

# Fitzroy River reaches 9.1m, still rising

BRISBANE: The Fitzroy River continued to rise last night, causing flooding that looked set to eclipse a 36-year-old record in Rockhampton, a police spokesman said.

Sergeant Ray Clarke said that at 8pm, the river had reached 9.1m and heavy rain had started again.

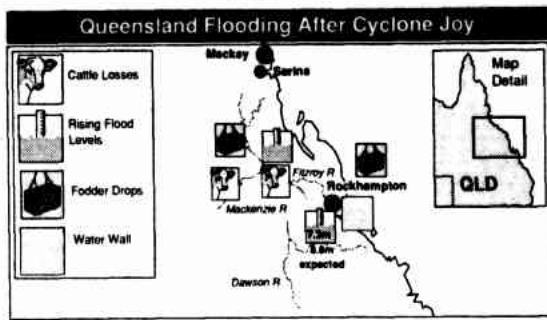
In 1954 the Fitzroy had peaked at 9.385m and in 1918 it reached 10.171m.

The earlier prediction had been for the river in Rockhampton to peak at 9.2m last night and remain little changed overnight.

However, Sergeant Clarke said the peak had not yet been reached. "If it keeps raining like this for the next few hours, we've got a bit of a problem on our hands," he said.

Evacuations so far had been orderly and residents had been cooperative, although police have had to ask some sightseers to keep clear of flooded areas, he said.

The State Emergency Service said about 500 people had now been evacuated. Most were being housed



in private accommodation, but 50 had been put up at the Rockhampton Grammar School, a spokesman said. All road and rail links out of Rockhampton remain closed, as is Rockhampton airport.

The Brisbane Bureau of Meteorology said heavy rain in the past few days meant the Fitzroy River could still be in flood after next weekend. The flooding began on December

29 in the wake of Cyclone Joy, and apart from a slight drop between December 31 and January 3, the river has been at flood levels ever since.

Fodder drops to stranded stock continued yesterday, but stock losses were expected to be high.

Queensland Railways said efforts were being made to move freight trains delayed by the flooding and divert them on to coalfields lines.

## Get real, that boar is stuffed



The owner of the Somerset Wildlife Sanctuary and Animal Museum in Mogo, Bill Padey, who is also a taxidermist, stages a frightening scene on the South Coast with a stuffed boar.

## Pilots criticise 'dangerous' flight scheme

MELBOURNE: Victorian pilots and flight controllers will discuss today how to halt a new flight procedures plan they say is a formula for disaster in Australian skies.

A spokesman for the group, flight service officer Neil Mitchell, said the plan proposed by the Civil Aviation Authority meant aircraft in uncontrolled air space would be denied vital information about other air traffic.

Mr Mitchell, flight service personnel representative of the Professional Radio and Electronics Institute of Australia, said if two planes were on a collision course, they would not necessarily be told.

He said at present flight service officers automatically fed information to pilots in uncontrolled air space on flying conditions, including the danger of collision.

Under the new system, pilots in uncontrolled air space would have to get all relevant information themselves through a special radio frequency.

They would not be told, as they were now, about problems affecting the flight, such as weather, proximity of other aircraft, failure of navigation aids and closure of aerodromes, even if they asked.

"It's a disgrace," Mr Mitchell said. "You only need one breakdown in the whole chain and you have got a formula for disaster."

"You have got an authority which is supposed to set the standards and is gradually trying to lower standards."

In controlled air space over the main trunk routes, pilots of international and domestic jets flying at 6-12,000 metres receive instructions from air traffic controllers.

In the uncontrolled tier, a range of aircraft, including tourist and public transport flights, charter, military and helicopters, flying at

6000m or below, are given the information by flight service personnel.

Roughly 70 per cent of Australian airspace is in the uncontrolled category.

Mr Mitchell said the authority's proposal was based on a watered-down version of the system used by the International Civil Aviation Authority.

But that authority was moving towards the safe system that Australia had always had, Mr Mitchell said.

On Friday, Colin Hill, also of the institute, said the Civil Aviation Authority also proposed to downgrade the present flight control search and rescue procedures.

Checks would be made on aircraft only after the estimated time of arrival.

Mr Hill, a flight service officer at Melbourne's Tullamarine airport, said, "So if a pilot crashes soon after take-off, nothing is known about it until perhaps hours later."

"There has never been a mid-air collision in Australian uncontrolled airspace, but that 100 per cent record could well go."

A senior executive with the authority's operational policy branch, Bill Sims, said that under the proposals, the role of the "middle man" — flight service officer — in providing traffic information would be abolished. But pilots would continue to communicate with each other while in flight.

He said compared with the rest of the world, Australia had been operating a "rather one-off system".

"We believe we should take the best of what the west has to offer and put it into practice," he said.

He said it was the authority's responsibility to spend the "safety dollar" in the most effective way.

## Bad weather postpones search

SYDNEY: Bad weather forced police and Department of Public Works crews to postpone attempts to salvage the wreckage of a light plane from Lake Burragorang, south-west of Sydney, yesterday.

The crews had been trying to refloat a Cessna 152 which crashed into the lake on December 21, killing 18-year-old Canberra trainee pilot, Angelina Neal, of Higgins, and her instructor, Andrew Patterson, 19, of Gympie Bay.

Public Works Department crews using a sonar device located the wreckage in 47m of water on Friday, and police divers identified it as the missing plane on Saturday.

A Camden police spokesman said on Saturday night that divers had found "signs of" the bodies of the two people inside the wreckage.

The spokesman said that police divers had only noted the "signs of the bodies" while making a positive identification of the single-engined aircraft.

Divers attached inflatable bags to the wreckage yesterday morning, but bad weather forced them to abandon attempts to refloat it.

The salvage work was to resume when the weather cleared.

Four people died, including a 27-year-old RAAF flight lieutenant, and two others were seriously injured when a plane involved in a search for the missing Cessna crashed into thick bushland near the crash scene on December 22.

## Minister to discuss Child Flight issue

By JODIE BROUGH

The battle over the controversial grounding of Sydney-based neonatal and pediatric helicopter rescue service Child Flight will continue today, when the NSW Minister for Health, Peter Collins, meets Child Flight staff.

An uproar of protest accompanied the announcement three weeks ago by the NSW Department of Health that the range of operations would be limited to about 140km from Sydney — leaving 48 regional centres including Canberra, Yass, Queanbeyan, Bombala, and Batemans Bay unserved.

The department instead proposed that Child Flight responsibilities be picked up by two non-specialist rescue services. Critics in the medical community have argued that these services would not be sufficient to deal with dangerously ill children.

Child Flight's honorary medical director, Dr Andrew Berry, said Mr Collins had intervened in the dispute late on Friday by agreeing to meet staff to discuss the issue. Child Flight had attracted widespread community backing, but country people had

"the most to lose" if the service's brand new, long-range "space ship" aircraft did not start flying in late January as planned.

An order for the specially designed aircraft, which can accommodate up to two infant-transport units and a specialised two to three-member retrieval team, had been placed as long ago as last March.

It had many features which improved the service's medical rescue capabilities, as well as all-weather facilities to assist the retrieval of sick babies despite poor weather conditions.

"The public issue of Child Flight had demonstrated a community expectation for a dedicated aircraft to be available on standby for emergency transport of very young patients," Dr Berry said.

"Given the fact that 55 per cent of all emergency retrievals are for newborns and young children, and 37.1 per cent of helicopter rescues and retrievals from Sydney are just for newborns, surely one of the six helicopters in NSW in 1991 should be retained for kids."

## Wheat-price promise sought

PERTH: The National Farmers' Federation has called on the Federal Government to guarantee the 1991-92 wheat crop, saying the \$250 million investment could prevent a \$4 billion drop in economic activity.

Federation vice-president Peter Lee said yesterday that a recent survey by the Western Australian Farmers' Federation had indicated further gloom in the rural sector unless the Government stepped in and offered wheat farmers a guaranteed income of \$145 a tonne for the next harvest.

He said without a government guarantee, wheat farmers who received \$195 a tonne in 1989-90 but only \$120 a tonne in 1990-91 were

expected to plant only half their crop this year.

"It costs between \$130 and \$140 a tonne to plant a crop, so if they receive only \$120 a tonne they are losing money," Mr Lee said.

"They just won't bother to plant if they believe that is all they'll get."

Mr Lee said the Australian Wheat Board was expected to announce its predictions on what wheat farmers will receive for the next harvest by early February.

"I've been told that they don't expect it to be much higher than \$120, in which case there will be big problems," he said.

Mr Lee said Australian wool producers lost \$2.5 billion in 1990 because of the reduction in prices, representing a 25 per cent drop in income.

He said economists estimated that every dollar earned by farmers represented \$2.80 in economic activity, so the \$2.5 billion loss cost Australia \$7 billion in lost economic activity.

Wheat income for 1990-91 had dropped \$1 billion and wool income was expected to drop a further \$1.2 billion this year.

Mr Lee said the average WA farmer expected to run at a deficit of \$17,000 this year, which would mean a net income drop of 105 per cent.

He said if wheat farmers decided to plant only half their crop, it would cost the economy \$1 billion in lost

grain income, plus half a billion dollars in lost farm inputs (fertiliser, fuel, oil machinery parts, etc).

"Using the standard 2.8 multiplier, this means a contraction in the economy of more than \$4 billion," Mr Lee said.

"If the Government does nothing, the recession will get worse, but if it provides the guarantee, the \$4 billion boost in economic activity will pay very good dividends for the Australian economy."

Depressed wheat and wool prices have been caused by a combination of factors, including an oversupply of wool, the trade war between Europe and the United States, and the Middle East crisis.

## Wheelie charged as drink-driver

SYDNEY: A pensioner in a motorised wheelchair has been charged with eight offences, including drink-driving, after being chased by police through the north coast city of Coffs Harbour early yesterday morning.

Police said the 27-year-old Coffs Harbour man was arrested at 12.40am after being pursued along a number of city streets.

A breath analysis after his arrest showed a blood-alcohol level of 0.240 — nearly five times the legal limit, he said.

Apart from drink-driving, the man was also charged with assaulting police, resisting arrest, negligent driving, menacing driving, driving in a manner dangerous to the public, exceeding the speed limit and crossing broken lines.

He was released on bail to appear in Coffs Harbour Court on January 21.

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## Mother, 3 children 'murdered'

Continued from Page 1

Neighbour Bill Hawley said there had been no signs that the family had any problems, and he was stunned by the deaths.

Mr Hawley said he had heard noises at the house about 7am, but didn't notice the fire until about 15 minutes later when he went outside to pick up his Sunday newspaper.

"I heard two or three or four quite loud bangs, but I didn't think anything unduly about it," he said.

"I got up at about quarter past seven to get my paper and saw the house was belching flames out. I made sure the fire brigade had been called, and then let the

wife know there was a fire opposite just in case anything happened."

He said the children killed in the fire had often played around the street and seemed quite happy.

"The kids were always around the street," he said. "They'd do what normal kids would do."

"The young lads would sometimes throw lemons on to our garden — just the sort of things kids sometimes do."

A police spokesman said a later search of the house uncovered a small number of marijuana plants.

The plants were growing in a small but elaborate plantation contained in a concrete cellar under the home.

## Four shot: dad, baby, mum, and grand-dad

Continued from Page 1

The gunman had parked two houses away from the family's home.

Speaking from the murder scene, Acting Inspector Cooper said the three adults had argued in the street before the shooting and there had been a scuffle over the gun.

A neighbour was also believed to have been involved in the scuffle, but was not injured.

The woman was shot next to the vehicle, then the grandfather was shot as he stood in the unfenced front yard of a house opposite the car.

The father is believed to have shot his baby as she lay on the footpath.

He then shot himself, falling next to her body.

Acting Inspector Cooper said several neighbours had witnessed the shooting.

One neighbour, Mark Weikus, said, "I heard some screaming from the mother, and the child was screaming."

"I ran into the street and I saw that the father of the child had a gun."

## US sours on London

Continued from Page 1

The Ministry of Defence, which thinks the thief is a criminal rather than an Iraqi agent, appealed to the thief's patriotism to return the machine.

In the separate row over the anthrax vaccine, the Pentagon, after repeated CIA warnings of Saddam Hussein's expanding germ-warfare arsenal, announced on December 27 the beginning of an inoculation program for the 400,000 US troops in the Gulf.

For many years, Britain's chemical and biological weapon research plant at Porton Down, Wiltshire, has been producing a vaccine against anthrax. The disease — caused by a fast-striking bacterium — can kill a human in 24 hours.

Widely known as "woolsorters' disease" because of its occurrence among workers who handle contaminated animal hides, it produces lung disorders.

The US has been producing an anthrax vaccine at a plant in Lansing, Michigan, at the rate of 6000 doses a year. A new type of vaccine, created by genetic engineering, is still in the research stage.

The Pentagon was looking to British stocks to boost the inoculation program, but the Porton Down vaccine has gone to the Saudis instead.

President Bush said on Saturday that the US would not engage in secret diplomacy with Iraq at talks on Wednesday in Geneva, but would restate US determination that Iraqi forces leave Kuwait or "face the terrible consequences".

— The Independent

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