

ITEM 1 6 APRIL 2024 NATURAL DISASTER EVENT - RECOVERY UPDATE

On Friday 5 April 2024 a forecasted rain event that had been sitting over Sydney for most of the week moved further south resulting in upwards of 300mm of rain falling over Wollongong throughout the evening and early hours of Saturday 6 April. The severe weather and rain caused extensive damage, resulting in a Natural Disaster Declaration on 7 April 2024. This report provides an overview of the natural disaster recovery.

RECOMMENDATION

That Wollongong City Council -

- 1 Note the significant impact to Wollongong LGA from the natural disaster event on 6 April 2024.
- 2 Endorse efforts to secure funding from NSW Government to enable Wollongong City Council to mitigate some of the risks associated with future storm events including funding for the repair and renewal of infrastructure. This should take into account Wollongong LGA's locally specific vulnerability to impact from natural disasters.

REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Authorised by: Greg Doyle, General Manager

ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments for this report.

BACKGROUND

The combination of the steep escarpment and flood coastal plains means Wollongong experiences significant impacts from high rainfall events which can pose a risk to life and property. Since the 1998 flood, Council has continually invested in stormwater management infrastructure. This focus continues within the draft budget for the next four years which will invest \$26 million for stormwater infrastructure.

The severe weather and rain on 6 April 2024 caused extensive damage to private properties, businesses, roads, footpaths, culverts, and other stormwater infrastructure. It impacted multiple locations across the Wollongong LGA (Figure 1).

The initial and ongoing geotechnical instability is a significant concern at known and new sites where the storm resulted in extensive movement with the risk of further instability.

It is not expected that the full extent of damage to the (underground) stormwater system will be known for several years until CCTV is used to survey stormwater pits and pipes.

Council mobilised staff from across the organisation before, during and after the rain event to support the community. Council received over 6,500 calls in the two weeks following and over 1,000 online requests. Council immediately directed resources towards clearing roads, creeks, culverts, drains, community and recreational facilities and paths impacted by the natural disaster.

Council responded to a large number of free kerbside on-call waste collections (over 1,400) that were extended to impacted residents. Approximately 3,400 tonnes of waste were collected.

Wollongong City Council supported the NSW Reconstruction Authority to establish Recovery Centres at several sites across the Wollongong LGA to aid residents impacted by the natural disaster. Council Customer Service staff were present to record and respond at the Recovery Centres. There are many within the community, including Council staff, whose wellbeing has been impacted by this event and the repeat trauma from previous natural disasters back to the 1998 floods.

A review of a potential scope of works to address necessary creek, culvert, basin and dam cleanup has identified 88 kilometres of creek length currently impacted. Across the LGA there are 30 plus creeks/watercourses which are on private and publicly owned property as well as 112 basins and dams. This impacts 40 suburbs of Wollongong.

Elements of our stormwater network are either impaired or operating with limited capacity. There are large volumes of material and debris that are in or on creek banks on private property that presents high risk to Council essential infrastructure, potentially resulting in further flood impacts for residents and businesses.

Council has prepared the Wollongong City Council Recovery Plan which has been provided to the NSW Reconstruction Authority.

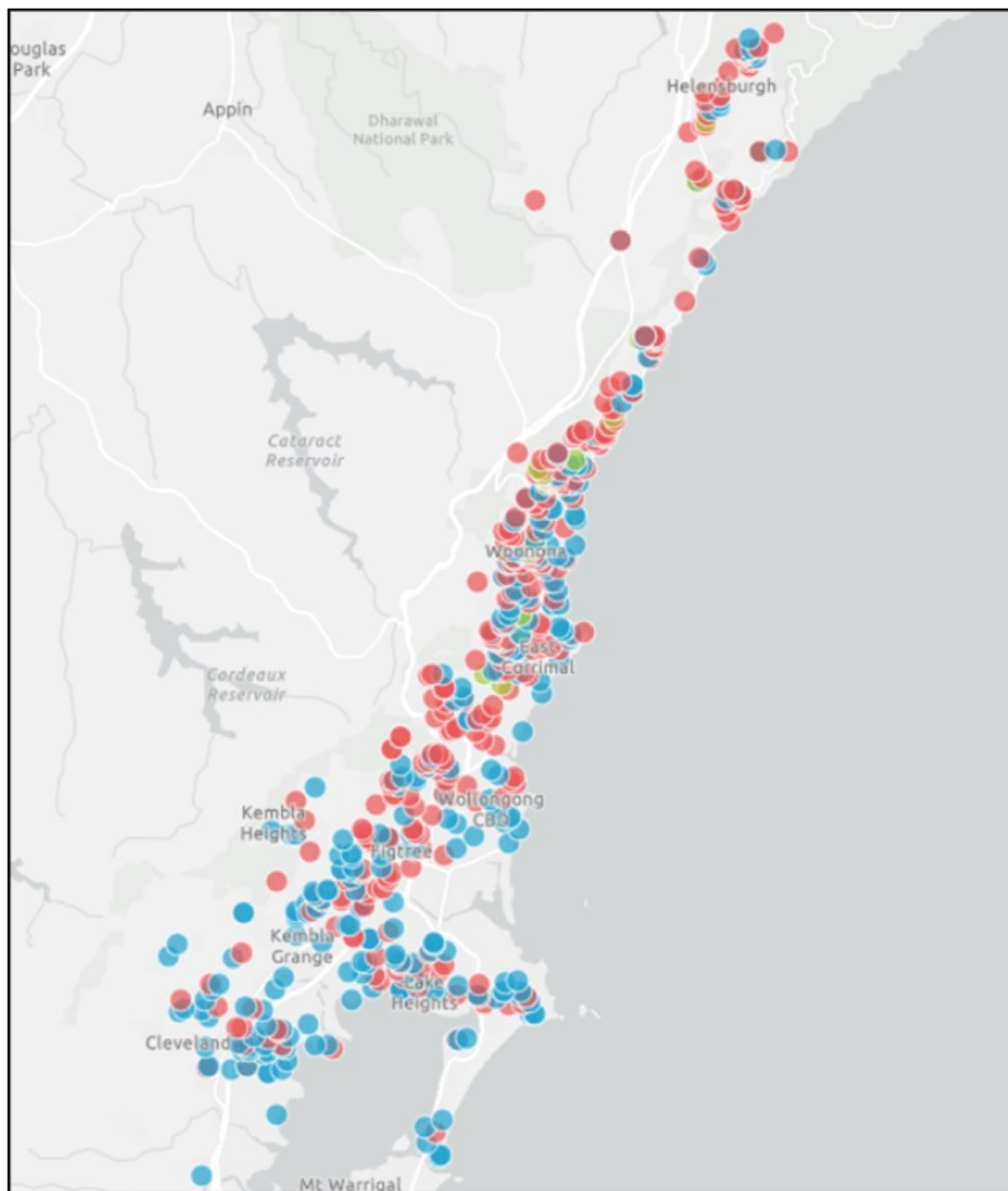


Figure 1: shows the locations of Work Orders related to Council's infrastructure.

PROPOSAL

There have been 6 Natural Disaster Declarations for Wollongong since the joint Australian Government-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DFRA) were established in 2018. The increasing frequency of storm events has highlighted issues and challenges with the DRFA.

The DFRA only supports like for like replacement of infrastructure. There is a need for investment in the enhancement (betterment) of infrastructure that would reduce the risk of it being impacted in the same way for similar natural disasters in the future. Enhancement projects can be informed from adopted State and local planning which account for climate change and new data collection and modelling. This change would provide Council with the opportunity to provide assets to the community which increases the resilience of the infrastructure and reduce risk.

An emerging challenge for Wollongong is that the DRFA do not support emergency works on private property where without intervention there is a risk to life, and / or damage to Council assets downstream.

It is proposed that Wollongong City Council:

- Seek a package of funding that takes into account our locally specific vulnerability to impact from natural disasters. This will enable Council to mitigate some of the risks associated with future storm events including funding for the repair and renewal of infrastructure and the collection and disposal of debris on private property that presents potential further and broader risk to life and property.
- Seek financial support to adapt and enhance Council infrastructure rather than repair like for like so we can attempt to mitigate the impacts of future natural disasters and their impacts on our community.
- Work with NSW Government agencies on a Wollongong specific adaptation plan to inform broader adaptation planning across the State. This pilot process would not exclude Wollongong involvement in regional adaptation planning.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Our Wollongong 2032 Goal 1 *We value and protect our environment*. It specifically refers to Strategy 1.3 which is to increase our resilience to natural disasters and a changing climate to protect life, property and the environment.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The rain event in April 2024 will have a demonstrable impact on Wollongong City Council's financial position.

CONCLUSION

The severe weather and rain event on 6 April 2024 caused extensive damage across the Wollongong LGA and impacted the wellbeing of many in the community. Council is continuing to work closely with the NSW Reconstruction Authority and other agencies as we move through the recovery phase. This includes a strong focus on obtaining appropriate funding to support recovery activities and build resilience to future natural disasters.