

QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Requirement to Provide a Written Statement to Commission of Inquiry

Graeme Scheu, Mayor, Goondiwindi Regional Council

In accordance with section 5(1)(d) of the *Commissions of Inquiry Act 1950* (Qld), I Graeme Scheu, Mayor, Goondiwindi Regional Council, provide the following statement of information as directed by letter dated 12th April, 2011. In providing the information this statement will be relative to the information request for the years 2010/2011.

1. *Any recent experience of the Goondiwindi Regional Council in co-ordinating disaster events with other local governments using the 'Guardian' Disaster Management System.*

- (a) I have not had any personal experience with the Guardian system.
- (b) Councillor Rick Kearney, Chair of the Local Disaster Management Group, will address this issue in a separate statement.

2. *Goondiwindi Regional Council's recent experience with local emergency services being unable to access essential information and resources within the Queensland and New South Wales border region.*

- (a) During the recent flood events, Council encountered some issues with the co-ordination of activities across the State border. For example, the residents from the neighbouring townships of Boggabilla (only ten kilometres away) and Toomelah who rely upon Goondiwindi for the provision of medical services were evacuated during the event. The "all clear" was given for these residents to return to their homes on Sunday 16 January 2011 at 3:30pm without communicating with the LDMG. This meant that residents of those towns were returned even though Goondiwindi had evacuated its hospital and was operating out of a temporary facility. The Goondiwindi hospital did not become operational again until Monday 18 January 2011 when evacuees were returned. The emergency department did not become operational again until Tuesday 19 January, 2011. Additionally, the road between the towns and Goondiwindi was closed and, as such, any emergency response would have been delayed or be required to be carried out via roads that were closed.
- (b) The LDMG Chair (Cr Kearney) has diarised knowledge of particular persons in New South Wales who sought rescue services and contacted the emergency system. Cr Kearney will address the issue in a separate statement.
- (c) Rivers and dams that cause flooding in most of the Goondiwindi regional area are either located in, or originate from, New South Wales. Boggabilla receives its warnings from the New South Wales branch of BOM at different frequencies to Queensland. Current funding models for gauging stations rely upon Council or other state agencies installing the stations with BOM then helping to maintain them. There is a need for someone to invest in gauging stations in New South Wales (i.e. outside of the Council local government area and outside DERM boundaries) to improve the information available to the Queensland branch of BOM to prepare warnings. In my opinion, it is necessary

to fund BOM to install these facilities in the most appropriate location regardless of state boundaries.

3. Details of Goondiwindi Regional Council's contact with Sunwater Ltd during the January flood events and any formal relationship the Council or LDMG may have with Sunwater Ltd.

(a) Cr Kearney will address this issue in a separate statement.

4. Any meeting with the State Disaster Co-ordinator, regarding river heights and the evacuation of residents from low-lying areas and health facilities in Goondiwindi.

(a) Meetings via telephone were held twice a day with the SDCC, the Chair of the LDMG and myself to discuss these and other issues.

(b) At those meetings, we had regular discussions comparing the collected information from the BOM as well as that of past flood studies and the local knowledge supplied to Council by a number of upstream irrigators and long time river height experts. All of the information led to a conclusion that a projected height of greater than 10.7m was extremely unlikely, the final result being a peak of 10.64m.

5. The communications issues that the Goondiwindi Regional Council had with Queensland Health and any Aged Health Care facilities whilst evacuating patients during the January 2011 flood event.

(a) During the flood event, aged care patients were evacuated to a makeshift facility in Inglewood (without air-conditioning and, in some cases, comprising tents), while Queensland Health patients were evacuated to the more appropriately resourced Inglewood hospital.

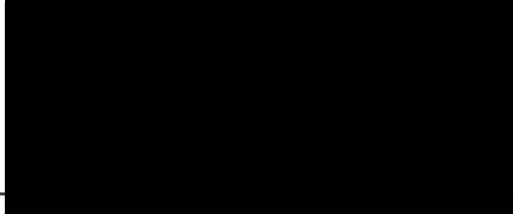
(b) Due to the difference in comfort levels, Council had requested that the aged care patients be returned to Goondiwindi prior to the Queensland Health patients. However, the communication between the LDMG, Queensland Health and Aged Health Care facilities resulted in the aged care patients returning to Goondiwindi after the Queensland Health patients.

6. The regulation and maintenance of the levee bank systems within the Goondiwindi Regional Council area in comparison to adjacent local government areas.

(a) Some of the regions levee banks are regulated under *Waggamba Shire Council Local Law No. 26 (Levee Banks) 2004*. Council's jurisdiction under this local law only regulates the construction and maintenance of levee banks within the former Waggamba Shire Council area which is predominately rural /agricultural. It does not include the levee bank protecting the town of Goondiwindi.

(b) I am of the opinion that the initial construction of the levee bank protecting the town of Goondiwindi including the location of it in proximity to the river stream has been a significant factor in the success of the levee system. Ongoing maintenance required is therefore minimal but is resourced accordingly.

- (c) Council has a regular inspection program of the levee system surrounding the town. In particular, valves, gate flaps and pumps are inspected regularly.
- (d) A separate allocation is made in the budget for the ongoing maintenance of the levee bank system. In the 2009/10 financial year \$35,000 was allocated to levee maintenance and \$25,000 for flood gate maintenance.
- (e) I do not have sufficient knowledge of the systems in other local government areas to be able to make a comparison.



Graeme Scheu
Mayor