LiDAR information available through SEQ Catchments at the time—which was funded partially by the council of mayors. We have a great deal more understanding of the science now of the floods and the flood modelling. It really is a great science when you see the videos of what can occur and the blue and red and yellow marks on that map that show the risk of flood which is obviously a combination of depth and velocity.

CHAIR: I am conscious of time and giving all members an opportunity to ask questions, because I am sure they will have questions to ask.

Councillor Charlton: I put on the table that outside this committee process, which I understand is limited and restricted by time as it should be, I am more than happy to discuss these issues collectively or individually with any members of the panel or other members, because they are very important issues and they are something that I am quite passionate about. It is a work in progress. I think we are lot further down the track than what we were pre-2011. The recommendations coming out of the Floods Commission of Inquiry, rather than the Reconstruction Authority, I think were the imposing ones.

Bit by bit, as we talk and work in groups like the Council of Mayors (SEQ) and other groups such as the Local Government Association of Queensland, there will be a transformation of how councils deal with this. It is a work in progress. We are not there yet, but I think we have come a long way compared to where we were in terms of those risk analyses and communicating with the community—and the fact that what you are looking at on your property is not a historical flood record but a risk matrix analysis generated with the best technology that we have. What has been very interesting in our region is that we have had a couple of significant events—on 1 May last year and a couple of events in June this year—and where those events have been able to be measured and categorised the results have been spot on to what the modelling said. There has been a good justification through that modelling.

Mr SORENSEN: Do you continue to monitor, especially where they put in levee banks? If you have two good levee banks on either side of the river where it used to be a flood plain, where the water spread out over the flood plains but now you are spearing it straight through there, what sort of modelling do you have and what control do you have over those levee banks?

Councillor McDonald: Thanks for the question. There really should not be any new levee banks going up. We have that exact understanding from the flood modelling that occurs. It is a horrific multiplier. If the creek bank goes up an extra metre and a half, it is a multiplier of many times in terms of the power of that stream. We are very mindful of that. Of course there is legislation that allows local governments to act when there is a complaint about new levee banks that occur. We will certainly continue to monitor that.

Mr Olah: A number of our councils have concerns with the entire levee bank issue and how it impacts on flood and catchment management. One of the issues that is consistently raised and discussed is the fact that the baseline data is not that strong. It is not about what happens next; it is what is currently in place so that you can have some control over what happens to existing levee banks. Certainly in some cases that comes down to a resourcing issue. This is often in places where councils are least resourced to do this intensive work. That capacity to look again at a whole-of-catchment model and move those resources to where they are needed is important.

Mr SORENSEN: I have been in council myself. When you talk to people who are affected by these flood plans, it affects their insurance as well. How do you handle that side of it?

Councillor McDonald: It is a very challenging situation. Last week our vet from Laidley had an issue where his insurance went from \$1,200 a year to \$9,000 a year, so he is obviously looking for alternative insurers. Through a form 19 process, people who are not flood affected or may have blocks that are slightly flood affected can get access to our flood mapping and show that where their house is they are not flood affected. There are a lot of irresponsible insurers and banks out there who are just looking at the postcode and not the actual block of land, so we assist them where we can with that.

Councillor Charlton: We have actually spent some time on that matter because our residents have raised it with us. We have had meetings with the Insurance Council of Australia. We have a pretty accurate picture, I think, of what does and does not work now and how they get their data for our region. Commercial competition is still one of the best answers. In a lot of cases where insurance premiums jump significantly like that, if the landowners do some commercial competition comparisons, they will end up with a much better deal. There is no doubt that we are used and our protection of our community is used at times, but we have done our best to get accurate information and then put that out before our communities so that when they say, 'The insurance company says it is because of your flood mapping,' we can say that they are not using our flood mapping in some cases.

Mr SORENSEN: They are just using the postcode.

Councillor Charlton: Correct. They are using a postcode and a risk factor.

Mr KATTER: Apologies for being late. I am trying to catch up. I am happy to listen. All I could add of any value is that I was on the council in Mount Isa and was a property valuer at the time. Picking up on that last point, at any time when you are doing these plans and strategies if we can improve in that space there is better information available to the banks—because the banks are another big one. Where you had a house clearly on a ridge or on a rise, it just gets caught up in it. A number of property sales fall over and insurance bills go up because of the inaccuracy of the information. As we improve mapping techniques and information available, it is a good space to work in for councils I think.

Councillor McDonald: Absolutely.

Mr MADDEN: I would like to focus on the Auditor-General's report and the recommendations that were made in the report. Four recommendations were made. Some of what we have discussed overlaps with those recommendations. Recommendation 3 states—and I will read it out to save you having to consider the Auditor-General's report—

We recommend that the four councils—

that is, Scenic Rim, Ipswich, Somerset and Lockyer—

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

I am very pleased to see the Lockyer plan. It is an excellent publication. My question for you, Mr Olah, is: what is the status of the other three plans?

Mr Olah: The mid-Brisbane plan is complete. We are looking to finalise the print and launch of that ASAP. The Pumicestone Passage and Logan-Albert are well underway and looking for launch early in 2017. We have two more ready to go to complete, effectively, the Brisbane-Bremer catchment subset.

Mr MADDEN: Sorry to correct you, but I do not think that is what the recommendation said. It is the flood management plans from the four councils, not from any specific area and certainly not the Pumicestone Passage. They meant everyone but Lockyer—Somerset, Ipswich and Scenic Rim. Are you aware what is happening with regard to their flood management plans?

Mr Olah: I cannot speak directly for those councils. I can speak for the regional position.

Mr MADDEN: Yes.

Mr Olah: The regional position is that, properly constructed, the catchment action plans under Resilient Rivers should include all the components of managing those catchments, including the flood plain management. In terms of this first plan, Lockyer does not include a comprehensive flood plain management strategy, simply because that data was not ready in time for the preparation of this, but it does countenance specifically that gap and recommends that at the first review of this document, which is in two years, that be brought into it. The later catchment action plans that have that data available will include flood plain management.

Mr MADDEN: My next question relates to consistency between councils with regard to their regulations. Councillor Charlton mentioned building regulations. Recommendation 4 was that the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the four councils—again, Ipswich, Scenic Rim, Lockyer and Somerset—work together to effectively and economically regulate levee banks. As the representatives here of the council of mayors, are you aware of any progress made with regard to that recommendation—in other words, the four councils talking about 'What are we going to do about levee banks? Are we going to let the state government take it over? Are we going to do it ourselves?' Are you three gentlemen aware of any discussions with regard to this recommendation?

Mr Olah: There are a lot of discussions, Mr Madden. I cannot tell you what the outcomes are, but I can tell you that there is a lot of concern about the capacity of some of those councils and certainly some areas to do so. As I mentioned earlier, there is a genuine concern about the veracity and value of some of the baseline data. The capacity to actually measure any changes in existing levee banks is obviously a concern, because if you do not know what is there how do you measure changes? Certainly there is a perception that extra levee banks are viewed negatively, full stop. For many of those councils, I think the feedback, at a mayoral level at least, is that the problem is less the 'what happens next?' and more the 'how do we manage what is already in place if we can't actually have solid data about what is in place?'

Councillor McDonald: Just to extend on that, these catchment action plans are all being constructed under the Resilient Rivers initiative. One of the great things is that, as each of the plans is being developed, the learnings from each of the plans are being shared with the other council areas and it is assisting in the development of those plans. Levee banks are certainly high on the agenda. Maybe it is something we need to go together on to specifically address that, but I know that it is happening at a shared and agreed level.

The other thing that is important about these catchment action plans is that they are strategic in nature and they will be included and referred to in our planning schemes. Protecting land strategically and finding alternative locations for sensitive areas, whether it be flying fox roosts or hospitals and that sort of thing, as well as flood resilience activities, will all be integrated into our planning scheme, which at Lockyer we are currently reviewing.

Mr MADDEN: Again, this is to do with councils' regulations and these four councils having similar regulations. I know with my area, which is Somerset and Ipswich, which the electorate of Ipswich West covers, individual councils are deciding what minimum floor height they will have. The three that are often mentioned are Q100, highest known flood height and the 1974 flood levels. Do you three gentlemen see any future problems with us continuing down this road—that our local authorities in this catchment set different levels for something as important as minimum habitable areas with buildings that are being built?

Councillor Charlton: I think part of the explanation for that is that catchments are individuals. For instance, in our region we have some different flood levels because there is a significant difference in the movement of water and how it reacts, for instance around the Pumicestone Passage, Bribie—those flood areas. Then you get back in to some areas like Eatons Hill and far more hilly areas. One of the things I have learned through the broader region versus the old Pine Rivers region is how those catchments do vary. I think there is a uniformity in the general desire and approach, but we have put an enormous amount of time and effort and spent a lot of money on this issue through our planning schemes. The political part aside, the technical side of how water behaves and therefore what free boards you need where to give the same level of indemnity is completely different. I think there is a case for individual catchments having some variance there.

I would be concerned about a one-size-fits-all. For instance, if you took the lower, slower moving areas, you might want one per cent probability plus 500 ml, whereas in other areas you get the same level of indemnity with one per cent probability and 300 ml. We are then forcing cost. We are sterilising land that might be a precious resource. I think the specificity of spending the time and the money and really focusing in on those catchments and coming up with the right answer of those is a good way to go.

Mr Olah: It is important to recognise that it is not a static area. The quality of catchment modelling in this region has improved out of sight in the last five years. It had to. That informs each iteration of each plan in each part of the region. It is one that changes. I do not think any of the councils are dogmatic about their position. It is about what works based on their best known information at a given point in time.

Mr MADDEN: I must say that I am reassured to hear that.

Mrs GILBERT: Mr Olah, in your opening statement you talked about the integrated catchment model. That seems quite comprehensive, what you want to do as combined councils. What has been produced so far is very good. Within your councils do you have the professional skills and expertise—the staff and the consultants—or do councils need assistance to continue on with this work?

Mr Olah: That is a very important question. The truth is that there are some very good resources. There is some good capacity holistically across councils, but it is certainly not necessarily where it is most needed. Part of what we have tried to do with Resilient Rivers is transfer resources, in terms of both dollars and knowledge, across the region to points of need regardless of boundaries. Certainly the fount of all wisdom is not within local government; it is spread across all tiers of government and the private sector—and most importantly in this region the community. Capturing that and bringing it together to an agreed, overarching approach is important.

Most importantly, transferring the resource to where it does the most good is vital. I guess that is the underlying tenet of what Resilient Rivers is about: spend and bring the capacity to where it gives you the best bang for buck. Initially, certainly in this region, a lot of that is in the upper catchments. Of course, those upper catchments are the least populated part of South-East Queensland. They have the least capacity around cash flow and innate capacity. There is no question that they need help, but what they do not need is to have their local knowledge ignored when that help is applied. That is what we are trying to do with Resilient Rivers.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. The time allocated for the hearing has expired. I thank all witnesses who have appeared before the committee today.

Committee adjourned at 10.24 am