



QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE

STATEMENT OF WITNESS



Occurrence #: \_\_\_\_\_

Statement no: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Statement of

Name of witness: KEMPTON, Mark McKnight

Date of birth: [redacted] Age: [redacted] Occupation: Senior Pilot

Police officer taking statement

Name: MURRAY, Kenneth William Gregory

Rank: Detective Sergeant Reg. no.: 9889

Region/Command/Division: SCOC Station: Taskforce Galaxy

Statement:

**Archerfield**

**Taskforce Galaxy**

**Mark McKnight KEMPTON states:**

1. I am a 52 year old male who lives at [redacted]
2. I am employed by Emergency Management Queensland Helicopter Rescue (EMQHR).
3. I hold the position of Senior Helicopter Captain (pilot) and have worked at the EMQHR Archerfield base situated on Wirraway Avenue Archerfield for 11 years.
4. My role as senior pilot encompasses the management of the Brisbane Base Air Unit located at the Archerfield airport. I am involved with the facilitation of training crews for operational taskings.
5. For this purpose I hold a Civil Aviation Safety Authority CASA grade one Helicopter Instructor rating and I am an approved CASA CAR217 check and training pilot for EMQ.

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6. I am also an independent Approved Test Officer (ATO) which allows me to conduct command instrument rating tests and other qualification tests on behalf of CASA.
7. I hold an Air transport Pilots Licence (*Helicopters*) and a commercial pilot airplane (*fixed wing*).
8. I have been a qualified pilot for 25 years.
9. I hold a command instrument rating in Helicopters for use in instrument meteorological conditions (*bad weather*).
10. The current aircraft available to the unit is the Agusta Westland 139 Helicopter.
11. It is multi engine IFR (*instrument rated*) aircraft and state of the art for our emergency use.
12. At anytime the Archerfield base has one operational aircraft for emergency use.
13. When in flight the crew consists of myself as pilot, an air crew officer (ACO) and Rescue Crew Officer (RCO).
14. I recall Monday the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2011.
15. I was working day shift as the operational duty pilot in "Rescue 500".
16. The crew consisted of myself as pilot, Daren PARSONS and Air Crew Officer (ACO), Mark TURNER as Rescue Crew Officer (RCO) Iilya SELMES Intensive Care Paramedic (ICP) and Doctor Glenn RYAN.
17. At approximately 1600 hours the aircraft had just returned from Kilcoy and was being refuelled when an urgent call came in from the Queensland Police Service.
18. The call received was from Police Communications Centre (PCC) asking for urgent assistance in the Grantham area due to a critical flooding incident unfolding. The actual call was received by crewman Daren Parsons'.
19. I accepted the task and informed the crew.
20. After flight planning and reconfiguring the aircraft for winch ops we departed for Grantham at 1628 hrs. We flew below the cloud base and around the active weather and arrived overhead Grantham at approximately 1648 hrs.
21. On arrival at Grantham we were shocked at the scene unfolding before us. There was water all over the ground as far as the eye could see. This water was brown and full of items and was travelling at a great rate of knots. In amongst all this were floating debris, like water tanks, shipping containers, pieces of buildings,

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cars, trucks, an aeroplane and boats that were being smashed and pushed along by the raging torrent.

22. What was most shocking to the crew was the amount of people sitting up on rooftops of houses completely surrounded by the torrent and totally trapped and cut off from anyone at this point. Many of the remnants of buildings could be seen and pieces were breaking off parts of structures still standing and being smashed up in the water.
23. We assessed the situation and decided that in order to not miss anyone trapped we needed to get people out of the water first if we saw anyone and then work our way from one end of town to the other and get as many people of the rooftops as we could to safety, before going back for more. With the wind blowing from the east we started at the western edge of town and worked our way from house to house.
24. After looking at the water it was impossible to see if anyone was in amongst the debris and we saw no one at this stage that required immediate assistance.
25. It was decided that we would commence winching operations of the people trapped on the roof tops. This winching operation which was to run over a two and a half hour period has all been recorded on a "Go Pro" camera that was being worn at the time by our ACO Daren Parsons and the footage has been provided to the police.
26. This winching operation was commenced with some people winched up and recovered until we were full of bodies in the back of the aircraft. I then looked for a suitable landing area out of the waters path and with high ground to land and off load the survivors and our Doctor to Triage the patients that needed attention.
27. I located a farm house that had someone driving a tractor across a paddock and it looked suitable to land in. I landed there and the farmer came over to render assistance. All the survivors were taken into the house and sheltered.
28. Many of the survivors had cuts and abrasions and were all soaking wet, some with little clothing. The Paramedic stayed on board at this stage as he could render assistance in the back with getting survivors into the aircraft and assisting to control people until we could land again. After a few trips the paramedic got off with the now growing group of survivors at the Helicopter Landing Site (HLS) Farm house to assist the Doctor to treat the patients.

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29. The winching process went on with groups of people being recovered from roof tops and others recovered from the water and trees hanging on to items to stay afloat until we found them and winch recovered.
30. Some survivors on rooftops actually pointed out people stuck in trees or in isolated spots which then drew our attention to them so we could rescue them. Many of these people would not have been winched as we could not see them from the air due to other obstructions. This was amazing to see with people trapped virtually saying don't worry about me, but get these other people first.
31. During one winch operation off one house roof survivors on the house top were pointing towards a small patch of land with some bushes on it to the north of the railway line. At first I could not see anything and then I noticed a person standing on the patch of ground. I was not sure if it was a man or woman. I positioned the aircraft and we proceeded to recover the person by winch rescue.
32. When landing back at the HLS ACO Parsons carried this female survivor who I now know to be Mrs KEEP. I saw Mrs KEEP and ACO Parsons' have a brief conversation. ACO Parsons' returned to the aircraft and told me that Mrs KEEP had told him she had just lost her child out of her arms in the flood waters.
33. As we moved from further location to location gathering more survivors' I was in communication with the pilot, Alex Wilson, of the channel 10 news helicopter that was filming the winch recovery we were undertaking. At this stage the weather was starting to deteriorate again and daylight was beginning to fade and our fuel was getting very low.
34. Due to the frantic nature of the winch operation and the extremely quick turnaround of each sortie I could not make a phone call and was out of radio range.
35. I asked Alex Wilson to make a phone call to our base where I knew we had another aircraft and crew that would be starting at approx 1800 hrs to see if they could activate early and proceed to Grantham to assist us with the winch operation.
36. He completed this and the second aircraft (Rescue 510) arrived at approximately 1800 hours.
37. I spoke with Peter ROW in "Rescue 510" and informed him to follow me to the farm HLS and land behind me.


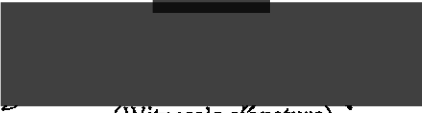
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38. This was facilitated and some winching equipment was exchanged between aircraft.
39. (Task no A1981) "Rescue 510" then commenced operations and we departed the scene at approximately 1815 hrs and returned to Archerfield.
40. There were still many people trapped on roof tops and it was extremely difficult to have to fly away and leave them to their fate. However the safety of the crew and aircraft was paramount.
41. At the completion of this mission I was informed that we had winched 28 people and one cat that had snuck onto a survivor at the last minute as they came off the roof and we did not know until the lady was inside the aircraft with the cat in her lap.
42. We left many other animals on rooftops as we informed survivors that we could not winch pets due to safety issues.
43. The whole operation had emotional extremes for the crew. Elation for the people we saved and sadness for the ones we could not save.
44. My crew did an excellent job under very difficult conditions and should be extremely proud of their achievements.
45. At base I spoke to other air crew that were located on site for Night Vision Goggle (NVG) training to ascertain if we could deploy "Rescue 500" back to Grantham and continue the operation. At that stage however it was dark and the weather had deteriorated to make visual flight impossible.
46. I debriefed my crew and after exhausting all other possibilities of getting an aircraft deployed back to Grantham to no avail I left the base with a view of getting some rest and returning the next day to depart in "Rescue 500" at first light.
47. The following day, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, I departed on "Recue 500" with a new crew of ACO Rod Morgan, RCO David Turnbull and ICP Jason Jones to track to Gatton to pick up Police and continue to the search for survivors in the Grantham area and attempt to get the police into Murphy's Creek where the town had also been devastated by flood inundation.
48. We departed Archerfield at 0510 hrs in party with Rescue 510 and were forced by bad weather to land at Gatton until conditions improved.


  
  
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49. We remained on the ground until 0703 hrs when the weather improved somewhat and then proceeded to track to Murphy's Creek and view other flooded areas along the way.
50. We made our way under low cloud and heavy rain up to the town of Murphy's Creek and saw the extensive damage that was caused by flood waters in relation to roads, building and surrounds. All the creeks and rivers were still flowing very fast and hard by the time we landed on the cricket oval at Murphy's Creek. All the landing areas were extremely soft and most occasions on landing on both days of flood operations the wheel would sink up to the axels and I generally kept in some collective to keep the weight of the aircraft off the ground while people embarked/disembarked the helicopter.
51. After leaving the police at Murphy's creek we tracked out on other tasks that were passed to us via "Rescue 510" and the QPS in the area.
52. We had to locate a man reportedly trapped on a roof at Tent Hill and were given a street address. As we had no workable maps due to water coverage on the ground, our ACO Rod Morgan used his Mobile phone, Apple I phone to connect to Google maps and we placed the street address given into the phone and used it to track the helicopter to tent Hill. On arrival we found no one in distress.
53. Over the next hour or so we searched the area looking for the missing man and did not locate him. We looked at many properties cut off by flood water and cut roads and many people came out of houses and signalled to us that they were OK.
54. On one property near the Tent Hill (South Grantham) area we landed after a local signalled us with a torch and hand gestures to land. He was extremely concerned for his brother and father at a neighbouring property up the valley and thought they were washed away by the creek that ran next to the farm house. We offered to fly him to the property only 5 minutes away by air and we located the property and the father and brother came out to signal they were OK. He was very relieved and we returned him to his property and continued our mission.
55. As the morning progressed we were getting low on fuel and needed to refuel and to change pilots and crew as we were feeling slightly fatigued at this stage.

  
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56. I had worked the rescue mission the day before and the crew Morgan and Turnbull were the night shift crew. We had another crew relocate from Archerfield by car to Amberley where we arranged to change over.

57. As we progressed from the Grantham area we tracked towards Amberley and as we did this the weather closed in and made flying VFR (Visual Flying) very difficult. There were many thunderstorm cells along our flight path with sheet lightning and bolt lightning going off all around us.


58. I looked for an area to land the helicopter as we progressed towards Amberley, but all the high ground was covered in cloud and the low ground was awash with torrents of water. Even part of the roads had drains that were overflowing and making a landing in these areas very dangerous in as much as the aircraft might have been washed away. Conditions continued to worsen with visibility down to 500 meters and cloud layers that looked like they were on the tree tops. At this point I saw an opening on the dual lane Warrego Highway and in between groups of vehicles I pulled a hover and descended to land on the left hand lane of the westbound lanes just east of the Walloon road turnoff. We then had to wait for the weather to clear. I spoke to Amberley approach and informed them of where we were as we were inside controlled airspace and they were happy to keep my clearance running based on phone calls.


59. At Approximately 0950 hrs. after a phone call with Amberley approach, I got airborne again in a last attempt to get to Amberley airfield. They reported improved weather at the field.


60. As I became airborne at the Warrego high way I realised we would have gone straight back into cloud at tree top height and so aborted the takeoff and landed back on the highway. I informed ATC and shutdown again.

61. At this stage my wife called me on my mobile phone and said that she had been trying to get hold of me and that rain water and storm water was pouring into our house and that the neighbour said were going to flood very soon.

62. I contacted our standby crew who had relocated to Amberley and they were trying to organise a Military fuel tanker to get fuel to us but to no avail. Red tape seem to be the hold up with the reply that we had to send a request to Canberra and that it might take 4 hours to get a reply.

  
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- 63. At this stage out of frustration, we organised for EMQ Engineers to use personal vehicles to bring drums of fuel out to the aircraft which they did.
- 64. I also informed the EMQ standby air Crew (Amberley) to drive to us, as I was feeling fatigued and that I needed to get home urgently to help my wife evacuate out of the house with our 2 children. The standby crew arrived during the refuel process on the Warrego Highway.
- 65. I handed the aircraft over to the new pilot (Phillip HEAD) and left to return to work and then home.
- 66. My house was flooded later that day and night and we had evacuated everyone and we were safe.
- 67. These 2 days of flight operations have been the most challenging and difficult for me in all my 26 years of aviation. I feel very proud of all my crew that I flew with over the 2 day period and have reviewed many of my actions and decisions taken on those flights to ensure that if I am challenged with this type of scenario gain I make all the right decisions. I feel proud of my achievements as the Captain on the flights.
- 68. Points I have addressed due to this incident from the mission include:
- 69. We could have remained overhead with more fuel if the aircraft was given the 6800 kilogram upgrade rather than the standard 6400 kilogram airframe.
- 70. We needed to have some form of moving map display to locate specific addresses as the police communications were giving us some street names to fly too and all the streets were completely covered with water rendering paper maps useless.
- 71. The winch rescue strop proved to be unsuitable for some survivors due to the body size and range.
- 72. The following day on tasking to Murphy Creek, Grantham, and Helidon was held up while arguments were undertaken with Queensland Health Clinical Co-ordination Centre (QCC) in relation to Inter-hospital medical transfers between flight crew and QCC coordinators versus we are looking for people who are in grave and imminent danger.
- 73. QCC were informed whilst the operation was tasked and at the completion of the operation, but coordinators were not aware of where exactly the Doctor and ICP

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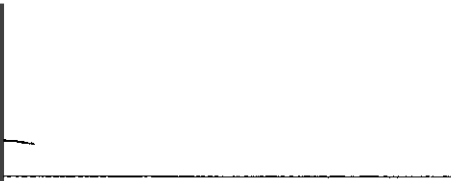



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were left and what they were doing overnight on the first night of Grantham operation.

74. We attempted to get a military fuel tanker from Amberley to drive to the Warrego highway to refuel the helicopter after I landed on the road. This proved to be an impossible task due to the inability for anyone in the military to approve such an operation (we were 4.5 nautical miles from the Amberley Airfield at this time).
75. The AW 139 was absolutely fantastic in all aspects of this operation and I would not have wanted to be in any other helicopter that I have flown over the years except the AW 139. The Aircraft had power to spare and if we had to do the same operation in the older less powerful Bell 412 we would not have been able to rescue as many people in the time frame that we did in the AW 139. The Bell 412 power limits would mean much of the early winch operation in the 5 minute power takeoff band. With the available AW 139 power I was rarely in the 5 minute limit during all the winch ops with high humidity and up to 11 people on board which included the crew of 5 and 6 survivors. The power in the AW 139 made the difference in this type of operation and was critical to its success.
76. The second aircraft that came down from Cairns had no operational gear in it and this meant when they arrived on the scene they had to rendezvous with us to get certain items before winch operations could commence.
77. The Traffic Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) was invaluable in helping us locate other aircraft during the operations in poor weather as many helicopters were flying around and not communicating with us and no one seemed to know what they were doing out there and who they were working for. The tasking control seemed to be non-existent between various organisations.
78. The aircraft would benefit greatly with the fitment of a EWGPS-Early warning ground proximity system as due to very bad weather I often had to fly extremely low and this would assist pilots in avoiding terrain i.e. stop them from flying into the ground.

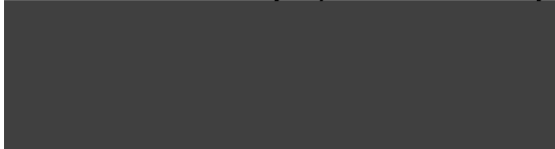
  
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79. This is a true and accurate summary of my involvement in this matter.



**Mark McKnight KEMPTON**

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 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 11 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.



Signature

Signed at ..Archerfield this..17th...day of February, 2011



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