

Submission:

I wish to address item d) “ the measures to manage the supply of essential services such as power, water and communications during the 2010/2011 flood events,” in the Commission’s terms of reference. This submission can be fully published on the Inquiry website.

In my opinion Energex had completely forgotten the lessons learned in the 1974 flood when it was called SEQEB and they were totally unprepared for the 2011 flood. This made the misery of the flood in 2011 worse by needlessly disconnecting power to consumers not affected by flood.

I lived through the 1974 flood in my home to this day, at Graceville, well above flood level. In 1974, with my house full of flood refugees, I never lost power and hence we (my wife and I) were able to supply food, shelter and comfort to flooded relatives.

On Monday of the flood week, remembering the 1974 panic buying of perishable food in shops and supermarkets, we bought at least a week’s supply of perishables, including frozen items.

Judging by the crowded supermarket we were not the only ones stocking up. I had also taken the precaution of tanking up my car on the previous Sunday. I clearly remembered the panic petrol buying in 1974. At no stage did I or my wife see or hear any warnings on TV or Radio not to buy perishables as Energex would cut power off, in advance, in flood affected areas.

We were absolutely horrified when about 10.00am on the Wednesday of the flood week our power was cut off. We saw or heard no public warnings, nothing. In disaster situations the loss of power is above all else a threat to one of the essentials of survival- food supply. Even worse supermarkets may have restocked with fresh food etc and all those like us with stocked fridges, all that food in danger of being dumped.

I was extremely angry at this and I wanted to lodge, a most forceful protest to someone in authority. When I couldn’t find any senior Energex manager number to ring I rang the Premier’s office and some young bloke answered. After giving him my name and address I said I wanted this recorded as a strong protest at this loss of power and it’s consequences. To my amazement he started defending the loss of power in terms of conventional Occupational Health and Safety. The fact that there was a flood emergency and threat to food supply was simply irrelevant. Protection against electrocution was the highest priority no matter what. I do not know whether this person was acting on his own initiative or whether someone in authority had decided on this policy in advance.

He had no answer as to why in 1974 I never lost power and as far anyone knows of the then 14 deaths the vast majority were due to drowning.

Fortunately, and unexpectedly for us, power was restored about midnight that night with our perishables still edible.

The most frustrating part was the absence of any communication or advice from Energex to us and all the, flood unaffected, shops near us. They were all struggling with candle or torch light in selling what was still saleable and I believe some did not have power restored till a week later.

The worst was no advice and no guidance from Energex on what was going on. Petrol stations also had their power disconnected for many days and badly needed petrol became unavailable to motorists with empty tanks.

As an outsider I have little detailed knowledge on how the Energex domestic power distribution network is designed. However from public comments in the media and personal observation on where domestic supply transformers are pole mounted it appears to be structured around discrete but interconnected distribution areas of several hundred, maybe more, domestic consumers.

So if a street with say twenty houses is flooded Energex disconnects power to a whole distribution area.

So for every flooded house there maybe twenty or a hundred or who knows how many flood unaffected consumers being punished for the few flooded ones. This is hardly fair and equitable.

Now that accurate data is available on where flood affected streets are, Energex must modify their power distribution systems to enable the automatic disconnection of flooded consumers only.

And above all else keep consumers informed. I can still remember the poor owner of the Foodworks store in Graceville struggling to keep going without power with torches for I believe maybe a week and nobody from Energex bothering to tell the owner what was going on.

think that was disgusting and uncaring, if not negligent.

In conclusion my submission is made, in the hope, that for the next big Brisbane flood Energex will be better prepared. There should be automatic power disconnection of flood affected consumers only. In addition, above all else, keep consumers fully informed, at least via Radio and TV, on how their power availability is being managed in a disaster scenario.