A wet and wild long weekend
The June 2007 Queen’s Birthday long weekend will be remembered for the severe storms and floods causing a massive trail of destruction throughout the Hunter Region. The damage was widespread, from Scone in the Upper Hunter to Newcastle on the coast. The Hunter Region was declared a natural disaster zone.

On Friday 8 June, following two days of heavy rain, a violent storm caused flash flooding like never seen before and grounded the bulk carrier Pasha Bulker on Nobbys Beach in Newcastle. In the Upper Hunter heavy snowfalls caused havoc on the roads. Major flooding occurred on the Hunter River causing extensive damage to homes, roads, railway lines and rural properties.

The highest flood in Maitland for 30 years
In Maitland, almost three-quarters of the average monthly rainfall fell in three days, with 285 mm recorded between 7 and 9 June. The flood reached a height of 10.71 m (AHD*) on the Hunter River at the Belmore Bridge gauge early in the morning on Monday 11 June. It was the third highest flood in Maitland since the 1955 flood, which reached 12.1 m (AHD) (Table 1).

Table 1. Major floods at Belmore Bridge since 1955

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Height m (AHD)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 Feb 1955</td>
<td>12.1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Feb 1971</td>
<td>11.14 m</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Mar 1977</td>
<td>10.81 m</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 June 2007</td>
<td>10.71 m</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Emergency response and evacuations
The flood height at Maitland was predicted to reach 11.4 m. In response, SES volunteers and emergency management agencies worked around the clock to prepare Maitland City and the surrounding suburbs for the impact of severe flooding. On Sunday 10 June 4200 residents were evacuated from Lorn, Central and South Maitland. The floodgates at the Maitland railway station were closed and sandbagged for the first time since being installed in 1974.

* Australian Height Datum (AHD)—a datum used to measure vertical height based on mean sea level as zero.
Maitland Floodways Scheme
Flood mitigation structures worked according to plan, overtopping the spillway at Oakhampton and diverting floodwater away from Central Maitland. A series of basins divided by control banks worked to control the speed and direction of floodwater along the floodway. Water flowed under the railway line, across the New England Highway, and into Fishery and Wallis creeks. The highway was closed for three days causing major traffic disruption.

At Belmore Bridge, riverbank protection works and a concrete wall completed in 2003 were effective in protecting the Maitland central business district and Lorn from flooding. Below Maitland, rural lands were inundated, including Phoenix Park, Raworth, Morpeth, Millers Forest and parts of Raymond Terrace. The township of Hinton, at the junction of the Paterson and Hunter rivers, was cut off by floodwaters and isolated for four days.

Recovery
Fortunately the flood peaked below the levee banks, which protected the city centre, allowing residents to return to their homes on Monday 11 June. However, many homes and properties in low-lying surrounding rural areas were flooded and roads were cut. SES floodboats delivered supplies to isolated properties until floodwaters subsided.

Are you FloodSafe?
The June 2007 flood served as a timely reminder to the community to always be prepared. This time the levee banks didn’t overtop in Maitland but the next flood could be even greater. Understanding the risks of flooding, being well prepared and acting appropriately during floods can greatly minimise the damage and loss of property and make all the difference between an inconvenience and a disaster.

For emergency help in floods, call the SES on 132 500
www.ses.nsw.gov.au