

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 210
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Program: Bureau of Meteorology (BoM)
Topic: Mackay Weather Station
Hansard Page: 45
Question Date: 22 May 2017
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Chisholm asked:

Senator CHISHOLM: I was specifically interested in Mackay because I have spent some time there recently. There were areas that were affected by flooding as a result of tropical Cyclone Debbie that previously had not been affected by flooding.

Dr Johnson: Sorry, can I just get you to clarify? What was affected by flooding?

Senator CHISHOLM: Some of the towns outlying from Mackay that were affected by flooding that had not previously been. Has the decision around the station there had any impact on that?

Dr Johnson: I am not sure what places you are talking about that have been affected by flooding this time that had not been previously. What I can say is that the changes in the observational infrastructure that we have made in the Mackay region have not had any negative impact whatsoever on our capacity to issue outstanding forecasts to the local community. As I said before, the replacement of assets that we are doing here, I think, actually improves the skill of our forecasting and provides improved information to those local communities. But I would be happy to take on notice if there is a particular set of communities that you feel are impacted negatively. I would be happy to look into it.

Senator CHISHOLM: Yes. I had the opportunity to check the name of the town that I was talking about, which is Eton, west of Mackay.

Dr Johnson: It is just up near the Pioneer Valley, yes.

Senator CHISHOLM: There is a dam involved there as well.

Dr Johnson: Correct.

Senator CHISHOLM: Kinchant Dam.

Dr Johnson: Kinchant is above Eton, yes. It is just to the southwest of Eton.

Senator CHISHOLM: Is there anything you would be able to impart on what happened there with regard to this?

Dr Johnson: It is probably best to take it offline. But my recollection of the period was that given the amount of rain in that part of the world the dam overtopped and there was some risk of that overtopping, in terms of communities downstream. But it is certainly not within the bureau's responsibilities, in terms of the management of Kinchant Dam. There was a very large amount of rainfall in that part of the catchment.

Senator CHISHOLM: The state has initiated an inquiry into it.

Dr Johnson: Correct.

Senator CHISHOLM: Will you be participating in it?

Dr Johnson: I would have to double-check. I would be surprised if we would not make some form of submission or be asked to provide details on the meteorological phenomena surrounding it. It is quite routine when these things happen.

Answer:

The Bureau of Meteorology Queensland Office has been contacted by the Queensland Chief Scientist, who is conducting the review into the operation of the Kinchant Dam, upstream of Eton. The request relates to the Bureau's rainfall and river level information for this area.

Typically, the Bureau would provide details of meteorological phenomena surrounding any event under review and the associated forecasts and warnings issued if requested.

With regard to Kinchant Dam and the areas downstream, the Bureau does not provide a formal flood forecasting and warning service. This is as per the Service Level Specification overseen by the multi-agency Queensland Flood Warning Consultative Committee.

Consistent with above, the Bureau will provide information requested by the Chief Scientist of Queensland and assist the review team with any other relevant information it seeks in a timely manner.

The changes in operations of the Mackay Meteorological Office had no impact on the services described above.