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"Vacating the Floodplain: Urban Property, Engineering, and Floods in Brisbane (1974-2011)"

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This article exposes the dominant socio-economic and political values that shaped flood management between 1974 and 2011 in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. By the 1970s, international hazard scholarship advocated regulating land use as an effective flood mitigation tool. In 1974, floods devastated Southeast Queensland and highlighted the hazards of building on floodplains. Drawing on scholarship that frames floods as a cultural, rather than natural event, this paper shows that the state government of Queensland prioritised property development and continued to rely on dam building as a way of controlling floods. Dams were built with the aim of providing immunity from flooding, but tensions between State and local governments allowed both to evade responsibility for the growing hazard arising from continuing development in the floodplain. When legislation and regulations were introduced to control floodplain development, they reflected popular sentiment against land use restrictions and hence were limited in scope, non-mandatory, and riddled with loopholes. The results of these inadequate land use regulations and continued residential development below the 100-year flood level were fully exposed in 2011 when a substantial increase in damages accompanied flooding of the Brisbane River. Despite evidence and predictions of increased risk of more frequent and larger floods from a warming climate, both state and local governments have continued to promote development in the Brisbane River floodplain, and appear willing to subject the city and its residents to increased hazards and vulnerability. (Text from author's abstract)

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