Driving through floodwaters: what's the point of flood forecasting?

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Abstract: Flood forecasting technologies have come a long way in the past few decades with substantial advances in numerical weather prediction and sophisticated hydrologic and hydraulic models contributing to improvements in accuracy and longer lead times for forecasts. Despite this, in many flood events, there continue to be fatalities and large economic losses due to the behaviour of people who have been caught unprepared or have underestimated the risks associated with the flooding. In some cases inappropriate development has been allowed on floodplains and flood protection infrastructure has mistakenly been believed to fully "flood proof" communities.

This presentation questions whether further improvements to the accuracy of flood forecasting both in Australia and overseas are needed. Instead should the focus be on improving flood education and preparedness? The role of information dissemination is also an important consideration as even a perfect forecast is of no use if not communicated to affected people in a timely and comprehensible way. Are advances in information technology and social media going to ultimately lead to reducing the costs of flooding more than further improvements in forecasts accuracy?