

YOUR STORY

Toowoomba and Complacency - a Disaster Waiting to Happen!

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WELL, Mayor Paul Antonio might still "clearly remember the death and devastation the 2011 Toowoomba floods caused" (TC, 13/01) but like many ordinary residents, I can still remember the empty supermarket shelves: no bread, no milk, no water, no fresh produce; their being power outages, no access to fuel supplies, the ATMs and phones down and many public services disrupted and utilities inoperative!

We are just over one of our nation's worst fire seasons which lasted months, with ferocious bush fires and wildfires that swept uncontrollably across Australia and engulfed swathes of forested and residential land and wiped-out entire communities.

Historical landscapes ruined and in rubble, rare flora reduced to ash and once endangered species of wild fauna and bird life horrifically consumed by calamitous fires to almost extinction.

Countless people were forced to abandon their homes and evacuate their properties; now many are homeless and destitute.

Significant damage to infrastructure, businesses reduced to cinders and livelihoods in tatters.

Mass evacuations of almost biblical proportions, sometimes forced, and executed by land, sea and air.

Australia was totally unprepared!

Now we have had flooding rains over the last few weeks; we are still complacent in thinking things couldn't get any worse in Toowoomba as they have before when natural disasters have struck.

Right weather events + right circumstances + complacency + unpreparedness = a disaster waiting to happen!

Mayor Antonio would have us believe that since the floods "we've had some very serious learnings, and that will allow us to respond better."

But as is typical when disasters strike local communities, as Toowoomba found out in 2011, and as evidenced by the responses of both people and authorities during the most recent national emergency, there was no Emergency and Disaster Response and Management Plan or instructions known to those ordinary ratepayers, citizens and visitors in the direct path of the raging infernos throughout Victoria and New South Wales!

What dumbfounds me is that we are shown images of panic buying and hoarding of essential food supplies and crucial provisions; alas retailers don't give a hoot because business is business.

And reports of contemptible looters, plunderers and scavengers ransacking destroyed homes and abandoned businesses!

It is so very disheartening to see Australia portrayed to the world like a Middle Eastern war zone.

So Mr Antonio, "do we have a Regional Emergency and Disaster Response Management Plan

(READMP) or not?"

"Are we going to sit on our hands - again, and bask in complacency, wishing for the best but never planning for the worst?"

If we have a READMP why do I not have a KISS infographic brochure on my fridge?

During a natural disaster:

- How will we be warned of an impending or resulting natural disaster?
- What, when, and who declares a state of emergency?
- What are Council's obligations and responsibilities?
- What are my rights and responsibilities?
- How will important instructions and messages be disseminated throughout the region?
- Who is responsible for doing what?
- Should residents fight or flee; when is it safe and recommended to do so?
- Who has the authority to order an evacuation?
- Do we have regional evacuation centres; if so - where?
- When and how should I prepare for an evacuation?
- What should I do if essential services and utilities fail?
- How should retailers respond to panic buying and hoarding?
- What measures are in place to prevent profiteering?
- How will law and order be maintained?
- How will looters be dealt with?

And my biggest concern is for the care, wellbeing, health and safety of our most vulnerable in the community: the aged, infirm, those who are mentally unwell, those in hospital, the blind, and the deaf?