

# Planning the response to flood

Changes in state planning laws and local planning policies were in the pipeline before the Queensland floods hit. But how will planners be impacted going forward?



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The catastrophic flooding in south east Queensland at the start of 2011 occurred at a time when legislative reviews of relevant planning policy frameworks had already commenced.

Catastrophic events such as the floods (and Cyclone Yasi) can result in an increased focus on the role local government plays in providing the framework for flood mitigation and disaster relief at the ground level.

Two weeks before the floods, the Queensland State government announced that it was updating 'State Planning Policy 1/03: Mitigating the Adverse Impacts of Flood, Bushfire and Landslide' (SPP 1/03), which came into effect in 2003 to give local governments advice and guidance on risk management of assets.

This policy provides statutory guidance designed to minimise the adverse impacts of three natural hazards – flood, bushfire and landslide. Principally, it provides guidance on the development approval process while also taking into consideration people, property, the environment and economic activity.

To this end, it balances these latter factors with the risks associated with the three identified natural hazards, and provides planners and local government with guidance on land use and zoning matters to ensure "adequate decision-making".

Of primary relevance, SPP 1/03 currently does not contain a default hazard management area for flood and only applies where an area has been identified by a local government as a flood affected area, within their planning policies.

A perusal of paragraphs 6.3 to 6.31 (and associated appendices) of the SPP 1/03 Guidelines indicates that a flooding hazard is a matter that can be planned around with some creativity – in other words, it is not definitive on refusing development consent due to the natural hazard associated with potentially catastrophic flooding.

Such creativity ought to be considered in light of the expected exacerbations caused by climate change. These changes will result in altered weather patterns; this has prompted a number of changes in state planning laws and local planning policies around Australia.

Of importance in light of these proposed policy reviews is the severity and frequency of catastrophic flooding, rainfall and category four and five cyclones are expected to increase. While the original SPP 1/03 made allowances for some climate change impacts to be considered when assessing development applications, it does not provide a precise benchmark for planners.

This will change with the updating of SPP 1/03, as climate change impacts will be properly incorporated into planning policies across the state. "Climate change impacts" will be taken to include allowing for a range of expected global mean temperature increases over the next 90 years of between 2°C and 4°C.

It will be acknowledged that increased mean global temperatures will alter natural weather events, including rainfall, precipitation, sea level rise and storm surge. This is important in the Queensland context due to the nature and type of development typically allowed in the state – Queenslanders homes with the downstairs area later enclosed, and more recently ground level homes approved in flood prone areas.



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### Increasing resilience post-floods

Last year saw the release of the *Increasing Queensland's Resilience to Inland Flooding in a Changing Climate* report, commissioned and produced by the State Office of Climate Change, the Department of Infrastructure and Planning, and the Local Government Association of Queensland.

It recommends a five per cent increase in rainfall intensity be taken into consideration for planning and land use purposes, and planning for flood events expanded to include one-in-100-year AHD, one-in-200-year AHD and one-in-500-year AHD events. This, combined with stepped global mean temperature increases, will be included in the

revised SPP 1/03, expected to be completed next year.

The 'Brisbane City Council City Plan' released in 2000 offers residents a free Floodwise Property Report, with which the average punter can obtain relevant flooding information on property with the local government area. This and other development requirements are outlined in the City Plan 2000 document.

This plan is also currently under review as required by the *Sustainable Planning Act*, which placed emphasis on a review every 10 years due to the impact of expected population growth will have on local planning.

However, there is no indication at present that the *Increasing Queensland's Resilience to Inland Flooding in a Changing Climate* report will inform the Brisbane City Council's revised City Plan 2000, or that either the review of SPP 1/03 or the City Plan 2000 will be delayed until the outcome of the Queensland Flood Inquiry are made public.

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