

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 17 March 2023 7:50 AM
To: Maribyrnong River Flood Review
Subject: submission - October 22 flood
Attachments: MW submission.docx

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Dear Sir / Madam

As a resident directly affected by the Maribyrnong River Flood on 14th October 2022, please find attached my submission for the Maribyrnong River Flood Review.

Contact details as requested:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Regards

[REDACTED]

Week beginning Monday 10th October 2022 was filled with ever changing warnings regarding the flooding of the Maribyrnong River. There was absolutely no sense of urgency with any of the messaging.

Why were community meetings not held to:

- inform residents of what could potentially happen if the Maribyrnong River were to flood?
- let residents know what support services would be available to them and when?
- let residents know what support services would not be available to them?

SES claims to have door knocked houses during the week prior to the flood. Why couldn't SES provide residents with an approximate number of how many they had door knocked or which houses were door knocked when questioned at several community meetings post flood?

Thursday 13th October:

Latest warnings received indicated that the Maribyrnong River would flood at 0600hrs on Friday 14th at a height of 2.44m. I walked over to the river numerous times that evening to check the level near the Anglers Tavern carpark. It looked normal. I did notice that the Anglers Tavern had sandbagged the outdoor area facing the river with a row of sandbags (see photo). Having seen the tavern flooded in 2011 I thought that the row of sandbags was going to be useless.

Why did the Anglers Tavern have a heads up re flooding of the Maribyrnong River on the Tuesday 11th October and not the residents?



The Anglers Tavern with a row of sandbags. Photo taken at 1714hrs on Thursday 13th October 2023.



Warning issued at 2116hrs on Thursday 13th October 2023.

I went to sleep at approximately 2100hrs after having set my alarm for 0530hrs – I wanted to wake up half an hour before the Maribyrnong River was due to peak so as to see what a height of 2.44m looked like. I had previously checked my 'Maribyrnong River Flood Plan Property Specific Flood Chart' which had been written by Melbourne Water in conjunction with Maribyrnong City Council and SES. I was not concerned as the measurements shown indicated the Maribyrnong River would have to be 3.50m high to reach my property boundary and 3.70m to reach the inside floor. Hence, I did not raise anything off the floor. I was also not concerned as just prior to the 2011 flood there had been several community meetings at the Maribyrnong Community Centre in Randall St informing the residents in the area on how to prepare for a flood and to stay informed.

My alarm went off at 0530hrs and I checked my phone to switch the alarm off. There was a message sent at 0418hrs stating that flooding was expected to impact one house in my street. Obviously, I didn't hear the message come through despite the phone being on and right beside me during the night. It felt surreal. I rushed to the front window looking down the driveway anticipating to see water but instead I saw a person at the letterboxes (approx. 25m away). I opened the door and asked who it was. It was an SES volunteer who yelled out that I had to **evacuate immediately**. He was soon joined by another SES volunteer and a member of VicPol who took down names. I knocked on the doors of the three other units whilst SES & VicPol door knocked on the front unit. I had previously spoken to all the neighbours earlier in the week about the flood warnings as none of them had seen the 2011 floods. The seven residents from the three units were all born overseas and English was their second or third language.

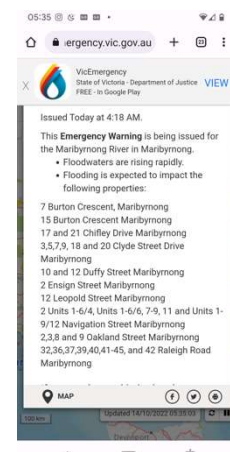
The seven residents failed to comprehend the gravity of it all and initially froze in shock. It took me quite a few minutes to explain it all and talk them through what they needed to take with them (passports, medication, pets, phone & charger). They still just stood there in total disbelief that it was happening. I had to hustle them in to moving and keep checking on them whilst at the same time get my essentials. I also had to give them directions on where to go (Community Centre) and how to get there. I only knew from the 2011 flood. Neither SES nor VicPol gave us any instructions on where to go. We could only evacuate via one end of the street as the other was already flooded.

Why were emergency services relying solely on door knocking to evacuate residents?

Surely using sirens or megaphones on vehicles would be a quicker way to get the attention of residents to wake up.

Why were residents in Victorian towns (Rochester & Echuca come to mind) given time (often quite a few days) to 'prepare to evacuate' and we were told to 'Evacuate NOW'?

Text message I woke up to on
Friday 14th October 2023.



I drove to the Maribyrnong Community Centre and arrived at approximately 0600hrs. It appeared to be just opening up and was chaotic. Displaced people like myself were arriving, some with children in tow others with pets. Some still had pyjamas on, others managed to carry a bag full of belongings. They congregated in various parts of the centre. SES and VicPol were all standing around chatting. A few other agencies began to slowly arrive. Eventually we were able to get something to eat and were registered.

Why wasn't the community centre set up the night before if they were anticipating the Maribyrnong River to flood?

Why were the displaced residents not informed of what would be happening with the data collected during registration?

The Essendon Unit Commander did provide people with an update on the Maribyrnong River flood somewhere around 0800hrs which I, and others, appreciated. More updates were advertised for later in the morning however they did not eventuate and people, including myself, became frustrated by the lack of information available to us.

Why was the Community Centre in Randall St used as an Incident Control Centre / Incident Control Point / Divisional Command Centre for the emergency services?

Why was the SES Forward Command Vehicle not onsite until late Friday afternoon?

Why were there only SES volunteer members onsite and no paid SES staff at this major event?

Why were there only 3 IRBs in the flooded Maribyrnong River to rescue residents? Surely more IRBs could have been obtained from other SES units, from Life Saving Victoria and from Vic POL.

I spent most of the day at the Community Centre making sure my immediate neighbours and a few others who also don't have English as their first language were looked after and received some of the assistance they needed. I managed to get a few walks down The Esplanade and Raleigh Road to see first hand what was going on. In between, I was watching the big screen TV which was providing us with updates on the ever-rising Maribyrnong River heights. Even when it was at 3.50m I was okay with it as I knew the measurements on my 'Maribyrnong River Flood Plan Property Specific Flood Chart'.

Where were the translators and interpreters to support all those displaced residents who have English as their second or third language?

That all changed for me when media informed us that the Maribyrnong River had surpassed 3.70m. I was shattered to say the least. I immediately began thinking about all the photo albums that would be floating throughout the unit. The precious heirlooms that had been passed down to me from several generations that would no longer be. The memorabilia I had acquired over the years from countries all around the world that would be damaged or destroyed. The items I had worked so hard for to save and buy that would have to be thrown out. The new kitchen that I had just had installed a couple of years ago. The clothing, the shoes, the books, the handbags, the linen, the laptops, the white goods the list goes on. I was in a state of total shock and there was nothing I could do. Life had changed.

I was fortunate enough to have somewhere to stay. Needless to say, I didn't sleep much that night. The whole day just kept re-running through my mind. It was surreal and not in a good way!

I was up before the crack of dawn and, armed with gumboots, gloves and sheer grit, I drove back home. It was apocalyptic. It was unrecognisable. It smelt really bad. The sludge and mud covered everything.

The days that followed were exhausting physically, mentally and emotionally. Navigating the mud and sludge was an experience I don't want to revisit. Time was spent throwing items out onto the nature strip with a heavy heart. Washing and cleaning and then washing and cleaning again and again and again.

Introductions to never-before-seen neighbours were a common occurrence as the days went on. Total strangers were offering to help with the clean-up, others were driving by with food and cleaning products. Sadly, others were just sightseeing!

During the following few weeks I felt like I was living a double life. I would dress up to travel over the Raleigh Rd Bridge to go to work and then I would travel back over that same bridge and change into clean-up clothes and keep chipping away at the cleaning and jobs that needed to be done. The streets rapidly changed. Rubbish was piled high filling the nature strips and front yards of every house. Portable toilets were placed on several street corners. Sludge was slowly removed from streets then footpaths and deposited near Coulson Gardens. Trucks were everywhere. The smell was sickening.



Sludge, rubbish, traffic and even a bogged council grader!

I had various agencies visit my property post flood. This included:

-the EPA for soil and water testing (they sent the results through a few weeks later however offered no advice on what to do with the extremely high level of E. coli. I rang their office several times before

someone was finally able to provide me with advice.) **Why didn't the EPA include a basic information sheet on how to treat high levels of E. coli in with their test results?**

-JLG-ERV Property Assessment (I registered for this at the caravan adjoining the Community Centre in the week after the flood. They advised they would contact me within a few days to arrange an inspection. By the 28th October I still hadn't heard from them and went back to their caravan / office. The person in charge came to my home within 10min with three other people. They spent more time on their iPads than looking around. Towards the end of January, a gentleman from the company was parked in our block of units. He was looking for a certain address, which I advised him did not exist. He explained that there had been a major 'stuff-up' with contact details amongst other things and mine was one of them. The report finally came through almost 4 months later on 20th February 2023. My other four neighbours are yet to receive their reports. **Why did it take so long to issue my report? Why didn't the JLG specialists check under the unit and complete their job properly? Why haven't my neighbours still got their reports (it's now after mid-March)?**

This week we will be coming up to 5 months since the day the Maribyrnong River flooded. These months have been filled with attending many meetings in relation to the flood, supporting neighbours in their 'down-in-the-dumps' days, contacting various people that are supposed to be representing the affected people in government, liaising with insurance and contractors in between juggling work, family life and my own mental health. I am living day by day. Anxiety is heightened when it rains or when the river is exceptionally high. The once quiet pocket of this suburb resembles a ghost town. This should not have happened and should definitely not happen again. The devastation is far beyond what is visible to the naked eye. Questions need to be answered and people need to be held accountable so that history does not repeat itself.

- **Why wasn't the 'Flood Management Plan for Maribyrnong City Council and Melbourne Water' followed?**
- **Why were the recommendations from the "Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Maribyrnong River Flood Mitigation Study Executive Summary" published in 1986 not adopted?**
- **Why aren't there mitigation strategies in place for everyone and not just the wealthy VRC?**
- **Why couldn't Melbourne Water and SES speak openly at the community meeting on 15th December and take questions from the residents? What did they have to hide?**
- **Why has the 'Maribyrnong River Flood Plan Property Specific Flood Chart' only been distributed once and that was in February 2013 – OVER 10 YEARS AGO?**