

Submission to the Queensland Flood Commission of Inquiry

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Occupation: Business Owner/I.T. Technician and Consultant

Community Role: Deputy Chairperson, Somerset Region Business Alliance

1/ Preamble:

Since March 2000, I have lived at [REDACTED] Lockyer View Rd in Wivenhoe Pocket, which is located on a hill just 2.2 km to the South-East of Wivenhoe Dam Flood Gates and 1.2 km to the east of where Lockyer Creek enters the Brisbane River at a point just 2.4 km below the Wivenhoe Dam wall.

Wivenhoe Pocket is an area of farmland enclosed in a pocket shaped meander of the Brisbane River as it travels from the Wivenhoe Dam to the outskirts of Lowood and then back towards Fernvale.

During the January 2011 flood, Wivenhoe Pocket suffered almost complete inundation when the flood release from Wivenhoe Dam combined with the flash flood water that was entering the Brisbane River from Lockyer Creek.

By virtue of its elevation and also being the site of the Wivenhoe Pocket Rural Fire Brigade shed, Lockyer View Rd became the community evacuation and support centre for residents of Wivenhoe Pocket and Splityard Creek. At one point our hill was almost completely surrounded by flood water.

Under the leadership of Wivenhoe Pocket Rural Fire Brigade First Officer, Graham Peall, the residents of Lockyer View Rd and surrounding higher ground provided accommodation, food, assistance, information and support for approx. 450 local residents and evacuees.

In the absence of any communications operated by the authorities, it became my impromptu role to provide communications for many residents of Somerset Region. My business is Internet dependant, so I have backup Internet services and power sources.

In addition, I have developed a database containing approx. 750 email addresses of local people. I also maintain a website for the Somerset Region Business Alliance, which provides information about flood relief resources for local people (www.somersetregion.org.au).

Since the flood I have talked with dozens of people throughout Somerset Region about the flood events, I have undertaken extensive reading of disaster management papers and

manuals published by emergency response authorities throughout the world, and I have read the inquiry reports into the 9/11 and London Underground terrorist attacks, with particular emphasis on communications and community preparedness. I have researched communication systems used by disaster response teams throughout the world, and I have read the excellent and very well researched book, 'The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes—And Why' by Amanda Ripley.

In addition, I have read the 'Somerset Regional Council Local Disaster Management Plan 2008' and the 2001 report by AGSO – Geoscience Australia, 'Natural hazards and the risks they pose to South-East Queensland'.

This submission is based on my personal experiences and research during and after the Brisbane River Flood in January 2011.

2/ The 2011 Flood Event:

This was my first experience of a disaster event – I learned very quickly that during a major emergency, nothing is normal.

At about 6.40 am on Monday, 10th January 2011, I attempted to travel to Fernvale along the Brisbane Valley Highway, only to find the road was closed due to inundation of the Geoff Fisher Bridge at the Brisbane River – it was a rapidly growing lake.



Brisbane Valley Highway

There was no prior warning.

Frankly, it had never occurred to me that such a situation was possible since the level of all Wivenhoe Dam flood releases during the previous few months had been under the bridge. I remember experiencing a sense of outrage that we had not even been given the opportunity to stock up on essential food supplies; such was my ignorance of the emergency situation that was developing. Like so many other people in our community, I had mistakenly believed Wivenhoe Dam would protect us.

I was aware that many people on my community emailing list would be travelling down the Brisbane Valley Highway from Esk and Toogoolawah, so I sent out a broadcast email at 10:36 a.m. advising that the Brisbane Valley Highway was closed at the Geoff Fisher Bridge and inviting others to send me information about any other road closures (copy attached).

Throughout the day, information about other road closures started to stream in from all parts of Somerset Region. It soon became apparent that local people were cut off in every direction.

Within a short time, many local residents on my email list had spontaneously organised themselves into an information sharing network using my I.T. resources as a communications hub. Initially we shared situation reports and information about road closures, but it soon evolved into an information exchange about sources of food and fuel.

The network still continues to receive and disseminate information about flood recovery resources from both official and unofficial sources. I'm aware that many of the emails were forwarded multiple times, so they reached many more people than I had in my database.

Even at the height of the flood emergency, many local people were still able to receive and transmit emails using laptops and smart phones. Perhaps this should be no surprise, since the Internet was originally developed as a military communications system and it is designed to be robust with multiple pathways.

During the day it rained and rained and rained, but up on our hill we still had very little awareness of what was happening in the low lying parts of Wivenhoe Pocket due to limited visibility. We watched events unfolding in Grantham on TV, but even then the alarm bells did not start ringing.

At 8:21 p.m. that evening we received the following SMS:

“Flash flood warning from S E S, significant heavy rainfall in the next 4 hours. People in low lying areas are advised to move to higher ground.”

A similar recorded message was relayed over our landline telephones.

The emergency alert still didn't stimulate a sense of urgency on the part of many in the community. It didn't help that it was vague about location and that “significant” was spelled incorrectly. Such details can be crucial in a disaster situation where very clear, unambiguous instructions need to be given to help overcome the initial resistance or “Denial” phase of human responses to an emergency situation.

Early on Tuesday morning, I received a mobile phone call from friends in Wivenhoe Pocket, “We have to evacuate - can we come and stay with you?” The rain had stopped for a short time, so I looked out of the window. Where there should have been a view through the trees of pastures and turf farms, there was now a huge lake as far as the eye could see. It finally sank in, the situation was desperately serious.



View of Wivenhoe Pocket

In the space of a few hours, one young boy had been drowned; Somerset Region Council offices had been inundated; approx. 500 homes, farms and businesses in Somerset Region had been flooded; the electricity went out; landlines failed; all local communication systems operated by the authorities and emergency services collapsed; and roads were cut in every direction. Mother Nature had done a slam dunk. Apart from helicopters, even the authorities and emergency services were just as cut off as everyone else.

The lack of preparedness on the part of both the authorities and the community seems quite remarkable.

I know of only 13 people in Wivenhoe Pocket who responded to the SMS warning immediately. On Monday night, they evacuated up to the Fire Brigade shed, in the dark and rain, found it to be locked, and eventually found shelter with friends further down the hill.

In the absence of any formal evacuation plan or community alarm system, the remaining Wivenhoe Pocket residents on the low ground stayed put overnight, by which time what could have been an orderly evacuation became a struggle against the surging flow of flood waters as people and animals had to be rescued, with neighbour helping neighbour. Fortunately, it's a farming community, so people tend to be resourceful and there were a few heavy tractors available to pull other vehicles through and rescue stranded residents, otherwise the outcome could have been so much worse.

In the following days, everyone on our hill opened their homes to evacuees and there was a community meeting organised twice a day at the fire shed.

Food and other necessities were in short supply. At the request of [REDACTED], First Officer of the Wivenhoe Pocket Rural Fire Brigade, I made four email requests for a food drop to the SES, but there was no response. Fortuitously, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] came to our rescue by making four trips to deliver food with his private helicopter. He also evacuated 3 children whose home was unsafe and a 91 war veteran who had become extremely distressed.

Local earthmoving equipment owners helped to clear blocked roads and driveways, bury dead animals, dispose of refuse, and even mow the verges (potential snake hazard). Worthy of particular mention is [REDACTED], who operates a contract cleaning company. He organised clean-up teams for flood damaged homes and ensured they had professional advice and equipment to enable them to deal safely with potential hazardous materials and situations.

During and immediately after the flood, without any input from the authorities, the community response in Wivenhoe Pocket was quite extraordinary.



Community Meeting



Food drops organised
[REDACTED]



One of several
volunteer clean-up teams

In nearly every disaster situation, ordinary citizens at the scene are usually the first to respond – they are the true ‘first responders’. This should be recognised in disaster management plans.

3/ Communications Systems

During Tuesday 11th January, the electricity and telephone systems failed. The Telstra Next G mobile phone system became heavily congested, but remained working in this area.

However, my experience was very different from that of many other Telstra customers in the region who reported that they had no service or that the service was so congested as to be un-useable. Residents of Fernvale report they had little or no service.

I don't have access to Vodafone or Optus mobile phone networks, but some of their customers reported there was simply no signal.

Satellite Broadband continued working despite heavy cloud cover and Telstra Next G mobile broadband continued working very efficiently at my location.

I was unable to receive ABC radio or any other station at my location.

River 949 radio station, which has a transmitter in the area, was off the air for a substantial period – this is a quote from the media release on their website:

“Last Tuesday, at the height of the deluge, River 949's main transmission took a massive lightning strike, causing both the main transmitter and tower and the spare transmitter and tower to fail.

River 949's technician [REDACTED] drove through torrential rain but was stopped by a wall of water at the base of the mountain where the transmitter is situated. Remote controlling was not possible because of the horrific weather conditions.”

At a community meeting convened by The Hon Wayne Wendt MP in Fernvale shortly after the flood, in response to my enquiries, Senior Constable [REDACTED] of the Queensland Police told me that they had no communications except personal mobile phones. When the power failed, the local police simply had no backup communications system.

I had two subsequent telephone conversations with Senior Constable [REDACTED] whilst he was on duty at Lowood Police Station on 5th April 2011 for the purposes of this submission. I report the conversations with his consent.

He explained in more detail that police radio communications in this district do not work well at the best of times, with innumerable 'black spots'. During the flood, Lowood Police station lost power and telephone services on Wednesday 12th January 2011 and radio communications failed completely. Whilst on duty during the height of the flood in the Fernvale area, he was often unable to use his personal mobile phone on the Telstra network due to congestion or lack of signal.

This is of particular importance as he was attempting to summon a helicopter to rescue local residents from rooftops. It's worth noting the local police do not have access to suitable radios that would have enabled him to communicate directly with any helicopters operating in the area. Fortuitously, a Channel 10 reporter arrived at the Lowood Police Station and Senior Constable [REDACTED] was able to negotiate use of their helicopter. Once in the air, he was able to use their radio to contact the Westpac rescue helicopter.

Senior Constable [REDACTED] should be commended for his creative use of available resources in adverse circumstances.

In the afternoon of Tuesday 11th January, I attempted to contact 000 as a friend and neighbour had become stranded in her home at the end of Shines Rd by surrounding flood water with her husband and 84 year old mother. After many attempts to get through, I was referred to the SES emergency number. Again after multiple attempts to get through, I was referred back to 000. On about my 20th attempt to obtain a connection, I eventually managed to get through. I was told someone would get back to me. I received a call from a police inspector in the 'Missing Persons Unit' at Toowoomba *5 days later*.

At one point, it appears that Wivenhoe Dam engineers even lost contact with Flood Operations Centre in Brisbane. This is a quote from an email sent out to MBRI members by [REDACTED] SEQ Water engineer on Thursday, 13 January 2011 at 2:47 pm (copy attached):

"We have experienced communications problems due to flooding around HO in Brisbane and phone difficulties (land line and mobile – you are probably experiencing them also)."

In response to my enquiries, [REDACTED] Q.A. Officer/ SES Controller for Somerset Region, advised me by email (copy attached):

"With the conditions that prevailed for a significant time during this event, SES communications were also less than we would have preferred. The solar-powered repeater for our SES two-way radios ran low with the protracted cloudy periods, so SES teams communicated on 2-way radio simplex (line of sight) channels as best they could. Intermittent mobile phone communication (depending on which network was involved) also allowed field teams maintain contact with their respective headquarters.

Numerous messages were received and sent by email whenever both parties had internet access; this was not the case for the Lowood SES headquarters while phone lines were "out" for a significant period.

It was my experience that telephone communication (either by landline or mobile) was generally available most of the time between my office and the other three SES group headquarters across Somerset Region.”

It’s worth noting that during the flood, Somerset Region Mayor, Graham Lehmann, was based in Lowood SES, where communications were out of action. Furthermore, shortly after the flood, I had a conversation with ██████████ CEO of Somerset Region Council. He was also cut off by the floods and rendered virtually incommunicado by the breakdown in communications services at his home in Fernvale. To quote Section 5.04.05 of the Somerset Regional Council Local Disaster Management Plan:

“The Mayor, or the Chief Executive Officer, SRC in the absence of the Mayor, on receiving advice from the agency, Chairperson (LDMG) or the Executive Officer (LDMG), has the responsibility for the dissemination of disaster management information to the public.”

Unlike other flooded regions, I am not aware of any communications via social, conventional or any other media to the Somerset Region community from either the mayor or the CEO until well after the flood emergency had passed.

Furthermore, the Somerset Region Council appears to have been unable to update their website during the flood event, possibly because their offices were inundated. For whatever reason, they did not provide any flood related information on their website until Saturday 15th January 2011.

Yet during this entire period, the Internet remained resilient in one form or another and many members of the community were communicating vital information effectively with each other using SMS, email and Facebook (Twitter is only just beginning to become more widely used in Somerset Region).

It seems the emergency services and local authorities simply failed to consider any need for backup communication systems. If the Somerset Region Council was unable to update their website, why didn’t they use Facebook? It was reported in the press that during the Christchurch earthquake, the city council and emergency services used Twitter to good effect, yet not one Tweet in this region from anyone in authority.

The emergency services and the local council need to establish reliable, back up communication systems and make greater use of modern social media such as Facebook to maintain communications with the community during any future disaster situation.

Perhaps satellite phones should be made available to critical personnel and in local emergency control centres in case of any future emergency. The cost is only \$1500 for a satellite phone and \$1600 for a satellite/Telstra GSM phone.

Communications systems used by the emergency services and the local council need to be better integrated with the communication systems used by the community.

4/ Warning Systems

There are no local warning systems in Somerset Region. Although a warning SMS was transmitted by the SES, this was not received by many local people and did not trigger an immediate response even when it was received.

In his report to the Somerset Region Council meeting on Wednesday 23 February entitled 'Alerting Systems' (copy of excerpt from the Somerset Region Council minutes attached), Mr [REDACTED], Somerset Region Council CEO states:

"Council is in receipt of advice from residents suggesting better communication systems should include SMS, text, email, use of current technology and use of old technology (similar to air raid sirens) to ensure the message is passed to consumers.

The activation of a form of siren particularly during emergency releases will have an appropriate sense of immediacy and urgency attached to them and perhaps a series of such sirens need to be installed at appropriate locations e.g. Wivenhoe Pocket, Lowood township, Fernvale Forest Hill Road, Fernvale Township etc."

Certainly, a mix of technological solutions may help, but this brings us to the first problem of any emergency warning system.

In her book, 'The Unthinkable: Who Survives When Disaster Strikes—And Why', Amanda Ripley vividly describes the four common phases of human disaster response based on extensive survivor research:

1. Denial
2. Deliberation
3. The Decisive Moment
4. Recrimination

The research shows that when confronted with a serious disaster event, humans go through an initial phase of profound and creative Denial (is this really happening to me; it can't possibly be true, I'm sure the risk is being exaggerated; my home was safe in the 1974 flood, so I'll be OK this time; no one else is making a move, I might embarrass myself if it's a false alarm; it's just not convenient right now, I need to finish this phone call, etc.).

Humans often underestimate risk when confronted with a dangerous situation. As a result, there can be a delayed response to warnings, almost a perverse refusal to accept reality. Some people pass through this phase quite quickly, others take much longer. During the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York, this was often the difference between life and death.

This exactly describes the delayed response that occurred here in Wivenhoe Pocket where, despite their very close proximity to Wivenhoe Dam and Lockyer Creek, the majority of residents in the low lying areas did not immediately respond to the SMS warning. They waited until daylight of the following morning (Tuesday 12 January) when they could see the flood with their own eyes before making a decision to act.

Any warning system needs to take into account how humans react to an emergency situation. A warning siren by itself is unlikely to produce the desired result, a close observer of the Tsunami warning sirens in Japan during their recent disaster events may have noticed they are combined with a loud and assertive recorded message that is repeated over and over again. I don't understand Japanese but I imagine it urges citizens to evacuate to high ground **urgently**. Clearly sirens on their own are not considered sufficient to stimulate immediate action.

Flood warning systems should feature multiple lines of communications such as warning sirens, SMS, e-mail, social media, radio, television, but not everyone has access to electronic communications and electronic warning systems may be prone to failure, so social networks should also be activated according to a pre-rehearsed plan.

Ideally, community alert networks should be developed to ensure information about an emergency is deployed using modern technology and then rapidly shared between neighbours using word of mouth, with especial attention to more vulnerable members of the community.

5/ Public Education

If you live in a flood plain region it is a certainty there will be floods.

Lucky for the residents of Wivenhoe Pocket, despite the massive damage to people and property, apparently the January 2011 flood was only a 'medium flood event'.

Professor [REDACTED] was responsible for the hydrology estimates used to develop the operating manual for Wivenhoe Dam, including the flood release rules. This is what he said in a recent ABC radio interview:

"Bear in mind that the really big floods in 1893 and 1941 were over 8m on the (Brisbane) gauge, and this one was only 4.5m. When John Oxley discovered Brisbane 180 years ago, the local Aboriginal people were very agitated about flooding, and they showed him high-water marks that would have been 12m."

In other words, there is geological evidence of past floods nearly three times the scale of the one we have just experienced.

Surely that means the community in the vicinity of the Brisbane River should be much better informed about the risk from floods?

The Somerset Region Council knew – this is their Risk Assessment from Section 2, g 14 of the ‘Somerset Regional Council Local Disaster Management Plan’:

“Flood: 1.0% AEP

Likelihood: **A – Certain**, Consequence: **5 - Catastrophic**, Risk rating: **E - Extreme**

Approximately 2500 people will be directly affected”

Time and time again local people told me they did not know it could flood. I would count myself as one of those, frankly I never thought about it, especially after 10 years of drought.

This problem of complacency was indirectly identified in the 2001 report by AGSO – Geoscience Australia, ‘Natural hazards and the risks they pose to South-East Queensland’, pg 22:

“There is, for example, a widely held view that the completion of Wivenhoe Dam in 1985 means that there will never be a repetition of the 1974 floods. This is clearly not the case, given that there are limits to the flood retention capacity of the dam and the fact that it can only influence the flood level in the Brisbane River itself.”

It comes down to community education. As required by the Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003, the Somerset Region Council has a ‘Local Disaster Management Plan 2008’. The problem lies in this paragraph:

“Public education consists of an ongoing public awareness program conducted by the Somerset Regional Council and Statutory Services in conjunction with the LDMG.

Council makes available to the public numerous pamphlets produced by BoM, DES, and EMA. These are displayed in the foyer of the Council Administration Building and in the libraries. Copies can be posted to members of the public upon request.”

I can only ask “What ongoing public awareness program?” If there was one, the community missed it.

It seems ironic that for the most part the Somerset Region Council, ‘Local Disaster Management Plan’ is actually an excellent and very thorough plan, yet the community appears to be almost entirely ignorant of the contents.

Perhaps this statement in the Plan may account for the complacency:

“Rural communities are well known for their resilience and self sufficiency compared to their urban cousins and are more likely to have in place appropriate strategies to cope with an event impact.”

That may be true, but in the past 10 years the community in the Fernvale and Lowood region has become more urbanised. Again quoting from the Plan:

“Urban communities need to be encouraged to be more self-reliant during disaster events and take ownership of the situation, where possible, at least for the first 24 hours. They need to be encouraged to have a personal disaster plan.”

From my reading of the legislation, the Somerset Region Council has a clear statutory responsibility to ensure the community is well informed and well prepared for any disaster that might befall us. A handful of leaflets in the libraries and foyer of the Council offices won't do it, as any first year marketing student would know.

Even a simple awareness program using a range of media to encourage local residents to think about the risks and to develop their own personal disaster plans in accordance with the SRC 'Local Disaster Management Plan' might be a good idea.

The message in nearly every disaster management manual written by disaster management experts in Australia and many other parts of the world is consistent and it is unambiguous:

A community that is well informed and well prepared is disaster resilient.

6/ Conclusion

During the January 2011 Brisbane River flood event in the region of Fernvale, Wivenhoe Pocket and Lowood, there was no local warning system and the sole SES SMS alert was ambiguous. All communication systems operated by the emergency services and the authorities effectively failed - the telephone system failed, local radio station transmitters failed, and television news was not available since the electricity supply had failed.

Furthermore, the local community was mostly ignorant of the risk of flooding as there had been no effective public education program. For many, this left them ill prepared to respond in a timely way to the dangers posed by the rising flood. It is a miracle more lives were not lost.

Yet whilst the emergency services and local authority had lost the ability to communicate with the community, many members of the community maintained the ability to communicate with each other using a combination of modern technology and good, old fashioned word of mouth.

In a disaster situation, accurate and timely information combined with education and planning is the currency of survival.

Effective communications, early warning systems and community education go hand in hand - all were lacking in Somerset Region.

This is a problem that needs to be fixed before the next flood or other disaster.

Paul Heymans 06/04/2011

Paul Computers

From: Somerset Region Business Alliance [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 10 January 2011 10:37 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Brisbane Valley Highway closure due to flooding

Anyone in Somerset Region planning to travel south or north to or from Fernvale on the Brisbane Valley Highway might find it useful to know the Brisbane Valley Highway is closed at Shines Gully (between Geof Fisher Bridge and Spltyard Creek Road at the Someset turnoff). It's a lagoon:



In addition, I've been advised that essential flood mitigation releases from Wivenhoe Dam will be increased over the next couple of days, so the Geof Fisher Bridge itself will be inundated. The recreational areas and viwing platforms in the Wivenhoe Dam spillway will be closed for safety reasons.

Anyone with land that may be affected by the Wivenhoe Dam flood mitigation releases can request to be included on the SEQ Water email alert list by emailiing [REDACTED] at [REDACTED]

In addition, the Somerset Region Council has posted this notice on their website:

"Due to recent rain, the Somerset Region's road network has been significantly affected and many of our roads have been flooded making vehicle travel difficult and in some areas impossible. Travelers are asked to be extra careful as there is significant flooding in many areas, and potholes and landslips are appearing as a result. Council is endeavouring to get as many roads opened as possible, however the developing rain is making that task all the more difficult."

If local residents would like to send me information about main road closures due to local flooding in our region, I will set up a web page on the Somerset Region Business Alliance website as a local resource if there is sufficient information to be useful.

Please feel welcome to forward this email to anyone you think may find it useful. If you wish to be included on the mailing list for future such alerts, please send an email to [REDACTED] with 'Subscribe Alerts' in the subject line. Your email address not be used for any other purpose.

Thank you.



Paul Heymans
Deputy Chairperson
Marketing and Communications
Somerset Region Business Alliance Inc.

Paul Computers

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, 24 January 2011 4:12 PM
To: Paul Heymans
Subject: FW: Releases from Wivenhoe and Somerset Dams.
Attachments: image001.jpg

From: [REDACTED] [mailto:[REDACTED]]
Sent: Thursday, 13 January 2011 11:48 AM
To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Releases from Wivenhoe and Somerset Dams.

Good morning MBRI members and other residents,

We have experienced communications problems due to flooding around HO in Brisbane and phone difficulties (land line and mobile – you are probably experiencing them also).

We have increased drainage of Somerset Dam. This will be completed within 5 days and require operation of low level sluice gates.

The release from Wivenhoe Dam remains at 2500cumecs. We are awaiting further instructions from the FOC on gate operations – expect to increase release rate today. Last night's 1800hrs Situation Report stated a target total flow of 3500cumecs (release plus other inflows), however this needs to be confirmed due to the time elapsed.

The Lockyer Creek peak passed Savage's Crossing at approx 0200 to 0300hrs yesterday morning and the river has been receding since than.

Current river levels are: Lowood 14.91m (falling); Savage's Crossing 14.91m (falling); Burton's Bridge – no valid data and Mt Crosby Weir 19.82m (falling).

We will update ASAP.

Regards,

[REDACTED]
Engineering officer
Queensland Bulk Water Supply Authority *trading as* Seqwater



Ph (07) 54278135 | Fax (07) 54261097 | Mob [REDACTED]
| E [REDACTED]
LWIC 2470 Brisbane Valley Highway, via Fernvale
PO Box 37, FERNVALE, Q., 4306.
Website | www.seqwater.com.au

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Paul Computers

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 23 February 2011 5:29 PM
To: 'Paul Computers'
Subject: RE: Communications
Attachments: image001.jpg; image002.jpg

Hello Paul,

With the conditions that prevailed for a significant time during this event, SES communications were also less than we would have preferred. The solar-powered repeater for our SES two-way radios ran low with the protracted cloudy periods, so SES teams communicated on 2-way radio simplex (line of sight) channels as best they could. Intermittent mobile phone communication (depending on which network was involved) also allowed field teams maintain contact with their respective headquarters.

Numerous messages were received and sent by email whenever both parties had internet access; this was not the case for the Lowood SES headquarters while phone lines were "out" for a significant period.

It was my experience that telephone communication (either by landline or mobile) was generally available most of the time between my office and the other three SES group headquarters across Somerset Region.

Without power (which was the case for some at various times) Facebook, Twitter, email or any other internet based communication option would not have been available. Nevertheless, these options may well be considered in the future.

The use of "Smartphones" is one that I am keen to see increase also.

Regards,

[REDACTED]
*Q.A. Officer / SES Controller
Somerset Regional Council
2 Redbank Street, ESK QLD 4312*

[REDACTED]
Phone: (07) 5424 4000 Fax: (07) 5424 4099

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From: Paul Computers [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 23 February 2011 2:14 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Communications

Hi Andy

Can I ask you for a favour?

I'm doing some research for an article about communications in the Somerset Region during the flood. Can you advise me if the Somerset SES was able to maintain communications with each other and with your HQ during the flood? What technologies did you use?

FYI

SES Warning SMS messages were received by some but not by others.

Telstra Next G mobile phone service was congested, but stayed up throughout the flood.

Telstra Next G mobile Broadband continued working very well throughout.

Vodafone and Optus customers reported they had no service

River 949 backup generator on The Nobby ran out of fuel at one point, but SES helicopter was used to refuel.

SRC seemingly unable to update their website after their offices were inundated.

According to a Lowood Police officer, once the electricity was out and telephones were down, the local police had no communications except with their personal mobile phones.

In the meantime, the local population was communicating very effectively with each other using SMS, email, Facebook and Twitter, yet no-one from the authorities thought to use social networking media to communicate with the population.

By contrast with Christchurch, where both the population and the emergency authorities are using Facebook and Twitter to share information and get out vital messages:

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/twitter-captures-nz-earthquake-drama-as-it-unfolds/story-e6frg6so-1226010355818>

Smartphones are the key.

Thanks.



Making I.T. happen in Somerset Region



Warm regards

Paul Heymans

Wivenhoe PA Pty Ltd t/a Paul Computers



[REDACTED]

Subject: Alerting Systems
File Ref: Disaster
Action Officer: CEO

Subject

A decision is sought from Council with regard to making a submission to the Commission of Inquiry on the inadequacy of alerting systems during flood events.

Background

Releases from Wivenhoe Dam are controlled by SEQ Water via the Water Grid Manager. Prior to Christmas 2010 after a series of low releases of water from Wivenhoe Dam and the subsequent closure of crossings such as Twin Bridges, Savages Crossing, Burtons Bridge and England Creek it was obvious that a better system of informing residents of such closures was required.

These releases followed a long period of time during which there were no releases which affected these crossings. Therefore residents and members of the public alike were not used to the inconvenience caused by such closures.

Council attempted to get the Water Grid Manager to be responsible for alerting residents on the eastern side of the Brisbane River of such closures. The Water Grid Manager refused such requests and was of the belief it should be a Council responsibility. In the face of such intransience, Council wrote to all property owners east of the Brisbane River that could be isolated by the closure of these crossings and sought their contact details, with the view to setting up Council's own alert system.

In the meantime Council initiated calls to certain specific persons (contact details of which were already held) to inform them of likely closures and request that they spread the word through their communities.

The January 2011 floods clearly do not support that interim step or the proposed step of notification by Council as being useful in emergencies. The situation is more critical in the Somerset Region as crossing closures occur a short time after release and the Water Grid Manager during low flow events would give approximately twelve (12) plus hours notice. This enabled Council to erect road closed signs. This short time frame is contrasted with closures of other low flow events such as Colleges Crossing, Ipswich where significantly more notice is given due to the time take for water releases to reach that location.

A similar increased time notification period is available during flood events for the cities of

Ipswich and Brisbane (up to two (2) days notice).

The releases on Tuesday 11 January 2011 affected not only crossings and residents east of the Brisbane River, but the communities of Wivenhoe Pocket, Lowood, Fernvale and outlying houses. The time period between releases and flooding of Wivenhoe Pocket is approximately 30 - 60 minutes, followed by Lowood and the Fernvale townships in approximately two (2) hours from release.

A better communication system with residents is sorely needed.

The Water Grid Manager / Council or other responsible State Government entity (SEQ Water or EMQ) has to have a more immediate warning system as updating of websites, SMS, radio or press releases do not have the same degree of immediacy or penetration, particularly during urgent releases and when communication is severely damaged, as was the case in the January 2011 floods.

It is my view that the body responsible for letting the water release should be the body responsible for alerting affected residents. This is the case when SEQ Water notifies the Mid Brisbane River Irrigators.

To impose a third party between the releaser SEQ Water and/or the Water Grid Manager and the affected residents will only slow the process and lead to possible inaccurate information. For example, during the January floods the Water Grid Manager was issuing advices in releases of "X" megalitres per day, whereas SEQ Water advised of releases in "Y" cubic metres per second. Council flood information is in cubic metres per second. Council had to seek clarification from SEQ Water that the advices of the Water Grid Manager equated to "Z" cubic metres per second to determine the effect of the release as all scales were based on cubic metres per second eg when flooding occurred at which point.

Council is in receipt of advice from residents suggesting better communication systems should include SMS, text, email, use of current technology and use of old technology (similar to air raid sirens) to ensure the message is passed to consumers.

The activation of a form of siren particularly during emergency releases will have an appropriate sense of immediacy and urgency attached to them and perhaps a series of such sirens need to be installed at appropriate locations eg Wivenhoe Pocket, Lowood township, Fernvale Forest Hill Road, Fernvale Township etc.

Council will still be responsible for erecting road closed signs during such events and particularly during low releases.

The releaser is a Government entity and should use the facilities of the State Government to provide a warning eg EMQ Alert System or other system.

Attachments

Nil

Recommendation

That Somerset Regional Council forward this report to the Local Government Association of Queensland to draft a submission to the Commission of Inquiry in its desired format to request the Commission of Inquiry to determine a responsible Government agency and a

particular method or methods to be used by the agency in both low flow releases and emergency flood releases.

Decision:	Moved - Cr Caddy	Seconded - Cr Hall
	"That Somerset Regional Council forward this report to the Local Government Association of Queensland to draft a submission to the Commission of Inquiry in its desired format to request the Commission of Inquiry to determine a responsible Government agency and a particular method or methods to be used by the agency in both low flow releases and emergency flood releases." <i>Carried</i>	

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