

## Resume of the Brunswick Valley Flood History

**Before I commence this brief address,** *I wish to express my deep concern for all the people, who have experienced the traumas of having their homes flooded during the recent floods, and hope that every flood mitigation measure possible will be implemented before another major flood occurs.*

*My knowledge of local flooding problems and the traumas associated with them has been gained from having to cope with floods myself. During a life time of living with cyclones and floods in the Brunswick Valley, one learns to understand our local sub-tropical weather patterns.*

**We just experienced a drought period of about 14 years and maybe it's now catch up time.**

**You may think that the recent torrential downpour we received on the 29/30<sup>th</sup>. June, 2005 was about as wet as it could get.**

**This most recent flood is said by some to be a once in a 500 year flood. Well, I have serious doubts about that!** *However, if you were to look up our annual rainfalls over the past 100 years, you would find something that may astound you. In 1954, we had double the rainfall that we received during our recent flood and I'm not sure if it was even considered a once in a 100 year flood. Between 1944 and 1956, we had a series of cyclones and floods.*

**The old saying of "History repeats itself" certainly applies to the frequency of flooding in the Brunswick Valley.** Major flooding usually occurs here about every decade. I can recall the major floods of the forties, fifties, sixties and seventies. However, the recorded heights of these floods may vary over the catchment, because quite often the rainfall isn't evenly distributed.

*In my previous triple role as the Shire's S.E.S. Controller, Fire Control Officer and Shire Councilor during Cyclone Pam of 1974, I witnessed the devastation, which resulted from that natural disaster. Seeing people traumatized on the second floor of buildings on The Esplanade, awaiting rescue from the waves, was a sight that left a lasting impression on my mind. During the Mother's Day floods at Golden Beach and North Ocean Shores in 1987, I assisted the Shire Engineer to record the water levels of that major flood. This action made me familiar with the water levels there. I have assisted with many search and rescues during floods at Main Arm and on one occasion, I transported the body of a drowned man to Mullumbimby, after he was washed from a vehicle near my farm, and this helped to motivate me to try and reduce flood levels where possible. Having witnessed first hand the devastation caused to fellow human beings by floods, I believe it is essential to view the current flood situation in terms of it being a real life crisis where we are dealing with factual flood levels that adversely affect people in a real life situation. It is not simply a theoretical computer model that can be studied, manipulated and reported on. It is a real life crisis and the devastating impact it has on human life cannot be overlooked.*

*In 1976, following a request from local fishermen, I was one of the Councilors, who voted on the Council's resolution to close the ocean outlet north of Fern Beach. This decision was made in good faith. However, this area's development has changed dramatically since that time. The ocean outlet just north of the Shire boundary was blocked off also, because of sand mining activities years before. Incidentally, this property was selected by my uncle, James Murnane.*

Rainfall isn't the only factor, which contributes to flooding on the North Arm. Tide heights and ocean surges play a major role in how rapidly the water flows into the ocean. Development changes, like the filling of the flood plain for development, limits the area available for pondage and consequently raises the flood level. Other man made fixtures like the Reading's Bay walls and the bund have their own contributing factors to flood heights.

Tom Kendall of New Brighton was an expert recorder of floods and cyclones there for many years. Unfortunately, he is no longer with us today, but his documents are held by the Brunswick Valley Historical Society. How times have changed and the North Arm's river depth has, too. In 1874, the North Arm was very different to how it is today. The early cedar getters could float their rafts of timber downstream. I am aware that the sand build-up opposite the New Brighton Sports Oval doesn't play a significant role after a flood has reached a certain height. However, the build-up of sand and its associated mangroves do restrict the volume of run off water reaching the ocean when the flood levels are low.

We some times experience a cyclonic rain depression bearing down on us from the Coral Sea, and unloading its fury on the coastal strip. On other occasions it's general rain with storms which result in flooding. These downpours seem to follow the mountains and deliver the heaviest falls at the head of the valleys, like the top end of Main Arm. It must be remembered that flooding isolates residents and observations of flood heights, which residents are familiar with, are usually near their dwellings. Therefore, regardless of how long a person has lived in a certain part of the Brunswick catchment, their flood knowledge is probably limited to the locality where they live.

It's not of any use placing the blame on our Shire Council or State Government for the predicament residents are in. It is however, important to note that the present day Council does have a duty of care to protect local residents from the ravages of floods. Hence, measures to alleviate the present flood crisis need to be implemented immediately by our local Council. Solutions to the flooding problem are what we need. An organization called "RAFT" (Residents Against Flood Turmoil) has been formed and if you are interested in being part of RAFT, more information is available here tonight. Another innovative educational move by locals is the establishment of a "Website".

This factual site [www.brunswickvalley.com.au/flood-history](http://www.brunswickvalley.com.au/flood-history) covers documents, maps and other matters of general interest to those who wish to be aware of subjects pertaining to history associated with flooding.

*Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen*

*Frank Mills 15<sup>th</sup>.August 2005*