

20 June 2017

MEDIA RELEASE

Reflecting on the record 1867 Hawkesbury-Nepean flood – a timely reminder to be prepared

The 150-year anniversary of the historic 1867 Hawkesbury-Nepean flood should serve as a reminder to people to be prepared for severe flooding, according to NSW State Emergency Service (SES) Region Controller Peter Cinque.

The Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley has a long history of flooding, and while the worst flood since European settlement was 150 years ago, Region Controller Peter Cinque said people should not become complacent about the risk.

“As we remember the devastation the 1867 flood caused, we should reflect on the fact that local lives were lost, and be reminded of the very real need to prevent loss of lives in the future.”

The Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley has the highest single flood exposure in NSW, if not Australia. The valley can be described as a bathtub, with five main taps (tributaries) but only one plug hole to let the floodwater out. This means floods in the area can rise quickly, and can be very deep and dangerous.

Region Controller Peter Cinque explained that there has not been significant flooding in the area for 25 years, so some people who have moved here since then might not be aware of the risks.

“Many people think that Warragamba Dam stops flooding in the valley. However there have been 29 significant floods in Windsor since the dam was built including the second largest flood on record in 1961,” Region Controller Peter Cinque said.

“The NSW SES has a specific Flood Plan for the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley, but it requires everyone to do their part - people need to know their flood risk, have a plan and act early.”

“While we reflect on the heroic efforts of boatmen during the 1867 flood who saved many people whose lives were in peril” SES Local Controller Kevin Jones said.

“Noone should rely on a boat to rescue them in a flood – the best way for you and your family to be safe during a flood is to be prepared and evacuate when directed.”

The NSW SES is participating in the FLOOD 1867 – 150 Years On anniversary program in Windsor, including with an NSW SES display including a flood rescue boat in Thompson Square and a talk at the Hawkesbury Regional Museum by NSW SES Hawkesbury Unit Deputy Local Controller, Dave King.

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KEY FACTS

- This year is the 150th anniversary of the largest flood since European settlement in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley.
- The flood in June 1867 has been described as creating an inland sea within the valley. Windsor, Richmond and Pitt Town became small islands in the floodplain. It reached more than 19 metres above normal river level at Windsor
- If a flood similar to the 1867 flood occurred today, around 90,000 people would need to be evacuated, an estimated 12,000 homes would be impacted and the damage bill would be approximately \$5 billion.
- The largest flood in living memory was in 1961, when the floodwaters reached around 14.5 metres above the normal river level in Windsor.
- The NSW SES recommends eight key steps to get ready for floods now:
 1. Know your risk
 2. Know where to go
 3. Know who to call
 4. Know your plan
 5. Get your kit together
 6. Prepare now to act early
 7. Check your insurance
 8. Listen to local radio.

Find out more about how to get ready for a flood on the NSW SES website www.ses.nsw.gov.au

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