

Elster Creek community forum

Report on feedback received from community representatives

18 October 2017

Introduction

On 7 September 2017, a forum about flood management in the Elster Creek catchment was held at the Duncan McKinnon Reserve Pavilion.

The purpose of the forum was to get community feedback and input into the draft Elster Creek Catchment Flood Management Action Plan. There have been a number of flooding events in recent years and many people in these municipalities have been adversely affected.

Over the past year, senior executives from Bayside City Council, City of Glen Eira, City of Kingston, City of Port Phillip and Melbourne Water formed a Working Group to develop a shared approach to responding to the issue of flooding in the Elster Creek Catchment. The councils have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work collaboratively to address flooding issues by taking a whole-of-catchment approach and have drafted an Action Plan.

The Working Group noted that the actions agreed in the draft Action Plan are over and above what Melbourne Water and the councils currently undertake as a matter of course to maintain and extend the drainage system. The draft Action Plan looks at what else could be done if the parties work together and take a whole-of-catchment approach to the flooding issues.

The forum was attended by approximately 20 community representatives from the four municipalities, including residents, business owners, councillors and representatives from a range of community organisations. Representatives from Emergency Management Victoria and the SES also attended.

It is expected that some form of regular consultation mechanism will be established to provide ongoing community feedback into the development and implementation of the final Action Plan.

The purpose of this report is to document the feedback received at the forum. It is important to note that as the draft Action Plan had not been completed at the time of the forum, initial ideas, themes and directions were presented for discussion.

The next step will be to take on board the community feedback and to develop detailed strategies and actions to create a final version of the Action Plan.

Feedback received from the community

Community members provided the following feedback about the draft Action Plan:

The Action Plan must include actions that will reduce or stop flooding

There was general commendation for the initiative of Melbourne Water and the four councils to work together to develop a whole-of-catchment approach to flooding.

However, comments were received at all tables that the plan must include practical actions and solutions to reduce flood levels as well as adaptation strategies.

Some community members commented that the priorities of the Action Plan were wrong and that the focus should be on actions to reduce flood levels, not just building community awareness and resilience as this will not stop their houses from being inundated.

During the general discussion it was noted that the community's views on mitigation options seem to be different from those of Melbourne Water and the councils. Part of the issue is that people in the community don't understand what is feasible and so don't understand why certain options are rejected. It was suggested that the Working Group needs to clearly define the options and communicate the business case for each option so that the community understands what is realistic and why options are rejected.

Other comments suggested that the Action Plan it needs to include a timeline, time-related goals, budget and designated responsibilities so that progress can be monitored. The question 'How can we benchmark success?' was also raised, and that there needs to be greater awareness of what has been implemented successfully in other areas.

Include community members on the Working Group

In order to have more efficient communication between the Working Group and the four communities, community members asked that four community representatives (one from each council area) be elected to the Working Group. These representatives can provide their community's perspective and also feedback directly to their communities about what is being and will be done to mitigate flooding.

Use of the term *resilience* in the core principles

A number of the community representatives expressed the view that telling residents who live in flood affected areas to be *resilient* as a flood 'prevention/mitigation' strategy was patronising and disrespectful to the community.

Helping the community be better prepared and informed

A number of suggestions were made about how Melbourne Water and the councils could help the community to be better informed and prepared, and these are summarised below:

- Create a regular community forum, or an online forum, that is publicised and considered by Melbourne Water and the four councils.
- Include the minutes of the CEO Forum and Working Group on each council's public agenda and website.
- Develop a publicly available website with information about the proposed mitigation strategies, providing the capability to sign up on the website for updates.
- Provide more communication and more accessible information to the public about which properties are in, or close to, flood-prone areas. This will help people make good decisions when choosing properties to buy or rent. Currently, this information isn't clear enough. Also let owners and renters know that they need the right insurance.
- There is a need for clearer and earlier warning about floods. Several comments were made that there was no early flood warning before the 29 December flood and the only warning came at about 3pm when the storm was already in force. Comments were made that there was miscommunication about when and where flooding was going to occur. It was suggested that local newspapers can be used to show the community how to deal with and prepare for flood events. Newspapers can also warn of upcoming storm events and periods when flooding is more likely to occur.
- Hold community forums right after a flood event to help activate and empower the community.
- There is a need for more emergency shelters within safe walking distance of flood-affected areas. Having only the town halls as emergency shelters made getting help unobtainable for many. It was suggested that lots of smaller sites, such as scout halls and community centres, be used as well.
- Some community members requested access to the flood mitigation/prevention models produced by the CRC and Melbourne Water.
- There is a need for clearer language around flooding. For example, community members noted that the flooding they are experiencing is more regular than a 1-in-100 or -400 year event and asked why is it still called this when these events are occurring at more regular intervals?
- Community members could share their experiences to educate others on how to prepare for flooding.

Mitigations suggested by community members

- Suggestions were made that more use should be made of open space to divert stormwater and that one issue is that land shouldn't be completely covered in hard surfaces. It was noted that Glen Eira is virtually impervious because there is so much development, but Bayside has a lot of open space that could be used to retain stormwater.
- It was asked:
 - Why is there no legislation about having to maintain some green, or even permeable, spaces in new developments?
 - Why does Melbourne Water agree to give permits for developments that increase impervious areas and will contribute to flooding?

- Why does all the water from the catchment go into one drainage basin and one exit point when there are several natural retarding and drainage basins outside of the one that leads to the Port Phillip Bay exit?
- It was suggested that the Working Group looks at natural catchments that are outside the one exit point being used at present, in order to reduce the water load that is currently being forced down that one path.
- It was also suggested that the Working Group considers the modelling and mitigations recommended by the CRC.

Improving flood response

Some residents expressed concern about the poor response from authorities and councils when flooding occurred. For example, it would have helped to set up road blocks to prevent traffic going through floodwaters or to have help from services such as the SES earlier, as this didn't happen until several days after the flood event had occurred.

Improving coordination between government organisations

Community members felt that communication between the councils and Melbourne Water needs to be improved so that each party understands what they are responsible for. Better coordination with other agencies like VicRoads and Department of Planning is also required.

It was suggested that action be taken to address gaps between Melbourne Water's flood area guidelines and requirements and council's enforcement.

Improving planning requirements

New developments should be required to go further than 'not make flooding worse' and be encouraged to actively reduce flooding by improving site permeability, etc. Water sensitive urban design to reduce the impact of flooding should be mandatory in the planning stages of new developments. Modifications to planning systems are required for all levels of government, to incorporate better flood mitigation at every stage.

Considering the real cost of flooding

Some community members expressed concern because their properties are uninsurable or insurance prices have increased and are unaffordable. They asked Melbourne Water and the councils to consider the real costs of flooding to the communities (such as increased insurance costs, trauma, having to leave a flooded home, cost of purchasing new belongings due to flood damage, etc.) when considering mitigation options.

It was noted that 12,000 properties in the catchment area were flooded and the flooding in this catchment accounts for 22% of Melbourne's flooding. This means that efforts to reduce flooding in this area are a priority.

Suggested quick wins

Community members were asked if there were any 'quick wins' that should be considered as part of the Action Plan and the following suggestions were received:

Quick wins and actions in Plan

- Publish maps of affected flood zones in local newspapers annually so people know if their property is at risk of being flooded.
- Identify new residents and target them to receive flood education. Requirement for a consistent water management policy across all four councils and agreement on the development planning scheme.
- Make permeable surfaces mandatory. Change planning controls to increase the percentage of permeability.
- Implement onsite water retention facilities, such as tanks. These could auto-empty prior to a deluge to reduce impact on drains.

Other suggestions

- Place sandbags/physical barriers along the creek/canal around flood prone times of the year.
- Stop the backflow of flood water into New Street and implement flaps on drains to stop this.
- Engage the community in a plan to re-wild (i.e. remove concrete) the creek between McKinnon and Elster Creek.
- Remove concrete in heavily concreted areas to create permeable areas so less water is forced to funnel towards Elster Creek.
- Create bigger drains.
- Include dual purpose retarding basins in the open space master plan.
- Adopt the GHD flood retarding basins plan.
- Further develop Elsternwick Park to increase the storm water retention capacity.
- Create a diversion for the Head Street dam to double its capacity. This drain needs repairing and its capacity increased.
- Use Duncan McKinnon Reserve as a retarding basin.
- Create a stormwater retention capability/retarding basin in North Road at the 24ha development.
- Look at Caulfield Racecourse as a possible option for a retarding basin/storm water retention zone.
- Melbourne Water has 250 parklands – can these be made into retarding basins?
- East Village Water Sensitive Urban Design
- Adopt Option 1A for Elsternwick Park north which recommends creating an 'urban' forest where the golf course currently exists, Oval 2 to stay in the same place and golf is not provided at the site.