

## **Private Submission to Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry**

### **Specific Shortcomings of QPF**

Natural Disasters such the floods that devastated Murphys Creek, Gatton, Helidon and Toowoomba on 10 January 2011 are unavoidable, however, their impact could be mitigated by a properly coordinated response.

**The Queensland Police Force (QPF) was not and is not geared nor has it a culture of providing such a response, specifically, an Aerial Command & Control Capability, albeit that they have administrative air assets on the ground and were not deployed in the disaster.**

The earliest response to any disaster is aerial assets, either fixed wing and/or rotary aircraft. The aerial response to the flood devastation was uncoordinated, lacked unity of command and was left to pilots to determine their own priorities. Furthermore, the over response had the capacity to create another disaster with such intensity of convergence of air assets.

There was no one Police Officer in charge of the airspace over the disaster scene. This task was by default left to the collective action of several pilots whose main task in the event of an incident is the safety of their aircraft and occupants, not the victims.

I would not be making this statement had I not witnessed the lack of priority displayed by the current Commissioner of Police at a recent meeting with both he and the current Minister of Police, Neil Roberts on 13 March 2011. Therein, the Commissioner advised that given any extra funding for aviation the Commissioner's priority was for Prisoner Transfer. I questioned the Commissioner and he advised inter alia, "...that you wouldn't rank Aerial Command & Control over Prisoner Transfer if you lived in Charleville". Obviously, a problem in clearing prisoners out of over crowded cells. To which I replied, "since when has Charleville dictated priorities to Queensland".

The Commissioner followed up by offering to give me an introduction to his Chief Pilot. I declined, outlining that if I wasn't able to convince him of the merits of integrated Aerial Command & Control, that it was pointless starting lower within his organization.

The overriding point is, that Prisoner Transfer could be effectively subcontracted out to a civilian operator, Aerial Command & Control cannot. It needs to be run from within the QPF and be the first asset deployed to assess and respond. Further, it needs to be boosted by off the shelf technology such as High Definition Imagery, Infra Red capability and capable of live downloads to Police HQ and Police Local Disaster Scene/Tactical HQ. Further processing of the imagery will assist greatly the follow up response. The same asset could be used in Bush Fire and Tsunami surveillance.

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28/4/2011

**How much of this currently affordable and available technology was helping the victims of the floods in SE Queensland?**

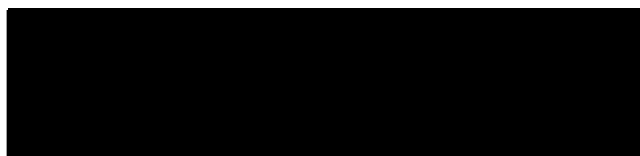
Sadly, none.

**Why?** The QPF and senior leadership do not acknowledge the need for Aerial Command & Control, not only in a disaster response situation but in police work in general eg high speed car chases, siege situations, terrorist operations, armed robbery, etc.

Quite clearly, an effective Aerial Command & Control Capability has the capacity to save lives, both victims and Police Officer lives. It is totally unacceptable that a sophisticated Police Force has rejected such a 'weapon' in lieu of seeking to improve Prisoner Transfers. Unfortunately, however, it is far more demanding a task that requires extensive selection/training than just throwing the 'nearest' Police Officer into the 'nearest' available aircraft and have that Officer command a disaster scene.

As the Public, and more so, the victims, we need to change the QPF's attitude and thinking.

**The message from this inquiry should be very clear to the QPF. Start developing an effective first line response to any disaster situation that may occur. That response needs to be an in-house Integrated Aerial Command & Control response because it is the quickest and most effective method of gauging the level of response required. It will also ensure that it is a measured response that does not lead to an over response.**



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28/4/2011

27 April 2011

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**Note:** The author is the Managing Director and owner of Churchill Abattoir, Ipswich, a private pilot and a previously serving Major in the Australian Army. He heads a company specializing in airborne surveillance based in Toowoomba. He is graduate from the Royal Military College and holds a MBA from the University of Queensland.