



Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry 2011

Submission by the Multicultural Development Association

4 April 2011

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Executive Summary

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) was established in 1998 to promote multiculturalism and support people from refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. MDA is one of the peak settlement providers in Queensland providing over thirteen years of specialist settlement support to refugees and migrants.

People from refugee backgrounds are particularly vulnerable members of the community, often having endured years of extreme hardships and displacement. Even in non-crisis periods refugees are disadvantaged due to their lack of English language proficiency.

During the 2011 Queensland floods, people from refugee CALD backgrounds were particularly disadvantaged and often unable to respond to emergency warnings due to language barriers and social isolation.

In the context of the terms of reference of the Inquiry, our observations from the flood crisis include:

- Disaster management plans for Queensland do not document and may not take into account the needs of people from refugee and CALD backgrounds
- In many cases, the communication of dangers and threats during the flood crisis and other essential safety and flood related information were not communicated using interpreters or through translated materials
- The SES volunteers worked well with the broad community but MDA clients were heavily reliant on MDA staff for communication support and for transport to evacuation centres
- Refugees do not necessarily have private transport for voluntarily evacuation when requested by SES volunteers
- Evacuation centres were well serviced and provided a comfortable environment for clients left temporarily homeless from the flood
- Centrelink provided good immediate financial assistance, especially through the multicultural service arm
- Multicultural Affairs Queensland provided effective translation of flood financial assistance
- MDA clients require increased ongoing support due to the floods, especially in respect of housing

To further inform the Commission, MDA has made 12 key recommendations at the end of this submission.

Introduction

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry under the Commissions of Inquiry Order (No. 1) 2011.

MDA was established in May 1998 to promote multiculturalism and empower people from refugee and CALD backgrounds through advocacy, community and multicultural sector development and the delivery of client services.

As Queensland's largest settlement agency for migrants and refugees, MDA settles approximately 1,100 newly arrived refugees annually and currently works with over 3,500 migrants and refugees. The diversity of our client base is shown in Table 1 below.

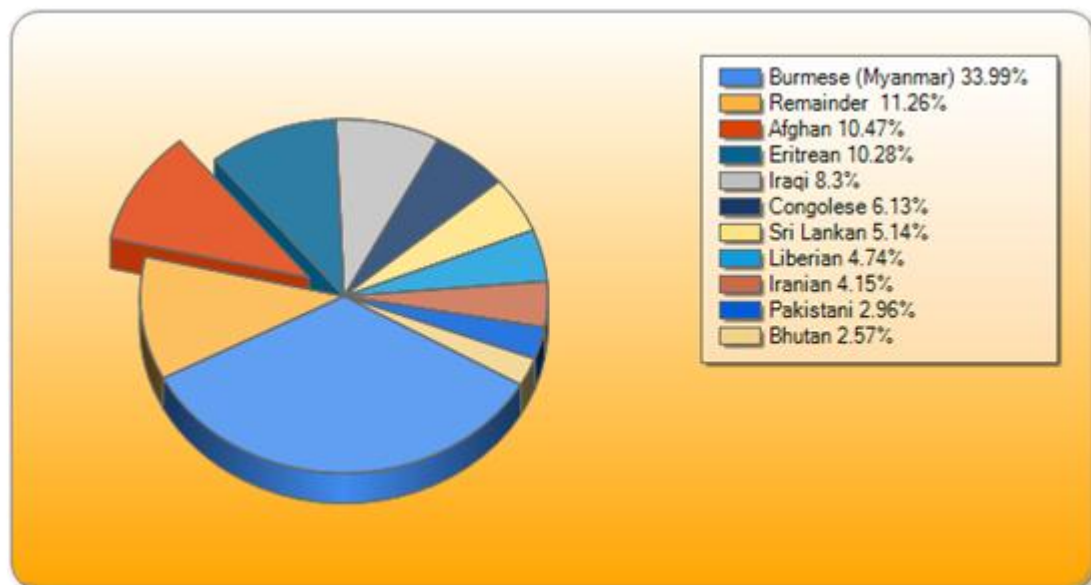


Table 1: The cultural composition of new arrival clients serviced by MDA through its Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy work, March 2010 – March 2011.

Our clients are mainly from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The majority of our clients arrive in Australia having experienced war, conflict, instability and persecution. Some have endured extreme violence, spent long periods in detention camps, suffered torture, trauma and malnourishment, and are affected by separation from and loss of family members. These experiences can have a lasting and profound effect on their ability to settle into life in Brisbane.

Language barriers are also a contributing factor to settlement difficulties. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship provides 510 hours of English language tuition through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) for all humanitarian

entrants, however, additional help in the form of interpreter service, translated material and ongoing English language learning support is often essential for our clients.

Languages spoken by MDA clients vary according to countries of origin as well as ethnic backgrounds within countries. As shown below in Table 2, our clients from Burma include ethnic minorities of the Rohingya and Karen and these groups have their own languages.

Language	Country of origin / Region
Arabic	Middle East region
Rohingya	Burma
Tigrinya	Eritrea
Burmese and related languages	Burma
French	African region
Hazaragi	Afghanistan
Tamil	Sri Lanka
Karen	Burma

Table 2: The languages relevant to new arrival clients serviced by MDA through its Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy work, March 2010 – March 2011

Through our settlement program, MDA is able to support our clients with the help of cultural support workers (CSWs). Our CSWs are usually from the same ethnic backgrounds as our clients or share a common language or dialect and are able to provide culturally appropriate assistance to service providers when engaging with our clients. They also act as an intermediary at times in assisting our clients needs. This is a fee for service arm at MDA which has proven extremely valuable to many external providers.

MDA provides refugees with intensive support in the first six months of settlement and ongoing support for up to five years. This includes a broad range of practical and emotional support as well as referral to specialist agencies and other support services. It is in the context of our settlement support that MDA informs the Commission of our clients' experiences during the 2011 Queensland flood crisis and makes recommendations on behalf of our clients.

Impact of floods on refugee communities

The floods resulted in approximately 70 MDA client families being displaced from their homes. Approximately 30 families continue to present with complex ongoing needs. Nine male clients were also evacuated from the Rockhampton floods and were accommodated at the RNA showground evacuation centre in Brisbane.

The majority of our clients reported they experienced feelings of uncertainty, fear, isolation and helplessness during the flood crisis. During the peak of the flood crisis, the bulk of assistance for our clients came from MDA staff and volunteers. MDA was able to assist over 1,500 refugees who otherwise may have been left isolated with little or no knowledge of the flood events.

The assistance provided by our caseworkers included contacting all clients and providing information about their local area, guidance on if evacuation was necessary and regular flood updates. MDA staff also worked closely with 36 refugee and migrant community leaders to provide assistance and safety information to client communities. MDA's CSWs were an essential support for our non-English speaking clients and played an important role in the dissemination of vital safety and evacuation information. Clients requiring assistance with evacuation were transported to safe accommodation or evacuation centres by MDA staff and the many volunteers who registered with MDA to provide assistance. Some clients were helped to evacuate by the State Emergency Services (SES). We thank the SES for their support during this time.

During the flood clean up, MDA was inundated with offers to help from the general public as well as numerous refugee communities. In two days we registered over 200 volunteers to assist with the post flood clean up activities. We were also fortunate to receive donations of household linen and furniture to help our clients. Many refugee communities were eager to help with the clean up, despite feeling traumatised by the flood event. For some refugees, being able to help others in the community was a practical way for them to show their support for their local community.

On Wednesday 19 January 2011, the streets surrounding Milpera State High School's flooded campus at Chelmer, were inundated with construction workers, residents and a significant army presence to control the traffic and surrounding areas. Over 20 Rohingya men arrived to volunteer in the clean-up efforts to prepare the site for the massive construction to take place the following week. Many of the men and youth are at different stages of resettlement and each carry with them different stories from their refugee experience, all touched in some way by the heavy military presence from their time in Burma and in refugee camps in Bangladesh. While there was some trepidation about coming into contact with military personnel, it soon dissipated when our community members were greeted with warm smiles and friendly handshakes from the men and women in uniform.

The community worked hard all day, barely stopping for breaks, reporting to their community development worker that they would stay all day if they were needed as they were working by choice as opposed to the forced slave labour they endured back in their home country.

Over a period of four days, MDA had approximately 120 volunteers from nine refugee communities contribute approximately 780 hours to the clean up process. The following communities worked in over ten different locations in and around Brisbane at homes, schools and business areas:

- **Karen**
- **Liberian**
- **Congolese**
- **Rohingyan**
- **Ethiopian**
- **Sierra Leonean**
- **Somali and**
- **Sudanese**

Although the flood crisis is over, MDA caseworkers are reporting that many clients are still very distressed and frustrated due to feelings of helplessness and fear, with some clients experiencing difficulty adjusting to new homes. This is further compounded for many by re-traumatisation from previous experiences in their home countries as well as settlement issues already present in adjusting to life in Australia. Many are reluctant to take up mental health support services or to move to new or temporary accommodation preferring instead to stay with friends and/or family for extended support. For MDA, the major ongoing flood issue is the impending homelessness of many refugee families.

Response to Terms of Reference

1. Flood planning and preparation

The flood crisis was well managed by the Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council, informed by disaster management plans. The Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003 (QLD)¹ details arrangements required for disaster management by the Queensland Government and the Brisbane City Council.

Part 3 of the Act sets out the guidelines for disaster management plans and lists specific information that must be included such as the strategic policy framework, roles and responsibilities, the coordination of activities and the priorities for disaster management. The needs of vulnerable community members do not form part of the specific information listed in Part 3.

¹ <http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/ACTS/2003/03AC091.pdf>

Consideration of vulnerable members of the community form part of The Final Report Recommendations from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission². Recommendation 5, particularly, recommends the State introduce a comprehensive approach to evacuation and include consideration of assisted evacuation of vulnerable people.

The Queensland Government State Disaster Management Plan³ (the Plan) cites a Comprehensive Approach as the overarching framework for disaster management and refers to prevention/mitigation activities, preparedness activities, response activities and recovery activities.

The revised Plan (revised Plan), signed on 10 March 2011 defines preparedness as:

The taking of preparatory measures to ensure that, if an event occurs, communities, resources and services are able to cope with the effects of the event.⁴

Of particular relevance for our clients are the preparedness activities. These include community awareness/education initiatives and stakeholder liaison. The scope of these activities is not detailed in the information available to MDA. However, as more than 7.6% of the Queensland population speaking a language other than English at home⁵, it is important that the preparedness activities of the Plan are informed by consultations with refugee and CALD community individuals and groups.

The revised Plan⁶ includes, in Annexure A, a list of government agencies and their roles and responsibilities in respect of a disaster. The Department of Communities is included in this list as the 'functional lead agency for human-social recovery'⁷. As the responsibility for supporting refugee and CALD communities is within the scope of the Department's broader responsibilities (through Multicultural Affairs Queensland), there is an opportunity for the role of the Department of Communities to include recognition and support for the more complex needs of people from refugee and CALD backgrounds within the disaster management plan.

Currently, the terms of reference of the Brisbane City Council Disaster Management Plan⁸ do not provide sufficient details to determine if communication to CALD communities is considered. It is therefore not known if the Group considered the

² <http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Assets/VBRC-Final-Report-Recommendations.pdf>

³ <http://www.disaster.qld.gov.au/publications/pdf/State%20Disaster%20Man%20Plan%20A050908.pdf>

⁴ http://www.disaster.qld.gov.au/publications/pdf/2446EMQ_SDMG_State%20Disaster%20Managmt%20Plan_BOOKLET_Green.pdf

⁵ <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/home/home?opendocument>

⁶ http://www.disaster.qld.gov.au/publications/pdf/2446EMQ_SDMG_State%20Disaster%20Managmt%20Plan_BOOKLET_Green.pdf

⁷ Ibid

⁸ http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/2010%20Library/2009%20PDF%20and%20Docs/5.Community%20Support/5.4%20Emergency%20management/emergency_management_introduction.pdf

forms of communication required for emergency information to reach CALD communities as the flood crisis evolved on 11 January 2011.

The 2011 Queensland floods have shown that planning and preparation in calmer times is vital to ensure a fast and effective response from government, government agencies, communities and individuals to appropriately support and protect refugee and CALD communities.

2. Response measures

The response to the floods, led by Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council and supported by the SES, the Australian Red Cross and other community organisations was an extraordinary effort. For the broader community, the communication of emergency information, the response by the SES and the ongoing support was generally well received. The Australian Red Cross provided vital emergency support at the evacuation centres and useful safety information on their website.

While the floods have been a traumatic time for many Brisbane residents, the trauma for MDA clients was exacerbated in many cases by reminders of previous traumas and homelessness as well as helplessness from lack of information. Communication

The main form of communication of emergency warnings during the flood crisis were Ministerial Media Statements by the Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh. These were broadcast on free to air television channels and on ABC radio. The regularity of the media statements provided good communication to the general community and the provision of Auslan interpreters was important for hearing impaired Queenslanders.

The provision of information necessary for residents to make informed safety decisions during and after the event was provided through these mainstream communication channels as well as on the Queensland Government website⁹.

However, for people from refugee and CALD backgrounds, who are already vulnerable members of the community, these forms of communication may not always be appropriate or able to be understood in the absence of interpreters and translated materials. As such, their vulnerability and disadvantage is exacerbated by comparison to other members of the community. While AMEP provides the opportunity to learn basic language skills, more advanced language skills are often required to understand and act on health and safety information. Our caseworkers have also reported that during times of crisis, their clients can lose the ability to use any English language skills as a result of shock.

⁹ <http://www.qld.gov.au/floods/news.html>

Without timely and accurate information in their own language, the risk to their health and safety is heightened and can become life threatening. Some MDA clients reported watching the television coverage with little comprehension of the emergency messages and therefore were hampered in their ability to fully understand the level of risk and what actions they should take.

The media statements by the Queensland Premier unfortunately did not prove to be effective for many refugee or CALD communities. MDA's clients were often not able to fully rely on this information without interpreters or translated material.

During the crisis, information reached MDA clients mainly through contact with MDA staff, volunteers and CSWs. MDA staff and volunteers provided exceptional support during the crisis to ensure the protection and safety of our clients. In some areas, such as Oxley and West End, the lack of electrical power meant mainstream media was no longer a viable method of communication. In some cases, our clients relied on weak mobile phone signals as their only way to find out information about the flood.

A Rohingya family of nine were stranded in their Oxley home on Tuesday 11 January. The area had been evacuated and as water came under the door of their home they became increasingly anxious and were not sure what to do. They were scared, did not have power could not find out what was happening. The father explained their extreme anxiety to the MDA caseworker:

“In Burma, if it floods, you are dead!”

The SES were called by the MDA caseworker at midnight and a call logged but the SES did not expect to be able to help them for some time. By 2am the family were very distressed and the caseworker called the Police, who then referred the caseworker to the Fire Department. Eventually the clients were rescued by the Fire Department at around 4am on Wednesday 12 January 2011.

While the family were anxiously waiting to be evacuated, a MDA CSW, with Rohingya language skills, was able to explain information to the family over a very weak mobile phone line. During the crisis, this was the only information source for this family and understandably the information void meant they were terrified. As a result, they are suffering longer term trauma from the flood event.

The above experience illustrates the significant stress and trauma possible from poor communication during the floods.

MDA clients with electricity and internet access were able to access basic safety information on the MDA website translated into Arabic, Dari, French, Karen and Kirindi. This was not a comprehensive list but was a useful, fast and effective way for some of our clients to find out flood safety information. It would have been useful to our clients and other people from refugee and CALD backgrounds for the Queensland Government to have provided translated flood safety information. A reference to this service in television or radio broadcasts could advise residents of the availability of this important information.

Other information available to MDA staff during the flood crisis included:

- Brisbane City Council Flood Maps
- Department of Main Roads Road closures
- Translink update on services
- National Registration and Inquiry System of the Australian Red Cross.
- Australian Red Cross Emergency Rediplan¹⁰.
- Press Releases by Lord Mayor Campbell Newman
- Bureau of Meteorology¹¹ website advice

For clients to access the information, interpreter services or translation was required by MDA CSWs or staff as the information had not been translated prior to its broadcast or publication.

The absence of translated emergency material can result in significant and costly delays in the ability of people from refugee and CALD backgrounds to access vital safety information. During the flood crisis, people from refugee and CALD backgrounds were not provided with adequate information to make informed decisions, putting individuals and families at risk.

a. Emergency response

The Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003 (QLD)¹² (the Act) ensures the State Emergency Services (SES) is available to provide emergency support and direction during a disaster. During the flood, the SES provided excellent support to the community at large. We commend the tireless efforts of the SES volunteers and thank them for their support on behalf of our clients.

Apart from performing rescue operations and being authorised to help protect injured persons or property, the Act conveys powers on SES officers to direct persons to leave areas of concern. Under the Act it is an offence to fail to respond to this request. During the flood crisis, the SES requested certain residents voluntarily

¹⁰ [http://www.redcross.org.au/media/REDiPlan_Update_14_05_09\(1\).pdf](http://www.redcross.org.au/media/REDiPlan_Update_14_05_09(1).pdf)

¹¹ <http://www.bom.gov.au/index.shtml>

¹² <http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/ACTS/2003/03AC091.pdf>

evacuate their homes to prevent them being isolated or in danger. For the SES to perform their role effectively, it is important that this advice is followed by residents.

Without language support, it may be difficult for people from refugee and CALD backgrounds to respond to SES requests for voluntary evacuation.

A large component of MDA's work during the floods was transporting clients safely to evacuation centres. The majority of MDA clients do not own cars, do not possess a drivers licence and are heavily reliant on public transport. Many of our clients have very large families (sometimes up to 10-12 members), had only recently arrived in Brisbane and had not mastered the use of public transport. These families experience extreme difficulties in evacuating voluntarily. The separation of family members during the evacuation was also of great concern to our clients, requiring MDA staff and MDA's CSWs to provide support to these clients around those issues.

Once moved to evacuation centres, the overall experience of MDA clients, assisted by caseworkers, was positive. The Brisbane City Council evacuation centre volunteers and the Australian Red Cross workers provided welcome support to our clients in the form of food and clothing. However, our caseworkers noted that information and flood updates provided to the evacuees at the centres was in English only and no interpreter services were provided.

One of our caseworkers spent significant amounts of time supporting Burundian clients at the QEII evacuation centre including explaining processes and providing updates on the flood crisis. For some clients, relocation to the flood recovery centre at Yeronga to fill out claims was a confusing process and not adequately explained.

A group of Burundian families evacuated to the QEII centre were asked to travel by bus to the recovery centre at Yeronga to process their disaster relief claims. There was no information provided by Centrelink or any other Government agency in Kirundi, the main language from Burundi, about where they were going, how long it would take or any other information.

The MDA caseworker, providing general assistance and language support, travelled with the families to the Yeronga recovery centre.

This experience shows the importance of communication at all stages of disaster management.

In terms of the overall experience in relation to immediate financial disaster relief, our caseworkers reported positive feedback from our clients. Financial support was provided for our clients and translated information was made available by the

multicultural service arm of Centrelink. This service provided excellent assistance to MDA clients in relation to filling out applications and lodging claims.

The communication of the availability of immediate financial assistance on the internet was effective and we congratulate Multicultural Affairs Queensland on their initiative to translate the Disaster Relief Information¹³ into 28 languages. This included the *Disaster Relief Financial Assistance Fact Sheet* and the *Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal*.

b. Ongoing support

An important support measures to assist people from refugee and CALD backgrounds to recover from the floods is ongoing support in the form of the provision of housing, access to services and provision of trauma counselling.

Many Brisbane residents were left homeless from the floods and required alternative accommodation. MDA clients displaced during the floods must once again go through the difficulties of familiarisation with a new home and residential area, which requires significant work for MDA caseworkers. As a result, caseworkers have had to revisit settlement services already provided. This includes ensuring clients can gain access to goods and services in their new local area, enrolling children in new schools and enrolling parents in the local TAFE for AMEP.

A Burundian mother and her family left their flood damaged Rocklea home at the peak of the floods and after staying with friends for a short period of time, sought respite in the QEII evacuation centre.

The Burundian family was re-housed by the housing support agency, 4walls. The MDA caseworker then needed to undertake the orientation, similar to the orientation on first arrival in Brisbane. For the family to relocate due to the flood, there are many practical services to provide including;

- **orientation to the local shops for food shopping**
- **familiarisation with public transport**
- **enrolling children in a new school**
- **organising furniture and white goods**
- **enrolling in a new TAFE for the AMEP course**
- **other practical services.**

The majority of MDA clients are housed on the private rental market, and as landlords take decisions to discontinue leases while they make insurance claims,

¹³ <http://www.multicultural.qld.gov.au/community/disaster-assistance/>

MDA anticipates more and more families will become homeless in the future. A number of refugees have returned home to find that their landlord has declared their rental property uninhabitable and have been requested to remove their personal property and vacate the lease. While this issue is not unique to our clients, it must be noted that it has previously been well documented that many refugee families have faced racial discrimination in trying to enter the private market with large families. This, coupled with short tenancy histories, means that many will be further disadvantaged in the current surge for demand on the private rental market.

The provision of counselling services and trauma support is also important for recovery from the floods. As part of MDA's settlement service, clients can be referred to the services of Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) and Harmony Place. However, we understand that these services have limited resources and capacity to support large numbers of additional clients.

The Queensland Government's community services website includes a list of *Emotional Support* providers including Lifeline, Queensland Health, Australian Red Cross and St Vincent de Paul.¹⁴ We commend the Queensland Government for including information on ongoing support for Queensland residents recovering from the floods. Although this information is not translated, some of the services, including Lifeline's telephone counselling service, facilitate access to interpreters through the national Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), to support people from refugee and CALD backgrounds.

We also recognise the efforts of Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre¹⁵, who have made available brochures for *Coping Personally after Major Disaster* and *Coping with a Disaster: Information for Times of Stress* in seven languages other than English.

3. Supply of essential services

The communication of information about essential services during flood events is important for health and safety reasons. The loss of electricity and telephone services in particular can isolate residents and endanger lives.

During the floods, the loss of the supply of electrical power and telephone services caused significant stress for many of our clients. The trauma associated with the flood event and the loss of power meant that many families could not return to their homes even though their homes were not seriously flood affected. Some clients who fled their homes in their countries of origin were displaced again during the 2011

¹⁴ <http://www.communityservices.qld.gov.au/community/community-recovery/support-assistance/further-information.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/pahospital/qtmhc/multilingual.asp>

floods, resulting in re-traumatisation and increased risk of ongoing stress and trauma.

MDA clients also required assurance from our caseworkers about the safety and supply of power and telephone services as services were reconnected and clients returned to their homes. The lack of communication about the supply of electricity and telephone services was difficult for many of our clients and resulted in MDA caseworkers providing additional support for clients who were confused and frustrated by the lack of these essential services.

West End residents lost power to their homes early in the flood crisis. This left some of our clients stranded in a house where young male clients are often housed. With no power, no telephone service and very limited mobile service, it was extremely difficult to be able to speak with the clients to check their safety.

The area near the house had been evacuated but there were no emergency services checking for people remaining in the houses. Consequently, an MDA caseworker who lives nearby took it upon himself to check if these clients had been evacuated. The caseworker was surprised and concerned to find them still in the house. The housing manager had left the building and some tenants, including our clients were left to fend for themselves.

Recommendations to the Commission

MDA makes the following recommendations to inform the Commission and to improve outcomes for our clients in disaster preparation, management and support:

Recommendation 1: The Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003 (QLD) require disaster management plans take into consideration the needs of vulnerable members of the community. For example, the Act could include 'communication, support and other relevant needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities' in the list of requirements of disaster management plans in Part 3.

Recommendation 2: Translated information be prepared and provided to people from CALD backgrounds through:

- the Queensland State Disaster Management Plan preparedness activities.
- the Brisbane City Council Disaster Management Plan emergency and safety information via SMS.
- emergency media statements from Government Departments.

- safety information on the Queensland Government website. Residents should be notified of the availability of the translated material through the media statements and radio broadcasts.
- materials published by government departments, agencies and community services on websites. The Australian Red Cross Rediplan was particularly useful and should be translated for people from refugee and CALD backgrounds.
- information booklets or documents at evacuation centres to enable people from refugee and CALD backgrounds with limited English to understand key flood information and updates.
- Queensland Government website¹⁶ flood financial disaster relief information or through a link to the information provided by Multicultural Affairs Queensland.

Recommendation 3: The Queensland State Disaster Management Plan specifically include representatives of CALD communities in stakeholder liaison within the scope of preparedness activities.

Recommendation 4: The Queensland State Disaster Management Plan expand the role of the Department of Communities in Appendix A to include ‘A list of actions to ensure the safety of vulnerable members of the community, such as people from refugee and CALD backgrounds.’

Recommendation 5: The Brisbane City Council Disaster Management Plan include actions, if not already included, to protect and support people from refugee and CALD backgrounds. These actions could include:

- the provision of dedicated phone lines for interpreter access at evacuation centres, and
- the provision of cultural support workers for emergency evacuations and at evacuation centres.

Recommendation 6: Appropriate interpreting services be provided to refugee and CALD communities for emergency media statements from any Government Departments.

Recommendation 7: An instant mobile phone messaging system be funded to dispatch information to community leaders in their own languages. MDA is currently looking for funding to procure such software to allow us to contact our client groups immediately in any emergency crisis. This would immediately reduce the hundreds of hours spent by caseworkers and CSWs contacting each individual client.

Recommendation 8: SES volunteers be provided with information and training on the need for interpreter use during evacuations. There should be clear guidelines to

¹⁶ <http://www.qld.gov.au/floods/>

determine if interpreters should be engaged and clear processes for volunteers to follow in order to contact an appropriate interpreter.

Recommendation 9: SES use of cultural support workers with language and cultural knowledge to support their volunteers when evacuating residents. For example, after the 2011 earthquake in Japan, a volunteer consortium was engaged to work with relief teams and provide interpreting assistance.

Recommendation 10: Families from refugee and CALD backgrounds be prioritised on the Department of Housing waitlist and that the availability of housing programs such as the Community Rent Scheme be increased. The main issue, particularly for large families is the one of access rather than affordability.

Recommendation 11: The Queensland Government's community services website include reference to ongoing support services with access to TIS, such as Lifeline. This will better facilitate access to ongoing counselling support for people from refugee and CALD backgrounds who have suffered trauma as a result of the floods.

Recommendation 12: Implementation of mechanisms to increase communication about the status of the supply of essential services, including energy, landline telephone, mobile telephone and water. This could include a partnership between providers of essential services and Multicultural Affairs Queensland to provide translated information and support in a culturally appropriate way.