

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria

Rochester – Wednesday 23 August 2023

#### MEMBERS

Sonja Terpstra – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Melina Bath

Gaelle Broad

Wendy Lovell

Samantha Ratnam

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Sheena Watt

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

John Berger

Ann-Marie Hermans

Joe McCracken

Evan Mulholland

Rachel Payne

**WITNESSES**

Ross Turner, Secretary, Committee of Management, Restdown Retirement Village Incorporated; and

Tracie Kyne, Lake Eppalock Working Group, Rochester Business Network and Rochester Community Recovery Committee.

**The CHAIR:** Good afternoon, everybody. I declare open the committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria. This public hearing is for the Environment and Planning Committee, a bipartisan committee of the Parliament looking into the October flood event. We will be providing a report to Parliament, which will include recommendations to the government. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee. I welcome any members of the public in the gallery, and remind those in the room to be respectful of proceedings and to remain silent at all times and please switch their mobile phones to silent.

All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament. All evidence is being recorded and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

I will just take the opportunity to introduce myself, and the rest of the committee will introduce themselves as well. My name is Sonja Terpstra. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. I am also a Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

**John BERGER:** My name is John Berger. I am a Member for Southern Metropolitan.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Wendy Lovell, and I am one of the Members for Northern Victoria Region. There are five of us altogether.

**Gaelle BROAD:** My name is Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Melina BATH:** Good afternoon. Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** I am Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Afternoon. Samantha Ratnam, Member for Northern Metropolitan.

**The CHAIR:** With that, I will hand over to you. If you could please keep your opening remarks to about 5 to 10 minutes in duration, that will allow plenty of time for committee members to then ask you questions. Just before you begin your opening comments, could I ask you to please state your name and the organisation you represent, for the record.

**Ross TURNER:** Thank you very much. My name is Ross Turner. I am here in the role of Secretary of Restdown Retirement Village Incorporated.

**The CHAIR:** Great. Thank you. Please begin.

**Ross TURNER:** I have been the Secretary since 13 September 2021. I have been a member of the committee since 2012, just after I retired. Restdown Retirement Village is in Rochester. Not many people know where it is. It is located just south of Rochester and was severely affected by flooding from the Campaspe River and other floodways which surround the village. Eleven units out of the 18 were inundated by floodwater,

which I believe came directly from the rising river and the depression which flows through the rear portion of the land that is owned by the village. Members of the committee, who are all volunteers, attended the necessary public meetings but were unsure as to what level the river would rise. The public meetings may have given a clearer picture if hydrology services from Goulburn Murray Water or a similar organisation had been in attendance to hopefully give us some idea of what level we could expect. As far as I know, there have not been any representatives of any body to attend any public meetings in both the 2011 and 2012 floods, so whilst we had the catchment management authority and those giving advice, I do not believe we have any hydrology services or the like to advise us of a decent level. In my previous working background I worked for the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission.

It was decided on Thursday 13 October to advise the residents to evacuate. We have 20 people in those units. It was a tremendous effort by the volunteer members of the committee in telling people to go and evacuate what they consider home, and 20 of those residents were evacuated – some were elderly – before the actual flood hit. We could not give them any certainty of any of the warning of why they were going except just that there was a fair flood coming down the river. The committee would like to express its concern about the information relayed at the public meetings. And the other thing that I did not write here was the public meetings are put out by social media, and it would have been better if we had had personal contact to somebody from our committee. However, that is my beef. Where were the river heights at? Who made the predictions? It is noted that the information that I obtained from the meetings were that the flood would be about as high as 2011 and maybe higher than 2011. When it says higher, we said 100 ml higher or whatever. So yes, we did not have a clear understanding to give the people in the committee.

In 2011 there were flood waters around the village. I cannot vouch for that entirely because I was not on the committee, but I have been advised that it did, and it flooded some of the air conditioning units which were located on the ground level. The village, as I said, suffered significant damage to 11 units out of the 18, which is surprising because that is what floods do – they get some and miss the others, as you have heard already today. We have a communal laundry that was destroyed in the flood as well, and we have advised the residents, and we will have to continue to advise the residents, that we will not be back in there until 2024. We have advised them that probably not until Christmas and it will probably be 2024. The stress and the trauma that is causing the committee and the residents is immeasurable. We are very thankful to Ward Bros for the removal of the carpets and giving a hand with the furniture and effects for the people who had to come back and then clean out the units, or see what they had left behind in the units, and remove the carpets and all the necessary such forth.

I had a very brief submission, which you may have with you. I have a rather large, lengthy one that I have ticked a few items on here that I thought I should read out and say to you, that I have added to the brief submission that I originally submitted. The committee would like the thorough review of the flood warning systems for the fast-rising and fast-rolling Campaspe River. I have lived my entire life so far on the Campaspe River. I lived at Elmore, I lived at Rochester, I am currently residing in Echuca. Somebody said, 'Boy, are you mad? You must be mad, staying on the Campaspe.' Installing more gauging stations that will operate on the streams and creeks downstream of Lake Eppa would be very, very advisable. As well as that, we need to review whether gauging stations would be preferential or better upstream of the lake. We encourage Goulburn Murray Water or those authorities who control the water or release the water to employ the services of a hydrographer, a hydrologist or an engineer to look at what provincial flood events will do. And I listened last night, and I believe some people are doing that.

We need to look at changing the *Water Act* is my brief, so that it gives Goulburn Murray Water the authority to release water to make airspace for the intending flood. There will be discussion about 'How do you know it is going to be an intending flood?' I could give you a few tips on that, but you probably will not need them. After changing the *Water Act*, I believe we need to look at the operations of Goulburn Murray Water and their vision and values to be proactive in flood mitigation, because if you read their values and things, there is nothing about controlling of floodwaters and helping alleviate floodwaters. We do – sorry, I have just lost my point here –

**The CHAIR:** That is okay, take your time.

**Ross TURNER:** There is in Goulburn Murray Water's nature and range of services management and concerns for the traditional owners of the land, which I do not object to, I wish to have great involvement with, and I have had involvement with, that at Wilcannia in New South Wales for the Darling River. But I believe

there should be in their nature and range of services some mention of management of house owners, businesses, hospitals and aged care facilities like we try to run that have been built as a result of building Lake Eppalock up to the size that it is now. People came to Rochester in 1964 and the 1970s to come and settle on the settlement out here. We grew exponentially, and we want to keep those people here. We have put these things here, but we need to have the people in charge of the releasing of the water to be able to release some to make airspace.

I have a question that I cannot answer. What happens to the water that was in Eppalock that was previously for the irrigators in the now-defunct Campaspe irrigation district? That is a question. I cannot answer it. Are the owners of the environmental water holders in recent years drawing down their water volumes in a similar manner to the irrigators' demands and usage prior to the closure of the Campaspe irrigation district in 2010, or is there more allocated water being left in the storage and carried forward for the following years, which may also be a contributor to the flood event?

We at the village do not understand unbundling of water and the total ramifications of the Murray–Darling Basin, which got in the news yesterday about Victoria is not in it or something or other. I do not gather that, but anyhow. We need a thorough review of the current practices because that will help alleviate the flooding events that we are having, or we hope it would anyway. After all that, we then would like to see an instigation of a system installed at Lake Eppalock to be able to release water at more than 1800 megalitres per day. The design function from 1964 is now urgently in need of a review. I have lost my last page.

**Tracie KYNE:** There you go.

**Ross TURNER:** Thank you very much. Thank you, and I will now finish my talk so that you may ask questions of me. In some small way I hope that I, as the Secretary of the committee, have enlightened you a little bit about our concerns. Like I have said, the township of Rochester should be a lot brighter than we envisaged, as we did, before the flood event. I would say that we evacuated all our residents in various forms of occupancy. Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. All right. Now, over to questions. Ms Lovell.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thank you, Ross. I am very concerned about a number of people today saying that they did not get adequate warnings and it was not clear at the meetings, the heights of the river et cetera. For someone like yourself who has worked for state rivers for so long, that really does show that there was some sort of problem. You mentioned having a hydrologist on site. How would that have added to the information, because surely the people were informed by hydrologists?

**Ross TURNER:** I agree with you, Wendy. I would hope that some people who made the decisions to come and speak to us were informed very admirably by some sort of hydrologist or hydrographer. I believe, and I am party to this because I have got relations that are hydrographers, the hydrographers at Kerang were on call and assisted with the flood works, mitigation works or levees and notifications up there. I believe that hydrography is now outsourced from what it used to be when I worked for the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission – it was outsourced to the Thiess brothers. I think it has been privatised, but there should be somebody employed along that line to give some advice. And we would hope that with the gauging stations that operate now, it would be a better information gatherer than having the BOM or whoever give you information as well. It would be something they could fall back on.

As we have heard this morning and today, people upstream, which I was one at once upon a time – I used to stand on the riverbank where we lived at Elmore and watch the floods go by, and I would report down here to anyone who wanted to know how high the river was. We have got the word-of-mouth one, but we need the official ones to do.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Are you saying that the CMA here do not have a hydrologist on staff?

**Ross TURNER:** I am sorry – I did not say that. I am not party to knowing who is employed by the CMA. I would like to think that somebody was. If I say there is not, I would like to stand corrected.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Dr Ratnam.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Thank you so much for your submission and your evidence here today. I just wanted to acknowledge the really significant upheaval, distress and trauma that you will have all gone through, particularly your residents. In your submission you noted impacts to 11 units, which are ongoing, and that you expect people to return by the end of this year, hopefully. Can you talk us through the ongoing impacts? A year on, what are the ongoing impacts you are dealing with, including the 11 units? Where are those people? What is happening? And the second question is: has there been any discussion with your facility about what happens in the future if there is a risk of an event like this? What would be different in terms of –

**Ross TURNER:** Can I answer your second question first?

**Samantha RATNAM:** Certainly.

**Ross TURNER:** The answer is no. There has been no discussion about going forward – what happens if this happens again. I do not believe there was a great discussion over the last flood, in 2011 – exactly the same thing. Remind me what your first question was, sorry.

**Samantha RATNAM:** First question: the ongoing impacts. You talked about the 11 units – people are displaced from them. Where are they staying? What do you anticipate about those time lines for people returning?

**Ross TURNER:** That presents a problem, because we have not got a time line at the moment. As far as I know, the people have found accommodation of varying descriptions, either caravans, units, living with friends or family or facilities out of town. The problem we have with the committee as well – and I am offering this to you so you understand how we operate – is that six of the members of the committee, like myself, are affected by the floods. So we have got volunteer work to do for the committee and we have got to fix our own place as well. I asked Tracie to sit here because I am having a little bit of trouble.

**Samantha RATNAM:** I can only imagine. You are doing very well, thank you, and we really appreciate you being here despite the very personal impact it is having on you, let alone the caring work that you are doing for others.

**Ross TURNER:** I do not speak as eloquently as the last speaker.

**Samantha RATNAM:** You are doing very well. Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs Tyrrell with a question.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Thank you, Chair. You mentioned that the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and the way the water is managed here has an impact on the floods. Do you think that a change in our carryover legislation would be helpful to the community, because Mr Christie stated earlier that it needed a thorough looking into.

**Ross TURNER:** I do not fully understand it – can I call you Rikkie?

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Yes.

**Ross TURNER:** I do not fully understand it, Rikkie – the carryover. I had some idea when I worked for the water commission. I was there for 23 years. I was also at Murray Goulburn for 23 years. I have seen a number of floods. I do not understand the carryover water now like I used to be able to understand it. When I worked in the water commission there was a person in charge around the western channel, which is the main channel that comes out of Waranga Basin from the Goulburn system and goes right through. It used to be called the Waranga-Mallee channel once upon a time. It is the major channel that we draw water from for the Rochester area, not the Campaspe district out the west of us here. The person in charge of the Waranga channel was also charged with responsibility of warning people about the river flooding in those days. If you look at the Goulburn Murray website, you will see that in 1973 we had a large flood here. The Elmore Field Days used to be on a different site to where they are now, on what was commonly known as Aysons Reserve, and it got flooded, I think at about the same time as what this flood was last year. People like the organiser for field days would be ringing the water commission office to get information. We had a diversions inspector located at Elmore and people in contact up the river that we had verbal contact with to say what size the flood was. I know the man who controlled the channel and would predict the heights, and most of the time he was fairly

accurate in the information he was providing, without modelling and hydrographers and all the rest of the things. We did not have any hydrographers stationed in Rochester. I hope that answers your question. I am not fully aware of the carryover, but if I answered your question with a 'yes', would that help? I would say I hope that is right.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** That is okay. I will put the question to Mr Christie later. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you. Thank you, Ross. Thank you very much for being here. You said you knocked off work to carry bricks. I think you said you retired, and then you have taken on this new role. I think that is so indicative of what many people in small communities do. They never finish working; they just go into unpaid work. So I just wanted to thank you for that and thank you for being here. It is an emotional day.

I also want to say I come from South Gippsland. We have rolling hills, so I am not very au fait with the Murray–Darling Basin plan or flatland farming. We do have some in fantastic Heyfield and Maffra and the like. But we have had the Shadow Minister for Water sitting here all day – Tim McCurdy – so when we finish I am going to go and check up with Tim and ask him some of the questions that have been raised today. So thanks, Tim, for turning up as well.

In terms of flood resistance and retirement villages, I guess it is just a rhetorical conversation, but is there someone – Retirement Villages Australia or retirement villages Victoria – that can help point you and your organisation to how to mitigate against disasters, in this case floods? Is there somewhere you could go, or could we assist you as a committee, to help support you to go about those flood mitigation –

**Ross TURNER:** Melina, I would love you to tell me, and I would write that down.

**Melina BATH:** Yes. So you need information.

**Ross TURNER:** I would take that on board, because I have not thought of that. With many things going on, you do not think of those things. And I heard the CEO of the hospital say, 'Yes, we've done so much, but we didn't think of that,' or something like that. I do not wish to quote her. But I think going forward we will have to do that. We on the committee consider ourselves to have a unique little village which is not like anything else. It was started in 1962 and did not get off the ground until 1972 and took a lot of funding to get things going. So yes, it has all been done by volunteers, and it has been done by bequests – extension, extension et cetera, the building ones – and we have self-funded the latest two units we built in 2014. But getting back to your Darling Basin, please get a hold of Mr Walsh and anyone else –

**Melina BATH:** And Tim McCurdy and have a chat.

**Ross TURNER:** and talk about the Murray–Darling Basin.

**The CHAIR:** They're just behind you.

**Melina BATH:** That's right, they are just behind you. The other thing – let me frame my question. We need to, as members of state Parliament, be able to make recommendations. In terms of retirement villages, what do you need us to advocate for you in terms of retirement villages?

**Ross TURNER:** One of the first things I would like you to do is have somebody with DHS and everyone else that understands our peculiarities. Answering questions from government departments and so forth – they do not understand. Somebody wanted to come and meet me at the office there one day. We have not got an office on site et cetera. So they do not understand how we operate. They do not understand we are totally volunteers, which we are running few of, so if you can round up a few I would be very thankful. What I would ask is that any organisation that we need to work with has an understanding of how we work and what we do.

**Melina BATH:** So to come onsite or come into the area.

**Ross TURNER:** Yes, come onsite. I have some photos taken after the floods of the overall area, and I should have presented them today, in hindsight.

**Melina BATH:** You can always send them in.

**Ross TURNER:** Yes. It gives you an idea of where we are. We have further land to the rear. It fronts the highway going out of Rochester. There are three or four houses after us, but we front that way. At the back of the land, we are not allowed to build on that after the 2011 flood.

**Melina BATH:** Because it could flood.

**Ross TURNER:** We did dig a dam for water to run into, as we tried to, and put that dirt somewhere. Well, that did not get flooded this time.

**Melina BATH:** Finally – and I know I am stretching the Chair’s kindness here – I just wanted to thank you. It is really important that you can actually have cradle to grave in country towns. People want to be near their ageing parents or ageing family members, so I just want to thank you for providing that service.

**Ross TURNER:** Yes. Can I say we are an independent living accommodation, so yes, I see what you mean. The last resident who moved out moved out just before her 100th birthday and was there for 25 years.

**The CHAIR:** Incredible, yes.

**Wendy LOVELL:** She is obviously very happy.

**The CHAIR:** All right. I might just ask a question if I can. To help us – obviously, as I said, we are going to be making recommendations to the government – what would be your top three priorities in terms of the community that you represent, being from a retirement village? What do we need to do better? So your top three things that you think we should take away from your evidence and submissions today – what are your top three priorities?

**Ross TURNER:** I will take your question without notice, thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. You absolutely can if you would like to.

**Ross TURNER:** The first thing I would like to implore is that we would like early warning, with predictions, so that you can give somebody something fairly solid, without being rock-hard solid, that the water is going to come to this level and you are going to be affected. That would be the first thing.

**The CHAIR:** Just on that, can I also ask, then: what is the method of communication, or how are people in your village receiving a message? Do they have mobile phones? How do they get that message?

**Ross TURNER:** They get that message. But yes, to get the message to us to get to them is what I would like. I heard previously that people will not leave their homes because blah, blah, blah, and that is exactly what we had a problem with when we said on the Thursday, ‘Hey, we need you to go. We cannot have you still here because we don’t know how high it is coming. It’s going to be big, but we don’t know how big.’

**The CHAIR:** Yes, okay.

**Ross TURNER:** The second thing I would like, then, would be some form of assistance to know what to do next after the event. I think that was highlighted today. Immediately after the event, or while the event is happening, we need to go, ‘Blah, blah, blah. We need to do this.’

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ross TURNER:** My next one –

**The CHAIR:** That is okay, you can think.

**Ross TURNER:** I would have to seriously think about my next one, but the first ones are so we can advise. If you were there, I would say to you, Sonja, ‘This is what we’ve got to do. This is what we’ve got to do because such and such has advised that it’s going to be this big.’

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ross TURNER:** Could I just bear your indulgence, please. On Thursday morning I got up at 5 o'clock, and I said to my wife, 'I'm getting up early because it's going to be big – bigger than I thought it was.' I got caught out in the 2011 flood. I live in Victoria Street, Rochester, nearly opposite the bowling green. I said to my wife, 'It's going to be pretty big, this 2011 one.' She said, 'How big, do you think?' I said, 'Usually it just comes up in the gutter and might go to the centre of the road. It mightn't cover the road.' I said, 'It might come up to the tree,' which is halfway up the nature strip. That morning she got up at about 4 o'clock and said, 'It's already at the front gate.' This time I got up on Thursday morning and said, 'I'm going to lift things, and I'm going to sandbag,' and that was fruitless, getting up at that time, because everything we did did not work. That was the magnitude of the water that came through.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just ask you one other thing: you and your wife, had you settled on an emergency evacuation plan prior to this flood event, or did you not have a plan? Can you talk to me about what decisions you had made as individuals? Had you considered: 'All right, if we've got a plan, we're just going to act on it'? What had you done in preparation for this?

**Ross TURNER:** What I had done was we had discussed it that week, because I saw that the rain event was going to be big, and when the weather bureau put out it is going to be 40 to 50 mil, you know that something big is going to happen that way. So I went, 'Yes, we're getting ready.' We have got a caravan, which we had only just come back from Queensland in, so we got it out and we took it up to the son-in-law's place, which we thought was higher ground.

**The CHAIR:** It was not?

**Ross TURNER:** Just.

**The CHAIR:** Oh, okay.

**Ross TURNER:** Just. All right, so then we started the preparation work, and my two daughters came to give us a hand on the Thursday and my nephew came down from Moama and gave us a hand to lift things and put sandbags around. Now, not being a professional sandbag layer like the last speaker, I do not think we did much good there, and on the Friday morning we did some more. Luckily, we could get some more.

**The CHAIR:** So there was some level of preparation but not a formal plan?

**Ross TURNER:** We had prepared ourselves, and that is why I said on the Thursday to the chairman of the village, 'We need to do something here very urgently, because I think it's bigger than what we expect.'

**The CHAIR:** And so the retirement village itself did not have a disaster plan?

**Ross TURNER:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Okay.

**Ross TURNER:** It has an evacuation plan, but it has not got a flood plan.

**The CHAIR:** No, that is right.

**Ross TURNER:** The units nearest the highway, the five units nearest the highway, and the two ones we built in 2014 – they were the ones that survived; they were the seven that survived. The ones that we had built previously, the original ones that were built, they all went under, and went under significantly. The two units on the other end of the first lot they built, they went under significantly, and then the level of the ones on the south side of the driveway – they were not affected as much but were affected; the water did go over the floors. And then there were five units down the end that were untouched. So as I said in my opening remarks, there is a depression going through around the village which comes across from the south-west area of the village. I have rambled on, sorry.

**The CHAIR:** No, no, that is fine. Thank you very much. I am just conscious of what the other committee members think. Mr Berger and then Ms Broad.



**John BERGER:** My question was along the same lines as a plan. I know you are supported by volunteers and it is very difficult to get people in to assist with those sorts of things, but would it be any assistance to you if you got some help with that?

**Ross TURNER:** Definitely. I would put my hand up for that, yes. Having done emergency plans for work, I know what it is like having to do evacuation plans. I know what it is like having to do just one for the village. We never, ever thought to do a flood plan.

**John BERGER:** Well, it is one thing to have one, it is another thing to implement it.

**Ross TURNER:** Thank you for your point. I will try to jot down some things, and I might listen to myself ramble on and go back and go, 'You should have written that down.'

**John BERGER:** That is fine.

**Ross TURNER:** All right. Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Broad.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you very much for your contribution. I guess I am just interested in the village – how is it going now? You talked about people being displaced. Where are things at for you right now, and I guess with insurance or rebuilding back, are you wanting to build back better? Where is it at?

**Ross TURNER:** I wish you had not asked me that question. I have been advised I cannot say anything, which is unfortunate, because a lot of people are relying on me to say something and I cannot say anything at this moment.

**Gaelle BROAD:** No, that is fine.

**Ross TURNER:** I hope I have not offended you.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Not at all, no. That is the least of your worries.

**Ross TURNER:** I cannot say anything. I have been advised not to say anything.

**Gaelle BROAD:** You have mentioned a few things here today that are helpful in the committee wanting to move forward and make recommendations that will help, because obviously losing people, moving to other parts and everything, is significant. It has a big impact on this town. I have heard that.

**Ross TURNER:** We have lost two residents who will not return at this stage, and goodness knows how many others. We usually do not have a waiting list of an armful, which is good. At the moment – I do not know why – we have suddenly got an armful on the waiting list, and we have lost two, so we are trying to get rebuilt.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. But you cannot accommodate people there at the moment?

**Ross TURNER:** Those that were not affected have gone back in, as they were untouched, so to speak. So that is really good. But it is probably not the same community. It stresses them. I hear this from people who were not flooded. It stresses them having not been flooded. You know, they have got some pot plants and things, and they come back and they water those et cetera, et cetera. It stresses them when they see what damage has been done, and it breaks that down. That is why I said in my meeting preamble that the stress is not just for the committee; it is stress for the residents who are currently there and the ones that come back to try to tend to some of their things.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Yes. Thank you.

**Tracie KYNE:** Can I just say, Ross and his committee, like a number of other residents in Rochester, looked after the residents of the village before they went home and looked after their own homes, so they are our true heroes.

**Melina BATH:** Hear, hear.

**The CHAIR:** Now, we have about 5 minutes left, so we will just get a few very quick questions in. Ms Lovell, do you have a question?

**Wendy LOVELL:** Yes. Just a question about the catchment management authority again and the notice at the meetings, were people made aware at the meetings of the ability to download an individual report for your property from the CMA's website, their Flood Eye reports, which actually gives the levels where your property may be inundated? Certainly in Shepparton everyone was made aware of those from the CMA, and they are very accurate.

**The CHAIR:** He might have to take that on notice, Wendy. If you need to take it on notice, you can, if you need to get information on that.

**Ross TURNER:** I am trying to –

**The CHAIR:** Think.

**Tracie KYNE:** In 2011 we were given that information, but that had no relevance in 2022. I think the meetings –

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, if Ross could answer.

**Tracie KYNE:** Okay.

**Ross TURNER:** Yes. Sorry, Trace.

**Tracie KYNE:** No, you are all right.

**Ross TURNER:** I think I went to two meetings here, Wendy, and I believe that there was a map showing blue areas. It should have been showing houses. I must admit my own error here. I looked to my own house and did not look at the village. I have not admitted that before. I should have been more involved in looking at the village, but yes, I was looking down at our end of the town and where we were moving to. I should have thought, 'Hang on, I've got another interest. I should be looking after that as well.' So that is for me to deal with.

**The CHAIR:** Melina.

**Melina BATH:** Can I just say a natural disaster is out of all of our hands. I think everybody in this room has worked very hard for their community, so please do not put any extra burden on your shoulders that you should not be wearing, if I could say that.

**The CHAIR:** Well said. Hear, hear.

**Melina BATH:** I want to direct the last question towards Goulburn–Murray Water. I know Mr Christie had a conversation with them. Not to verbal him, I am just kind of seeking to understand. I think Mr Christie said something like Goulburn–Murray Water had said, 'We're not into flood mitigation' or 'We're not a flood mitigation service.' I guess if we could reframe that; I question that because they are involved in water supply. If you could have a good conversation with Goulburn–Murray Water, what would you say that you wanted them to improve or enhance the actions that they take, just probably capping that off?

**Ross TURNER:** That is exactly right. I wrote that down, and I went through this morning and said, 'I'll speak about that.' I believe that they should be empowered under the *Water Act*, and that is legislation that you have got to change. You people have got to change that. You have got to understand that. I got out of water some time ago when they unbundled it from the land and I lost track of where it was. I believe that if they are the releasers of the water – no matter who owns the water in there – and they are asked to release it, they should have some care for the downstream people, particularly in flood events. I agree with what David said. They should have something to do with floods. They should be able to help us do flood mitigation of some degree, of some shape or form. Now, what that is, I cannot give you the answer to because I have a number of things here that I thought I would have answers to, but I do not know whether they are the answers.

**Melina BATH:** But we should be investigating that.

**Ross TURNER:** Yes, I think we should investigate that. The biggest thing that I have said to people is that it is no good putting a gate on the dam now. It was built just before I started work at the water commission, so I was involved in the rating office of the water commission here setting up all of the new rating stuff and everything for the new Campaspe irrigation district, right. So I knew when new landholders came on, when the appointments were made by the rural finance committee et cetera. I can go back to those days. That is when, as I said, there was a large influx of people into the town because of that. People came on the farm and their elderly parents might have come and stayed in Rochester or stayed at the village or whatever. I agree that some authority, whether it is an authority or an actually constituted body, and I like to differentiate between the two, should be charged with the responsibility of assisting with flood mitigation. Like I have indicated, in a number of ways – their nature and range of services – it is never ever mentioned. So yes, I would back up what Mr Christie has said. I was not here to hear that. I was around at my house doing something that I needed to do with one of my builders.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Well, thank you very much, Ross, for giving us your evidence today, and we very much appreciate your time. I know this has been challenging. It is difficult to talk about this. I know you have been through a lot of trauma and distress as a result of the floods, so I would just like to thank you. Of course if this has raised any difficult issues for you, please feel free to reach out to Lifeline or other mental health supports that are available. Thank you very much for your attendance today.

**Witnesses withdrew.**