



October 2022 Maribyrnong River Flood

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

A summary of community stories

Prepared by Articulous



Acknowledgement of country

Articulous respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians. We recognise their cultures, histories and diversity, and their continuing connection to the lands, waters and seas of Australia and the Torres Strait.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Traditional Owners of the many lands where we meet, work, learn and connect. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and emerging.



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Introduction

Articulous Communications was commissioned by Melbourne Water to document people's experiences of the October 2022 Maribyrnong River flood event. This report is a collation of those experiences.

On Friday 14 October 2022, Melbourne Water established an independent review panel to investigate the flood's causes and contributors within the Urban Catchment of the Maribyrnong River. The review panel is guided by a Terms of Reference which details the review process, scope, and role of the panel.

To support the submissions stage of the review, Melbourne Water undertook a two-month public consultation and engagement program from January 17 to March 17, 2023. During this engagement program, community and key stakeholders were invited to contribute to the review in one of two ways:

- by making a submission to the independent Review Panel addressing the Terms of Reference
- by sharing experiences
- acknowledging the scale of community impact, Melbourne Water invited community impacted by the flood event to share their stories and experiences of the October 2022 flood event.

To support the engagement program, six community information sessions were held (two online and four drop-in sessions). The drop-in sessions provided people who were impacted by the flood with the space and opportunity to speak directly with Melbourne Water staff and partner agencies involved with the flood event, and to share experiences of the flood event.

The community was also provided the opportunity to share experiences online via an interactive map on the review's engagement webpage.

Melbourne Water engaged independent engagement specialists Articulous Communications to facilitate the 'Share Your Experience' element of the community information sessions, and to prepare a summary report (this report), consolidating all experiences shared throughout the program.



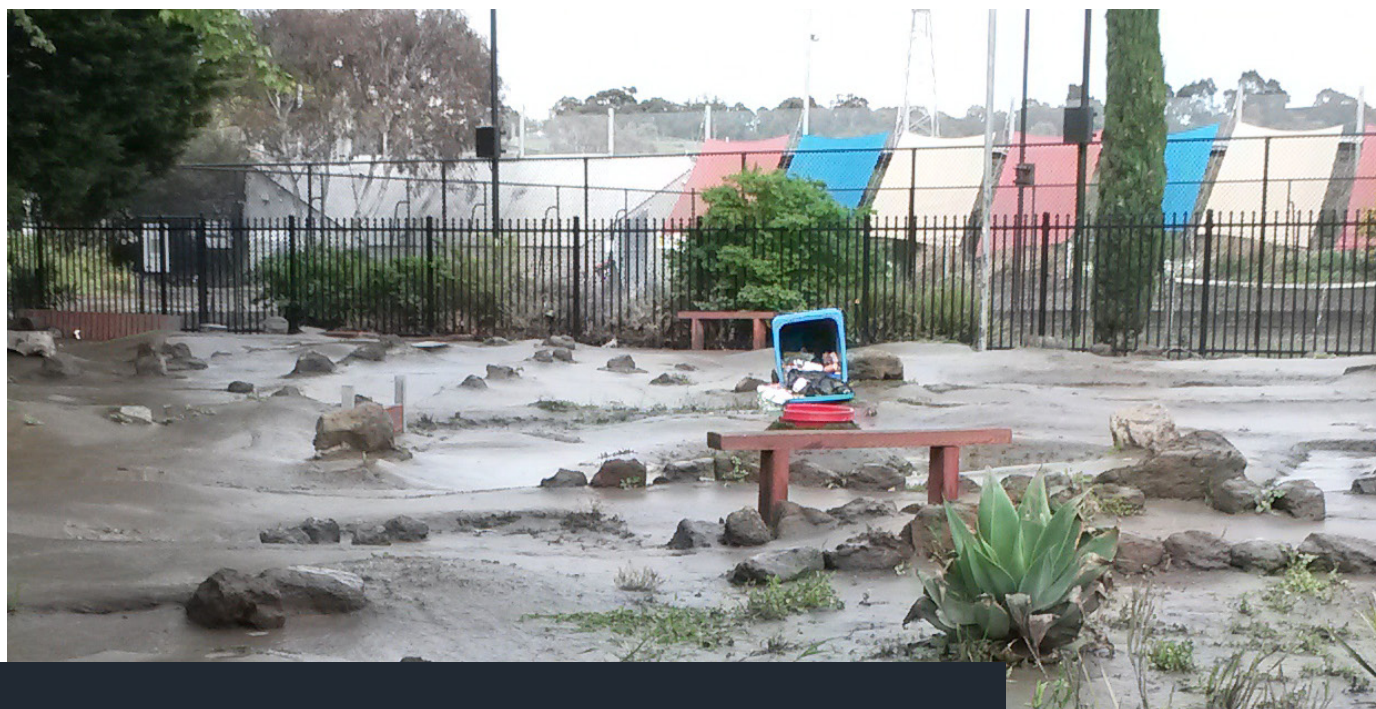
ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report captures the experiences of the Maribyrnong River flood event of 51 community members who contributed to the Share Your Experience components of Melbourne Water's engagement program.

The first section of this report provides an overview of the Share Your Experience engagement approach. It includes a summary of the key themes that emerged from the community's experiences. The second section of this report recounts the collective community experience before, during and after the flood event.

Melbourne Water has indicated its intention to share this report with the independent Review Panel and relevant agencies (including local councils, VicSES and State government). The report will also be shared with community members and other stakeholders on Melbourne Water's engagement webpage.

In preparing this report, Articulous and Melbourne Water would like to acknowledge the community members who shared their experiences of the 2022 Maribyrnong River flood event. The consolidated experiences collated within this report will contribute to the historical record of the event.



Note in reading this report

This report captures the experiences of the 51 community members who participated in the Share Your Experience components of the Maribyrnong River Flood Review. For more information about the broader engagement program, please read Maribyrnong River Flood Review - Public Consultation and Submissions Stage - Engagement Report.

1. The views and observations expressed within the experiences collated herein represent the observations, views and opinions of those community members who participated in the Share Your Experience engagement activities. This report does not represent all communities who may have been impacted directly or indirectly by the flood event, nor does it reflect the opinion or views of Articulous Communications or Melbourne Water Corporation.
2. The stories and experiences documented, which may be quoted in this report, have been gathered from conversations with participants of the Share Your Experience activities. Articulous has taken care during the note taking process but cannot guarantee the accuracy of all notes. We are however confident that the range of ideas, concerns and views shared during the engagement activities have been faithfully captured.
3. To protect the privacy of Share Your Experience participants, full transcriptions have not been included in this report. Where appropriate, quotes have been used.



Section 1:

Share Your Experience

This section of the report provides an overview of the Share Your Experience engagement approach and a summary of key themes emerging from the experiences shared. For a detailed account of the broader engagement activities undertaken as part of the submissions stage of the Maribyrnong River Flood Review please read the Maribyrnong River Flood Review - Public Consultation and Submissions Stage - Engagement Report.

APPROACH

As part of the submissions stage of the flood review, community and stakeholders were invited to share their experience of the October 2022 Maribyrnong River flood event.

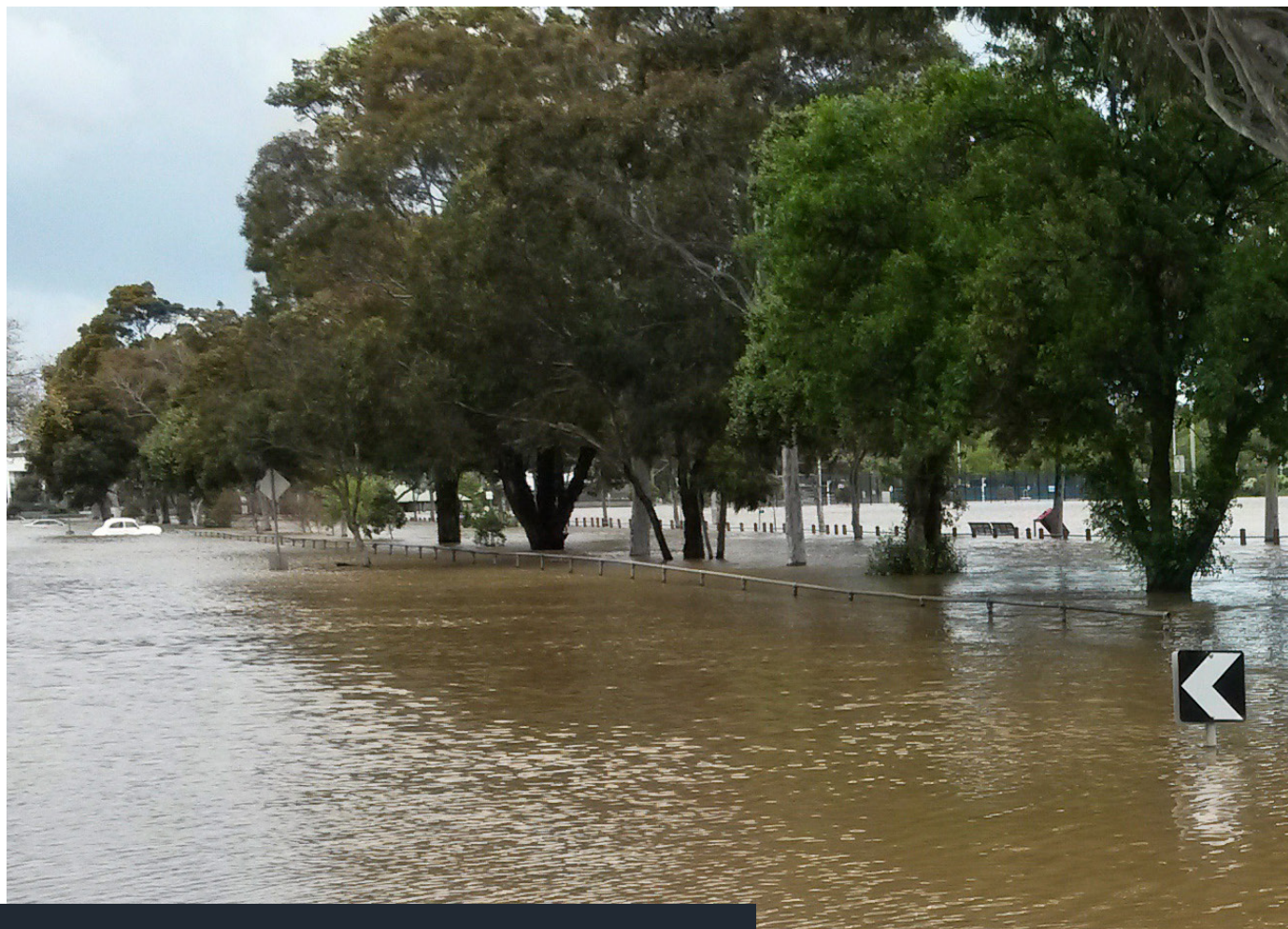
Community and stakeholders were invited to:

- speak with an engagement practitioner at one of the six community information sessions
- submit their story in writing, including images, via email or post
- submit their story in writing via an interactive map on the Maribyrnong River Flood Review Your Say engagement webpage.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

A total of 51 community members shared their personal experiences of the flood event:

- 39 were transcribed from in-depth and lengthy conversations with community at the Share Your Experience stations across the six community information sessions
- seven were shared online via the interactive map on the project's Your Say engagement webpage
- five were submitted via email.



WHAT WE HEARD

Participants graciously shared their own personal stories of before, during and in the aftermath of the October 14 2022 Maribyrnong River flood event. Four local government areas were included as part of these sessions - City of Melbourne, Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley and Brimbank. Each local government area was impacted in different ways, with the flood peak occurring at different times and with differing impacts.

These varied impacts of the flooding are far-reaching, with many community members still affected today. Despite the variation across areas, a number of common experiences became evident.

A summary of the key themes that emerged through the experiences shared by the 51 participating community members is presented on the following pages.



KEY THEMES

Awareness and preparedness

- Many participants indicated a lack of understanding within the community about when or how to act during a flood event.

"Knowing how to act... [you're told to] watch and act but what do you actually do?"

- Other participants shared that even when a flood plan had been prepared, it was not helpful during the event.

"[Our building] had a flood plan but in retrospect it seems inadequate to me that there's only one route – go through park to [redacted] Road - but it was also flooded."

Information, warnings and alerts

- Many participants felt the flood warnings and alerts were inadequate, were not received, were received too late to act, or that public information did not alert them to the potential significance of the flood, or the need to act. Others commented that they could not access or understand important information.

"We didn't know what to do because we didn't know what a lot of water meant (20cm, 30cm etc) – we needed specific preparedness for inundation zones."

"We had no warnings – or the warnings weren't suitable."

"At 4:15 a.m. we got an SMS warning but we didn't see it, we were asleep."

"We got a warning on Wednesday, but we didn't get another warning, then we got one at about 4:30am to say get out. We were sleeping."

"Heard a flood warning on radio, got home at about 5am. Could see then flood water was enormous. Watched the weather report the night before which said only minor flooding was expected."

"What I found really difficult was that I expected warnings would happen... I expected more urgency."

- Many participants spoke about receiving warnings from concerned family, friends and neighbours.

"Woken up at 6:45 by Sister-in-law to say look out window. Saw the water about a meter from the front fence."

"Other than on the news, we didn't know anything about the flood. It was conflicting. But the only way we found out were neighbours ringing our doors."

- Other participants spoke about the inaccuracy in warnings and alerts they received through various sources, adding to confusion about the urgency of the event.

"Looking at EMV/BOM app which had minor flood warnings."

Observations of flood event

- Many participants commented that the level, speed and intensity of the flood was greater than expected, taking many residents by surprise. Long-term residents of the area commented that the flood was the biggest they had experienced.

"People literally put their feet in water when they got out of bed, animals were out in flooded water because people had no idea the flood water was coming. The flood warning system failed dramatically."

"We were watching it come up at 7am fast and furious – that's when we started getting really worried."

"We wondered how quickly the river was going to come up, it was like the river exploded. It was a raging torrent."

"Lived in the area for 67 years, never seen floods like this."

"Family been here for 115 years, this flood equivalent to 1916 levels."

"This flood was nasty. Increased intensity of scale of river. 20-25% larger than 1993."

"Got 2 feet higher on our land than 1993. I could see it was higher than 93."

- Many participants reported observing sources of flooding from overflowing stormwater drains.

"The water started coming from the stormwater into the neighbour's backyard then into [our] backyard."

"Started coming up through the drains in the road, about 30 mins later the road was flooded."

"The water primarily came through the stormwater systems and the grates in the road, it bubbled up slowly and seeped into homes over 2-3 hours."

"Within about an hour, the water had come up through the drains and was at our door – we got it from the front and the back from the drains in the property and from the drains on the street."

- Other participants commented on the amount of debris and rubbish in the aftermath of the flood.

"I was struck by the mount of rubbish that was upturned... We had a lot of debris to clear."



Response

- Several who shared their experience felt the response by government, both state and local, as well as agencies such as Melbourne Water and the SES was inadequate. It was generally commented that people expected more 'boots on the ground' before, during and after the flood.

"...We only had the 1 boat for SES. Had neighbours in trees. I was directing SES where I could see the kids in the trees and high up on top of another house. We waited for them to come take us out."

"On Thursday night we went for a walk, and we thought there would be SES, police, Council out – but there was nobody."

"There's no interdepartmental cross functionality."

"My issue is the lack of engagement, due diligence, and duty of care by Melbourne Water, Brimbank Council and everyone else."

"After the flood, [I've] seen no one – the only one who came around was the deputy mayor with \$100 vouchers, from the Vietnamese community, she was lovely, but it wasn't anything to do with the Council. Understand that many other people had worse impact but it's frustrating that no one has been around at all. [I] would have liked some assistance to clean up."

- Other community members however, praised their local council for their swift clean-up efforts, and were grateful for SES help during the evacuation.

"Local council offered some help. You could contact them, and they could assist."

"The Council has been fantastic."

"When the SES came at 6:30am, they put the bags down around the doors."



Impacts of the flood – immediate aftermath

- Participants described the unexpected indirect impacts of road closures and power outages.

"Didn't realise that even if my property wasn't flooded, it would still impact me."

"Took an hour to get to [redacted] Road, decided to turn around and took another hour to get home."

"Power cut off from 1pm to 8pm... We were given a couple of approximate times when it would go back on, but it was pushed out by a few hours."

Community spirit

- Participants praised friends, family, neighbours and volunteers for coming together to support each other.

"I am grateful to have met a lot of the neighbours – this is a silver lining I suppose... I am also grateful for the Flood Warrior group and Council provided that stop gap for all the volunteering and clean up."

"... some people are so good at turning up and organising – they restore your faith in humanity."

"The volunteers were amazing – on the Sunday people came around and helped my cousin remove stuff and collect it from the kerb, and sweep all the mud out of our garage."

Ongoing impacts

The engagement sessions heard that the recovery is still ongoing, with many people facing long-term emotional and financial impacts, including:

- Ongoing impacts to mental health and wellbeing; stress, anxiety, uncertainty about the future.

"She has had enough and is at the end of her rope... She has no home and no car. She feels very angry and exhausted."

"Was able to go to work on the Monday [but] broke down due to the stress and exhaustion."

"I don't want to live in fear anymore."

"My concern is in the future... what if it was worse?"

- Significant loss and damage to property and personal belongings.

"The water that came into our place was only half an inch, but it damaged the whole house."

"Came through the house about 4 inches. Has caused about 52k worth of furniture damage."

- Displacement: many of the residents we heard from were still in emergency accommodation at the time of the consultation period.

"After the flood, couldn't move back into the house. Had great difficulty finding somewhere to live and ended up living in the COVID centre for about 6 weeks."

"Been experiencing elevated anxiety as a result – I don't like where I'm living, I just want to go home."

- Experiences of financial hardship and devaluation of property.

"Caused \$7.5k a month hotel accommodation for 3 months. Have been forced to move into a little place at [redacted] for about \$2K a month."

"Apart from the personal trauma. The actual monetary costs to individuals is immense. For us it's about \$20,000. And because we're retired, that's our nest egg."

"House was valued at about 1.3 mill before the flood and now I wouldn't get 350k for it. We were defrauded, deceived, lied to."

"Melbourne Water's [water] meter needs to be changed but they can't touch it until we can fix the pump. It's not safe but I've got jacks holding it up. I've already spent \$5,000 fixing the electric motor but we need the pump physically taken away with a crane, get a new base plate. \$20,000 just to replace it. I can't afford a new one."



- Some participants expressed frustration with challenges and issues dealing with slow insurance processes. Others highlighted difficulties obtaining or affording insurance even before the flood event.

"Still not home, very slow working with insurance."

"[We] knew [we] were in the flood plain, couldn't get flood insurance, couldn't get any info on the report that was done a few years ago – got the flood report after the flood but it wasn't helpful – no info about how high [redacted] is above sea level so hard to understand what it means for [my] property."

"Within 2 weeks, insurance went up to \$22,000 where it was only \$3,000."

- Loss of independence for retirees.

"Now we are looking at the potential of our kids having to pay for us to go into care. We've lost our independence."

"We are retired. They've destroyed our wealth. What am I going to do?"

- Environmental impacts, including damage to riverbanks, access roads and equipment, raising concerns about responsibility for covering these costs.

"One thing I'm concerned about is the significant erosion – at the headwaters of the Maribyrnong. Concern is the several trees fallen are restricting the flow and all the rubbish and debris is still there."

"We do have some platypuses on the property, and I haven't seen them since. There are a lot fewer kangaroos being seen around there."



Looking to the future - Strategies to prevent future flooding and build community resilience

Many participants expressed the need for enhanced flood awareness and preparedness education, so that people would be better informed about their flood risk and how to prepare, respond and act in a flood event.

"It's going to happen again. We need to be prepared for floods, like fire risks."

"New residents vs long term residents. [There] needs to be an educational piece. Otherwise, they learn the hard way. And needs to be more support from council."

- One participant also expressed concern about the perceived lack of 'post-flood-response' in the aftermath of the event.

"[I'm concerned about] Not having a post-flood response, things are already happening, people might be buying into the area unknowingly."

- When looking to the future, communities are looking for solutions to prevent future flooding. They also have a desire to be better prepared and more resilient if floods occur again.

"Something has to be done to avoid it happening it again."

"We know about this stuff – the Council had a plan – and it wasn't followed. What makes me angry is that people are paid to do this job and they didn't do it. Will we do all this work now, just to forget it all in 20 years' time?"

"The flood review needs to come up with something to make sure this doesn't happen this way again."



Suggested causes and contributors to the flood

Some participants shared their suggestions about what may have caused or contributed to the extent and duration of the flood, including:

- **Flemington Racecourse floodwall.**

"In my mind, had [the wall] not been there, the levels near my house would have been a lot lower."

- **Development along the river including Edgewater, the Chase, Metro Tunnel.**

"Where the Chase development site is, they have a man-made lake. All the water spills over, flows down the street. It's a domino effect."

"Why are houses built on the floodplain? Wasn't there a plan in the 80s to reclaim houses built in the area? People didn't know about the floodplain who have moved to the area."

- **Release of water from the Rosslynne Reservoir in the days leading up to the flood event.**

"So they released Rosslynne Weir and that's why it flooded. We were actually watching the river and it was actually falling – about 40cm. And all of a sudden it just came up about 2 metres."

- **Blocked stormwater drains.**

"I took some photos of drains that weren't in the flood area and they were chock full of rubbish. Isn't it the responsibility of the Council to make sure these drains are clear?"



Previous planning decisions

- Participants commented on historical planning decisions, questioning how developments could be approved in flood plains and why mitigations didn't prevent flooding.

"We went through numerous approvals and paid a lot of money to ensure the house was prepared for flooding including additional irrigation to move water away... which now means nothing because risk mitigations have failed."

"It's a political problem and MW had the willingness to move the flood line, after 147 years of experience. And here we are, flooded."

"The problem is the zoning of the land. It's a floodplain."

"...people shouldn't be building on flood plains."

- In contrast, one resident commented that one local development was built up and this stopped water inundating homes.

"In [redacted] Estate... Some entity decided to lay a whole lot of crushed rock and stone and level it out, up to a height of about 3 meters. That saved hundreds of houses in the flood".

Maribyrnong River Flood Review Terms of Reference

- Some participants criticised the scope of the Maribyrnong River Flood Review, saying the Terms of Reference were too limited.

"Why does the Terms of Reference seek to limit the terms to the metro area? We were impacted just as much as everyone else."

Flood modelling

- Some participants noted a difference between predicted and actual flood levels, and questioned whether Melbourne Water's flood modelling was accurate.

"Why did the modelling fail?"

Section 2: **Collective community experience**

This section recounts the collective community experience before, during and after the October 14 2022, Maribyrnong River flood event.

BEFORE THE EVENT

Despite the record-breaking rainfall in the days leading up to the flood event, some participants had the view that the impact of the rainfall was downplayed by media outlets. Many of those attending the engagement sessions said that because they didn't expect serious flooding they did not prepare. Only a few participants recalled taking minor precautions such as lifting boxes up from the ground.

“[We] watched the weather report the night before which said only minor flooding was expected.”

A large portion of participants said they relied on television news, social media, and weather apps for updates, very few said they monitored flood level predictions via the Bureau of Meteorology website. This group reported there was a significant difference between the predicted and actual flood levels, with many people unable to interpret how these predictions would impact their homes.

Of the people we heard from, many felt they had no time to prepare once official warnings were issued to the community. Some received text alerts when they were asleep, around 4:30am.

“There was a sense of laissez-faire – we don't think it will get that high and we don't think it will be too bad.”

Additionally, many people who shared their story felt the warnings were too generic to warrant concern. Others said they didn't receive any flooding alerts and were woken by neighbours knocking on doors, by phone calls from family and friends or when flood waters were already inside their homes.

“People literally put their feet in water when they got out of bed.”



Several people who had woken early watched as the river rose, saying that waters were rising from as early as 4:30am. Many reported that the Maribyrnong River broke its banks between 6:30 - 7:00am. People said the waters rose very quickly, catching many by surprise and giving them no time to make any flood preparations.

“[I] saw the river was breaching its banks and it was coming up fast, but still no warnings. Where were the warnings?”

Some people said the warnings were inadequate. Others didn't know how or what to prepare. Most participants said they didn't have a dedicated flood plan.

Many expected the SES or police to be on the ground before the floods to help people evacuate or help them prepare. People said that although the SES were able to provide sandbags to some homes, many weren't aware sandbags were available for the general community.

A number of community members whose properties were not directly impacted by the floods were taken by surprise by the wider impacts such as road closures or power cuts, and how this might affect them.

“I didn't realise that even if my property wasn't flooded, it would still impact me.”

DURING THE EVENT

At the Brimbank engagement session, some attendees said a large amount of water was released from Rosslynne Reservoir late in the evening on Thursday, October 13 2022.

Residents who lived along Jacksons Creek, which connects to the Rosslynne Reservoir in Gisborne and the Maribyrnong River in Keilor North, reported that the floodwaters came through like a wave from around 4:30am.

“It was the speed of the water. It was like a wave going through.”

This wave of water washed away riverbanks, access roads, and farming equipment, including a shipping container which was swept downstream. The floodwaters destroyed the historical Arundel Road Trestle Bridge as it made its way along the Maribyrnong, with many commenting that the flood levels were some of the highest in living memory.

“[I’ve] lived in the area for 67 years, never seen floods like this”

In Maribyrnong, participants reported the SES began doorknocking from around 4:00am. However, most people were still unaware of the impending flood.

Many people recounted watching the floodwaters breach the river’s banks and start making its way onto streets and into people’s yards from about 7:00 – 7:30am. Many people woke to an already flooded street.

“We just woke up and looked out the window to see the flood.”

At this point, people started gathering important documents such as passports, and lifting curtains up from the floor before evacuating. In some areas, participants reported the floodwaters were starting to get too high for cars to drive through. Many roads and bridges were flooded, limiting evacuation routes.

In some of the lowest lying areas of Maribyrnong, participants reported people were climbing trees or onto the roof to stay clear of the water. The SES rescued a number of residents but participants were concerned that only one rescue boat was available.

“I was directing the SES where I could see the kids in the trees and high up on top of another house.”



Several people described how the floodwaters weren't able to properly drain onto the natural floodplain near the Flemington Racecourse, and instead pooled around the floodwall, while nearby homes were flooded.

Some residents who shared their stories were not impacted by riverine flooding alone, but described being flooded by stormwater, sewage, and other drains.

"Within about an hour, the water had come up through the drains and was at our door."

People described a sense of not knowing if or when their properties would flood, how high the water would rise, or when it would recede. They also described not knowing what to do in the moment and were expecting to be given direction by authorities.

"[you're told to] watch and act but what do you actually do?"

Long-term residents who had experienced previous floods described this event as one of the biggest, both in terms of flood height and areas impacted.

"The river peaked at 4.3 metres high, nearly 2 metres higher than the 1993 flood."

Residents estimated that the floodwaters began to recede around lunchtime. People started returning home around 1:00pm to begin cleaning up.

AFTER THE EVENT

In the immediate aftermath of the flood, participants described a general sense of shock. However, as people began to sort through their mud-coated belongings, friends, family and neighbours came out to help, and mud army volunteers were swift to assist.

“Some stood around stunned and simply bewildered... Others seemed unable to act or chose to do nothing.”

Despite this, those who shared their stories felt a sense of being ‘left to deal with it’. Many expected authorities would coordinate the clean-up.

It took days for residents to sort through their belongings and pile them on the street for councils to collect. Many people could not return home and had to find emergency accommodation.

“It’s been very confronting, to see neighbours, everything they own out on the nature strip ruined...”

During this time, people began making insurance claims. Unfortunately, some people who spoke to us didn’t have adequate insurance, and in some cases didn’t have any.

While residents and businesses waited for their insurance claims to be processed, some were having to pay out of pocket for such things as cleaning, temporary accommodation, and repairs. Those with insurance described a lengthy claims process, with many still awaiting approval when they spoke to us.

While most were able to return home soon after the flood, some were still in temporary accommodation when they spoke to us. Others have described ‘making do’, such as living upstairs while downstairs is uninhabitable.

Many participants described the overwhelming stress they felt in the immediate aftermath of the flood, having to go through the clean-up and recovery process. Those who were displaced commented on the emotional distress of having to leave their homes.

In the days and weeks after the flood receded, authorities began providing support and assistance. However, some found the processes for accessing support, especially financial support, a difficult and stressful process.

In reflecting on the flood event and aftermath, people began to raise concerns.

There was a general sense of ‘how could authorities let this happen’. Those we heard from expected swifter action and a more coordinated response by the SES and emergency services, local and state government, and other relevant agencies including Melbourne Water.

“On Thursday night we went for a walk, and we thought there would be SES, police, Council out – but there was nobody.”



People also raised concerns about how developments, such as Rivervue Retirement Village in the Moonee Valley municipality, could be built on a floodplain. For Rivervue in particular, questions were raised regarding the amendment of a 1-in-100-year flood risk level in 2015. Several residents were of the opinion that it had led to the development being approved.

“[I] Want to understand how Rivervue was able to build on flood plains.”

Further concerns were raised about how construction and developments in the area may have directly led to or exacerbated the flood event. Many participants considered the Flemington Racecourse floodwall was the cause of much of the flooding.

“The flood wall was the cause – of course it was.”

Other areas of concern included:

- Edgewater Estate in Maribyrnong
- Ascot Chase residential development in Ascot Vale
- Lakeside residential development at the old Duke Street Quarry in Sunshine North
- Metro Tunnel Construction.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In recovering from the flood, those who shared their experiences have pointed out the many ongoing challenges faced by community members. There is a general sense of anxiety and uncertainty about when the next flood will occur, particularly as a result of climate change, and around what to do now and in the future to prepare for future floods.

“When it rains people are jumpy. There’s a sense of anxiety...people are still really suffering.”

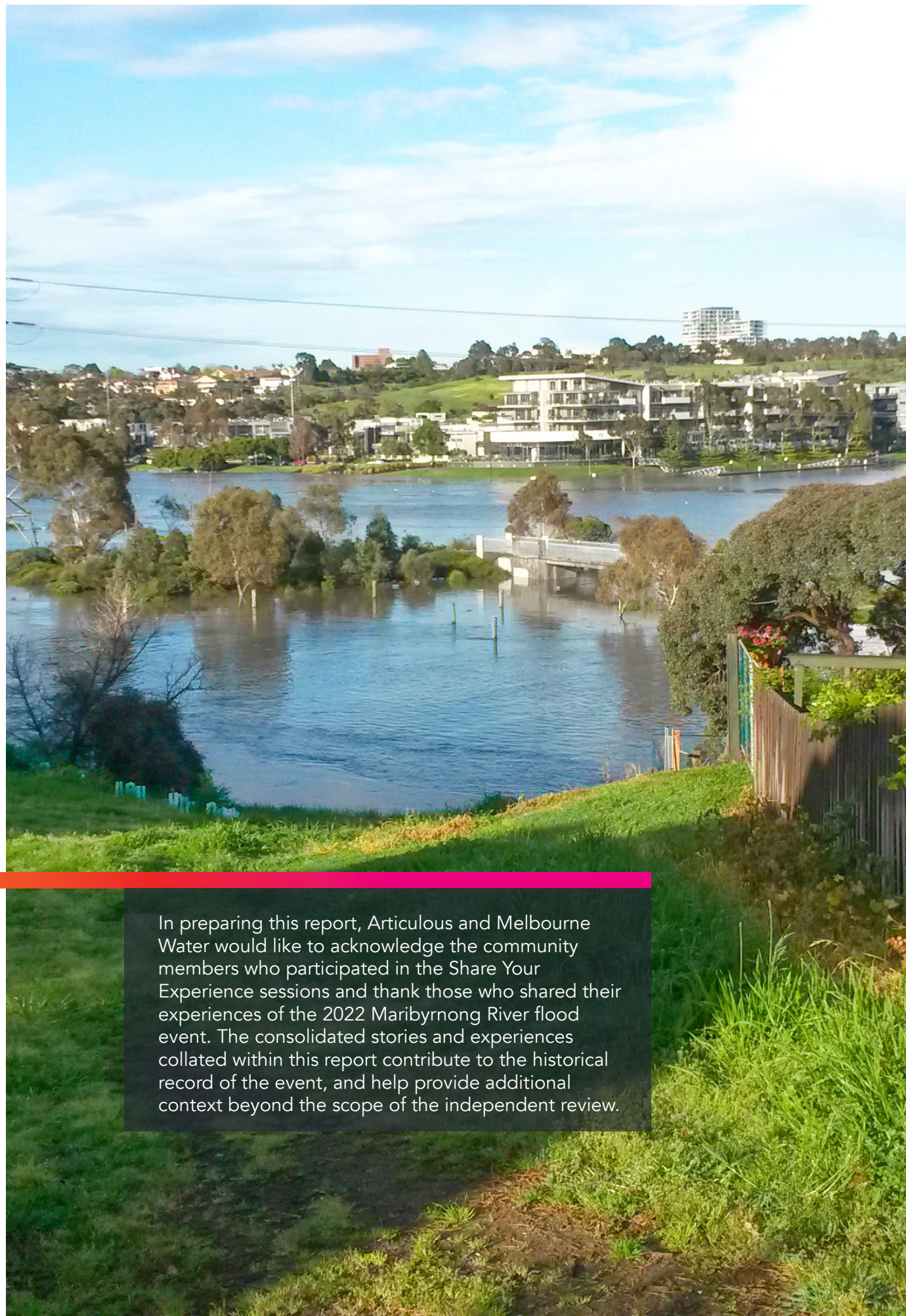
Many of the people we heard from are concerned for the future of their homes. If they stay, they may not be able to afford adequate insurance. However, selling will be difficult due to property devaluation.

“Who would buy a place that floods? We are in a home that is being devalued because it’s a risk.”

When looking ahead to the future, a strong desire for improved flood mitigation and prevention has been expressed. Some people want to know ‘how can we stop this from happening again’.

Some agree that floods will continue to happen and expressed a desire for improved preparedness and response, especially around warnings and alerts. People have also expressed a desire for better knowledge and understanding around how to prepare and act.

“My concern is in the future... I’m thinking about the next time”.



In preparing this report, Articulous and Melbourne Water would like to acknowledge the community members who participated in the Share Your Experience sessions and thank those who shared their experiences of the 2022 Maribyrnong River flood event. The consolidated stories and experiences collated within this report contribute to the historical record of the event, and help provide additional context beyond the scope of the independent review.



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