



Preparing for the worst

THE attention-grabbing, repetitive, wailing siren sound of the Standard Emergency Warning Signal blared from the radio in the kitchen. Josh and Joanne, their parents, Paolo and his dad and Mr Jones from the neighbouring farm sat around the dining table and listened to the latest update on Cyclone Uriah. It was proceeding in a westerly direction and continued to intensify as it approached the coast. If the cyclone followed its current path it was headed straight for Wooloo. Most of the 138 residents and the holiday makers had already evacuated the town, moving inland to escape the first cyclone threat that had proved to be a fizzer. However the heavy rain from Cyclone Tatjana had caused some major flooding and the road out of town was now cut. No one could get in or out of Wooloo. There were only a handful of residents left, all looking out for each other to make sure they were all prepared if the cyclone hit.

Mr Jones had lived in Wooloo for all of his 71 years. He was a cane farmer, a real character, who

had lots of stories to tell. He couldn't remember a cyclone ever hitting Wooloo in his lifetime but had recalled a couple of close shaves. Back when he was a very young lad, his dad had built a bunker for his family to shelter in. At the time the Japanese had dropped bombs around Townsville and Mossman in their push to take the South Pacific during

the Second World War campaign. The attack was a little close to home for the Jones family so a shelter was built in case they became a target. It was still standing. It had been used on a few occasions when a cyclone menaced the coast nearby but over the years was utilised more for storage. Mr Jones suggested that if Uriah decided to be stubborn and refuse to shift, they should all take refuge in the safety of this reinforced concrete structure under his house. He was fairly certain they were in for a battering because he had seen some interesting animal behaviours over the past couple of days. He'd witnessed crabs climbing up mangrove trees, bats flying inland leaving their usual habitat and a mass exodus of native water rats from the river. Even his dog Buster had come upstairs, moving from his usual downstairs haunt. Mr Jones was worried.

To Josh and Joanne it sounded very exciting and they were eager to help clean out the bunker and stock it with what would be needed if Cyclone Uriah did pack a punch. They filled containers with water, gathered food that didn't need refrigeration

and could be cooked on the portable camp stove, made sure there were spare batteries for the torches and radio and restocked the first aid kit. It was like going camping. They helped Paolo and his dad tie down the caravans and check that any other loose material was secure. The windows on the houses, marina office and caravan park buildings were all taped. Cars had been parked in Mr Jones's farm machinery shed. Important documents and valuables were placed in waterproof bags and placed in the shelter along with clothes and bedding. They were ready. Now they just had to wait.

Severe Tropical Cyclone Uriah had started its life as a tropical low in the Coral Sea but the system, named by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, quickly intensified to a Category 2 cyclone and started tracking in a general westward direction. It rapidly intensified to a Category 3. For the next 24 hours Uriah maintained Category 3 intensity before being upgraded to a Category 4. During this time, the cyclone started to take a more west-southwestward direction and began to accelerate towards the tropical Queensland coast, showing signs of further intensification. Cyclone Uriah maintained its south-west movement and had Wooloo firmly set in its sights.



BLOWN AWAY
by the facts

WARNING

The Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) is a warning signal that is broadcast immediately prior to major emergency announcements on the radio, television and other communication systems.

CYCLONE NAMES

Cyclones can last a long time and therefore need to be identified to help issue forecasts and warnings. As a result, tropical cyclones in the Australian region are assigned a name. The names are selected from a list of 104 that is compiled by the Bureau of Meteorology.

CYCLONE CATEGORIES

Australian Tropical Cyclones are rated according to wind speed. There are five categories ranging from the relatively weak Category 1 to the most destructive Category 5.



TOMORROW: CHAPTER 7 – CYCLONE WARNING

