

## SUBMISSION TO QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

### Gold Coast City Council

#### 1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this Gold Coast City Council submission to the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry is to provide input into the following areas:

- preparation and planning by federal, state and local governments, emergency services and the community
- the response to the 2010/2011 flood events, particularly measures taken to inform the community and protect life, private and public property
- measures to manage the supply of essential services

As shall be read in this submission, although the Gold Coast itself was not impacted to the same degree as other areas, the City's disaster management arrangements were activated during the event. However, in addition to our own response actions, Gold Coast City Council played an active and important role in supporting those communities that were directly affected by the event; and it is primarily from our Council's support of these communities that we have identified the lessons and recommendations documented in this submission to the Inquiry.

#### 2 BACKGROUND

Heavy and continued rainfall which commenced late November 2010, tropical cyclone Tasha and subsequent flooding has led to one of the worst disasters that has affected Queensland in recent history.

As a result of the widespread and extreme nature of this event, the majority of Queensland's local governments activated their disaster management arrangements at some point since mid-December 2010. Under the Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003, local governments are identified as being primarily responsible for managing disaster events within their local government areas, with local governments and their Local Disaster Management Groups supported by district-level Disaster Management Groups and the State Disaster Management Group (Section 4A).

Throughout the event that devastated South East Queensland, the Gold Coast was fortunate in that only minor damage was sustained when compared to other disaster-affected communities.

Council's Disaster Management Unit, which monitors the City's disaster risks as part of its core business, adopted a watching brief over the developing disaster event from its commencement on 26 December 2010. In accordance with its role, the Unit provided advice to the Gold Coast City Local Disaster Coordinator on the nature of the event and maintained communications with the City's key disaster response agencies. This included communications with key Council Branches and Councillors.

On 27 December 2010, following a period of heavy rainfall and forecasts of more to follow, the Local Disaster Coordinator moved the Gold Coast City Local Disaster Management Group to STAGE 2 – STAND BY in preparation for possible event

escalation and coordination was carried out by the Disaster Management Unit.

For the Gold Coast, key impacts included:

- leaking roofs, tree damage and incidences of minor property flooding
- incidences of localised flooding
- a number of minor landslides around the City
- minor damage to road infrastructure, which required minor maintenance and repair.

Key response agencies included: Gold Coast City Council, the State Emergency Service and the Queensland Police Service.

On 11 January 2010, heavy rains again impacted the Gold Coast. To ensure that the City was prepared for a range of possible flooding scenarios, the Local Disaster Coordinator activated the City's Disaster Coordination Centre. The impact to the City was again minor, with key impacts being incidences of localised flooding, leaking roofs and activation of the Tallebudgera Creek Dam Emergency Action Plan (EAP) to Trigger Level 2 for approx 4 hours. (Activation of the Dam's EAP at Trigger 2 is largely precautionary, and comprises preparatory actions should the event escalate.) Despite a series of inaccurate media reports, no flooding was experienced within the Tallebudgera Creek system.

Although the actual impacts of this rain event were relatively minor, the event had a major impact on the confidence of the City's residents and visitors and their perceptions of risk, especially since this event followed the flash flooding incident in Toowoomba on 10 January 2011 and reports of major flooding impacting Brisbane and Ipswich. To respond to the high volume of calls from Gold Coast residents and visitors concerned about their own wellbeing and safety that were being received by Council, the Local Disaster Coordinator activated the City's Disaster Hotline (1800 606 000) and Call Centre to assist. The Call Centre continued to operate until 24 January 2011, with its focus transitioning during the event to assist with receiving calls from the public offering assistance to disaster-affected communities outside of the Gold Coast.

### **3 SUPPORT FROM GOLD COAST CITY TO DISASTER-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES**

#### **3.1 SUPPORT BY GOLD COAST CITY COUNCIL**

During the flood event Council played a major role in supporting Queensland communities that were impacted by flooding. In summary:

- Operation of the Gold Coast City Disaster Coordination Centre and Disaster Hotline (1800 606 000) to respond to public enquiries and requests for assistance.
- Deployment of 1000 temporary beds and bedding for evacuation Centres in Central Queensland.

- Deployment of 14 Disaster Coordination Centre Incident Management Team staff to Somerset Regional Council to assist with disaster coordination from 14/1/11 to 21/1/11. While on deployment the GCCC staff assisted Somerset Regional Council to develop their own capacity to coordinate disasters.
- Deployment of 2 Disaster Coordination Centre Incident Management Team staff to Lockyer Valley Regional Council to assist with disaster coordination from 24/1/11 to 28/1/11, after initial confusion over the reason for their deployment. Initially Lockyer Valley Regional Council requested assistance from Gold Coast City Council with enhancing the capacity of the Lockyer Valley call centre to respond to public enquiries and requests. However, as this initial request took six days to move through the State's disaster management arrangements before it reached Gold Coast City Council, the initial need for call centre support had diminished by the time the Gold Coast staff arrived at Gatton. On arrival, the Gold Coast staff were advised that they were no longer required, but were welcome to stay to assist with disaster coordination, which was the subject of an updated request for assistance.
- Deployment of resources (equipment and operators) and release of contractors to Brisbane City Council to assist with street clean-up operations from 15/1/11 to 22/1/11.
- Deployment of resources (equipment and operators) to Ipswich City Council to assist with clean-up operations and road repairs from 16/1/11 to 1/2/11.
- Deployment of a Spatial Information Services Officer and a large map plotter to Somerset Regional Council to assist with mapping functions for flood recovery operations from 17/1/11 to 21/1/11.
- Deployment of Environmental Health Officers to Lockyer Regional Council (17/1/11 to 21/1/11) and additional Environmental Health Officers and Pest Management Officers to Ipswich City Council (20/1/11 to 26/1/11) to assist with flood recovery operations.
- Deployment of a Workplace Health and Safety Officer to assist Lockyer Valley Regional Council from 24/1/11 to 4/2/11.

The requests for the above GCCC resources were made by Local Disaster Coordinators of disaster-impacted areas, through to the State Disaster Coordination Centre.

### **3.2 SUPPORT BY OTHER GOLD COAST AGENCIES AND THE PUBLIC**

In addition to the support provided by the Gold Coast City Council, a number of agencies assisted with the flood response and recovery effort by deploying personnel and equipment.

Further during the disaster event overwhelming levels support were offered and provided by the Gold Coast public to the disaster-affected communities. This included:

- A number of councillors organising a Gold Coast 'hamper drive', which resulted in approximately 1500 hampers being prepared for distribution to communities in the Central Queensland and South East Queensland areas.

- In excess of 1000 calls received on Council's Disaster Hotline from members of the public, businesses and organisations offering their services to assist with flood recovery operations.
- Individuals supporting disaster response and recovery operations through donations of goods and cash through the Premier's Appeal.

This level of support required Council to play a significant local coordination role, for an event located outside of our local government area.

#### 4 LESSONS LEARNED

From Council's involvement in the event, it has learned the following lessons, which it wishes to draw to the Inquiry's attention.

##### 4.1 THE IMPACTS OF DISASTER EVENTS ARE FELT BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF LOCAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT GROUPS, EVEN IN AREAS NOT DIRECTLY IMPACTED. THIS MAY REQUIRE SUCH AREAS TO ACTIVATE THEIR LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS TO COORDINATE RESPONSES TO REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE AND LOCAL PUBLIC INTEREST AND SUPPORT.

Although not directly impacted to the same extent as other areas, the recent flood event still had a significant impact on the Gold Coast community.

This was manifest in two forms:

- Despite not having a statutory obligation to contribute to disaster management in areas outside of the Gold Coast, this Council chose to make resources available (as per above) to provide assistance to other local governments to assist with their response and recovery operations.
- Due to the size and scope of this event, and the range of resources that were required by disaster-affected areas, Gold Coast City Council activated its Local Disaster Management Group and its Disaster Coordination Centre to coordinate these requests for assistance. This provided a systematic way of coordinating external event support.
- During the event there were many inquiries from Gold Coast residents and visitors about the event per se, the risks to the Gold Coast and how they could assist disaster-affected communities.
- To manage these public requests, Council activated its Disaster Hotline to provide information to the Gold Coast public about the event and how they could offer assistance through State systems. The Hotline is a critical component of our City's disaster management arrangements.
- The Hotline was well received by the public and took in excess of 1000 calls across the 14 days it was active in support of the floods.

#### ***Recommendation:***

#### ***The Inquiry note:***

- ***The Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements typically "frames" disaster coordination in terms of coordinating response and recovery within a disaster-impacted area.***

***However, from the experience of this Council, activation of local disaster management arrangements may be required even when an area is not impacted directly by an event, to: coordinate support to disaster-affected communities; and to coordinate information to the public in areas not impacted by disasters, who seek information about the event and wish to offer assistance to those areas in need.***

- ***This change in thinking about activation should be reflected in the State's arrangements and policy documents, and be actively promoted by those responsible for the State's system and developing training materials that support it.***

#### **4.2 THE CAPACITY OF SMALLER LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IS LIMITED TO COORDINATE DISASTERS EFFECTIVELY GIVEN THE RESOURCES REQUIRED TO DO SO**

Under Section 4A of the Disaster Management Act 2003, local government is identified as having the primary responsibility for disaster management within the local level. Whilst this works effectively at the Gold Coast, our recent experience with assisting smaller local governments during the recent flood event suggests that Section 4A becomes less feasible as the size of local government decreases. The fundamental underlying issue relates to the numbers of trained personnel required to provide effective coordination of disasters.

In accordance with the State's Introduction to Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements course and Local Disaster Coordinator Induction course, the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System is the preferred system for managing disasters. This is supported by Gold Coast City Council, and has been implemented during events and exercises over the past four years.

However, an analysis conducted by the Gold Coast City Council in 2008 showed that for our Council to provide effective disaster coordination approx 70 staff trained were required to operate the Disaster Coordination Centre, if 24 hour operations were required for a protracted period, during a "typical", non-catastrophic event at the Gold Coast. Whilst for Gold Coast City Council, which has in excess of 3000 employees and contractors, it is not easy to identify 70 staff to undertake disaster coordination roles without significant impact to Council's essential core business functions, finding significant numbers of staff to coordinate disasters is even more problematic for smaller Councils. In essence, for small local governments, there is a tension between meeting the requirements of core business and Section 4A of the Disaster Management Act 2003.

Besides the availability of staff to coordinate disasters, capability of smaller local governments is further limited by the availability of operational skills-based training in disaster management. Whilst Gold Coast City Council employs a fulltime Disaster Management Education Officer to provide relevant operational training in disaster coordination to its staff and those of other agencies, this situation is not the same in other smaller local governments. The capability of these smaller local governments relies on the provision of training by others. However, within South East Queensland, there are limited

opportunities for personnel to undertake disaster management training. The main providers of disaster management training within the region over the past three years have been:

- Gold Coast City Council with its Disaster Management Training Program, which is made available to any disaster management agency within the region; and
- To a lesser extent Emergency Management Queensland, which mainly presents introductory/induction courses on the State's disaster management arrangements. Gold Coast City Council has written to Emergency Management Queensland on numerous occasions requesting that they expand their offering of courses for Local Disaster Coordinators and members of local groups. Under Section 16A (e), it is the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Department of Community Safety to ensure that persons performing functions under the Disaster Management Act in relation to disaster operations are appropriately trained.

From working with Lockyer Valley and Somerset Regional Councils, it was clear that, although some of their staff had completed induction-level training in the State's disaster management arrangements, very few had completed appropriate operational training, such as in the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System and the roles of incorporated functions.

To enhance the capability of the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements, a concerted commitment to developing appropriate standard operational courses and delivering these to all relevant stakeholders is required.

***Recommendation:***

***The Inquiry note:***

- ***During the recent event, a number of smaller local governments required assistance from other areas with meeting their disaster coordination obligations. This indicates that the current model and structure is not able to be fully implemented within these areas, and more flexible models should be explored. Such models might include the development of strategic partnerships between local governments to provide operational support for coordination (eg, as seen recently between Gold Coast City Council and Somerset and Lockyer Valley Regional Councils) as distinct from local governments combining for disaster management and forming a single local disaster management group (as per Section 31 of the Act).***
- ***A more effective and coherent program of training is required to raise the operational effectiveness of all those who perform operational duties under the Disaster Management Act. This requires an urgent and more concerted effort by the Emergency Management Queensland division of the Department of Community Safety.***

#### **4.3 THERE IS A NEED FOR EFFECTIVE AND CONSISTENT STATE COORDINATION OF RESOURCES DURING LARGE EVENTS.**

As outlined in Section 3.1 (above), numerous requests were received by Gold Coast City Council for resources during the recent flood disaster to assist with response and recovery operations.

Under the Disaster Management Act 2003, the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements are designed to provide effective coordination through local groups, with district and State groups providing local governments with appropriate resources and support to help the local governments carry out disaster operations (Section 4A).

During the event, however, it was the experience of Gold Coast City Council, that:

- There was a lack of strategic direction by the State Disaster Coordination Centre over how limited resources should be deployed across the State.

This was evident when our Council received competing requests for the same resources. For example, both Hinchinbrook Shire Council (following the impact of Severe Tropical Cyclone Yasi) and Lockyer Valley Regional Council (following the floods in South East Queensland) requested Gold Coast City Council Environmental Health Officers to assist with recovery operations. While our Council was happy to provide six of these limited resources, Gold Coast City Council was not in a position to determine how best to deploy these (eg, three to each, six to one area, etc), and relied on the State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC) for this strategic advice, which was not readily forthcoming.

Advice was received from the SDCC that the Local Government Association of Queensland Inc (LGAQ) was managing council to council support; and the LGAQ advised our Council to work directly with Council's in need. This approach seems to run contrary to the principles underlying the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (as outlined in Section 4A of the Act) which has district and State groups providing this role, and has the risk of limited available resources not being deployed strategically to reach areas in most need.

- The Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements did not process requests for assistance in a timely manner.

For example, requests from Ipswich City Council for maintenance service resources, requests from Somerset Regional Council for disaster coordinators and mapping resources, took up to five days to be processed before being received by Gold Coast City Council. This was also experienced more recently with a request by Hinchinbrook Shire Council for GCCC environmental health officers, which took six days before that request was received by our Council.

Following a series of inquiries by the Gold Coast City Local Disaster Coordinator, it became evident that the slowness of processing requests for assistance was in part related to the unclear roles and responsibilities of the SDCC logistics cell and the relationship with LGAQ. Phone calls made to the SDCC during the event revealed that there was confusion over these roles, with SDCC stating that LGAQ was responsible for managing council to council support even though at times the LGAQ did not have a presence in the SDCC.

However, the most significant and concerning issue identified was that, despite the various guidelines and training doctrine published by the State, there was not an incident management system implemented consistently within the State for management of the event. Although the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) is the preferred incident management system for managing disasters in Queensland, AIIMS did not appear to be implemented within the SDCC. If this were so, LGAQ should have been fully incorporated into the logistics functions of the SDCC, and there should not have been confusion over functional roles and responsibilities for managing requests for assistance.

***Recommendation:***

***The Inquiry note:***

- ***There is an urgent need for the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System to be implemented consistently across the State and across all levels of the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements to ensure that functional roles and responsibilities are well known and widely understood.***
- ***There is a need to clarify the role of the Local Government Association of Queensland Inc in the State Disaster Coordination Centre.***

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