

Richmond
Valley
Council



SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

Ordinary Council Meeting

Date: Tuesday, 18 March 2025

Time: 6pm

**Location: Council Chambers
10 Graham Place, Casino**

**Vaughan Macdonald
General Manager**

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5 MAYORAL MINUTES

5.2 MAYORAL MINUTE - TROPICAL CYCLONE ALFRED: IMPACTS AND RECOVERY UPDATE

Author: Robert Mustow

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. Acknowledges the outstanding efforts of Emergency Services personnel, volunteer organisations, Council's operational teams and members of the community in preparing for and responding to the Cyclone Alfred disaster in the Richmond Valley.
2. Continues to advocate strongly for government support for disaster recovery and improved resilience of local homes and infrastructure.

REPORT

Over the past two weeks, the Richmond Valley has once again experienced the threat of natural disaster, with Tropical Cyclone Alfred having significant impacts on Southeast Queensland and the Northern Rivers regions. Thankfully, the outstanding efforts of the community, emergency services and Council's operational teams in responding to this event have helped to ensure that the damage was minimised and we are now in a better position to recover.

From those who volunteered their time in response agencies and community welfare organisations, to the individual acts of neighbour helping neighbour to prepare and be safe, I am immensely proud of the way that our community worked together to get the job done and respond to this challenge. In the past seven years, we have been threatened by drought, bushfire, flood and now cyclone, and once again we have worked together to rise above it and recover.

The lessons learned from the 2022 floods have helped us to prepare more effectively, and it was encouraging to see that resilience works, such as the new culverts at Dairy Flat and Thearles Canal on the Woodburn-Coraki Road, have proved their worth. We were able to access flood-affected communities in the Mid-Richmond more quickly this time, to provide support and begin recovery tasks. Council will continue to advocate to the Federal and State governments for more funding for these essential infrastructure improvements, as we prioritise completion of the Tatham Bridges replacement project.

This time, it was also reassuring to see that Government response agencies were better prepared to respond, providing us with information and support much earlier in the event. This included daily briefings for community leaders from the Federal Government's Special Envoy for Disaster Recovery, Senator Tony Sheldon, which I attended each day on Council's behalf. The government has also moved swiftly to ensure that appropriate disaster declarations are in place and our community has access to the Disaster Recovery Allowance for affected businesses and employees and the Disaster Recovery Payment for those personally impacted through property damage or injury. We look forward to receiving further support in the recovery phase, through the NSW Reconstruction Authority.

Over the past two weeks, Council has been working to ensure that our community's voice is heard in the Government's disaster response, and we receive the same support as other affected areas. This has included two separate meetings with the NSW Premier to raise awareness of the Richmond Valley's disaster impacts and advocate for more funding support. The General Manager and I also met with the NSW Minister for Planning and the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads at Woodburn, last week, and hosted a visit and media announcement by Senator Sheldon yesterday. We will continue to ensure that our community's needs are recognised in the coming weeks while also highlighting the long-term opportunities the Richmond Valley has to offer this

region in terms of flood resilience. There is sufficient flood-safe land in inland communities such as Casino to accommodate housing growth for the next 50 years, if the Government is willing to invest in the essential infrastructure we need. This message cannot be lost in the wake of this disaster, along with the urgent need to invest in greater flood resilience for housing in the Mid-Richmond communities. Programs such as the Resilient Homes house-raising subsidies must be progressed as soon as possible to ensure that communities such as Coraki, Woodburn and Broadwater can be better protected in the future. Council will continue to advocate for this funding and to implement the disaster adaptation recommendations in the Mid-Richmond Place Plans.

In the meantime, the work to complete the damage assessment from Cyclone Alfred continues and Council has formed an Infrastructure Recovery Team to progress inspections of our road network, water and sewerage networks, drainage, parks and playgrounds, council buildings and sports facilities. A preliminary report from the Team is attached, with the reassuring result that the damage is not as extensive as the 2022 event. The team will also be responsible for ensuring that essential services, such as waste collection return to normal and that special arrangements are in place for collection of flood waste in affected communities. Another key responsibility will be to prepare Council's applications for Disaster Recovery Funding to fix any damaged roads and bridges. This will be in addition to the \$50m+ already received under the scheme for road repairs from the 2022 floods. Further reports on progress will be presented to Council, along with regular updates for the community.

As we continue the recovery journey from Cyclone Alfred, I want to thank all those within our community and beyond who have played a role in preparing for and responding to this event. Once again, we have shown that the Richmond Valley is a strong, positive and progressive community that is willing to work together when the going gets tough.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. TC Alfred - Preliminary Report

Preliminary Report: Richmond Valley Council Infrastructure Recovery Team

AGRN 1198 – NSW Tropical Cyclone Alfred severe weather

17 March 2025

Background

Council was alerted on 4 March /2025 of the high chance of a tropical cyclone “Alfred” crossing the coastline in the vicinity of Brisbane towards the end of the week.

The last tropical cyclone that crossed the coast in this vicinity was in 1974, resulting in major flooding across the Richmond Valley.

The event known as AGRN 1198 – NSW Tropical Cyclone Alfred Severe Weather was declared a Natural Disaster on 6 March 2025, allowing council to seek financial assistance to restore defined public assets damaged as a result of the event to their pre-disaster condition.

Preparedness

Council implemented improvements and protocols developed after the 2022 flood event to ensure that:

- Sand and sandbags were made available to SES and the public
- Generators were located at high-risk sewer pump stations
- Meter boxes were raised
- Electrical components of BBQs in riverside parks were removed
- Most ramps to pontoons were removed
- Plant was moved to high ground and
- Equipment and staff resources for road closures and emergency call outs were ready to go.

Impacts

The initial impacts were felt in the coastal areas of the LGA, being very high winds, moderate rainfall and the loss of electricity impacting infrastructure in Woodburn and Broadwater. Further impact occurred on two fronts after the cyclone crossed the coastline with the associated outer rain bands dumping a significant amount of rainfall in the Bungawalbyn and Myrtle Creek catchment areas and flooding occurring in the upper Wilsons River catchment.

These high rainfalls saw moderate flooding in Casino, Woodburn and Broadwater and major flooding in Coraki, Bungawalbyn and Rappville.

As is normally the case, much of the infrastructure damage across the LGA will be to Council's road network, with high impact areas expected to be in the Swan Bay, Bungawalbyn and Myrtle Creek. At this stage those areas are still inaccessible. In the areas that have been inspected, some minor scouring in roadside table drains and loss of gravel on road surfaces has been found on the unsealed road network.

Council's sewerage network, particularly the pump stations, has seen considerable improvements to resilience after the 2022 flood event. Damage during this event is relatively minor including some water ingress through switchboard doors at sewage treatment plants

and pump stations due to the rain and high winds, some fallen debris over structures and damage to flow meters at our storage reservoirs from inundation.

Stormwater ingress into the sewerage network continues to be a major issue across all of our towns and villages during high rainfall events and is exacerbated when flooding occurs, this has impacted particularly in Coraki during this event.

High winds at Evans Head saw some damage to trees and structures at the Razorback Lookout reserve and the flooding at Woodburn and Coraki saw both riverside parks inundated with a lot of mud deposited in Woodburn in the new playground and picnic shelters and a considerable amount of mud and timber debris being deposited in the park at Coraki.

Most of our buildings and facilities received no damage with some minor roof leaks and gutter damage reported as well as some minor damage to fencing. Due to the high winds, all the shade sails at the Evans Head Pool will need to be removed, tightened and reattached.

The most significant impact to our waste services was some missed bin collections early in the event, with staff not being able to get to work to either drive garbage trucks or attend waste facilities, and the inability to access some of the Mid Richmond towns for an extended period due to the flooding. Nammoona Waste Facility and the Evans Head Transfer Station were closed for a number of days

At the time of preparing this report, most of our stormwater outlets particularly in the Mid Richmond are still inundated or inaccessible. We are not anticipating any additional damage to sites in Casino that received Essential Public Asset Restoration (EPAR) funding after 2022.

At this early stage, the estimate of damage and the clean-up required from this event is approximately \$5.75m

Recovery

Council has now commenced the recovery phase of the Natural Disaster event.

Inspection teams have started inspections on:

- The road network
- Water treatment plants, sewer pump stations and reservoirs
- Playgrounds and parks
- Buildings and other council owned facilities

Once all damage has been assessed any immediate works required will be undertaken as Emergency Works. The Infrastructure Recovery team will then start putting an EPAR claim together for approval by Transport for NSW to restore damaged public assets to their pre disaster condition or function'

The Water and Sewer team has contacted all residents who reported sewer overflows through our Customer Request Management (CRM) system and undertaken inspections to confirm if there were any blockages downstream of the overflow and have cleaned up the overflows and disinfected the areas with lime.

The Roads and Drainage team is working through Customer Requests concerning damaged property access, blocked roadside drainage and safety issues relating to travel encountered during the inspection process and will continue to do so for at least the next month.

The Waste Team has completed the collection of all missed bins and is now back to normal pickups in all areas, excluding some of the rural residential areas in the Swan Bay area. All missed services will be collected by the end of week. The Nammoona Waste Facility and the Evans Head Transfer Station have been accepting storm related green waste and household waste since 12 March 2025 and kerbside collection of flood affected materials in the low lying areas of Coraki will commence on Thursday 20 March 2025.

The clean-up of Woodburn Riverside Park is 70% complete and the park is open to the public with only beach sand and playground replenishment, as well as timber debris removal around the pontoon and under the bridge to be completed. The clean-up of Coraki Riverside Park will take some time and needs to dry out before any works can be safely undertaken. The park has been closed to the public. Works will initially be targeted within the Caravan Park with the aim of re-opening the facility by the end of March. Our Open Spaces team is back undertaking its regular mowing programs in all towns and villages.

Councils works crews and the Asset Delivery Team have recommenced construction on projects that were in progress prior to the event.

In preparation for this event, Council acted in accordance with its natural disaster protocols and procedures and has responded quickly with asset inspections, post event cleanup and emergency works. As access to areas improves, particularly in the Bungawalbin and Myrtle Creek, council teams will continue to inspect the road network and advise of any immediate safety issues that require works.

The Infrastructure Recovery Team will use the next few months to prepare a comprehensive EPAR claim for submission to Transport for NSW to ensure Council receives the funding required to restore our assets back to their pre-event condition or function.