



Bathurst Flood Inquiry 1986

**REPORT TO THE HON. JANICE CROSIO M.P.
MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND
MINISTER FOR WATER RESOURCES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Committee of Inquiry into the Bathurst Flood of August 1986 interviewed 59 witnesses, accepted 58 exhibits and made 11 inspections during the period 17th to 21st November 1986.

The Terms of Reference of the Inquiry were twofold:

- to examine the adequacy of current and previous flood mitigation schemes in the Bathurst City Area; and
- to recommend the flood mitigation projects required to adequately safeguard the residential, commercial and industrial areas of Bathurst City.

In broad terms, the Committee found that the previous flood mitigation schemes, because of their limited nature, are of little benefit during major floods such as that of August 1986.

The flooding problem at Bathurst is complex and multifaceted. The Committee concluded that only a comprehensive flood plain management plan, comprising a mix of works and measures, can adequately deal with the problem. The need for a solution is compelling because the records show that floods comparable to that of August 1986 have occurred four times this century.

The components of the problem are as follows:

- some 260 residences (many over 100 years old) have been constructed on the Macquarie River flood plain;
- previous river clearing works in the Bathurst area were undertaken without due regard for the complexity and subtlety of river bed behaviour, and are of limited usefulness in mitigating the effects of major floods;
- in the absence of any comprehensive management strategy, Council has granted approvals to fill on the flood plain on an ad hoc basis;
- there is no adequate Flood Warning System; and
- being primarily concerned about their immediate area, flood plain residents generally lack an understanding of the overall flood problem, as was reflected in the divergent views expressed by witnesses.

The Committee formed the view that solution of the complex flooding problem requires the preparation and implementation of a comprehensive flood plain management plan for Bathurst, as proposed under the terms of the Government's Flood Policy. This should be done as a matter of urgency. Council should now activate its Flood Plain Management Committee to prepare the plan which should include community input and technical expertise.

For inclusion in the flood plain management plan, the Committee of Inquiry recommends the following works and measures:

1. a levee system to protect major areas of development;
2. a voluntary acquisition program for residences on the eastern floodplain which cannot be protected;
3. master drainage plans for all developed flood plain areas to cater for both local runoff and flood flows;
4. an accurate and reliable flood warning system;
5. upgraded emergency services able to deal with major floods;
6. appropriate planning and development controls; and
7. co-ordination of the local flood plain management plan with a future valley Total Catchment Management Strategy.

It is considered that a commitment by Council to implement a flood plain management plan containing the above elements would, in due course, provide adequate safeguards for the residential, commercial and industrial areas of Bathurst City.

The Committee of Inquiry wishes to place on record its very great appreciation of the observational skills of the people of Bathurst who so generously gave their time to assist the Committee. It is the earnest wish of the Committee that the recommended works and measures be implemented as quickly as possible, to ensure that the residents of Bathurst never again have to experience the danger, distress, losses and personal hardship occasioned by the flood of August 1986.

J. CURRAN. (Chairman)

J. CARTER.

S. LEES.

A. COLLIS.