

## Statement of Gordana Petroccitto

I, **Gordana Petroccitto**, Program Officer, Disaster Response and Recovery Office, c/- Brisbane City Council, 266 George St, Brisbane, in the State of Queensland, state on oath as follows:

1. Attachment "GP-1" is a copy of a notice from the Commissioner of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry (**Commission**) dated 21 April 2011 requiring me to provide a statement to the Commission (**Notice**). This statement is provided in response to the Notice.
2. For the purposes of preparing this statement, I have:
  - (a) extracted and reviewed the emails from my Council email account to and from Look Here Pty Ltd trading as The Early Warning Network (**EWN**);
  - (b) reviewed the contractual documentation in place between Council and EWN; and
  - (c) reviewed the relevant Early Warning Alert Service alerts issued on the dates and times referred to in the Notice.
3. The information set out below represents my best recollection of events from my own knowledge and with the benefit of having reviewed the documents attached to this statement.

### Role

4. I have been working for Brisbane City Council (**Council**) for about 11 years and my current role is Program Officer in Council's Disaster Response and Recovery Office. I have been in this role for approximately 3 years.
5. Prior to my current role, my roles within Council were as follows:
  - (a) Assistant to the Business Development Manager of Brisbane Certification Group for a short period of time; and
  - (b) Program Officer and Project Manager of various projects within the Water Resources and Sustainability area of Council.
6. The Disaster Response and Recovery Office consists of the following three different branches:
  - (a) Flood Review and Recovery;
  - (b) Disaster Management and Operations; and

  
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(c) Disaster Recovery.

7. My role predominantly involves project management and in particular, I work on the Lord Mayor's Taskforce on Suburban Flooding (LMTSF) Project. Although my role is within the Flood Review Board branch, as a project officer, a lot of my work is within the Disaster Operations branch. My role is administrative and project management. I do not have qualifications in hydrology or flood mapping, though I have a general understanding of the information which the Early Warning Alert Service employs.

**1. How the Early Warning Alert Service operates in Council's Local Government Area, particularly the interrelationship between EWN and Council.**

*Background to the arrangements between EWN and Council*

8. The implementation of a flood advice alert service had been considered as a result of the LMTSF Report which was published in August 2005. The LMTSF Report is Attachment 3 to the Initial Submission of Council dated 11 March 2011 (**Initial Submission**). Action No. 6 of the LMTSF Report is for Council to "*Investigate the establishment of local flood advice, forecasting and warning systems*".
9. In about 2009, Council officers, including me had been investigating the various warning services that were available. In about August of 2009 Council entered into discussions with EWN.
10. EWN operates an early warning network system where residents can register to receive alerts about severe weather warnings that may impact on their area.
11. In December 2009, Council and EWN entered into a Sponsorship and Services Agreement for the provision of an Early Warning Alert Service (**EWAS**) by EWN for a 12 month trial period from 20 November 2009 to 29 November 2010. Attachment "**GP-2**" is a copy of the Sponsorship and Services Agreement between Council and EWN.
12. Under the Sponsorship and Services Agreement, EWN agreed to offer residents within Council's Local Government Area (**Brisbane Residents**) the opportunity to register to receive severe weather alert messages which were co-branded with EWN and Council's corporate logos. Although Council contributed to EWN's costs of providing the service, the service was (and still is) provided to Brisbane Residents free of charge.

  
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13. The EWAS provided under the Sponsorship and Services Agreement related to severe weather events only and the alerts contained only Bureau of Meteorology (**BoM**) data for severe weather events impacting directly on Brisbane. It did not, and does not, provide information about a major Brisbane River flood.
14. However, its scope was extended in December 2009. In response to concerns raised by some residents who were prone to creek flooding during general discussions with Council, Council and EWN also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (**MOU**) for the provision of the EWAS relating to creek flooding. Members of the Boondall community agreed to participate in the free pilot of the EWAS for creek flooding in the Boondall catchment area (**Pilot**). Attachment "**GP-3**" is a copy of the MOU.
15. The Pilot was initially for a 3 month trial period from 10 December 2009 to 31 March 2010 but was extended to 31 April 2010 as there were no creek floods during the initial period. The Pilot was intended to test the suitability of a creek flooding EWAS (based on the Council's Floodwise system) before making the service available to the wider flood prone communities in Brisbane.
16. Council determined that the Pilot was a success and a full procurement process was undertaken by Council in late 2010 to seek competitive products, services and pricing. In order to provide a continued EWAS to registered participants during this procurement period, my understanding is that both the Sponsorship and Services Agreement and the MOU were extended up to 17 June 2011.
17. After calling for tenders, on 1 February 2011, Council and EWN entered into a Contract for the Provision of an Early Warning Alert Service Contract No. J110029-2010/11 (**EWAS Contract**) for both severe weather warnings and creek flooding. Attachment "**GP-4**" is a copy of the EWAS Contract. The EWAS Contract is for an initial period from 1 February 2011 to 31 January 2013 with the option to extend for three further periods of one year each, not exceeding a maximum term of five years from 1 February 2011.

*Registered Participants*

18. Council promoted the EWAS as part of its summer storm season campaigns. EWAS has been advertised by Council in its community service announcements, media releases, radio advertising, local newspaper advertising, brochures at Council's regional business centres and in Council's "Living in Brisbane" mail-outs. During the summer storm season, Council's website also contains an advertisement in relation to EWAS on its homepage. Council's budget

  
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for advertising the 2010/2011 Summer Storm Season Campaign including the EWAS during the 2010/2011 summer storm season was approximately \$200,000.

19. Immediately prior to the January 2011 flood event:

- (a) approximately 19,000 households (out of approximately 400,000 households in the Brisbane local government area) had registered for the EWAS severe weather alerts; and
- (b) approximately 350 households had registered for the EWAS creek flooding alerts. The EWAS creek flooding alerts have been extended to cover Boondall, Rocklea, Hemmant and East Brisbane and another six creek flood-prone areas are currently being investigated with a view to being added to the EWAS.

20. Following the January 2011 flood:

- (a) approximately 46,000 households are now registered for the EWAS severe weather alerts; and
- (b) approximately 770 households are now registered for the EWAS creek flooding alerts.

*How the EWAS operates*

- 21. EWAS is a free service to Brisbane Residents and is intended to provide subscribers with early warning of severe weather events and potential creek flood events that may impact on their residential address. In order to access the EWAS, due to privacy issues, Brisbane Residents must register to receive the alerts. Residents can register by completing an online form or by contacting Council's Contact Centre to receive a form by post. Registrants can elect to receive the alerts by SMS to their mobile phones or pagers, by landline (as a voice message) or by email.
- 22. EWAS is a system for Council to provide registered Brisbane Residents relevant information from the BoM by a method of communication that each Brisbane Resident has identified as being most effective to them. Although it is possible for those Residents to obtain that information from, for example, the BoM website, this may not be possible for those without access to the internet.
- 23. EWAS was just one method used by Council to communicate warnings to Brisbane Residents during the January 2011 flood. Given EWAS is only provided to those who register, it is not

  
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designed to be a primary method of communication for Council during an event. As set out at in paragraphs 5.7 and 6.2 of the Initial Submission, I am aware that the EWAS is just one of a suite of methods used by Council to communicate warnings to Brisbane Residents which include:

- (i) Community Service Announcements;
- (ii) Media Releases;
- (iii) Facebook posts;
- (iv) Tweets;
- (v) Council's website; and
- (vi) Flyers, Brochures and letters.

24. As noted above, there are two separate early warning alert services available to Brisbane Residents:

- (a) Severe weather EWAS which relates to severe weather events such as storm, hail, damaging winds, flash flooding, tsunami, cyclone and bushfire; and
- (b) Creek flooding EWAS which relates to creek flooding in certain creek flood-prone areas in Brisbane.

25. In relation to the severe weather EWAS, I understand that EWN monitors severe weather warnings and forecasts issued by the BoM 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When BoM issues a severe weather warning, EWN evaluates this information and, based on EWN's own calculations, EWN determines what areas of Brisbane could potentially be impacted by the severe weather and issues the EWAS alert to those residents who have registered as being resident in the potentially affected area.

26. In relation to the creek flooding EWAS, I understand that notifications sent out through EWAS are derived from Council's Floodwise system. As I understand it, Floodwise is a system which sends out notifications for flooding in local creeks. As I have said, EWAS is not a system which is designed to provide alerts for major Brisbane River flooding. Floodwise works by issuing a notification that pre-determined trigger levels have been reached for flood heights at various identified spots and areas around local creeks. Floodwise sends a message to EWN by email and my understanding is that EWN verifies the information in relation to potential creek

  
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flooding by using their own systems and processes and, if necessary, communicating with Council's Disaster Management Duty Officer. EWN then issues the alert to residents in the relevant area.

27. I understand the EWAS may also be used in some other local government areas (such as Townsville).
28. I am also aware that the State of Queensland acting through Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) has a separate and substantial "Early Warning System" which is not dependent on registration by users and can be distributed (through Telstra) to relevant individuals across the State. Attachment "GP-5" is a copy of a Memorandum of Understanding between Council and EMQ regarding their respective "Early Warning Systems".
29. It has been drawn to my attention that a number of Brisbane Residents have commented in submissions to the Commission that the EWAS alerts were of no assistance in dealing with the Brisbane River flood in January 2011. As I have explained, however, the system was not designed to be, and was not, a system for warnings or information about a major river flood. Most Brisbane Residents who signed up to EWAS receive severe weather alerts. At the time that a Brisbane Resident signs up to the EWAS system, it is my understanding that the Resident is provided with the EWAS Brisbane Subscriber Terms and Conditions which makes clear the scope of the EWAS. A copy of the Brisbane Subscriber Terms and Conditions appears at BCC.052.0032 of the Sponsorship and Services Agreement at attachment "GP-2" of this statement.

**2. The extent of Council's input (if any) into the timing, content and distribution of the alerts provided by Early Warning Alert Service, with particular reference to alerts referred to in the Notice**

30. The content of EWAS severe weather alerts are generally based on the relevant BoM severe weather warning. For severe weather EWAS, the BoM warning and forecasts are the trigger for the EWN to produce an alert and, in most cases, the EWAS simply repeats the BoM information warning or forecast.
31. In the case of creek flooding events, the EWAS alert content is based on the content of the Floodwise alert pre-determined by Council.
32. I understand that EWAS alerts are sent by EWN as soon as possible after a BoM / Floodwise warning and usually within about 5 minutes of the BoM / Floodwise warning.



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33. EWN uses its own systems to determine what areas of Brisbane are likely to be impacted by the severe weather event and issues the EWAS alert to residents in those areas that are likely to be impacted who have registered to receive the EWAS alerts.
34. As set out in paragraph 23 above, Council has a variety of methods it adopts to communicate warnings. During the course of the association with EWN, it was also identified that extreme cases of emergencies or unidentified events may arise and therefore Council may wish to alert residents of issues other than severe weather or creek flooding, for example, king tides. Therefore, Council also has the ability to send Council-generated messages and alerts via EWAS as required.
35. Attachment "GP-6" contains copies of the EWAS email alerts referred to in the Notice. Details of the SMS and landline alerts on these dates, and my recollection in relation to each of these alerts, is set out below.

*Wednesday 5 January 2011*

36. The EWAS alert which appears at **BCC.052.0076** of attachment "GP-6" was issued by EWN at 10.55am on Wednesday 5 January 2011 following the issue of a BoM severe weather warning. Council did not have an input into the content of this alert.
37. The content of the SMS alert was as follows:
- "QLD Severe Weather: Heavy Rain and Localised Flash Flooding. All of Brisbane at risk from later today, Thursday and into Friday. BCC ewn.com.au"*
38. The content of the landline voice message was as follows:
- "This is an important message from the Early Warning Network and Brisbane City Council. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued a Severe Weather Warning for heavy rain and localised flash flooding in your area. This warning is in effect for today, Thursday and into Friday. Repeating, this is an important message from the Early Warning Network and Brisbane City Council. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued a severe weather warning for heavy rain and localised flash flooding in your area. This warning is in effect for today, Thursday and into Friday."*
39. I am informed by EWN that this alert was sent to registered residents as follows:
- (a) Email: 19,147 registered users;

  
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- (b) SMS: 18,428 registered users; and
- (c) Landline voice messages: 965 registered users.

*Saturday 8 January 2011*

40. The EWAS alert which appears at **BCC.052.0077** of attachment "**GP-6**" was issued by EWN at 11.00am on Saturday 8 January 2011 following the issue of a BoM severe weather warning. Council did not have an input into the content of this alert.

41. The content of the SMS alert was as follows:

*"QLD Severe Weather: Heavy Rain and Localised Flash Flooding. All of Brisbane at risk from later today, Sunday, Monday and into Tuesday. BCC ewn.com.au"*

42. The content of the landline voice message was as follows:

*"This is an important message from the Early Warning Network and Brisbane City Council. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued a Severe Weather Warning for heavy rain and possible flooding starting later Saturday and continuing over the next few days. Repeating, this is an important message from the Early Warning Network and Brisbane City Council. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued a Severe Weather Warning for heavy rain and possible flooding starting later Saturday and continuing over the next few days."*

43. I am informed by EWN that this alert was sent to registered residents as follows:

- (a) Email: 19,395 registered users;
- (b) SMS: 18,688 registered users; and
- (c) Landline voice messages: 967 registered users.

*Sunday 9 January 2011 / Monday 10 January 2011*

44. It is my understanding that the alert of 9 January 2011 at 11.04am referred to in the Notice is in fact a reference to the EWAS alert which appears at **BCC.052.0078** of attachment "**GP-6**". This alert was issued by EWN at 12.04am on Monday 10 January 2011.

45. In relation to this warning, I recall that Kerry Plowright of EWN telephoned me and asked whether Council would like EWN to send out another alert even though a similar warning was sent the day before. I then discussed this with Chris Lavin, the Acting Disaster Operations Manager, and we instructed EWN to go ahead with the alert. I recall that Council requested



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that EWN include a recommendation that residents contact Council for available sandbag locations.

46. The content of the SMS alert was as follows:

*"BoM advises heavy rain expected starting early hrs of morning, local flooding possible. For available sandbag locations contact BCC 3403 8888."*

47. The content of the landline voice message was as follows:

*"The Bureau of Meteorology advises heavy rain expected starting early hours of morning, local flooding possible. For available sandbag locations contact Council on 3403 8888. Repeating, the Bureau of Meteorology advises heavy rain expected starting early hours of morning, local flooding possible. For available sandbag locations contact Council on 3403 8888."*

48. I am informed by EWN that this alert was sent to registered residents as follows:

- (a) Email: 19,472 registered users;
- (b) SMS: 18,767 registered users; and
- (c) Landline voice messages: 965 registered users.

49. This alert was also sent to residents who had registered for creek flooding EWAS alerts as follows:

- (a) Email: 356 registered users;
- (b) SMS: 458 registered users; and
- (c) Landline voice messages: 157 registered users.

*Tuesday 11 January 2011*

50. The EWAS alert which appears at **BCC.052.0079** of attachment "**GP-6**" was issued by EWN at 8.00am on Tuesday 11 January 2011.

51. Due to the impending events, I recall that email and telephone conversations occurred between myself and EWN regarding the wording of the SMS alert. Attachment "**GP-7**" is a copy of the email exchange on 11 January 2011 between myself and Michael Bath of EWN in relation to the content of the SMS alert.

  
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52. I understand that the email alert and landline voice message wording was based on the BoM alert and Council did not have an input into the content of these messages.

53. The content of the SMS alert was as follows:

*"QLD Emergency Flash Flood Warning. Very heavy rainfall is spreading S-SW into the greater Brisbane area. Flash flooding is likely in many areas. BCC ewn.com.au"*

54. The content of the landline voice message was as follows:

*"This is an important message from the Early Warning Network and Brisbane City Council. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued a Severe Weather Warning for heavy rain and localised flash flooding in your area. Repeating, this is an important message from the Early Warning Network and Brisbane City Council. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued a severe weather warning for heavy rain and localised flash flooding in your area."*

55. I am informed by EWN that this alert was sent to registered residents as follows:

- (a) Email: 19,560 registered users;
- (b) SMS: 19,214 registered users; and
- (c) Landline voice messages: 969 registered users.

56. Attachment "GP-8" is an extract of an email chain with an email from EWN's Kerry Plowright to me on 20 January 2011 which sets out the text of all SMS messages sent as part of the EWAS from 3 to 18 January 2011.

**3. Any problems or limitations encountered in the operation of the Early Warning Alert System in Council's Local Government Area during the period 5 January 2011 to 11 January 2011**

57. As stated in paragraph 21 above, the EWAS is available to registered users only. Neither Council nor the EWN has the ability to deliver EWAS to Brisbane Residents who do not subscribe to the service.

58. To my knowledge, there were no specific problems or limitations encountered in the operation of EWN's warning system during the period 5 January 2011 to 11 January 2011. However, as I have explained, the EWAS was not intended to, and did not, provide information about major river flooding. While EWAS would not have been much assistance in respect of the Brisbane River flood event, severe storms and flash floods can also cause damage and EWAS is directed to those kinds of events.

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I make this statement conscientiously believing the same to be true, and by virtue of the provisions of the Oaths Act 1867 (Qld).

**Dated** 3 May 2011

**Signed and declared** by Gordana Petroccitto at  
Brisbane in the State of Queensland  
this *3rd* day of *may* 2011  
Before me:



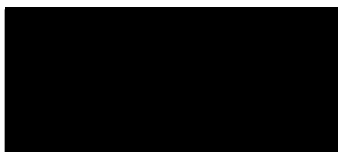
Signature of person before whom the declaration is made



Signature of declarant

*Tanya Janfada Solicitor*

Full name and qualification of person before whom the declaration is made



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