

<i>Name of Witness</i>	Wendy Margaret NEWMAN
<i>Date of Birth</i>	[REDACTED]
<i>Address and contact details</i>	[REDACTED]
<i>Occupation</i>	Business Owner / Councillor Maranoa Regional Council
<i>Officer taking statement</i>	Detective Sergeant Stephen Platz
<i>Date taken</i>	18/04/2011

Wendy Margaret NEWMAN states;

1. I am a [REDACTED] year old married female presently residing at [REDACTED] with my husband Brian. In October 2010 I was elected to the Maranoa Regional Council and I still serve in this role. During this event, however, I was not performing my role as councillor but rather as a community member. I am not part of the local district disaster group within my electorate.
2. I have lived within the township of Surat since September 2009 but I have lived in the Surat area since 2001. Whilst living in the Surat region the Balonne River has flooded on only a couple of occasions. The last of which (prior to this event) was in March 2010 when the bridge to Roma went underwater. Due to the geography of the Surat Township it does not flood but rather becomes isolated as all the surrounding low lying areas become inundated. There has been no other significant flooding to my knowledge and the region has just experienced an extended period of drought.
3. In early December I became aware of heavy rainfall in the catchment areas of Dalby and Condamine. I received this information via media reports, Bureau of Meteorology river stations and general community awareness of the situation. Through local experience it is known that heavy rainfall in these areas may result in flooding along the Balonne River throughout the Surat district. Despite this, however, I did not expect the volume of water that we did receive in late December.

4. Between the 28th and 29th of December 2010 the flood that we were expecting arrived at Surat. The large volume of water that travelled from the said catchment areas arrived, causing inundation of the only roads into town. The flood surrounded the township of Surat and we were effectively cut off. The flood waters were extremely strong and the fastest running I have ever seen them.
5. I was contacted by a community member who asked if I could assist in getting some prescription medicine as they had run out. I then made some inquiries with a chemist in Roma and sent a fax with the required details. I requested the SES to transport the medicine to the town. This caused some concern to the local disaster management group (LDMG) in Roma as my request was not part of the official process that had been established to attain these types of supplies. Apparently only the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) could, under the guidelines, transport the medicine once it arrived in Surat. As a result of this, I was asked by the LDMG to chair a teleconference to clarify the arrangements and processes of the various agencies.
6. On the 30th of December 2010 I chaired the first teleconference between the Roma LDMG and the local emergency agencies at Surat. This meeting was held at the Surat office of Maranoa Regional Council and present were members from the State Emergency Service (SES), Queensland Police Service (QPS), the Surat Fire Auxiliary, the QAS, local hospital staff and council roads staff. It was then decided to continue the teleconference process and I chaired these conferences on a daily basis and during the height of the flooding, twice daily. These conferences continued until the 25th January 2011.
7. The main areas covered within the conferences were that of supplies, road conditions, status of residents on outlying properties, co-ordination of resources, management of evacuations and the general concerns and wellbeing of the town residents. As we were cut off, the issue of supplies to the town became paramount. An official recorded process was established with regards to the request of food, medicine and other essential supplies. This was established to ensure that the right amount of material was being requested and then delivered to

people in the community. In most instances supplies were brought via road and then SES boat.

8. The co-ordination of resources was managed through this group as it allowed a central point of information to all services. The meetings were kept open to all emergency services personnel, including those temporarily sent to Surat to assist or relieve Surat staff. This ensured open and quick communication. In one instance our group organised specialised equipment to be sent to the swift water rescue teams based in the town. This was enabled due to the local knowledge of community members being imparted to the emergency services.
9. As I was an integral party of this management group I was approached by members of the community asking questions concerning flood heights. The media was reporting in-correct data concerning 'walls of water' heading to Surat. This made the community very concerned. Maranoa Regional Council had already arranged for a surveyor to conduct surveys of the flooded areas and rivers in order to obtain an estimate on the highest possible peak. It was estimated that a highest peak of 14.9 metres was possible and as a result we made evacuation plans for the community in some parts of the town. Forty eight homes were identified as being at risk and these residents were notified via personal service. Each home owner was given a document outlining what action to take in the advent of the highest peak. This included evacuation routes and evacuation centres. Fortunately the peak did not get to this level and only two houses were evacuated, though they did not become inundated.
10. As previously stated I assisted in this role only as a community member and not as a councillor. The local council staff members in Surat were heavily involved in this group. Due to my prior experience in management and counselling I was able to assist the relevant agencies in their tasks and I performed this role on a daily basis between about 5.30am and 8.00pm.

Issues of concern

Media

11. The media was reporting in-correct information concerning the flood peak which caused panic in the community. There did not seem to be any co-ordination or contact with the local LDMG before issuing reports that were not correct. As a result of a number of media reports outlining an impending wall of water we door knocked the community and held an information meeting. In this meeting we discussed the reports conducted by the surveyor and plans in the advent of such an event. As a result, the community were kept informed and it reduced their anxiety on this issue, which never eventuated anyway.

Lack of contact register

12. My main concern, with regard to flooding, in Surat was those residents on outlying properties. The SES and volunteers attempted to establish and maintain regular telephone contact with all residents on stations and farms in these areas throughout the flood. However there was no central contact list or register available, which meant that initiating the process was dependent on local knowledge of which properties may or may not be affected. . This process was hampered by going through a number of people to find out contact numbers for the residents in the outlying areas. Eventually when we did contact these properties sometimes we did not receive an answer, so we were un-sure whether they were away or in trouble. I suggest that in future a central register be kept by the council with up to date information on outlying residents contact details and their whereabouts, so that authorities can contact them in the time of crisis.

Key emergency service personnel on leave

13. I noticed that when the flood cut off Surat that principal members of the emergency services, who were involved in and familiar with the Maranoa

Regional Disaster Management Plan, were on leave and unable to return to the area due to the floods. It appeared that this was a co-incidence and not intended but key members of the disaster management system in both Roma and Surat were not available when they were needed most. I suggest that in future a cross agency leave planner for key members be devised so as to ensure that their local knowledge is not lost due to their absence.

Lack of maintenance of key infrastructure

14. During the flood crisis a community member raised a concern about the runway lights at the local airfield. This airfield is often used by the Royal Flying Doctor's service and was used during the flood crisis as means of delivering essential supplies. The concern was that the lights were not operational due to damage from mowing. The lights were checked and many were not operational. The local police officer and an electrician worked into the late hours of the night to fix them so aircraft to land. I suggest that these systems should be regularly checked and maintained to avoid this situation occurring again.

Denial of local knowledge/resources

15. Another area of concern was the treatment of community members providing assistance during the declared emergency period. In Surat there is a long history of residents with boats and good local knowledge assisting friends in the area by getting supplies to them or checking their stock or buildings if they are absent. This was occurring on a regular basis during the floods. At one stage the Water Police were called in (by the Roma SES) and the locals, as mentioned, were questioned by police concerning their activities. This action created a great deal of anger towards the 'authorities' and potentially the loss of a valuable local resource.
16. I think consideration should be given to accepting that individuals will continue to help each other during problem times and rather than trying to prevent it we should be finding a process that ensures we are all informed about what is going on and bringing this local knowledge under the response umbrella. This could be

solved by having a permanent local police liaison deal with the issue or have a simple sign out and return form for people visiting the properties.

17. In a similar vein, the private use of helicopters for supply or rescue work became difficult during the emergency because all fuel was reserved for emergency services. This became, I believe, counter-productive at time. e.g On one occasion the owners of Morocco station evacuated the manager and his wife (the house went completely underwater) to St George. The station owners were then denied fuel, to return to the property to continue their damage mitigation preparations. I think they managed to get fuel elsewhere, but the evacuation needed to be completed and independent evacuation, when possible, would save resources for where they are really needed. I suggest that these resources come under the one umbrella and be utilised accordingly.
18. Overall the agencies worked well together and an efficient response was achieved to the floods. I think that in future though, better preparation is needed to assist in the response effort and the in-incorporation of local knowledge and resources under the disaster management system.

W.NEWMAN

Justices Act 1886	
I acknowledge by virtue of section 110A(5)(c)(ii) of the Justices Act 1886 that:	
(1)	This written statement by me dated 18/04/2011 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 6 is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and
(2)	I make this statement knowing that, if it were admitted as evidence, I may be liable to prosecution for stating in it anything that I know is false.
<div style="text-align: right;">.....Signature</div>	
Signed at <u>Sydney</u> this <u>19th</u> day of <u>April</u> 2011.	