

Stories of the Flood Project

The Stories of the Flood project was funded by the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development via the State Government's Floods Community Recovery Fund. The project aimed to capture individual stories and experiences of the devastating 2011 flood in the Buloke Shire.

Stories of the flood is a collection of photographic images and individually written stories about the flood and the impact it had on the Buloke community. The emphasis is on the impact of the flood event on the Shire as a whole and the capture of the widest possible range of stories and impressions.

We wish to thank those who have contributed to the project and who have shared their experiences with the wider community. It has been a privilege to put these stories together and we would like to personally thank all the individuals and groups for their contribution.

We hope you enjoy these stories from the people of Buloke, which reflect not only on the devastation but also the resilience of our Buloke communities.

Cr Reid Mather
Mayor



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The project aimed to capture individual stories and experiences of the devastating 2011 flood in the Buloke Shire.

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Overview of the Flood

Heavy rainfall on the 13th of January 2011 added to an already flooded Avoca River and fully saturated surrounding catchment area after flooding in 2010. The result was a 'once in two hundred year flood event' which saw the highest river levels in recorded history and widespread riverine flooding.

All areas of the Shire were impacted to some extent by the January 2011 flood event and faced the stress, trauma and anxiety of dealing with rebuilding homes, business and farms, and, losing irreplaceable personal belongings and memories.

The townships of Charlton, Donald and Culgoa were most significantly impacted by the floods but the damage to the rural economy of the Shire should not be underestimated.

While the overall impact of the flood emergency had a negative impact on the community, the response and reaction of the Buloke community to the actual emergency and its aftermath was fantastic. All of the strengths of the Buloke community came into play. There were incredible acts of kindness, contributions of time, money and material aid, thousands of hours of volunteer assistance, and community actions to help those individuals and groups of individuals most affected by the flood.

People opened their homes to family, friends and neighbours who had been displaced from their own homes by flood waters.

These are some of their stories.



Coonooer Bridge

This small community sits on the Avoca River some fifteen kilometres south-east of Charlton. River heights in Coonooer Bridge are a key indicator of the likely impact of floods on Charlton. Parts of the area are low lying and flooding is not uncommon.

The flood resulted in:

- Six houses being inundated.
- Extensive damage to road infrastructure.
- Extensive damage to the natural environment.

Yawong: Hayley Watts

Like most people I have never seen water as high as it reached in 2011. For most people these floods brought tears and heartache, but for our family they brought fun and bonding time with our family and neighbours. Our dam burst its banks onto the Charlton-St Arnaud Road, which resulted in our blow-up boat being rowed back and forward even though the water was only about knee deep. It was enjoyed by all, including the dogs.

But for some it resulted in cars being stopped and having to be towed into both St Arnaud and Charlton before the road was officially closed. With the dam flowing down towards the river, yabbies were coming out thick and fast, resulting in some good old hand-catching in the sunshine and the pouring rain. With the power out they made for a good tea.



△ Left to right: Michelle Watts, Owen Lowe, Craig Watts, Mike Lowe, Jackie (dog), Thomas Watts, Austin Lowe and Dale Watts.

Charlton

The flood resulted in:

- 80 per cent of the Charlton township being inundated and remaining underwater for up to three days.
- At least 400 residents being forced from their homes by flood waters.
- Establishment of an evacuation centre. A secondary Evacuation Centre in the nearby town of Donald was established due to the number of evacuees.
- 95 per cent of the businesses located along the length of High Street being inundated.
- Charlton Hospital being inundated. Damage to the Hospital was so severe it requires total replacement.
- Essential service buildings such as the Police Station, Ambulance Station and Country Fire Authority Station were inundated and not able to be used for some days.
- The Charlton power substation being inundated, resulting in loss of power to 85 per cent of Buloke Shire residents for a period of up to five days. Food drops were made into the town over two days following the flood as a result of loss of power and lack of a safe water supply.
- Sewerage and water supply systems in Charlton were affected by the floods and were out of service for up to one week after the flood.
- Charlton was isolated from surrounding towns for nearly two days as a result of the flooding of state highways linking the town to Donald, Wycheproof, Boort and Wedderburn respectively.
- Inundation of community infrastructure, including the Swimming Pool, Community Theatre, Municipal Offices, Museum, Pre-School, Senior Citizens Centre, Bowling Club, Croquet Club, Harness Racing Club, Pony Club, Golf Club, Maternal and Child Health Centre, Traveller's Rest, Caravan Park and Recreation Reserve facilities.
- Extensive damage to surrounding agricultural land, machinery sheds and farm equipment. A small number of homesteads were surrounded by water for up to five days.
- Extensive damage caused to the surrounding road infrastructure.



△ Charlton township

Jenny Pollard

As a casual photographer and a reporter for the Donald-based newspaper *The Buloke Times*, I have many images from the flood in Charlton.

Let me emphasise-the photographs are from the flood, not of the flood, because my flood experience was being marooned at home at Teddywaddy for five days until the water subsided enough to wade along Nicholls Road to a car parked on high ground.

My story is expressed through a selection of images which capture something of the uniqueness brought about by the flood.

The set of photos-the 'Signs of the Times' were all taken independently of each other following the flood. When put together they build a story-the event, the reactions and the recovery. They say picture tells a thousand words-so let the talking begin!

Drought ▷

This is what things looked like before the flood. Fifteen years of drought had left farmland bereft of any vegetation -a stark expanse of barren land.



△ Thursday, 13 January 2011 Public Meeting, Charlton Shire Hall

Before the storm-the Charlton Shire Hall is filled with anxious residents at the Public Meeting held at 5 pm on Thursday, 13 January 2011. Less than a week later the hall would again be filled with the same residents trying to come to terms with the disaster which had struck the township.



△ The Charlton Swimming Pool sign takes on an ominous meaning as the flood waters start to rise on Thursday, 13 January 2011.



△ Calls for help at the Charlton Shire Hall which became the recovery centre following the flood.

Flood Height ▷

Debris is wrapped around the top of the water level sign on the Borung Highway heading towards Boort, suggesting that the sign was submerged during the peak of the flood.



◁ When BlazeAid moved into Charlton they brought not only much-needed help, but a sense of hope. The work of the volunteers provided untold assistance to many farmers, and the volunteers quickly assimilated into the community.

The BlazeAid base camp at Charlton was operational from 27 February to 31 July 2011.

In that time, volunteers assisted with 383 kilometres of fence clearing, and 341 kilometres of new fence, over a total of 3,241 volunteer days.

This was a truly remarkable effort and farmers were very grateful for the assistance. Local community groups and businesses worked together to provide an evening meal for BlazeAid, with an amazing 4,329 meals served.





◁ Lightening the mood in a bad situation-
real estate advice for potential buyers!



◁ As frustrations built with insurance
problems signs started to appear along the
Calder Highway heading north into Charlton.



◁ The sign says it all. An expression of
gratitude from the 'Friendly River Town' to the
hundreds of people who came to lend a hand
when it was most needed.

East Wimmera Health Service



◁ The Charlton campus of East Wimmera Health Service and the Charlton Medical Centre sustained extensive damage due to the flood which affected the Charlton community in early January 2011.



◁ Flood damage to the Charlton Hospital was severe, as the starkness of this image shows.

The residents of the nursing home were transferred to other East Wimmera Health Service campuses.



◁ Demolition of the old Charlton Hospital.



△ In the interim, an emergency medical unit was provided by the Department of Health and managed by Ambulance Victoria. This was situated in the basketball stadium of the Charlton College and operated until the temporary Medical and Primary Care centre was set up in the grounds of the St Joseph's Church at the end of March 2011.

Funding was provided by the Department of Health for East Wimmera Health Service to employ two flood recovery workers and a part-time psychologist to assist members of the community affected by the floods.



△ Temporary medical centre next to St Joseph's Catholic Church in Charlton.

On Wednesday, 28 October 2011, approximately 45 staff attended a function at Oogies Café, Charlton, to farewell the 28 staff that had left East Wimmera Health Service due to the closure of the Charlton campus.

Presentations were made to all staff, with a special presentation for those who had achieved 15 years or more service.

The Chief Executive Officer, Kathy Huett, thanked all of the staff for their dedication and commitment and acknowledged the difficulties many staff had encountered as a result of the flood. Nola Wright, Board Member, thanked the staff on behalf of the East Wimmera Health Service Board and the community of Charlton for service to East Wimmera Health, Service and wished them well with their future.

In March 2012 following an extensive review of a number of sites, the Department of Health purchased land in Learmonth Street to enable a new health service to be built in Charlton.

In May 2012 the Minister for Health the Hon David Davis, announced that \$22.7 million had been allocated to the East Wimmera Health Service to build this new health service.

By November 2012 planning was well underway and work to relocate a large essential sewerage pipe had commenced.



Signage of the new Charlton Hospital △



◁ Building commenced in April 2013 with an anticipated completion date of September 2014.



Elaine Donaldson

We rose to a fine sunny morning, quite oblivious of the drama that would unfold before the end of the day. That morning we kept a close check on the level of the Avoca River. We shopped to purchase food required for the next few days.

The creek in Watson Street was overflowing across the road and at this stage approximately 30 centimetres deep. Water was beginning to come up the gutters in the streets, including High Street which had been entirely flooded in September 2010.

We kept a close watch on both St Arnaud and Back St Arnaud Roads. By 4 pm water was along each side of the Back St Arnaud Road and creeping around the corner into Watson Street; this was mainly from the Yeungroon Creek and backwash.

We were constantly tuned into the ABC for updates. At 5 pm we received a phone message from the SES, directing people living in homes downstream to evacuate.

Once again we checked the water level crossing the road, still not expecting our home to be flooded.

Previously, we had placed sandbags placed around the house, garage and horse stalls.

My husband, Matt, stabled and fed the horses. Suddenly he heard the roar of the oncoming storm water. The noise was deafening-not a calming effect on the horses at all.

Meanwhile, the house was surrounded with water. I called out to him and he tried putting down extra sandbags around the doorways, using the wheel barrow.

Matt noticed gas bottles floating in the water but still connected. There was urgency in his voice as he instructed me not to go outside because a large brown snake was wrapped around one of the gas bottles, thus blocking the pathway. Seconds later I glanced out of the lounge window and to my surprise Matt was standing on top of the sandbags beside our letterbox. I could not help but give a chuckle. The snake eventually made his way towards the rock, rose up then disappeared.

Water began gushing under the doors of our home. I quickly grabbed towels and a bedspread, but to no avail as it was impossible to prevent the water flowing through the room, and within five minutes the house was inundated.

We knew it was time to evacuate. We phoned our son Ian at the Tyre Service and he arranged for Charlton local, Jeremy Minster to collect us in his four wheel drive vehicle. I gathered an overnight bag, change of clothes and medication.

Before leaving we did lift a few possessions onto the table and beds, which later proved not very successful. We only had 20 minutes before our rescuer arrived in his ute. We waded through knee-deep storm water to the vehicle and we headed towards the Back St Arnaud Road but were forced to retreat owing to the pressure and depth of the water. Slowly we continued down Wilson Street and into High Street. There we could see several pieces of furniture floating along.

Thanks to Jeremy we arrived safely at the Charlton College. We were invited to local accommodation, but later that evening it was announced that all Charlton residences were to be evacuated.

Because of this scenario we boarded a bus and with people and their pets-dogs, cats and birds-this bus was appropriately named 'Noah's Ark'. At the Vale of Avoca we joined a convoy, consisting of a fire truck, ambulance, our bus and a shire truck at the rear, and headed towards Donald. It proved to be an extremely anxious journey, especially at the Wooroonook Lakes area. Our driver remarked there were now no head or tail lights to follow. He was very capable with his guess work regarding the way.

I am certain that many prayers were said and we finally reached our destination, the Donald Sports Stadium.

We were greeted by Red Cross ladies and we thank them, along with the Donald community, for their generosity and the compassion showed to us during the five days we were there.

Owing to the loss of power at the main supply in Charlton, there was also a black out in the Donald township. Generators were installed for power at the stadium until the problem in Charlton was rectified.

Each morning and evening we attended an assembly where our accomplished supervisor, shire employee Judi Bird, would report on the Charlton situation and kept us informed regarding all aspects of the home front. We were very fortunate to have Judi in our midst.

On Tuesday, January 18 we returned to Charlton. High Street was an appalling site-almost resembling a war zone. Large vehicles and excavators were working, with piles of furniture, floor coverings and food in huge heaps.

When we entered our home we were greeted with a horrible mess and we realised that almost all of our possessions were gone forever, as the water level through our house had been 70 centimetres in depth. In the garage it was considerably higher. We thus lost three vehicles as the water was over the dashboards.

That afternoon the family from Bendigo arrived with a caravan and generators. Over the following eight days they travelled here with their families and with all the necessary cleaning products, buckets and rubber boots. Days later the home was liveable and we moved back into our home. There is still much maintenance to be carried out, but hopefully this will commence very soon.

Incidentally, for those wondering, while we were in Donald, our son, Ian, was brought out here to our house by boat to feed the horses.

We are indebted to our community.

The spirit here is alive and well. One day Charlton will return to its former glory.

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High Street was an appalling site-almost resembling a war zone

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Marj Bartlett

A public meeting was called on Thursday evening, 13 January, to update everyone on the expected floods. I guess I was a bit off-handed when we were told if rain continued overnight we should expect flooding and to expect a bigger flood than in September 2010. I was not too perturbed as although that flood had completely surrounded my house it had not entered the building-not even the back sunroom, which is a step lower than the main part of the house. I thought, "Well, it might come back into the back room this time but that would not be too bad." The November 2010 flood had not been a problem for me either so I believed I would be fine.

I was wakened 7 am Friday by an emergency phone call to advise everyone to evacuate. There was no sign of water anywhere so I ignored that. Later in the morning I decided it might be a good idea to sandbag the back entrance but-too late-there were no sandbags or sand left. The SES advised me to fill shopping bags with soil, so I did this using the sand I had in the garden. I later found this had been a useless exercise as even the black plastic did nothing to prevent the huge flood waters coming inside.

A long day followed with no indication of what water was to come. I walked to my sister's place in Wright

Street along with my companion dog, Sam. The river was filling the paddocks around the old dairy and on either side of Halliday Street. Everyone was looking anxious but no real threat was felt.

I will always be grateful to local builder, Mark Boyle, for insisting that his wife Janice put all the family cars up the hill. I happened to be there at the time she was taking some up and included mine, even though I really thought it would be okay in the carport as it had been in the September flood. Later, as I was walking home, I realised how much water was pouring over the roads. There was a real torrent coming in the St Arnaud Road.

Water gradually filled my backyard and was racing across from the hospital, filling my front yard. The hospital, nursing home and hostel had been evacuated earlier.

Thank goodness family members Carmel and Brian were next door as it can be very lonely. They evacuated into my house with Saxon their golden retriever at about 6.30 pm and I made up beds for them, never dreaming I would be inundated.

A lot of what happened later is a blur. I think it was about 7.30 pm when the water crept silently into the back sunroom. I moved what furniture I could from the sunroom to the bedroom but could have saved



△ Approaching Charlton township.

my energy as by 9.30 pm water was coming in my front door.

This clear water creeping silently into my house was taking over. This was a shocking feeling. It was like a silent creature, invading our homes and there was nothing you could do to stop it. It was slowly but surely finding a way to enter every little nook and cranny in my house.

I will always be grateful for having Carmel and Brian there as I could not think what to do next. We made our call to SES and then tried to lift some furniture but there is a limit to what you can put up on tables. Thank goodness I thought of protecting my computer and case of Probus and Golf papers.

The Yeungroon fire truck with those wonderful lads to help us all arrived about 10 pm and they were so good and patient helping three adults and two precious pets on board to join those already picked up. So began the longest and weirdest 'Charlton tour' one would ever wish to see.

Those volunteers were marvellous, driving through water so deep and flowing so strongly, with landmarks few and far between and only spotlights to guide us. They checked on anyone that might be in trouble and helped others to leave their homes safely.

Then began the slow tour of streets. There was so much water; cars stranded everywhere, all sorts of strange objects being swept along in the fast-flowing water. Gas cylinders and wheelie bins and a couple of strange objects passed by.

Some families were waiting on verandahs. Some were determined to stay and care for their animals.

Everyone was delivered to where they wanted to go. Sam and I arrived at the Pole family residence about 1.30 am after touring the town for three hours. That night the Pole household grew and ended up with ten grateful adults and ten dogs.

Trevor Pole connected his huge generator and ran a lead to the house across the road. This gave us power for lights and cooking. He saved frozen food for many householders while the power was off and his large cool room provided refrigeration for the town's food supply.

Saturday was a warm, sunny day-a long day with helicopters hovering overhead, some with media and some with food supplies. Phones were not working so we were unable to contact my family in Wright Street. The town was isolated as all roads were cut and all the shops were flooded.



△ High Street, Charlton.

Grace Cadzow

On Friday, 14 January 2011, the Avoca River at Charlton rose steadily throughout the day. By late morning the water was up to the driveway of my home, 3 Wright Street.

For a time the river steadied and we thought it had reached its peak. However, by 11 am clear water began streaming down Wright Street from the St Arnaud Road towards the river. This water filled the billabong between our sheds and the river, and formed a whirlpool in front of my house at the corner of O'Donnell and Wright Streets. This pushed water under my house and down through my carport into my backyard.

By late afternoon the water had risen through the floorboards into the house. By 9 pm on Friday night the water had invaded all the rooms in the house to varying depths-the deepest being about half a metre. In the 50 years I have lived at 3 Wright Street this flood and the September 2010 flood are the only times the river water has come under my house.

By Sunday morning the water was gone from inside my house and by Monday my family were able to reach me and we started the monster cleanup effort. One of my life's big disappointments was seeing my much-loved treasures thrown out on the rubbish pile.

Our insurance company was on the job early and installed ten heaters into the house to dry out the walls. My son Peter installed a pump under the house to remove all the water.

For ten days members of my family worked constantly removing saturated carpets, damaged furniture, clothing and household goods.

Town meetings were held regularly to keep everyone up to date on what was happening. On Sunday, 23 January the Anglican Church held a well-attended interdenominational service in the Shire Hall. Rev John Fowler conducted the service and School Chaplin Gary Allen delivered a heart-warming address.

As usual Australia Day was organised by the CWA, Lions and Forum, this year as an outdoor event. A few days earlier the choir members met at the Senior Citizens to practice their items. It was wonderful meeting up with our friends, many of whom we hadn't seen for days and who I knew had suffered greatly. When we sang 'I still call Australia home' it was so hard to keep the tears from our eyes.

Hundreds of Charlton residents and their families attended the ceremony and all were greatly moved by Chairman Geoff Wright's opening message and the acceptance speech of that year's 'Citizen of the Year' Margaret Wood, both of which were received with great acclaim.

I'm sure Geoff's message will be remembered for years to come. He finished with the following words: "We face perhaps our greatest challenge since this little town was established in the Vale of Avoca. But we will rebuild, we will recover, and we will emerge a strengthened community."

We are proud to be Charltonians and generations to come will also be proud to call themselves Charltonians.



△ Australia Day, Charlton 2011.

Photo: Jenny Pollard

Citation-Charlton Community Event of the Year 2012

The recipient of the Charlton Community Event of the Year 2012 Award is the Charlton Pacing Cup Race Meeting held on the 20 February 2011.

The 2011 Charlton Cup Pacing Race Meeting was held in very difficult circumstances just 36 days after Charlton's most horrific flood event in the history of the town, which makes the 2011 event special and a significant achievement for both the Harness Racing Club and the community. The Harness Racing facilities, along with an estimated 80 percent of Charlton residences and businesses, were inundated with water from the floods. In the case of the Harness Racing Club the water depth ranged from 30 inches to 48 inches and involved building damage, the loss of significant machinery and equipment and the loss of a vehicle, with a total valued in excess of \$160,000, not to mention the damage to the track and road infrastructure at Charlton Park. We all remember only too graphically the damaged floors, the ruined carpets, the damage to fixtures and fittings, the mould and so on, all of which had to be overcome in order to stage this event.

The committee debated at length their ability to get things cleaned up and repaired sufficiently in order to stage the event; in addition, they recognised the need for the community to be seen to be helping itself and endeavouring to get a sense of normality back into their very stressed lives. The committee's deliberations led to a determination that the Cup 'must go on', that the community at that time needed something special, something that would both provide them with entertainment and help lift the spirits, and give people a break from the arduous work of clean-up and recovery.

Being the first major event after the floods, the Cup needed to be special, it had to be accessible to the people and it had to be entertaining. So the committee decided to throw open the gates and make it free entry to enable people to enjoy it without the cost considerations normally associated with such an event. With the decision to run the event came a unique experience for the Charlton community, the appearance of the volunteer army. People from across the state came to lend a hand, local people not flooded lent a hand, as did

organisations like the CFA, the Football Club and other neighbouring Harness Racing Clubs. By Cup day the mess was virtually gone, key equipment was replaced and working, and whilst things were not pristine the facilities were ready and operational.

Planning went into overdrive. Extra attractions had to be organised, sponsorship was achieved to cover the cost of hiring the cover band to entertain the people, meat packs were donated and given as prizes, and the surrounding area newspapers offered free or discounted advertising for the event. It was also decided that the event should be used to raise funds to help with the community's recovery, which prompted the catch-cry of Race for Relief Race day which attracted further sponsorship of accommodation and dinner packages that, together with support from Charlton businesses, were used as fundraising raffle prizes. The committee had previously committed to support the Danny Wright Fundraising Appeal so it was decided that the fundraising raffle would be shared by the two appeals; again with the support from many volunteers selling raffle tickets. These activities resulted in excess of \$1,140 being raised on the day.

In summary, the event was much more than just another Annual Charlton Cup Race Meeting, it was indeed a community event that attracted the imagination and support of many people and organisations. It attracted volunteers, effectively from across the state, to help clean up and set up, it attracted sponsorship from new sources and more importantly it encouraged Charlton people to come together and gain relief from their very arduous circumstances. This event was indeed symbolic of the year experienced by many Charlton people and was greatly appreciated by those who attended; in many respects it is a reflection on the strength of the Charlton community and its people. In short the Charlton Pacing Cup Race Meeting it is a very worthy winner of the Charlton Community Event of the Year 2012 Award.

The Police Association Victoria Journal February 2011

The following article originally appeared in the February 2011 issue of the Police Association Journal, The magazine of The Police Association Victoria.

Sergeant Nigel MacDonald, the officer in charge at Charlton, had to leave his wife Sue to prepare their home as the flood water rose around the town. He had a town and a police station to defend. Nigel and Sue have lost just about everything. The putrid flood water from the Avoca River inundated the police residence with an incredible force. The water moved across rooms and permeated into every corner of the three-bedroom home. When the waters receded they left behind a rotten, soggy mess.

When *The Police Association Journal* visited Nigel and Sue they were working their way through the heartbreaking task of throwing out irreplaceable mementos of three generations of their family and favourite pieces of furniture that are beyond repair.

"In the past few months we've started buying the furniture we've always wanted. Our Chesterfield is ruined. It's sodden and it stinks," says Sue as she looks at the pile outside her home. "So much was on the ground level and that is just gone".

The water moved into their house with incredible speed. "The water was coming in all directions. It was a surreal sight. It was coming through every part of the brick work. Within 10 minutes it was across the entire house," remembers Sue. "Nigel came home. He realised we were in big trouble, but what can you do?"

Nigel believes 80 per cent of the town has been impacted by the floods. "It came so fast. We knew it was going to be big, but we never thought it would be this big. In 21 years I've never seen it like this. I thought we'd be safe inside. But it came hard. We got about an hour's notice to head for higher ground. I'd sandbagged the house and the police station. It just delayed the inevitable. Within 10 minutes it was up to the running boards of the car."

Nigel and Sue grabbed their dogs and some clothes. By the time they got to the street the water was over the headlights. They pushed their way out of the town with water coming over the bonnet. He walked back to the house through waist deep water

to rescue their cat. It was on top of the chest of drawers, terrified.

So much of what Sue and Nigel lost was new. Drawers are so warped they can't be opened. They've had to smash them open to see if anything inside is salvageable. What was inside was destroyed. Their child's favourite teddy, Oliver, is sodden and he stinks. Letters, school reports, documents-they're all ruined. The filthy water has soaked into all the bedding, the dryer, washing machine, fridge-as Sue puts it "they're stuffed".

They have managed to salvage some personal belongings. The crockery is filthy but it will clean up. The plastic containers in the bottom of one of cupboard will wash up but there's not much else. Shoes-gone. The contents of the bottom drawers-gone. Carpet-gone. Family photos-gone. Children's toys-gone. What were once their prized possessions were being shovelled into a wheel barrow and dumped in the garden.

While *The Police Association Journal* was with Sue, Nigel found her mother's wedding photo. Water was inside the frame. It pushed Sue to edge of despair. She wept as she looked at the photo. Association photographer Greg Noakes was able to help salvage this treasured photo for Sue.

The family car is going to be towed away. The insurance company has written it off. Nigel and Sue don't believe their comprehensive contents insurance will cover them.

They are now living at the Wycheproof police residence. For the first couple of nights they only had a 'Lilo' to sleep on.

"We started with just a couple old chairs, an esky and a mattress on the floor when we first got together. We'll start with nothing again," says Nigel philosophically as he takes a break from dumping more ruined possessions on the pile in the garden.

Sue says it has been a nightmare-something you don't expect to happen to you. In September last year flood water inundated their garage and they expected this flood to be the same. It was so much worse. Nigel and Sue will start again.

Australia Day Speech: Geoff Wright, President, Charlton Forum Incorporated, January 2012

This year after much deliberation the Forum decided not to give individual Citizen of the Year awards but instead to collectively recognise all the citizens of Charlton and district, young and old, as joint Citizens of the Year. We felt this was an appropriate way to recognise and celebrate the remarkable effort of the people of Charlton in banding together in so many ways to resurrect Charlton after last year's devastating flood.

So many helped, either through some of the organised voluntary effort or just quietly got on with helping out friends and neighbours. To mention just some: we saw the marvellous work done initially out of the RSL Hall and later at the CIRCLE, the goods distribution from the Pivot Shed and the caring of the Buddy System. Our churches, service clubs, sporting clubs and businesses have all contributed to the concerted community effort to get Charlton back on its feet.

So this Award is for all of you, because everyone has done something extraordinary over the last year.

We are of course enormously grateful for the outside assistance received, both financially and by the army of volunteers who have helped in the recovery.

We acknowledge that there is still much to do, but all of our businesses are again operating, whilst many homes have been or are being repaired. Still, some are not back in their homes and some are still having issues with their insurance companies.

Nevertheless if we look back to 12 months ago I think individuals, businesses and the community can be proud with what has been achieved. If we had some lingering doubts about Charlton's ability to fight back I think those doubts have been irrevocably dispelled. I think we can say Charlton is back in business.

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It is worth reflecting on a few of the things that have been achieved over the last 12 months or are in the pipeline:

- The Rex has received substantial funds for repair or upgrade.
- The 2020 Committee is working with the Shire on final plans for the upgrade of Charlton Park.
- Plans have just been announced for the establishment of a \$7 million trade training centre to replace the old Cluster Centre.
- A manager's cabin will be constructed at the Travellers Rest.
- A youth precinct will be established at Gordon Park, including the building of a skate park.
- A new hospital WILL be built in Charlton.
- Our community Resource Centre, the CIRCLE, has been established.
- At least one new business has been started, whilst others have been upgraded; and there is a good possibility of at least three new businesses starting this year.

So I think we can look to the future with confidence, but we must never underestimate the importance of the voluntary organisations which are the lifeblood of any community. It is imperative that our community groups, churches and sporting clubs are well supported and people are willing to serve on their committees.

So this Award is a way of saying thank you and well done to the people of Charlton who have got us to this point. Our district marks its 150th year of European settlement in 2013. Let's continue to work hard as a community to ensure we have much to celebrate.

Teddywaddy

Jenny Pollard



△ No passengers here: the V/Line Bus stop on the Calder Highway at Teddywaddy appears in an inland sea, Sunday, 16 January 2011.

During my 'home alone' experience I was fortunate to have had great support from neighbours near and far until water stopped their access and resourcefulness became imperative.

A totally new (and never to be repeated) experience for me was attempting to siphon fuel out of the car to run the generator which I was using to keep freezers running when the power went off.

Neighbours Peter and Cathy Hobbs kayaked their meat across to me, along with a can of fuel supplied by John and Francis Powell of Teddywaddy West. Thoughtfully, this had been tied to a tree to prevent it being washed away!

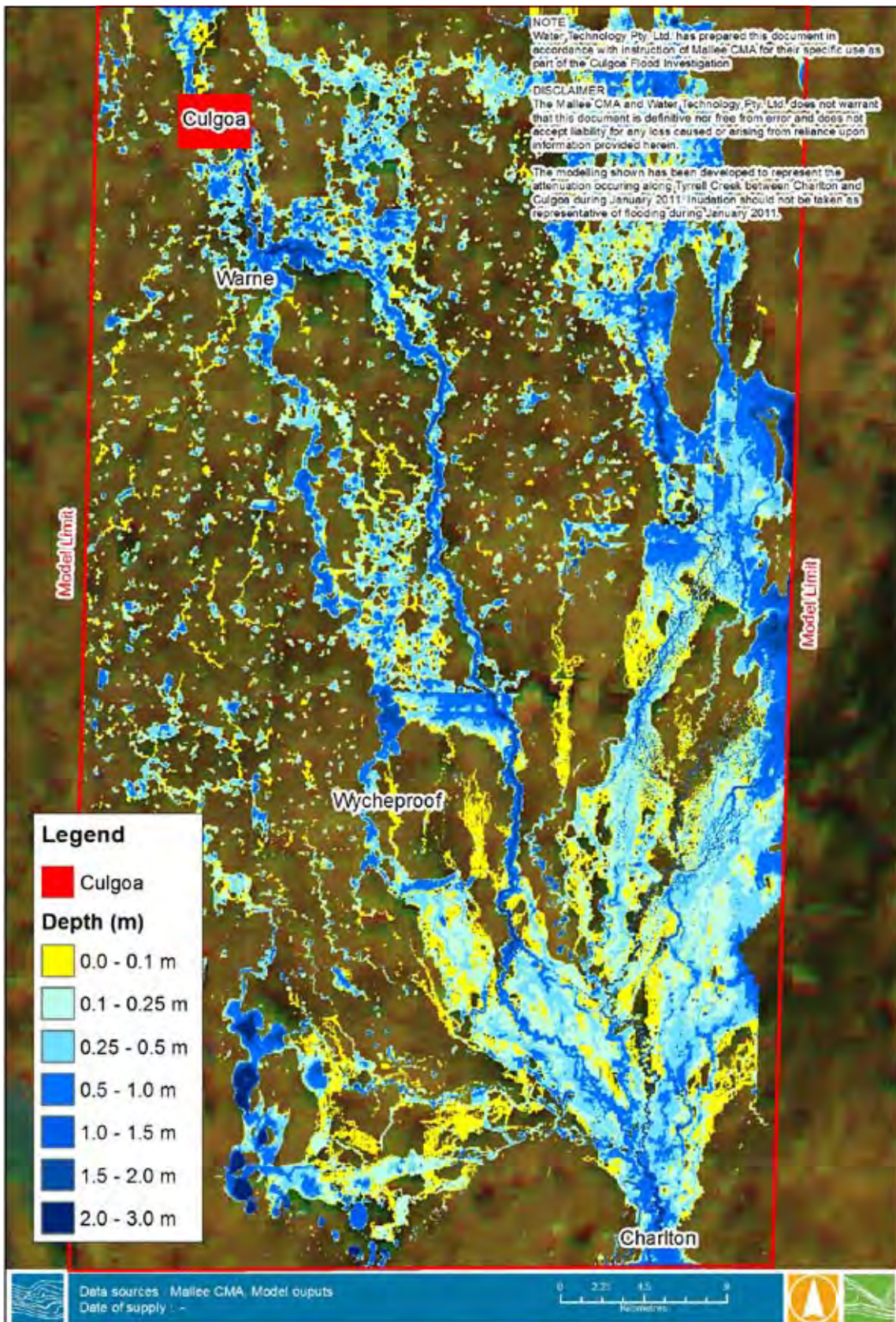


◁ Peter and Cathie Hobbs kayaking their meat across to me.



◁ Getting On With It! Life goes on as hanging out the clothes becomes a novel experience at Teddywaddy.

Wycheproof



△ Flood extent overview-Water depth of Tyrrell Creek Catchment.

Wycheproof township and surrounding farm lands were impacted by riverine flooding as flood waters from the Avoca River spread across the area and spilled into the Tyrrell Creek catchment. Water volumes were extremely large with an estimated area of 25 square kilometres under water in and around the town. Water flowed into the Cooroojerrup Creek, a tributary of the Avoca-Tyrrell system which has not run water since 1924, and threatened the town on three sides. An evacuation notice for the town was issued by the SES on 15 January but action by the community resulted in the construction of a series of levy banks around the town. The levy banks held water back from the town and only three houses on the western side of the town were surrounded by water. Many rural properties experienced extensive crop, stock and infrastructure damage.

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Water volumes were extremely large with an estimated area of 25 square kilometres under water in and around the town.

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The flood resulted in:

- Three houses being surrounded by water.
- Up to 50 rural properties being severely impacted by flood waters for periods of up to one week. Food drops were arranged for several properties due to the depth and extent of water surrounding homesteads.
- Inundation of the Charlton power substation resulted in no power to the town for more than two days. This had an impact on communications, the provision of local services and local water supply (at one point during the weekend of 14 to 15 January the Wycheproof Service Station was the only source of fuel for more than 50 per cent of the Shire due to the initiative of the owner in powering a petrol bowser with a portable generator).
- Extensive pasture damage.
- Extensive stock losses.
- Extensive damage to farm sheds and equipment.
- Extensive damage to a key local poultry and meat processor resulting in the temporary loss of local jobs.
- Extensive damage to road infrastructure (some roads in the area remained closed six weeks after the event due to the extent of damage).
- Road access to and from Wycheproof to Charlton, Boort, Birchip, Donald and Swan Hill were impacted for varying periods due to flooding of State highways.

Wycheproof Community Resource Centre

In January 2011 parts of Wycheproof and surrounding districts were flooded due to heavy rain and the Cooropajerrup Creek overflowing. It was the first time in approximately ninety years this has happened.



△ View from the top of Mount Wycheproof towards Boort.



△ Aerial View-Wycheproof.

The neighbouring towns of Charlton and Donald were also flooded. Charlton in particular suffered severe damage. Wycheproof was very lucky to escape serious damage. This was due mainly to members of the community who worked day and night to help minimise the flooding. Many people helped fill sandbags, donated their time and machinery to help build levy banks, cooked, made sandwiches, helped the home owners involved pack the contents of their houses and shift to safe places, and many other time-consuming jobs.



△ Levee bank construction, Wycheproof.



△ Levee bank construction, Wycheproof.



△ Wycheproof Bowling Green.

Photo: Wycheproof Resource Centre

The Resource Centre quickly became involved. A staff member's home was in danger of being flooded and another staff member had to help her immediate family as their home was completely flooded in Charlton. The remaining staff members organised for the Resource Centre to be the 'kitchen' and make sandwiches and rolls to be distributed to the flood workers. The centre was also a drop-off point for cooking to be left here. The next few days passed very quickly and then began the clean-up. A lot of people volunteered in Charlton, as well as Wycheproof. Wycheproof was very lucky compared to Charlton.



Photo: Wycheproof Community Resource Centre



Photo: Nullawil Historical Society

Elaine Ison-Ritchie

I look back and think, was this real? Well, here we go again. January, rain and more rain. The creeks that haven't run since 1972-73 at the back of Corack are filling up and running towards the farm (Woodlands) on the Birchip Road six miles out of Wycheproof. We are watching with an intense sense that this is big and getting bigger.

Water is lapping the boards under the house and the next thing I get a phone call from my son, Jamie, saying, "The sewage is flooding and I'm getting these four kids and us out." They went to Echuca, the last car to get through.

They ring us to say that the kids are upset about their chickens in the chook yard. They are half grown, so out I go with Pop (husband Graeme). I put on some old sneakers (so I won't cut my feet) and start wading in from the front gate down the drive to the chook yard, muck up to my waist. Ten little very wet chickens were sitting on the roost with water touching their feet. I reached out and caught two in each hand and passed these to Pop.

The rest get a fright and fly, landing in the water so I rushed to grab as many as possible with them flapping and splashing me. "Got ya," I said, grabbing two more in one hand and one in the other, then down I went into the dirty 'pooley' water flat to the bottom. I came up covered in feathers and poo. All I could say was "I didn't let them go," and shook my head. My husband Graeme was roaring with laughter at the state I was in.

No one realised, SES included, that the water was so bad. We survived and went on to help others with lots of food for the emergency workers and BlazeAid.

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My husband Graeme was roaring with laughter at the state I was in.

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Allan Milburn

– Coorooopajerrup Creek

Growing up we always knew that the depression at the south end of Wycheproof was called the Coorooopajerrup Creek and that it would in all probability never flow again. Well, how wrong could we be. From research I have established that it flowed in 1909 and 1923, and the reason it could never flow again was because the channels which had been built across the creek would stop the flow. This has stopped the creek flowing in other years, but after 2011 it has been proved that if you get enough rain all rules are broken.

The local paper reported in 1909 that there was a huge pool of water at the south end of the town as far as the eye could see, but strangely enough the paper made no mention of the flood in 1923, which was a huge flood and the water got up well past Dumosa.

We had been told that possibly the creek split and flowed around the east and west sides of the town and this did happen last year. The water on the east side of the town flowed along defined depressions which landholders knew about but just did not realise what they were—the Coorooopajerrup Creek line. The water flowed north until it hit the Waranga channel and could not get past the barrier and came out to the Calder Highway, the water being stopped from re-entering the Tyrrell Creek up near Dumosa.

The flow of the creek to the south and west of the town was a lot different from the other floods as the physical features of the land had changed a lot since previous flows. The channel bank on what we call the Goschen Channel had been raised to at least four feet, and this had to be a significant impediment to the flow of water and as it turned out, it put more water to the south, and for quite a while it put a couple of houses in danger of being flooded. The Calder Highway over the years has been raised to a level of close to three feet and this held back a lot of water from flowing up the creek; whether or not there should be pipes put under the road is a question for others to look at.

The water threatened a few houses and the wonderful effort by the local community to put up levee banks to stop water from flooding houses just showed how this community can pull together. It was a magnificent effort.

It will be interesting to see in the future if this can happen again and I think the answer is 'yes', especially now that the channels have been filled in and those were structures which stopped the floods in the past, and we all know that wet years will come again.

I was driving through water on the highway and I stopped to let a car go past and I looked down, and there were some carp swimming across the highway-never thought I would see that. These are my thoughts on the Cooropajerrup flood: never thought I would see it, and it brought out the best of the people in my town. When there is adversity people pull together.

“

I stopped to let a car go past and I looked down, and there were some carp swimming across the highway.

”



△ Building a levee bank at Wycheproof



△ Calder Highway - Warne.



△ Nullawil-Quambatook Road.

Allan Milburn – Tyrrell Creek

When we went out to see the Tyrrell Creek along the Boort Road I was amazed at how wide the creek was there and how fast it was flowing. I had never seen it so wide there or flowing so fast. Nobody in their right mind would have driven across the bridge there through the water, it was that bad.

After it was over I spoke to my neighbours who live five miles from Wycheproof, some of whose land adjoins the creek, to find out how they fared in the flood, and what they told me astounded me. A part of my old farm was where the Waranga Channel crossed the creek and a siphon has been built there to allow the creek to cross the channel. In a 'normal flood' the water banks back the water quite a way, and in 1983 I walked down to see how much the water was banked back there, and I saw water was running over the top of the channel bank and back into the channel. This bank at this spot was approximately five feet high, so a considerable amount of water was held up there. This was the highest flood I saw in my days of farming, but still the water was contained within its 'traditional course'.

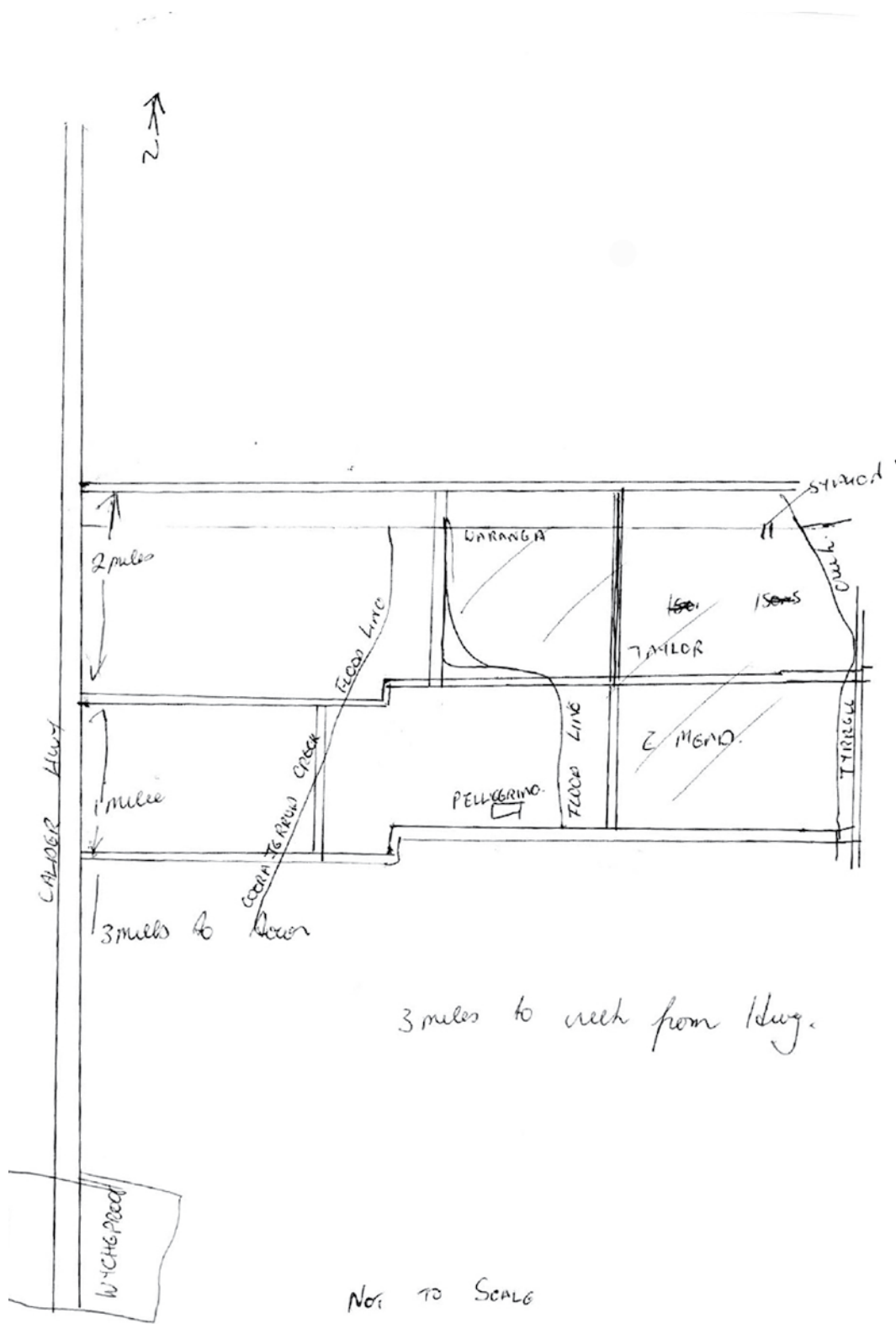
What I was told about the 2011 flood and where the water flowed I could hardly believe. The Pellegrino family told me that the water came to within 400 or 500 yards of their house and this is over a mile from the creek's course. This has never happened before;

normally it stayed within its confined course, well over a mile away. To the north of their property the creek spread out and because the flow of the water hit the Waranga Channel, and could not get over it. The water spread out till it hit the Goschen Channel, which there runs north-south. The creek at this point would have been close to two miles wide, and this is unheard of from the past.

This was the west side of the creek but on the east side the flood nearly reached Charlie Elston's old shearing shed and this has never happened before. The Tyrrell Creek at this point was approximately five miles wide, and it was hard to comprehend the enormity of the spread of the water from the creek. It went into areas where there had never been water before and my informants told me that this water joined up with the Avoca River water, which has not happened before.

The cost of the fencing alone was enormous and the government help for the replacement of fences was gratefully received. Tragically, the cost of the crop damage cannot be calculated. It's hard to say if this would ever be repeated as the Waranga and Goschen Channels have now been filled in, the siphon has now gone and this barrier is not there to hold up the creek, but it will be interesting to see where the next flood goes as now we have gone back to where we were nearly ninety years ago as far as the Tyrrell Creek is concerned and we are virtually in uncharted waters so to speak.





△ North of Wycheproof on the Calder Highway.

Dumosa



◁ Richard and Dianne Sheahan's farm



◁ Richard and Dianne Sheahan's farm



◁ Darren Baker's Turkey shed.



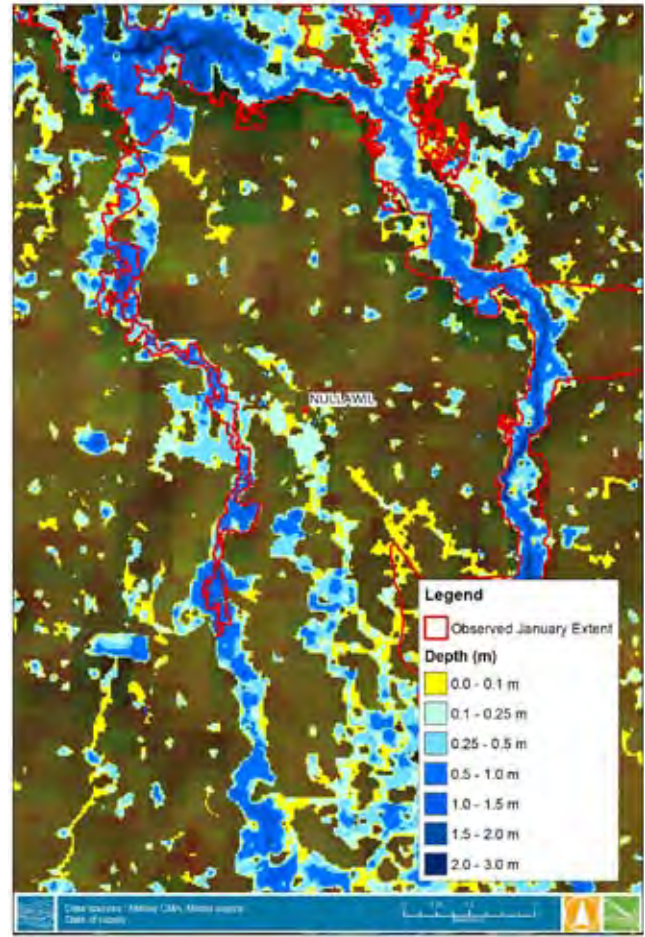
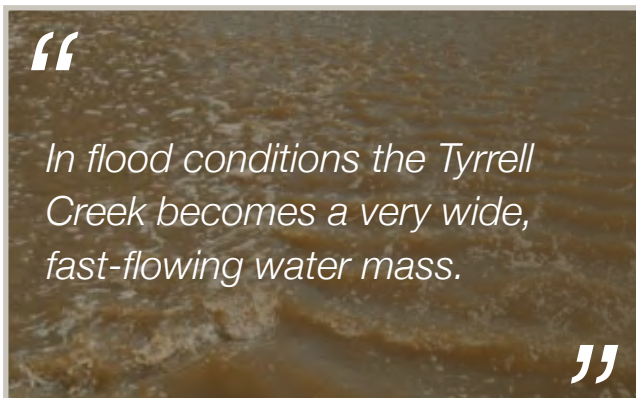
◁ Turnbull's Shearing shed, Dumosa.

Nullawil

Nullawil was impacted by riverine loading from Tyrrell Creek which is fed by waters from the Avoca River. In flood conditions the Tyrrell Creek becomes a very wide, fast-flowing water mass. Surrounding farmland was inundated, with the November 2010 and January 2012 floods resulting in significant losses in grain quality and subsequent effects on the incomes of farming families.

The flood resulted in:

- Inundation of one home in Nullawil.
- Inundation and significant crop loss.
- Some damage of pasture.
- Loss of power due to the inundation of the Charlton substation.



△ Nullawil and surrounds.



△ Tyrrell Creek Crossing between Nullawil and Quambatook.

Steven Cooper

I believe the millennium drought climaxed on Black Saturday 2009. It was a reasonable season but an extremely difficult year financially. 2010 was a wet year that got wetter.

Big rains further north had locusts swarming. I sowed barley during locust swarms in late April. They did damage to germinating crop on light rises and I had to boom spray with no government assistance.

Experts said the damage would come in the spring. My father had no recollection of any locust damage.

The Shire put signs up on certain roads with the intention of spraying. All roads looked the same to me. I passed by neighbours to spray. Thought about it. Eventually proved a waste of effort.

Having spent money on my header I made the committed decision not to hire contractor help.

A promising thirty acres of chickpeas was the last of the harvest on 1 April (this paddock had parts of it sown three times in 2011 due to mice). Barley, on wheat stubble yielded well before flooding rain-rest weight was just under malt grade so I stored 200 ton that sold for \$73 a ton more.

I decided to strip the wheat first. Fungus was a segregation issue so the grain shed was back in use for the first time in nine seasons. The water came up to about ten inches of the heap. Insurance here was worthwhile. The water didn't get right through the shed, only about a third of the way in, which was fortunate but baffling because water inundated all the way around.

I made a heap of approximately 40 ton of weather-damaged wheat from the header on to the ground as no other storage was available. This eventually sold for \$163 per ton.

A neighbour had to have 4,000 litres of water pumped out of an in ground silo from the 1960s. Wheat from the first load out passed, but the second was rejected and loaded the same day.

I could write a manual on weevil control in unsealed situations.

The barley had to be boom sprayed before harvesting. I re-filled the grain shed not aware of any sites taking the segregation. Heliotrope seed has a different odour, and moisture is an issue due to ongoing showers. I eventually sold two B-double loads at \$100 per ton. It was extremely difficult to keep weevils out of them. Did someone say petrol?

Sheep will eat it. I still have more than 50 on the farm.

Water came to within three metres of the house on three sides. Yabbies from the dam were under the garden shed near the house. The rest of the farmyard was under water.

The services of local contractor, Gary Quirk, and five loads of stone were a good investment before harvest. I could drive out to the bitumen in two-wheel drive.

Mosquitoes were cruel, especially on dogs' ears. The different species of spiders were incredible. Blow fly infestation killed 40 sheep.

There was no electricity for days.

I attended two flood meetings at Culgoa as I was captain of the Nullawil CFA. I hope they had enough help.

I was there just before the creek came up on 16 January, which was my son's fourth birthday as well as the hundredth anniversary of my grandfather's birthday.

I was extremely busy preparing for the 2011 crop while still harvesting, due to weed growth and heavy stubbles.

The mouse plague of 2011 was the worst I've seen and that's another story.



△ Tyrrell Creek east of Nullawil (Tyrell/Tyrrell Creek can be spelt either way. This sign was erected to recognise the alternative Tyrell').



△ Chris Hogan's John Deere Tractor towing Peter Hogan's Inter Tractor.



△ Men at Work, Peter Hogan: Alan Smith and Chris Hogan.



△ Robert Kemp's Bogged John Deere Header-February 2011.



△ Shot head of Barley.



△ Robert Kemp's Dry Dam Paddock.

Photos: Nullawil Historical Society



△ Part of Richard and Dianne Sheahan's farm yard at Dumosa.

Photo: Wycheproof Community Resource Centre



△ ▽ Alan Smith's Chamberlain tractor and field bin in paddock.



△ Barry James' house.

Birchip

While the Birchip township is not located on a river, the flash flooding on 13 January led to the overflow of the Dunmunkle Creek, causing some local flooding and crop damage around the outskirts of Birchip and significant areas of the surrounding country.



△ Morton Plains Silo.

Curyo Glenys Rickard

I know that there have been many accounts of the floods of 2010 and 2011 and many of these have been, rightly, accounts of great personal and community devastation with subsequent heartbreaking hardship.

I, however, would like to share with you some of the excitement which I experienced during these unprecedented floods (unprecedented, that is, at least within my lifetime).

I now live west of Curyo but grew up west of Nullawil, beside the old Tatchera Creek. As a child the flowing of the Tyrrell Creek at the Warne Bridge and east of Nullawil was cause for great community excitement. I guess my interest in water courses began at this time.

So after the rains I began to explore the watercourses of which my father and others previously often spoke. I simply couldn't resist the chance to witness this rare natural event fully knowing that I may not ever have another opportunity within my lifetime to do so. I could do this because my property was not under threat. I was safe as others were not.

So, off I went with my camera. Like so many others I flew over the floods so that I could accurately follow the water courses whilst constantly striving to remember old creek and swamp names-Tyrrell, Dunmunkle and Tatchera-and wishing that I had listened with greater attention to my father's recollections of previous floods.

Although always high, my respect for the power of water and its ability to bring life so decisively back to our parched land has been further heightened. Even now, eighteen months later, the transformation of our landscape, where so many life forms have responded with such splendour and vigour, continues to amaze me.

I feel privileged to have seen these floods and exhilarated by them also. I have also learnt to respect the old box trees. They knew where the waters flowed! Now I know too.



△ Curyo



△ Winston Road



△ Tyrrell Creek north of Nullawil



△ Birchchip Cropping Group field day at Warne.



△ Homemade sign. The Shire had run out!



△ From the tinnie: Wichigulk Lake near Marlbed, Birchchip-Sea Lake Road.

Photos: Glenys Rickard



△ Crossing the Tyrrell Creek east of Nullawil.



△ Blue Hunt's Bend, north of Carapugna.



△ Howard Smith and Mandy Moloney trying to relieve the pressure along the Winston Road, Tatchera and Tyrrell Creeks near Dumosa.



△ Tyrrell Creek near Dumosa.



△ Shifting stranded sheep on 'Lenrich', Culgoa-Watchupga Road.



△ Overlooking Warne to Culgoa.



△ Nullawil looking south.



△ Marlbed Lake, Sea Lake-Birchip Road.



△ Wichigulk Lake, twin lake to Marlbed, off Sea Lake-Birchip Road.



△ Marlbed looking south-east.

Photos: Glenys Rickard



△ Marlbed Curyo Road heading east.



△ Tyrrell Creek north-east of Nullawil.



△ Tatchera Creek heading east from Kevin Barbetti's gateway, Nullawil-Birchip Road.



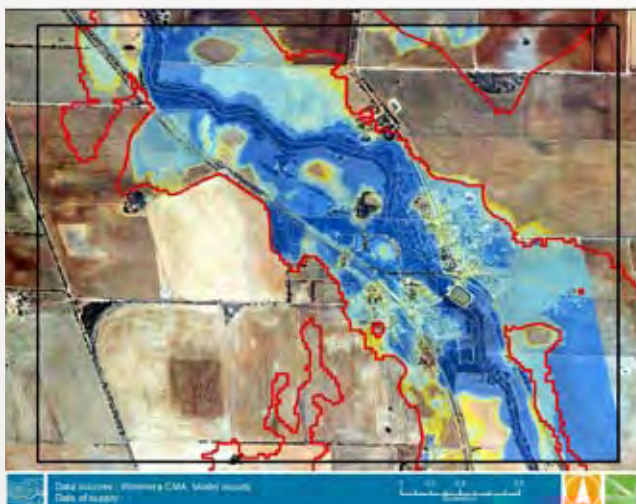
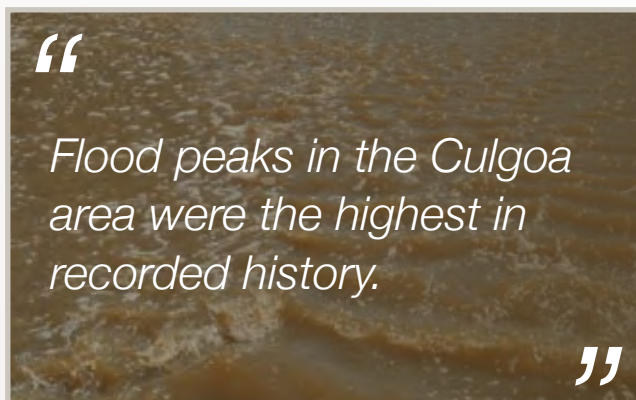
△ Tyrrell Creek about to go under the bridge at Warne on the Calder Highway.

Culgoa

Culgoa sits adjacent to the Tyrrell Creek and is impacted by riverine flooding. The Tyrrell Creek is fed by waters from the Avoca River. In flood conditions the Tyrrell Creek becomes a very wide fast-flowing water mass. In flood conditions the Tyrrell Creek inundates homes and rural properties on the eastern and western sides of the Calder Highway as it passes through Culgoa. The Calder Highway is impassable during flood conditions. Flood peaks in the Culgoa area were the highest in recorded history.

The flood resulted in:

- An evacuation notice being served on Culgoa residents on 15 January and the flood crisis continuing for the next seven days.
- Evacuation of townspeople to an evacuation centre established in Sea Lake.
- Twelve homes in Culgoa township (fifty percent of the town) being inundated by flood waters, and water around a further ten homes.
- Three rural homesteads near the town being severely impacted by flood waters.
- Loss of power to the town as a result of the inundation of the Charlton substation.
- Transport of food staples to the town in high-clearance CFA vehicles for three days as a consequence of the power outage and relative isolation of the town.
- Extensive damage to road infrastructure.
- Widespread pasture damage.
- Large areas of public land around Culgoa were still inundated many months after the event.



△ Culgoa township.

Wendy Spry

Oh what an amazing experience! For any one of us our lives are always going to be a part of history, but the flood experience has made our time and place quite unique.

My father, who farmed and lived his whole life (80+ years) in the Mallee had been told of the possibility of the area being flooded, but he didn't live to see it. I would just love to be able to show him the pictures and tell him about our January in 2011. Another lady had spoken of our farm and house being flooded sometime in the past, but that was all I knew about what might happen. I had no idea what to expect-I think I imagined a stream wandering past! What happened left me speechless!

The excitement really started late on Sunday evening. At about 10 pm my husband Lex and I drove down to see the water at the Calder Highway Bridge at Warne. The water was 'roaring' under the bridge. At this time Culgoa wasn't flooded, so we thought all the water was amazing.

Went to sleep at night having no idea what lay ahead. About 6.15 am we rose and walked to the creek to see what was happening. It was very evident by that time this was going to be a very different experience for us all. At the same time our daughter Rachael was planning to leave for work in Swan Hill. My husband Lex suggested she drive down along Hayes Road to have a look.

Whilst she was there the water started flowing under her car, so that changed her day and she thought she would go into Swan Hill along Meehans Road. That was not going to happen either. As she drove back to the farm she found Meehans Road completely flooded.

The morning and day just kept unfolding with more and greater levels of water everywhere, and even greater shocks for us all. Strangely I felt no fear at all.

By about 10 am the town was flooded. Oddly though, the main street wasn't! Several houses were inundated. Our 'chook shed' stood on what we thought to be higher ground, which became the car park for the town. We had 30,000 birds inside the shed. As the morning progressed the water started rising up along the sides of the sheds, and we were not sure what to do. We didn't fancy letting the birds out! We had about thirty cars in front of the sheds by lunchtime.

As the day progressed the water continued to rise so I just kept on marking the levels. Fortunately the water did not get high enough to do any damage to either the birds in the sheds or the cars. Our home further down Lalbert Road had water under it and nearly up to the ant caps. Oh what a blessing, the water did not rise high enough to get inside our home.



△ Lex and Rachael Spry at Hayes Road, Culgoa.



△ Cars at the chook sheds, Culgoa.



△ 2 Lalbert Road, Culgoa.

Later in the morning I became concerned about our daughter at the farm and went out to check on her. There was water everywhere, but it was not too bad. Then within about an hour of leaving the farm we received an urgent call from her asking us to come and get her. The water had raced into the house yard so hard and fast it knocked engines off stands in our workshop. She was very frightened. Our farm is about six kilometres from the Tyrrell Creek. We were all amazed at what had happened!

So, we all spent the night together. Together means Lex, myself, Rachael and her two dogs in our home in Culgoa, with water up nearly to the ant caps! Sleeping wasn't really very successful for any of us that night, but we rested.

The real shock came on Tuesday morning, when we went back out to the farm. There was water everywhere. Words are not adequate to describe what confronted us. Everything on the 640 acre block was under water and about two and a half feet of it. The only dry spot was under the house. We constantly ask ourselves "How did the people who built the house (early 1900s) get it so right?" But they did.

That was the real beginning of our story, being confronted with so much water was and still is very difficult to comprehend. We have seen it, we have waded in it, we had to live with it for weeks, and we have had to clean up after it.

The Flood felt like a serpent wandering towards us—we didn't know where it would go or who and what it would damage. We just had to watch and wait. Fortunately for us the damage caused wasn't too bad and our lives have continued on in the same way. I consider us to be very fortunate. Each of us has a special and lasting memory of our "flood experience". Lex tells people about the roar of the water, he says it was like being near the ocean and that it lasted for three nights. He woke me on the Wednesday night and said "Listen, the water has stopped roaring". Rachael's memory is of seeing the water engulfing our farm yard with such force and haste. For me it is 'water everywhere' and at such a great depth. We still look at pictures and comment on the markers indicating the depth of the water.

The flood was very destructive yet beautiful.



△ Aerial view of the Spry farm house, yard and paddocks.

Sea Lake Red Cross – Valerie Stewart

The year commenced with rain, rain and more rain- with devastating floods in the Buloke Shire and all neighbouring shires.

The Tyrrell Creek ran three times in four months. The first time was in September 2010 then again the following December, but the biggest flow was in January 2011. Of course, with so much water about, the mosquito population expanded to plague proportions, thus spreading mosquito-borne diseases.

The Swan Hill-Sea Lake Road was cut by the Tyrrell Creek east of the Sea Lake township. The Tyrrell Creek then flooded the crossing on the Robinvale Road where the creek flows into Lake Tyrrell, but due to previous good engineering the culvert held.

With the Calder Highway impassable around Mittyack, the Murray Valley Highway cut near Swan Hill and the Swan Hill-Sea Lake Road flooded, the alternative route out was the Robinvale Road which took a battering from heavy vehicles.

The Sea Lake Community Complex was turned into a relief centre when the Tyrrell Creek at Culgoa inundated parts of the township.

Red Cross emergency team members, Beryl Lowe, Barbara Shepherd and Tita Craig, were at the complex initially to receive evacuees-some with pets! Later they were relieved by two Red Cross ladies, Anne and Rae from Shepparton. There was always a member of the police force in attendance.

The evacuees formed a cross-section of the community from the elderly to very small children.

Lions Club members brought in bunk beds and bedding from the Green Lake Camp. People were very generous with donations of food, bedding and their time. Toys came from the Toy Library.

It was an anxious time for the evacuees, not knowing what state their homes would be in when they returned home. It was also a stressful time for the volunteers who had left their families and businesses to give assistance where it was needed during the flood crisis.

“

It was also a stressful time for the volunteers who had left their families and businesses to give assistance where it was needed during the flood crisis.

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Donald

Heavy rainfall in the Avon Richardson catchment and in and around Donald over the period 12 January through 14 January resulted in flood conditions. The result was the highest river levels since 1909 and widespread riverine flooding.

The flood resulted in:

- Flooding of Johnson Goodwin Memorial Homes retirement village requiring the evacuation of residents to nearby towns. An entire section of the village also required rebuilding as a result of the flood event.
- Inundation of two motels and 13 homes. One of the homes has subsequently been demolished as a result of the damage caused.
- Loss of power for three days due to inundation of the Charlton sub-station. The loss of power and associated impact on mobile telephone and internet access created similar problems to those experienced in Charlton.
- Establishment of an evacuation centre. The Evacuation Centre also served to accommodate evacuees transported from Charlton.
- Donald township being effectively cut in half by flood waters for two days.
- The town being isolated by flood waters from the surrounding towns of Charlton, St Arnaud, Birchip and Wycheproof for varying periods of time due to flood waters across state highways.
- Inundation of community infrastructure including the Donald Swimming Pool, Heritage Walking Trail, Cricket Club Rooms, Apex Park, Hockey Club and Archery Club.
- Extensive damage to surrounding agricultural land. Large areas of agricultural land remained underwater for the next 12 to 24 months. There was extensive damage to crops, machinery sheds and farm equipment. Some homesteads were surrounded by water for up to ten days.
- Extensive damage to the surrounding road infrastructure.



△ Aerial view of the township of Donald.



△ Surrounding areas of Donald paddocks under water.



△ Aerial view of Donald Recreation Reserve underwater.



△ Aerial view of Donald.



△ Wood Street Donald, Donald-Swan Hill Road corner.



△ The Donald Football Ground inundated with some interested spectators afloat.



△ The Cod in Donald underwater, located on the Richardson River.

Alison McEwen

“Mum, you can’t get through!” Oh dear! Three children on board. I had been driving for hours. I had picked them up from a camp at Phillip Island. I had driven from Werribee to Phillip Island and now we were driving back through Melbourne on our way home. The phone again: “I have arranged for you to stay in Ballarat with friends.”

A lovely diversion, but I wanted to be home, and local water across the highway at Lexton and Learmonth was preventing a same-day arrival home. Early morning reading of the VicRoads website indicated that the local water had cleared. We left as early as possible. St Arnaud was reached with no problems although we had observed along the way the effect of the rushing local flooding across the road and through the town centres. It had rained continuously all week throughout the State but particularly in the northwest.

Thank goodness for mobile phones. We had contact: “Drive north to Dooboobetic and I will meet you.” So glad to see husband Ian and follow him in a circular route north of Cope Cope where the flooding had cut the Sunraysia Highway, preventing straightforward access to home. I knew that I just had to get home before the bridges were cut off.

I walked into home and looked out our front windows at the river flooding by. Not up to the house yet. Will I start lifting things, Ian, knowing how much work that was going to be? No, it will be all right, came the confident reply. I drove down the street to see if our newly acquired property, the old National Bank, was getting wet. Still high and dry, good, so I drove down to see if the Bullock’s Head was getting a drink. It was. “Hello, Alison,” said a concerned voice. “Do you want a hand to lift furniture up?” “I don’t know if I need to,” I replied naively. “Oh yes, a huge body of water is coming. I will round up lots of help.” I jumped into the car and rushed home to tell Ian that many people were coming to lift everything.

We had built our lovely new home on the river frontage. Flood plain to the left, to the right and in front-what a lovely position. I proudly told everyone that the floor was surveyed to the level of the top of the bridges and the VicRoads engineers have got it right-the bridges are built above flood level. For six years I had prattled off that belief until that fateful day in 16 January 2011.



△ The Richardson River grows in size.

Oh my, lounge room furniture out and up the back to the shed, books piled high, dressing tables on beds, linen and shoes up a level, people everywhere all being helpful. Kitchen drawers on top of benches and tables-what a shambles but done so quickly.

Only family left. “You know that the peak isn’t tonight-Wimmera Catchment Authority have let water into our catchment to save Horsham.” I was brave till then but then I cried-how could they sacrifice people’s businesses and homes in Donald to do that? That was the rumour running rife through the town. Later it proved to be not true. But then I believed it.

Where were we going to sleep? One folding bed was found and a sleeping bag on the floor for Ian. Every hour, Ian was up measuring the rise of the river, by this time flowing very fast under the house. The noise was so loud, and only drowned a little by the generator. The smell will remain with me forever. A putrid smell. Later, I was to understand that the river was contaminated by sewage. The water was so filled with acid that it cut the galvanized finish on the stumps. They rusted so a number had to be sanded back and repainted. I slept fitfully. The river kept rising, two inches an hour. At last, between 3 am and 6 am it slowed and by 7 am it stopped. We had survived by 8 inches. So close. We thanked the Lord for His goodness.

We sat on our verandah with family and friends as the water poured past in a strong, unrelenting current. Was this our home or were we on a house boat? The blue sky and brilliant sunshine after the rain accented the beautiful phenomenon-massive

amount of water rushing through Donald out to Lake Buloke. Where does all this water come from? For three days and three nights it flowed on and on. There are lots of photos to tell the tale. But the beautiful image was spoilt by the knowledge that so much destruction had occurred in its wake. It took ten days to right the house. I did not like to ask for help as the need was so great amongst hundreds who had lost so much as the floods swept through their homes in Donald and in Charlton. This became a reality for me when I took two friends and we helped clean houses and the motel in Charlton, ten days later.

It was some time after the fateful night that I learnt that while we were experiencing our drama, two ladies had opened the Op Shop to give Charlton folk whatever they needed. Many had arrived at the Blue Room wet through in the early hours of the morning and most others had nothing but the clothes they stood up in. We were so thankful we were able to give articles that were needed. We had been managing the Op Shop for four years and had been given notice to move. We had just bought the Bank building to move the Op Shop into it. What a blessing the shop was to so many at the time and weeks later.



△ Gilmour farm, Kyndalyn Swanwater North.



△ Gilmour farm.



△ Donald: from the edge of the Recreation Reserve which looks like a lake.



△ Donald Recreation Reserve.



△ Locals gather on Donald main street at the intersection between Woods Street and the Borung Highway to see the Richardson River rise.



△ Locals try to cross the bridge over the Richardson River.



△ Viewing platform at the Bullock's' Head.



△ Donald Swimming Pool after the flood peak.



△ Lake Buloke at full capacity flooding out over farmlands.

Corack

Richard J Reilly

Amongst all the disappointment of the flooded houses and downgraded crops, rain brings opportunity. Full subsoil moisture gave the district's farming community in 2011 a magnificent chance to capitalise with their broad acre crops.



△ Water lying after a summer storm outside the entrance to the Reilly property Laurelville, Corack.



△ The Opportunity Crop. Hurricane TT canola being direct headed, and yielding 2.5 t/ha in November 2011.



△ 'Sam' and 'Cliff' enjoying the torrent of water flowing into the Le Lievres Swamp at Thalia district.



△ Linton (L) and Richard (R) Reilly overlooking the flooded Yeungroon Creek flooded over much of the Reilly and neighbouring crops.

Photos: Richard Reilly



△ Flood water spilling out of the Donald Main Channel at Corack township. The Wimmera Mallee pipeline had just superseded the old open channel system. VicRoads had removed the bridge at Corack on the Donald-Swan Hill Road creating a block in the channel. Flood water caught by the channel through all districts right down from south of Donald, was heading north and filling here.



△ Donald main flood water spilling over the Donald-Swan Hill Road/Birchip turnoff at Corack. Neville Reilly of Corack gets organised to check livestock in flooding paddocks.



△ Water encompassing a vast area of the Reilly and Slater properties at Birchip turn off at Corack. Paddocks inundated were 'John Milles blacksmith shop block' and 'Shepherds'. In places this water would have been at least half a metre deep.



△ Corack residents: Peter and Maree Sands, Linton, Barbara and Neville Reilly at the Richardson Rivers peak at the height of the floods.

Ann Prendergast

We were flooded due to the roof collapsing and the underground rainwater tank at the back door overflowed due to the sheer quantity of water in such a short period of time. The house also flooded and the septic tank overflowed. Our power was off for three weeks, and we had no phone, and most importantly no oxygen, which I desperately needed. We do not have a mobile, as we do not get reception.

Roads to Donald were flooded due to the channel being backfilled with dirt. With Birchip and Wycheproof Roads under water a panic of being trapped set in. It did not take long for severe mould to set in. Panic! I could not breathe.

When we did finally attempt to go to Donald, 26 kilometres away, for supplies, I was terrified. All food supplies at home had been used. All our freezer goods had perished and were useless. I was devastated. At the Centrelink office in Donald we had to wait in line for six hours, only to be told "Sorry come back tomorrow". We listened to others' sad stories and went home to nothing except candles.

We proceeded to collect jumpers, as older people with pacemakers feel the cold, and other excess things useful for the poor souls of Charlton evacuated to Donald Basketball Stadium. All were very grateful and I felt pride and satisfaction on returning the next day to find a number of sympathetic people all eager to help. Wow!

First of all we got a food voucher and \$1,000, with which we brought a generator. We felt very humbled and excited at our prospects. But the power had been seriously cut out due to water damage. We lost the fridge, washing machine, freezer and all power to house sparks! We went back to town and bought bags of ice for Eskys-a temporary measure.

Then we met our 'guardian angels', social workers through a newspaper advert from Charlton; Casey Wright, our flood recovery case worker, Peter Trask, psychologist, and Peter Noble of East Wimmera Health Services. We have also managed to obtain some money for emergency rebuilds from some caring people. We have been so very grateful as nineteen months later we are still waiting on an insurance pay out. The insurance was a waste of money.

We had a builder that ripped us off and took advantage of our vulnerability. We were depressed beyond belief-this has been one hell of a nightmare and an ageing process. My son who is my husband's carer was asked to weld together a volunteer key by the Charlton crew in recognition of all the volunteers involved in clean ups. It was a job well done-the key looked fabulous. Still to this day Casey Wright has maintained weekly contact with us and the insurance company. Our lives have changed forever and will never be the same again. God Bless all involved.

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Citation-Charlton Community Event of the Year 2012

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