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'Know your neighbours': disaster resilience and the normative practices of neighbouring in an urban context

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Abstract. As part of community resilience policy, urban dwellers are advised to get to 'know their neighbours' so that they are more likely to turn to them in an emergency. But the idea that neighbours might function as resources for disaster preparedness fails to take account of the fact that neighbour relations are highly diverse and occasionally problematic. Drawing on residents' experiences of the 2011 floods in south-east Queensland, Australia, this paper examines how neighbouring practices and relationships prior to a disaster influence the nature and extent of support from neighbours when disaster strikes. It shows that emergency assistance can map onto existing neighbour relations, such that closer neighbour relations foster frequent and more reliable forms of help. However, the seriousness of the disaster event may be such that residents are aware of their responsibilities to one another as neighbours even if relations are relatively poor or absent. The paper yields important insights for disaster policy and practice in suggesting that community resilience should be embedded within local social practices such as neighbouring, but that neighbouring itself cannot be engineered into existence.

Keywords: disasters, community resilience, neighbours, neighbourhood, social ties

Introduction

It has long been recognised that disasters have consequences for 'communities', with local ties, collective identity, and sense of community potentially strengthened or undermined by the shared experience of trauma (Johnes, 2000; Lerry and Lindell, 2003). More recently, interest has turned towards questions of how 'community', and its constitutive features of local networks and associations, function as resources to help residents better prepare for, and recover from, such events (Chamlee-Wright and Stour, 2011; Frankenberg et al, 2012). In academic parlance, this capacity for disaster readiness is understood as 'community resilience' (Norris et al, 2008)—a term that has gained currency among policy makers wanting individuals and communities to take greater responsibility for the risks they live with. Despite the popularity of community resilience as a framework for disaster policy, the concept is also subject to critique for its assumption that a geographical space is coterminous with a 'community' that is likely to generate shared resources and mobilise them collectively as needed (Kirschenbaum, 2004). These criticisms are especially pertinent to urban contexts and echo well-established debates about the relevance of local community to a mobile, individualistic, and outwardly connected urban population.

This paper engages with these debates by examining the role of neighbours as a specific component of local social life commonly viewed as essential to community resilience. Neighbours remain a salient feature of suburban life since their physical proximity renders them an important source of local support (Unger and Wandersman, 1985), particularly during disasters when they can act as unofficial warning systems and/or be the first responders once the emergency has passed (Kim and Kang, 2009; Nagarajan et al, 2012). Among disaster

researchers and policy makers, there is explicit recognition of the importance of neighbourly ties in building resilient communities (Breton, 2001; Kirschenbaum, 2004), with residents frequently prompted to 'get know their neighbours' before an emergency strikes. In a country such as Australia, where major bushfires, cyclones, and flooding are a frequent occurrence, and where recent years have seen a spate of such disasters on an unprecedented scale, consideration of how local communities might become more resilient has dominated disaster policy. Across all stakeholders, there is common agreement that 'getting to know your neighbours' is an important first step in community disaster preparedness (Emergency Management Queensland, 2011; Queensland Government Department of Emergency Services and Safety, 2011):

> "Getting to know your neighbours is easy. Start small—knock on the doors of your neighbours, introduce yourself and leave your contact details with them. Once you've met some of your neighbours, there are many things you can do together to build and improve your community" (Australian Red Cross REDiPlan, 2009, page 16).

Yet the kinds of interactions that take place among neighbours, and the relationships that ensue, render this advice more complex than first apparent. As Bulmer (1986, page 18) earlier noted, "neighbours are quite simply people who live near one another" and while this provides a distinctive context for the kinds of relations and interactions that might arise, it does not determine them. Neighbour relations can be absent, or they can resemble emotional bonds and support networks commonly associated with family and friends. But they can equally be tense or antagonistic and subject to conflict and dispute (Merry, 1993; Nieuwenhuis et al, 2013; Stokoe, 2006). The question of how neighbour relations are conceived and enacted outside of disaster events and how these dynamics influence the provision of neighbourly support when disaster strikes is the subject of this paper. Empirically, this question is addressed through the accounts of residents in the Ipswich suburb of North Booval in Queensland, Australia, who experienced major flooding of their homes in January 2011. The findings suggest that, while patterns of support were indicative of the different levels of neighbour interactions that existed prior to the flood, the severity of the event was such that it also generated a more "situated or occasioned" form of neighbouring (Laurier et al, 2002, page 353) in which certain rules and moral obligations of neighbouring are enacted even when usual neighbourly interactions are minimal. The next section expands on these ideas in more detail, showing how research on the sociology of neighbours aids our understanding of local responses to disasters within the community resilience literature.

From community resilience to the normative practices of neighbouring

Contemporary analyses of disasters are often framed through the language of community resilience, thanks to the growing popularity of the concept. Broadly defined as the capacity of a community to face a threat, survive, and adapt to a 'new normalcy' circumscribed by post-disaster losses and changes (Cox and Perry, 2011, page 396), the provenance of community resilience reveals a disparate set of influences from the fields of psychology, engineering, and ecology. These cluster around two converging strands in the social sciences (Berkes and Ross, 2013; Brown, 2014; Davourdi, 2012; Welsh, 2014). The first is a person-centred or 'psychosocial' approach that focuses on the capacity of individuals and communities to recover from a traumatic event or to sustain well-being in the face of continued adversity (Norris et al, 2008; Welsh, 2014). The second operates within a biophysical or socioecological framework and locates social and cultural systems alongside ecosystems to consider how societies, cultures, and ways of life can evolve and adapt to ongoing changes such as those generated through resource depletion or climate change (Berkes and Ross, 2013). While there is insufficient space to provide an overview of the expanse of literature in these two fields

of study, it is possible to identify points of commonality in the way community resilience is conceived in disaster research which are of relevance to this paper.

Coaffee (2013) offers a useful framework for this task. He identifies a chronology of three 'waves' of urban resilience thinking and the emergence of a fourth, but insists that this should not be taken as a claim that resilience policy has evolved in a linear manner. In its first wave, resilience was said to exist when entities or systems were able to 'bounce back' to their preexisting state after an initial shock. Critics argued, however, that, while this metaphor might work well for physical systems, its application to social systems was problematic because it depoliticised risk by failing to recognise that a return to the original state was not always desirable, particularly when vulnerability was underpinned by the structural logic of the system itself or by unequal access to power and resources (Brown, 2014; MacKinnon and Deriskson, 2013; Weichselgartner and Kelman, 2014).

In response, a second wave of resilience thinking has adopted a more evolutionary perspective to consider how communities might absorb shocks and transform themselves postdisaster, such that they 'bounce forth' rather than back (Davourdi, 2012, page 301). As well as placing greater emphasis on disaster prevention and preparedness, this revised paradigm operates on the assumption that resilience can be engineered—largely by identifying and enhancing features of social systems that assist with adaptability while attempting to fix those that do not (O'Malley, 2010). Norris, for example (see Norris et al, 2008), has argued that community resilience is contingent on the presence of a set of networked 'adaptive capacities' or resources (economic development, social capital, information and communication, and community competence) that can be collectively deployed during an emergency. If these resources are present before the disaster, are capable of being rapidly mobilised in an emergency, and are robust enough to withstand the disaster, then the community will be 'resilient'.

Among the various types of resources thought to foster community resilience, it is the potential contribution of social capital in the form of local bonds and networks between individuals and across local institutions and organisations that has elicited most interest. As Cox and Perry (2011) point out, this preoccupation with social capital has led to a concern with local neighbourhoods as sites of resilience development (see also Barrios, 2014) and neighbours as key generators of local social capital. Writing in the context of urban security challenges, Coaffee (2013) identifies this 'rescaling' to the local level as a fourth wave in resilience development. Here, however, it is regarded as a third phase, partly because the application of community resilience to bounded local areas is relatively well established (see, for example, Breton, 2001; Manyena, 2006; Norris et al, 2008), and partly because a new, emerging approach to local resilience can now be discerned that seeks to avoid the criticisms of treating locality as some kind of cohesive and resilient 'community'.

These criticisms take two forms. The first raises questions about the extent to which notions of community as collective identity, action, and belonging map neatly onto a bounded geographic territory and the logic of promoting a local community as the appropriate locus of action when people's lives are increasingly enacted outside this sphere (Barrios, 2014; Cox and Perry, 2011). Second is a more critical analysis of the 'politics' of community and the appropriation of the term by a neoliberal political agenda in which collectivised approaches to risk management have been replaced with the construction of responsibilised individuals whose allegiance to a community obliges them to manage their own and others' risks (Lentzos and Rose, 2009; O'Malley, 2010). As MacKinnon and Derickson argue (2013, page 263), placing local action at the heart of resilience policy "discursively and ideologically absolves capitalism and the state from accountability" in the creation and management of disaster risks, as failure becomes a property of those who fall victim: not only are they insufficiently resilient, but their insufficiency is rooted in their failure to act collectively.

In the final, and possibly still emerging, stage in resilience thinking, there is evidence that policy makers are beginning to come to terms with the futility of a disaster resilience strategy that relies upon artificial and nostalgic constructions of local community life (Coaffee, 2013). In their review of community resilience policy in the UK, for example, Bach et al (2010, page 17) argue that attempts to stimulate resilience through aspirations to recreate a lost form of local community "face strategic misalignment from the outset". They suggest that a more useful starting point for resilience policy is to focus on the 'everyday' lifeworlds of residents in ordinary nondisaster situations as a way of embedding resilience within existing local social patterns and interactions. Unlike friendship and kinship ties, which have become more widely dispersed, neighbouring, by definition, remains an inherently localised practice and recognition of this has led to a sharpening of the focus on neighbours in local resilience building. In Australian disaster policy, government and emergency service agencies have produced a range of guidelines on local disaster preparedness which place neighbours at their core. 'Getting to know their neighbours' (Emergency Management Queensland, 2011) is thought to be the first step in this process, based on the argument that "people who know each other in the community are more likely to turn to one another for help" (Australian Red Cross, 2009, page 15). The next step is for residents to talk to their neighbours about emergency planning and preparation (Queensland Government Department of Emergency Services and Safety, 2011). When a disaster is imminent, neighbours can then assist one another by helping secure properties, preparing emergency kits, moving furniture and valuables to safe ground, keeping an eye on vulnerable residents such as the elderly, providing emergency shelter, helping to clean up after a disaster, and providing emotional support (Emergency Management Queensland, 2011).

This advice may seem straightforward and intuitive and it also seeks to avoid the problems of assuming that a 'community' can be found in local neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, neighbouring is a complex and tenuous practice that takes many forms—not all of which are positive. Encouraging residents to 'get to know' their neighbours glosses over these complexities because it fails to consider the kinds of relationships that exist between neighbours even when they *do* know each other (including those that are negative), or the norms and values that underpin neighbouring as a social practice, even among those who appear relative strangers.

While a clear understanding of these issues is presently lacking in the community resilience literature, more comprehensive insights can be discerned from research that takes neighbours and neighbouring, rather than disasters, as its object of inquiry. Whereas disaster researchers consider how neighbours might function as *resources* for disaster preparedness and recovery (Breton, 2001; Norris et al, 2008), the sociology of neighbours focuses on the norms and expectations that underpin relationships with neighbours and the way they are enacted through particular sets of neighbour interactions. Kusenbach (2006, page 282), for example, defines neighbouring as a "normative set of interactive practices" that arise among people who have little in common except for residential nearness, but which are laden with certain rules and expectations about good neighbourly conduct. Along with expectations that neighbours should be friendly but also respect each others' privacy', 'helpfulness' is considered a fundamental principle of neighbouring (Bulmer, 1986; Crow et al 2002; Kusenbach, 2006). This includes what Kusenbach (2006) terms 'proactive intervention'—where neighbours do not simply respond to calls for assistance, but also volunteer their services without being asked. Outside of disasters, this may involve small favours such as keeping a neighbour's key or watering plants while a neighbour is away (Baumgartner, 1988; Richards, 1990). Litwak and Szelenyi (1969, page 470) suggest that many of these services are "the special province of neighbours" because neighbours are best placed to offer assistance in cases where a quick reaction is required; when the problem relates to a common territory; or when assistance is

needed from those most proximate. Such is the power of these norms that, in her study of neighbouring in the US, Kusenbach (2006) noted how requests for assistance were rarely refused without an apology, although neighbour relations deteriorated if assistance was not accompanied by appropriate expressions of gratitude or reciprocated at a later date.

While research on neighbouring has taken place outside of major disaster events, researchers have consistently noted that providing assistance during an emergency is one of the core components of helpfulness among neighbours. This is illustrated by Laurier et al (2002) in their account of an everyday emergency: in this case a lost cat. Like Kusenbach, they also suggest that there are "rules that provide organisational features to neighbouring" (2002, page 353). One is an implicit understanding that there are occasions when neighbours may justifiably approach each other *as neighbours* even if they do not know each other and rarely interact at any other time. Second is an unspoken consensus that on these occasions residents can turn to a neighbour for assistance, as opposed to a friend or family member, "*primarily because of a neighbour's obligation as a neighbour*" (2002, page 356, emphasis added). Along with a missing cat, Laurier et al list a range of occasions when these rules might be enacted—to which one might add an impending disaster, such as rising flood waters, which instils in residents an obligation to alert neighbours to the impending disaster and provide assistance after the event.

What this research shows is that role of 'neighbour' carries a set of moral codes about how neighbours should act towards one another (including that they should be 'helpful') and the occasions (such as an emergency) when those expectations become particularly incumbent. Following Mann's (1954) distinction between manifest and latent forms of neighbouring, the point is not that neighbours need to be engaged in frequent acts of mutual assistance for neighbouring to be beneficial but, rather, that neighbours can be trusted to be there if the need arises. The unpredictability of emergencies means there have been limited opportunities to examine the enactment of these 'occasioned' rules of neighbouring (Laurier et al, 2002), missing cats aside, but the practice of neighbouring during disasters, and the way this is influenced by broader notions of neighbouring in nonemergency situations, clearly has consequences for disaster policy and practice. Is it really helpful for people to get to know their neighbours in preparing for disasters, as current policy suggests, and, if so, how well do they need to know them before they can rely upon them in a disaster? Are residents particularly disadvantaged if they do not know, or even like, their neighbours, or are the occasioned rules of neighbourly aid reliably mobilised regardless? And, if knowing neighbours is so important, how best can this be facilitated? In the remainder of this paper, these issues are explored in the context of North Booval and the stories of those affected by the 2011 Queensland floods. While viewing the flood as a distinct occasion where particular forms of (helpful) neighbour behaviour were mobilised, I also engage with the proposition that the forms of neighbourly behaviour incited by the flood cannot be understood in the context of this single event alone, but need to be embedded within the neighbour interactions and relationships that existed among residents of North Booval prior to the flood waters rising. The implications of the findings for disaster resilience policy are revisited in the concluding section.

The research site and methods

The 2011 Queensland floods are notable in Australia's recent disaster history because of their impact upon the most urbanised and densely populated part of the state. Following a prolonged period of intense rainfall towards the end of 2010, more than three quarters of Queensland experienced extensive flooding and was subsequently declared a disaster zone. This included the southeast region containing the state capital of Brisbane and the regional city of Ipswich, located 40 km away. Combined, over 29 000 homes and businesses in Brisbane and Ipswich were inundated with flood water (Queensland Floods Commission

of Inquiry, 2012), forcing affected residents to evacuate to emergency centres or to family and friends. In Ipswich, where there was little warning of the severity of the impending disaster, North Booval was one of the most badly affected suburbs.

North Booval is a low-lying suburb bordered on two sides by the Bremer River and the Bundamba Creek. Demographically, the suburb is ethnically White and generally low income, with a preflood (2006) average household weekly income of AUS $1056 (city averages are $1398 for Ipswich and $1403 for Brisbane). As shown in figure 1, the suburb is intersected from north to south by North Station Road. On the southeastern side, which is older and more accessible to local shops and transport networks, the housing is a combination of low-set and high-set brick and weatherboard homes interspersed with newer and larger brick homes which have been constructed by households attracted to the area by the low cost of land. In contrast, the northwest side contains a newer housing estate comprised of low-set brick homes. This part of the suburb has poor accessibility to public transport and appears to lack the sense of identity and connectivity evident among residents in the older area, possibly because many of the homes appear to be private rentals. The distinction between these two areas proved significant in the course of this study as flooded residents reported diverging experiences in the provision of support, with those residing in the newer estate feeling that they had been 'forgotten'.

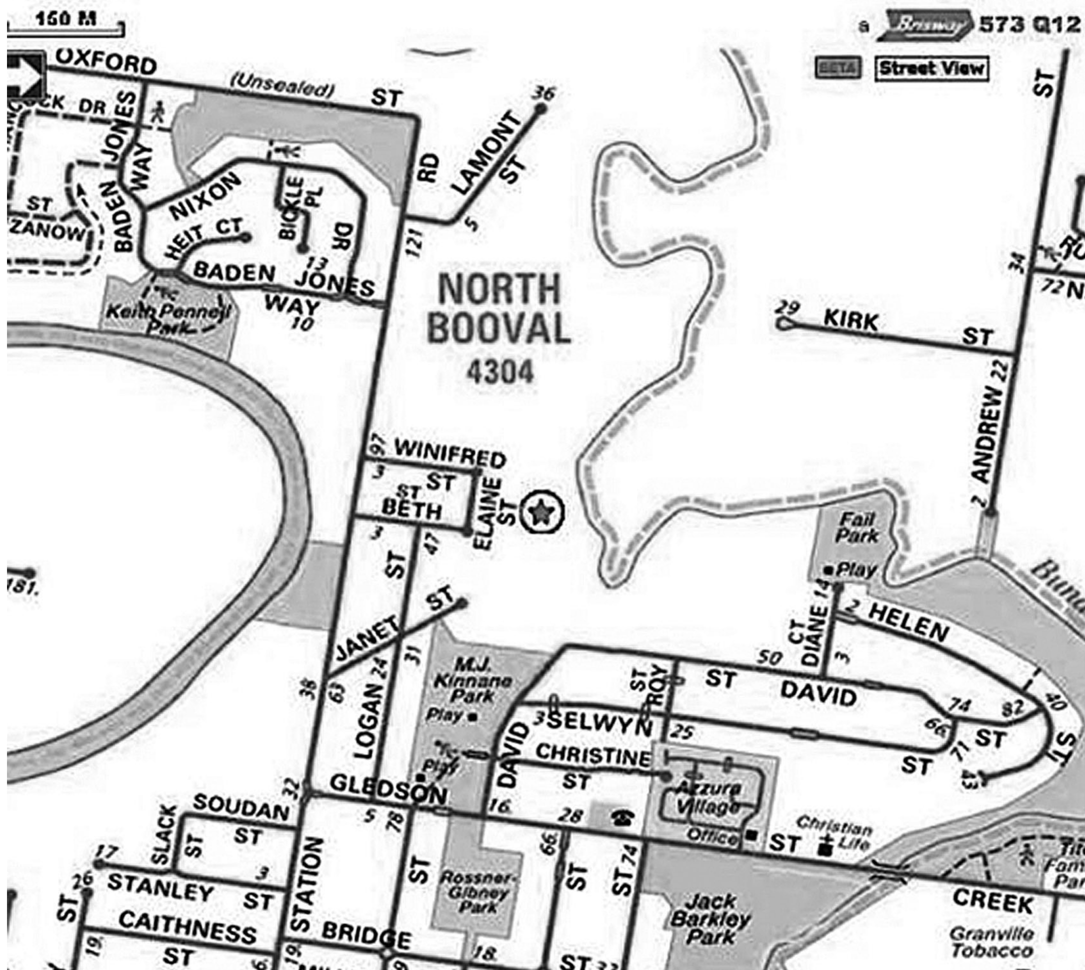

Figure 1. Map of North Booval (source: Virtual Map Australia Ltd).

While extensive rainfall had put the city of Ipswich on flood alert since late 2010, the Ipswich City Council (ICC) activated a flood plan on 10 January 2011 after predictions that further heavy rain would cause the Bremer River to peak at 8.3 m. At this point, it was anticipated that only a handful of properties in low-lying areas would be affected and that serious flooding would only occur if the river rose to 14 m (ICC, 2011). In the hours that followed, however, the flood warnings were continually revised upwards and a State Disaster Declaration was implemented on 11 January when predicted flood levels rose to 16 m. In its subsequent submission to the Queensland Flood Inquiry (2011), the ICC reported that both the rapid escalation of the flood risk and the commensurate increase in the number of homes and businesses at risk of inundation gave residents little time to prepare—in most cases only 2–3 hours. When the river finally peaked at 19.4 m on the 12 January, one third of the city was partially or wholly under water—including North Booval, where some homes were submerged up to their rooftops.

The present study of the flood occurred eighteen months later when most residents had repaired and returned to their homes. With funding provided by the Queensland government to identify the factors influencing 'community resilience', North Booval was selected as a site for study because it had been one of the worst-affected suburbs in Ipswich. Recruitment of research participants occurred through a multistage process, beginning with a leaflet drop to 500 of the suburb's 800 residences. This elicited a sample of nineteen participants, which increased to twenty one through 'snowballing' from those already recruited. Four additional interviews were conducted with local council representatives in the area. A second stage of recruitment commenced in early 2013 following recognition that many residents who had been living in rental properties at the time of the flood had moved elsewhere. In order to incorporate their experiences, recruitment occurred via newspaper advertisements and leaflets handed out at the local shopping area. This generated a final sample of twenty-seven participants: twelve men and fifteen women. Of those, twenty two had been flooded to the point where their homes had been rendered uninhabitable. Despite efforts to recruit across residential tenures, only three had been renting at the time of the flood. The sample was equally divided between long-term residents of over thirty years and more recent arrivals of less than a decade.

Data were generated through an interviewing process in which participants were encouraged to tell their flood stories in as much detail as possible. As others have observed (Gilbert, 2002), traumatic events such as disasters are given meaning through the act of storytelling because this enables people to bring order to an otherwise disorderly and disruptive situation. Communicating this narrative to a listener, such as a researcher, can also assist research participants in making sense of, and coming to terms with, what happened (Tuohy et al, 2014). Given the significance of the flood as a key event in participants' lives, the interviews oriented around the flood, starting with the days leading up to it; the experience of evacuation; the period of being away from, and then returning to, damaged homes; and the lengthy process of recovery. Participants were then asked about their preflood and postflood experiences so that they could think about the way in which their suburb had changed. In line with a narrative approach to interviewing, however, this three-phase approach provided the main structure of the interview although direct questions were used to invite elaboration and/or check on points not covered.

The interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours and were audiorecorded. All but three took place in residents' homes, which enhanced the process of storytelling via the inclusion of photographs, indications of flood-water levels, and tours of renovated homes. Given that neighbours were so central to the research objectives, several questions had been prepared to pursue this line of inquiry. However, neighbours proved so integral to participants' flood stories that they emerged naturally through the course of the conversation. *How* participants

talked about their neighbours gave insight not only into the assistance provided (or not provided), but also into the kinds of relationships they had with those neighbours. In some cases, neighbours were referred to by their first names such as ‘Bill’ or ‘Fred around the corner’, indicating a high degree of familiarity between them. In others, neighbours were referred to in role-descriptive terms (such as ‘the young couple across the road’) or, more disparagingly, as ‘weirdos’ or ‘the feral next door’. To protect identities, all names were replaced with pseudonyms. Interviews were transcribed and subjected to a two-stage analytic process as outlined by Daly (1997). The first stage involved a detailed review of the transcripts to elicit the ‘first-order stories’—the local narratives embedded in the lived experience of the participants themselves. Key themes which emerged from these stories included the kinds of relationships people had with particular neighbours prior to the flood, their experience of the flood itself, and their interaction with different neighbours in the lead up to, and aftermath of, the disaster. The second stage involved the construction of what Daly refers to as a ‘second-order story’ where the concepts and theories of the social scientist were combined with participants’ accounts to tell a larger story about the dynamics and influences of neighbouring as disasters occur.

Neighbouring in North Booval

The study of how neighbouring is enacted during disasters begins with an examination of neighbouring in North Booval *prior* to the flood in order to ascertain the neighbour interactions, relationships, and moral codes already in place, ready to be mobilised when disaster strikes. Whereas Baumgartner (1988) has described the existence of a prevailing ‘moral order’ governing interactions between neighbours, Crow et al (2002, page 128) more recently suggest that patterns of neighbouring are multiple and “actively constructed and chosen by individuals” rather than being a structured feature of the neighbourhood to which individuals must conform. In North Booval, preflood neighbouring patterns support Crow et al’s observations. While some research participants inferred preferred styles of neighbouring, with some more likely to engage in frequent and intensive interactions than others, this could not be attributed to any prevailing social norm, as Baumgartner (1988) found. Nor did participants exhibit only one neighbouring style but, rather, often spoke of neighbours with whom they had established close bonds while simultaneously identifying neighbours they did not, nor had any desire to, know. While seemingly obvious, the essence of neighbouring, as Kusenbach (2006) observes, is that it is an *interactive practice*, meaning that, while individual choices or circumstances, and neighbourhood characteristics, may influence neighbouring styles, each set of neighbour relations is interactively negotiated and managed between the parties concerned. The effect is that individuals have a high degree of variability in the way they relate to different neighbours, which the following excerpts from North Booval illustrate as residents described how many of their neighbours they knew:

> “Not many. As I say, Glenn next door of course, the Watsons over the road who have sold out, but I’ve got their son’s phone number with me … . People over the road, the Whites and their parents, but not that well. It’s just sort of ‘hello, how are you, goodbye’ kind of thing. Peter and Jim next door—they’ve moved out, but they were really good. Doreen and David right at the end of the street and Charlie and Georgina down in [name of] Street. They’re really about the only ones—just this little bunch. The rest of them, because a lot of them now are rental properties, they tend to come and go every six to twelve months” (Bernard Sargent).

Brian:	"Next door neighbour—fabulous. They've been here since the year dot. Get along with them very very well."
Louise:	"Adore them. They've been so good to us."
Brian:	"When we make trips overseas, they'll pick us up from the airport. I mean, that's how well we get on. We get along well with the neighbours the other side, Wendy and Alex. Not so pal-sy."
Louise:	"We're not close. We're not close …"
Brian:	"But we've had Christmas dinner on the patio with them, and we know them and they're in our age group. So neighbours both sides, good. Good relations."
Interviewee:	"The rest of the street? Do you know people as well?"
Brian:	"Not well."

Beth Dwyer's relationships with her neighbours were equally diverse, ranging from 'awesome' to highly problematic. Beth had lived with her mother in the older part of North Booval prior to the flood, but later moved into a rental property of her own on the new estate. Since moving there, she had not become acquainted with any of her neighbours, but described her preflood neighbouring experiences as follows:

> "One side we tried not to [interact] because he's just a drunk, feral that—I think they have nine kids now and they're all feral. They hang out on the roof and they're just disgusting—called my mum a bitch. But the other side, we knew them really well. They were awesome. Straight across the road, we know them pretty well. But the rest of them, nobody knew anybody. You know, everybody sort of like 'mm neighbours' [turns her nose up]."

From all accounts, preflood neighbour relations in North Booval appeared to fall into five categories, four of which closely resemble those identified by Blokland (2003) in her study of an inner-city neighbourhood of Rotterdam. The first type is 'bonds'—"connections with individuals that are relatively long-lasting" (Blokland, 2003, page 73). Here, neighbour relationships are close and more likely to resemble friendships as neighbours socialise together, participate in family events, and provide mutual support that goes beyond the usual forms of neighbourly 'helpfulness'. Such relationships are evident in the accounts of Bernard, Beth, and Brian and Louise, but also among at least half of those interviewed. What these participants share in common is that they are often older, owner-occupier residents who have lived in their homes for several decades and built up established neighbour networks that typically exclude those who are more transient (usually renters). But younger, more recent arrivals can also become part of these networks as Beatrice Singleton, a young rental tenant described:

> "They [my neighbours] all had been there for years, so they were all friends, they all knew each other. They were all older than us, I'm only 28, but we just got along well with them. They just took us under their wing as well because we were younger, and we became really good friends with them."

Second are what Blokland calls 'attachments', which differ from bonds by degree and which are based primarily on a shared recognition of the value of good neighbour relations rather than any attachment to neighbours as individuals. Neighbour attachments can still be highly beneficial, however, and an important local source of support and sociality. Brian and Louise's description of being less 'pal-sy' with one set of neighbours while still enjoying Christmas lunch with them is indicative of the sometimes-subtle difference between bonds and attachments, as is the use of the term 'neighbour friend' by another participant, Lachlan Windsor, to describe an elderly neighbour with whom he and his mother had grown close over the years.

The third type Blokland identifies are 'transactions' where neighbours wholly relate to one another as neighbours, rather than as individuals. Transactions involve the exchange of small favours, but Blokland suggests that they are rarely overtly sociable and are based instead on a relationship of peaceful coexistence. This is nicely captured in Crow et al's (2002) concept of 'friendly distance': an expectation that neighbours will be there when needed, but will also respect one another's privacy, and Mann's (1954) view that positive latent values of neighbouring can still persist even if they do not manifest in frequent interaction. In North Booval this was the most common expression of neighbouring, as participants identified neighbours by name, knew something about their lives, and reported engaging in small forms of mutual exchange but did not see them as 'friends'. Young mum, Elise O'Leary, for example, reported exchanging home-grown produce with her neighbours, while Lachlan Windsor beautifully summarised the essence of a friendly, but transaction-oriented, relationship he and his mum shared with their neighbours:

> "We look out for any issues, as long as we can see them, but we don't interfere in each other's lives at all. We know the families because they've grown up, so … we know them well. We know the kids, so we know the people who come to their house and that sort of thing … . You would say we're acquaintances, not friends. Yet we have this understanding to look out for each other. You develop that trust, knowing people and seeing the comings and goings."

For those who enjoyed more intense neighbour friendships, friendly distance represented a lesser, but still positive, set of relationships. For others, friendly distance was as close as neighbour relationships got, with the remainder being even more limited or absent. Blokland describes these last types of neighbour relationships as 'interdependencies', arguing that, even if neighbours fail to interact, physical proximity makes it difficult for them to completely ignore one another. Nor does it necessarily exonerate them from their neighbourly obligations. For the participants described, interdependencies existed with neighbours who existed outside their circle of close associates, but there were others for whom interdependencies were the most common experience. These interviewees represented a particular cohort—usually young singles or couples who had moved to Ipswich in recent years for a house they could afford. Most continued to work and socialise in Brisbane and had no long-term plans to stay in Ipswich. New mum Kate Bishop, who had moved into her North Booval home only days before the flood, described her subsequent interactions with her neighbours as follows:

> "Well, we don't have a relationship with them. It's kind of weird. Everyone is sort of different demographics."

Kate also felt that the area had 'undesirable neighbours'—a sentiment shared by Dominic Wheeler and his partner Kylie Gordon who had moved to the area "because it was so cheap" but encountered neighbours they described as "not the best". Here, reduced interaction with neighbours was not simply the outcome of lives being less locally oriented, but also of choosing to maintain a distance from them. This preference was articulated most clearly by Siobhan Rebus, who lived in a rental property in the new estate in North Booval:

Siobhan: "I don't really associate with neighbours because I've had a neighbour in the past spit in one of my ex-husbands' face. So I don't really associate with neighbours."

Interviewer: "Neighbours in general or those neighbours?"

Siobhan: "Any neighbour. I prefer to keep to myself."

This leads to the final type of neighbour relationship—hostilities—which Blokland omitted from her analysis, presumably because it is relatively uncommon. Only in two instances were there reports of hostility between neighbours: Siobhan's comment above and Beth Dwyer's earlier description of her 'feral' neighbour', although others reported

relationship breakdowns with neighbours as a result of various disputes. Even though they appear infrequent, the existence of negative, rather than simply absent, neighbour relations is significant for disaster resilience because they may influence neighbours' willingness to provide assistance in an emergency. The next section turns to this question by examining how neighbours in North Booval supported each other during the flood crisis and the way this support was patterned by prior forms of neighbouring behaviour.

Neighbours and neighbouring during a disaster

Preflood interactions, flood warnings, and evacuation

On the morning of Tuesday 11 January 2011, a state disaster declaration was put in place for Ipswich as flood predictions began to escalate. Residents who had lived through the last major flood of 1974 and/or who had an understanding of local river systems foresaw the impending disaster and began to move their belongings to higher ground. Neighbours looking on saw them loading vehicles and went out into the street to learn what was happening. With no time for official warning systems to be enacted, evacuation advice spread informally through phone calls from concerned family and talk among neighbours. Long-term resident Nancy Sullivan received a visit from her frantic neighbour Claire Feeney who told her to pack, while Beatrice Singleton and her neighbours made a collective decision to leave. Others reported speaking to no one. By mid-afternoon, as flood waters and police cordons cut off access, everyone had left.

In taking a temporal approach to the analysis, this account begins with neighbour interactions in the lead-up to evacuation as residents received news of the impending disaster and the need to leave. The rapid escalation of the flood risk and the subsequent inability for official warning systems to be enacted meant that few people understood what was about to occur or how best to respond. Instead, warnings and advice predominantly came from concerned, but largely uninformed, family, friends, and neighbours, or, later, from television and radio announcements of areas to be evacuated. This increased residents' confusion, leaving them ill prepared and slow to respond until the situation became acute. In recounting their experiences, most participants made reference to the actions and advice of neighbours in prompting their own evacuation plans. Most of these interactions appear to have played out in the public space of the street, where participants reported observing neighbours loading up vehicles. For Siobhan Rebus, this was the first sign that something was wrong:

> "Then when it came to the crunch on the morning of the evacuation, there was no real warning until I could hear everyone going frantic out the front yard. I looked out my window and here's these people across the road from where I was living loading their van, their cars—they had about four or five cars there. The young couple next door, they had a truck. They were filling a truck up. They were filling both their cars up. It was just unbelievable."

As someone who avoids neighbour interaction, Siobhan did not speak to her neighbours, but began packing on the advice of her daughter who telephoned a short time later. Other participants witnessing a similar level of street activity were more comfortable about approaching their neighbours to inquire what was going on, as Bernard Sargent recounted:

> "I came home from Brisbane that afternoon on 11 January and next door had all his furniture outside and packing up; over the road were packing up, so were people over the road here. I said to Glenn [next door], 'what the hell's going on? You didn't tell me you'd sold out or anything. Where's everybody going?'. All he told me was 'we got told to get out; there's a flood coming'."

One observation from participants' accounts is that interactions with neighbours mainly occurred through incidental exchanges in the street as people packed vehicles and gathered to confer. Only in certain cases were there explicit attempts to visit neighbours in their

homes either to impart or to elicit information, and this was usually prompted by one of three conditions. The first was where neighbour relations took the form of bonds or attachments. With little time to prepare their own evacuation, warnings were restricted to friends or neighbours they were closest to. Close relationships also meant that neighbours had other means of communicating, such as telephone, which they could use more expeditiously. At the time of the flood, for example, Doreen and David Cerizo were away on holiday so their "very good friend" and neighbour Charlie White telephoned their son to prompt him to come and pack his parents' belongings. Second, residents were cognisant of neighbours whose age or poor health were likely to impair their evacuation and/or limit their means of communication. In several cases, participants reported making special visits to neighbours who they considered particularly vulnerable, including Siobhan Rebus who heeded her daughter's request to check on an elderly neighbour despite her usual preference to avoid all neighbour interaction:

> "One of my daughters said 'mum, just be nice and go over to the lady next door'—because she was a grandmother that had a couple of grandchildren with her—'just make sure she's okay'. I said 'yes that's fine love, I'll go over'. So I did."

Another elderly resident, eighty-year-old Nancy Sullivan, also reported how a neighbour she barely knew came by with a utility vehicle to move some of her furniture to his own home on higher ground. Even after Nancy had left, the neighbour continued shifting her belongings until it grew dark. When asked how well she knew this neighbour, Nancy replied that she "hadn't know him at all except to say hello to".

Finally, as awareness of the seriousness of the impending flood grew, so neighbour interactions became less incidental and more explicitly oriented towards warning others. In some cases, they also began to deviate from established, preflood patterns as neighbours warned anyone nearby of what might occur. Earlier in the day, this could be observed among those with an interest in extreme weather events who quickly understood what was about to unfold. Towards the end of the day, as the suburb began to empty and only a few people remained, Beth Dwyer temporarily put aside her hostilities with her unpleasant neighbour to advise him he needed to act:

> "we said to the feral next door—we were getting stuff out in crates and he's kicked back outside, drinking a rum, and I said 'mate, you really need to get some shit because we're going to get flooded'. Yeah whatever. Okay. Fine."

Flood recovery

Within a few days, the flood waters receded and residents returned home to survey the damage and begin the process of recovery. In most houses the damage was extensive. Walls and ceilings had collapsed from the weight of the water; large items of furniture had floated across the floor and were blocking access; cupboards had been pushed open and their contents spilled out; and a thick mud coated everything, creating an unpleasant odour in the summer heat. The clean-up process commenced with salvaging items that could be cleaned and disposing of those that could not. Most items fell into the latter category and the entire contents of people's homes were piled up in the street for council collection. Once homes were emptied, damaged walls, floors, cupboards, and ceilings were removed and the remaining shell was pressure-cleaned and disinfected. Once done, residents then waited, sometimes months, for the repair work to begin.

In participants' stories of the long recovery process, family and friends were easily identified as the principal source of support, although a large volunteer effort, later dubbed 'the mud army', also descended onto flooded streets. But participants also reported high levels of assistance from neighbours via the provision of emotional support, food, information, equipment, and help with cleaning, which came not only from neighbours they knew well, but also from neighbours with whom there had been little prior contact. For example, on

returning to their damaged homes, some participants went to see how their neighbours had fared, sometimes entering their homes for the first time:

> "Yeah, we went next door. We hadn't seen in their house before we moved in, but yeah, when they were cleaning up, we went and saw them. They had a few friends and family helping them out as well. But we shared a beer, and I think we helped" (Kate Bishop).

The desire to check on neighbours—even those they did not know well—was often induced by a sense of shared experience and trauma, but it was also facilitated by the flood's disruption of the usual conventions of neighbourly interaction. As Stokoe (2006) argues, when neighbours are relative strangers, neighbouring normatively occurs outside the private space of home, with doors, fences, and gates providing symbolic, as well as physical, barriers to maintain privacy and distance. In this instance, not only did the disaster give neighbours a reason for calling, but it also dismantled the boundaries between private (homes) and public (spaces) as doors and windows were opened, fences and gates removed, and the contents of neighbours' lives flung onto the footpath. As the day progressed, it was common for each house to have dozens of people involved in the cleaning (including some strangers) and the constant coming and going made private spaces public, and much easier for little-known neighbours to enter.

Help mostly came from friends, family, and volunteers rather than neighbours—usually because neighbours were so busy with their own homes. But there were important exceptions to this. Most notable were neighbours on higher ground who had escaped damage to their own properties and who came to the aid of others to help clean and/or provide food and refreshments:

> "A family up the road put on barbecues every day and fed dozens and dozens of people. In fact, I think the first day they bought about 30 sausages. The next day 100, the next day 200, the next day, probably 300. They were just feeding everyone; all free, everything free" (Simon Neil).

Second, were examples of collaboration where neighbours took it in turns to clean each others' properties: Bernard Sargent assisted his neighbour Glenn before they moved onto his own place, and Doreen and David Cerizo worked on Charlie and Georgina White's house while waiting to enter their own. This communal clean-up was partly induced by the pattern of the flood waters receding from each house, leaving some properties ready for cleaning more quickly than others. It was also a way of managing demand for sought-after pressure cleaners and power generators. But working together was also brought on by a sense of camaraderie among neighbours which was seen to make the task more bearable, as Beatrice Singleton recounted:

> "Our community was really good, our street, like everyone got together and helped. The day we were cleaning we were all laughing and joking and throwing stuff out and it made it easier when you're doing stuff like that."

In each of these cases, turn taking was enacted among neighbours where prior bonds and attachments existed and thus followed established patterns of mutual aid and assistance. In Brett Fisher's street, however, residents' decision to divide into teams and to tackle three houses each meant that rules of helpfulness and reciprocity were situationally imposed onto neighbours with different patterns and histories of interaction. While Crow et al (2002) have suggested that neighbours can always choose whether or not to adopt certain neighbouring styles in certain situations, in this context those who opted out of this collective approach were seen to have breached an unwritten rule and were subsequently censured:

> "There was a couple down the end here who chose to do their own thing. We were back up and functioning days before they were. Because they didn't really join in … we just said 'well bugger ya, do it yourself', which is not the right thing to do but they had a choice" (Brett Fisher).

Similar judgments were levelled at unaffected neighbours who were absent during the clean-up. Laurier et al (2002, page 364) help explain this by observing that the criteria for judging good and bad neighbouring "changes and remains to be settled on each and every occasion … our moral assessment varies according to who we find someone to be on any particular occasion." On the occasion of a flood disaster where the entire city mobilised and total strangers turned up to help, it was morally incumbent on those living nearest to pitch in, particularly if they had escaped the disaster themselves. Many did, and participants recounted considerable generosity at the hands of neighbours. But the absence of others was noted and reproached. For Brett, though, the failure of some neighbours to help out in an emergency came as no surprise and merely reinforced his initial assessments of who was a good neighbour and who was not:

Interviewer: "What about the people who conspicuously didn't help?"
Brett: "Anger. I felt anger."
Interviewer: "Are they people who used to involve themselves in the neighbourhood before?"
Brett: "No. They just didn't change their spots, obviously."

Among all those interviewed, only Siobhan Rebus received assistance from no one but her family. While Siobhan was not the only one to have absent relations with some or all of her neighbours, she was the only one who explained this as a preferred neighbouring style rather than different lifestyles or daily routines preventing more significant interaction. Siobhan also lived the newer part of North Booval where rental housing was more dominant—a tenure often associated with transience and reduced interest in fostering local connections. Either way, Siobhan's account of neighbouring during the clean-up was remarkably different from any other:

Interviewer: "Did anyone knock on your door during the clean-up to volunteer help?"
Siobhan: "No …"
Interviewer: "So nobody knocked on the door …"
Siobhan: "No, no."
Interviewer: "… with food or drink?"
Siobhan: "No. If anyone came knocking on my door it might have been while I was still down at my daughter's house. But not while we were here; not when we came back."

In the days and months after the flood, neighbours also shared information and resources, passing on advice about financial support, providing updates on insurance payouts, and forwarding details of available tradespeople to help with repairs. While residents made a particular point of informing those they knew well, this exchange was not limited to any type of neighbour relation but, rather, occurred through general neighbourly talk to ensure that information was passed on widely. This also included the circulation of gossip about neighbours who were thought to have benefitted unduly from the flood and were poorly judged as a result. One of Brett Fisher's neighbours who had not assisted with the recovery effort was known to have accessed disaster funding to replace his fence despite "not one ounce of water … [going] into his yard" and Beth Dwyer's 'feral' neighbour was said to have bragged about the donations he received, but refused to tell others how they might also access them. On the whole, though, most accounts of neighbouring at this time were overwhelmingly positive and featured stories of significant and unexpected acts of considerable generosity, including among neighbours who were relative strangers to one another. Kate Bishop recounted one such story when she described how her husband, a carpenter, had observed a family across the park living in their garden while their house was repaired and, taking pity on them, helped them rebuild. The families subsequently struck up a friendship.

Discussion and conclusion: do we need to know our neighbours?

The accounts of how neighbours mobilised to warn and assist each other as the suburb of North Booval flooded provides important insights into the potential role of neighbours in fostering disaster preparedness and recovery. Community resilience scholars have identified neighbours as an important 'resource' in fostering resilience at the local level (Breton, 2001; Norris et al, 2008), while recent Australian policy prescriptions encourage residents to get to know their neighbours so that they are more likely to turn to them for help. But literature on the sociology of neighbours—and indeed, the findings of this research—suggest that 'neighbours' are by no means a single entity and that neighbouring behaviours and relationships vary enormously depending on a complex set of factors such as individual preferences, relational dynamics, and neighbourhood characteristics. The one common feature of neighbouring is physical proximity which forcibly bestows the identity of neighbour onto all those involved. And, while physical proximity cannot determine the interactions that ensue (Bulmer, 1986), it does provide a distinct context for the establishment of a set of rules and expectations that are attached to the neighbour role. One such rule is not simply that neighbours should be helpful, but that they can be approached at times of emergency, even if no history of prior contact exists. Whether the exchange of neighbourly assistance conforms to these generalisable norms when disaster actually strikes, or remains patterned by prior histories and relationships, are important questions for disaster resilience and have guided this study.

The findings indicate two 'moments' when neighbours come to one another's aid in a disaster. First, neighbours can pass on important information about an impending disaster and the necessary response. Research suggests that communication patterns among neighbours can be influenced by prior modes of neighbouring, meaning that residents can be selective about who they warn (Kim and Kang, 2009; Nagarajan et al, 2012). In North Booval, flood warning patterns did appear to map onto existing neighbour relationships insofar as those whose relationships conformed to Blokland's bonds and attachments (2003) appeared most likely to take time out from their own evacuation plans to check on others. Nevertheless, even transaction-type or interdependent relations based on friendly but minimal interaction meant that residents knew enough about their neighbours to identify the more vulnerable, and special effort was taken to alert these groups and help with evacuation. In all other cases, however, neighbour interaction was more ad hoc and occurred through incidental encounters in the street as residents witnessed neighbours packing up. While this hardly constitutes proactive warning or intervention (Kusenbach, 2006), such neighbourly talk nevertheless played an important role in disseminating evacuation advice. It may also have been situationally constrained by the sudden escalation of the flood risk in North Booval since not only did residents have little time to prepare, but there was also considerable uncertainty about what was happening and how they should respond. This may explain why neighbour interaction took the form of incidental street talk rather than proactive warnings, particularly since the incidence of proactive warnings to *all* and *any* neighbour increased as the impending danger grew clearer and closer. In these instances, even hostilities were briefly put aside to warn others.

The second moment was when residents returned to their homes after the flood and began sorting through and cleaning damaged homes. With so many neighbours affected, it was family and friends who provided the most support, along with the 'mud army' of volunteers, but neighbours also engaged in mutual assistance, offering emotional support, sharing equipment and food, helping clean damaged homes, and passing on information. Neighbours who had not been flooded invariably played a greater helping role and, while this was remarked upon as a generous act, the expectation that they *should* help was evident in the condemnation of those who failed to do so. Previous modes of neighbouring were informative of how recovery assistance played out in the way that some neighbours took a communal approach to cleaning, using humour and friendship as a way of getting through the

task. But existing patterns of neighbouring were most notable in their *disruption*, particularly among those whose previous contact more closely resembled absent interdependencies or friendly distant transactions. Such was the nature of the disaster that it gave neighbours an opportunity to visit homes they had not previously entered; to offer assistance where it was needed even if the recipient was a stranger; and to establish new, occasioned rules for collaborative working.

In returning to the question guiding this research, then, the answer is twofold. First, it is clear that when neighbour relations are strongest, more extensive and intensive forms of neighbour support are provided. As one might expect, established norms and patterns of neighbour helpfulness, friendship, and reciprocity can be quickly and reliably mobilised in an emergency. This suggests that emergencies are occasions where existing patterns of neighbouring are drawn on and heightened. In addition, however, North Booval also illustrates how conventional patterns of predisaster neighbouring can be disrupted, usually in positive ways as neighbours rally around to help each other, even if they have previously been strangers. What this suggests is that neighbours can be important resources in disaster preparedness and recovery, regardless of prior histories and interactions, precisely because the unwritten rules and expectations attached to the role of neighbour require that this be the case. Yet there are still significant differences between neighbour relationships as bonds and attachments and those that are transaction oriented, interdependent, and—especially—hostile. Where helpfulness, friendship, and reciprocity provide the 'glue' for bonds and attachments, making them highly reliable in an emergency, the expectation that friendly acquaintances or strangers will proactively intervene is, to use Mann's (1954) framework, based on latent dispositions rather than established action, meaning that there is no guarantee the neighbours will feel the weight of their neighbourly duties and respond accordingly. As the experiences in North Booval illustrate, most do, providing forms of assistance that go beyond what one might reasonably expect of a neighbour. But, in some cases, neighbours may fail in their moral duties, leading to anger, disappointment, and a deterioration in the relationship.

From this we can conclude that the campaign of encouraging neighbours to get to know one another as a local disaster resilience strategy has some logic, but it runs the risk of being overly simplistic and missing some key points. Following Mann (1954), effective neighbourly support during an emergency relies upon the existence of a latent set of neighbourly rules that neighbours will provide assistance in the event of an emergency *even if they do not know each other or rarely interact outside of that emergency*. These are core values of neighbouring that need to be preserved and enhanced. But, as Mann points out, attempts to stimulate neighbourliness through sociality and interaction in the absence of "a sound foundation" of these positive neighbourly values and dispositions "is a facile form of relationship which is unlikely to endure" (page 164). In other words, good neighbouring cannot easily be engineered—not even for the important task of enhancing disaster resilience. Any attempt to nurture neighbourliness might thus be more effective if it occurs outside of disaster policy and seeks to enhance neighbourly respect and tolerance rather than superficial expressions of neighbouring such as exchanging greetings or telephone numbers. This is no easy ambition, but it can be facilitated through strategies that address some of the common sources of irritation among neighbours (such as effective urban design to preserve privacy or prevent disputes over noise) and through assisting neighbours to resolve disputes through the provision of toolkits and mediation services.

With these values in place, minor forms of sociality among neighbours can then aid in the mobilisation of manifest forms of neighbourly support if knowing one's neighbours helps to identify those who are vulnerable and provides some reassurance to these individuals that neighbours are indeed looking out for them. The elderly, people with a disability, or with young children, and people whose first language is not English are likely to benefit

from more outward expressions of neighbourliness and proactive intervention when disaster becomes imminent. Exchanging contact details with neighbours, sharing information about emergency planning, and actively warning vulnerable groups about the impending disaster can help them in enhancing their own disaster preparedness. Advice of this kind in disaster policy is thus useful.

But, as this paper has shown, disaster resilience policies can only rely on neighbours so far, even when their relationships are characterised by bonds and attachments. For example, while neighbours may be willing to share information with each other and to take time to issue warnings, this is dependent on the provision of fast and reliable information in the first place, which appears to have been lacking in the case of North Booval—in part because of the speed with which the flood risk escalated. Without adequate information from reliable and legitimate sources, neighbourly exchanges are more likely to add to the confusion, while those who are not party to such conversations can miss out on advice altogether and/or receive warnings that are too late because no one thought or cared to warn them. Further, and returning to the criticisms of community resilience policy laid out earlier in this paper, there also remains an inherent danger in devolving responsibility for disaster preparedness and recovery to local neighbourhoods rather than paying fuller attention to the structural factors that not only render some neighbourhoods more vulnerable than others, but also leaves them with fewer resources to mobilise their own recovery effort (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013). The experience of Siobhan in a low-income housing estate in a pocket of the Bremer River, who found life easier without neighbourly interaction, but who subsequently came to be overlooked in the provision of neighbourly aid, not only illustrates the risk of relying on neighbourly goodwill for support, but also highlights the inequalities that exist between neighbourhoods with differential patterns and experiences of neighbouring. In essence, then, neighbours can certainly contribute to disaster preparedness and recovery, but only in certain ways and under certain conditions, and never as a substitute for broader policies that address the systemic bases of disaster risk and resilience.

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