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Know what to do before a flood, during a flood, and after a flood.

## PLANNING

**Disclaimer:**

Information provided is broad level guidance only; landowners should seek region-specific and location-specific information and professional advice prior to action.



Courtesy SEO Catchments and Desert Channels Queensland

**General**

Preparedness is more than moving everything to higher ground; it is about being mentally prepared, having communication and safety networks in place, practicing evacuations, having written plans and checklists to make sure nothing is forgotten and, importantly, having and testing backup options.

Property management plans have long been recognised as valuable management tools for rural enterprises; they are just as relevant for lifestyle blocks and hobby farms. A well written plan identifies the resources under a landholder's control, and is a valuable tool in managing a property sustainably and profitably. For assistance with property management planning, web search 'Regional Groups Collective' to find the contact details of your local natural resource management body.

If you live in a flood-prone area, your property management plan should recognise this, and include a flood preparedness and response section. The historic flood levels in your area are shown on the interactive map at <http://flood.dnrm.esriaustraliaonline.com.au/floodcheck/>, or at your local Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM) office.

It is a good idea to have the whole family involved in the planning process so they all have ownership of the finished document, and a familiarity that allows any one of them to act on it.

Some of the critical components recommended for a flood preparedness and recovery plan are:

- a comprehensive checklist to ensure nothing is overlooked;
- identification of a safe evacuation place with adequate food and water;
- preparation for the loss of electricity;
- a current list of emergency phone numbers;
- an identified practical storage area out of flood reach for machinery and consumables;
- an identified safe areas for livestock - must be large enough to sustain them for an extended period, or if not, must remain accessible for fodder deliveries;
- identification of fodder requirements for livestock where adequate safe ground is not available;
- identification of appropriate crops and farming practices to ensure ground cover at high risk times to minimise soil loss;
- identification of critical post flood activities such as assessing access roads, infrastructure and livestock; and
- identification of financial, physical and emotional support agencies and contact details - in the event you have suffered major damage and losses.

Remember, flood preparedness should not be something that is only thought about when a flood is looming, it should be a state of mind for those living in flood-prone areas. Making flood preparedness a part of your everyday life will ensure that last minute preparation for a flood, enduring the dislocation of a flood, and recovery from a flood are all smoother, easier and less stressful experiences.

## Risk Profiles

Insurance companies have often-complicated methods for calculating the flood risk in any given area; these are generally more applicable to urban rather than rural situations. Knowing your flood risk profile will provide guidance on the level of preparation you need to undertake. Your position in the catchment, historic flood levels, amount of vegetation and ground cover (both yours and upstream), and the type of floodplain infrastructure can all have a bearing on your flood risk. If you are new to an area, talk to your neighbours and local council to gain a sense of your flood risk.

## Cropping

There are several elements to planning for floods on cropping land. These include:

- using stubble retention and strip cropping;
- having erosion-minimising crops in the ground during the flood season;
- maintaining ground cover on headlands and in drains; and
- removing obstructions such as rills

Most importantly, if your land is part of a large cropped floodplain, plan in cooperation with your neighbours to ensure an integrated, strategic approach to flood preparedness. If in doubt, seek expert advice.

## Livestock

The most important thing with livestock is to have a secure place out of flood reach to move them to at short notice, and to move them early - it's best to move them unnecessarily than to leave it too late and be unable to get them to safety. If don't have a large enough area to sustain them for the duration of the flood, put them where they can't become isolated, and ensure you have enough fodder on hand to maintain them.

## Hobby Farms

If you have any sort of creek or drainage depression on your property, you may be subject to flooding... the good news is, small watercourses flood for shorter times, unless subject to backup from a large stream or river; however, you should still plan to protect your livestock, machinery and natural assets from flooding. Because of their small scale, hobby farms sometimes have limited alternatives for livestock. Develop a neighbourhood preparedness plan, and band together to implement it. This may mean mixing several owners' stock, but it may be the most effective solution.

## Dams

It is especially important for landholders downstream of major dams to be aware that flood-time releases of water may cause a marked increase in flood levels. Make sure your contact details are added to the dam release register so you will receive notification of releases, and ensure verification of release triggers is included in your readiness checklist.

Dams on private property are generally not subject to the same engineering standards as major water storages, and may be prone to partial or total collapse in extreme circumstances. If your land is at risk from such a structure, monitor its integrity constantly during high rainfall events, and take precautionary measures where necessary.

## Warnings

Following are the standard flood warning terms used by the Bureau of Meteorology.

- **Minor flooding:** Causes inconvenience. Low-lying areas next to watercourses are inundated, which may require the removal of stock and equipment. Minor roads may be closed and low-level bridges submerged.
- **Moderate flooding:** In addition to the above, the evacuation of some houses may be required. Main traffic routes may be covered. The area of inundation is substantial in rural areas, requiring the removal of stock.
- **Major flooding:** In addition to the above, extensive rural areas and/or urban areas are inundated. Properties and towns are likely to be isolated and major traffic routes likely to be closed. Evacuation of people from flood affected areas may be required.
- **Local Flooding:** Used where intense rainfall could be expected to cause high runoff in limited areas local to the rainfall, but not necessarily leading to significant rises in main streams.
- **Flash Flooding:** Flooding occurring in less than 6 hours of rain, usually the result of intense local rain and characterised by rapid rises in water levels. They are difficult to predict accurately and give little time for effective preventive action.

Check with your local council to see how local river gauge heights relate to each of these official flood warning categories, and how those heights impact on your land, roads and access to critical services. This will enable you to cross-reference and make sense of official warnings, both forecast and current.

## Important

Make sure the whole family is part of the planning and practice process, because you never know who will be called on to act or lead in a time of stress and crisis.