

STATEMENT OF WITNESS

Prepared by: Legal Services Unit

Prepared by: Legal Services Unit

Date: 5 May 2011

Name of Witness: Stephen Anthony Smith

Address of Witness:

Occupation: Fire Fighter

Position: Manager – Technical Rescue

I, Stephen Anthony Smith, Manager – Technical Rescue, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Department of Community Safety state:

1. I have been a member of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service ("QFRS") since 1994 and currently hold the rank of Inspector.
2. I have worked as a fire fighter and station officer before commencing my current role as Manager - Technical Rescue in 2007.
3. I am a qualified senior instructor in Swift Water Rescue and Urban Search and Rescue and have been a qualified rescue technician since 1999 in all five disciplines.

Swift Water Rescue Training

4. The QFRS provides rescue capability across five disciplines of rescue which are:
 - 1) Vertical Rescue;
 - 2) Confined Space Rescue;
 - 3) Trench Rescue;
 - 4) Urban Search and Rescue; and
 - 5) Swift Water Rescue.

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5. QFRS rescue technicians are a group of permanent fire fighters who have undertaken specialty training in the above disciplines. Each discipline has its own set of skills, techniques and equipment, many of which are complimentary to other rescue elements.
6. Due to the often extreme and dynamic nature of incidents that require the involvement of QFRS rescue technicians, the training must not only develop high level skills but very importantly, personnel who also have sound judgment and who can quickly get an appreciation of the scene and then act decisively and appropriately.
7. In training a QFRS rescue technician, the sum of the whole is greater than its individual components. This capability is developed by virtue of accumulated knowledge and experience that is gained by the formal training in each discipline, regular competency maintenance and operational experience.
8. For example, in vertical rescue training, a rescue technician is taught a range of fundamental and advanced rope skills and participates in numerous exercises to build conceptual understanding of rescue philosophy.
9. Given that no two rescue incidents are the same, it is essential that rescue technicians have situational awareness and act decisively in a dynamic and often high risk environment.
10. In keeping with the QFRS All Hazards approach, it is necessary for technicians to be competent in a range of rescue disciplines as this allows for rostering flexibility and enhanced service delivery .
11. While the Swift Water Rescue (Level 2) course will provide an experienced rescue technician with the skills to operate in a swift water environment, it will not necessarily provide that level of competency to a firefighter who undertakes the course without the skills developed through the completion of the other complementary rescue disciplines. The course is structured around an assumed advanced knowledge of rope rescue skills. If a participant attended without this level of prior knowledge they would (at best) obtain an appreciation of the skills required but would not achieve a true understanding of the full scope of swift water techniques and applications.
12. Given the high standard set by QFRS, it is not uncommon for participants to be unsuccessful in competing technical rescue courses.

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13. In response to the evidence of Mr Burrows (at pages 7 and 110) of the transcript, I note that Mr Burrows was initially accepted to undertake level 2, technical rescue technician training, but failed to demonstrate the required standards for the vertical rescue component. This component is more than simply 'climbing a rope' and is a necessary and fundamental skill set for any rescue technician.
14. Further, I note the comments of Mr Burrow's at page 7 of the Transcript, about the requisite training not being suitable for all individuals. Given the high risk nature of the work undertaken by rescue technicians and the standards of training required for safe operation, the role (and the training required to undertake it) is not suitable for all personnel, which limits the number of personnel trained in swift water rescue.
15. Training is designed around the framework of the three skill sets that QFRS have established. The first of these is the "Swift Water Rescue Awareness" training which is made available to all auxiliary and rural fire fighters.
16. The second level is 'Swift Water Rescue – Level 1' which is designed to equip personnel with the skills to undertake rescue activities at the first three levels of the rescue risk scale (as outlined in paragraph 22 of this statement). All permanent, operational fire fighters and selected auxiliary fire fighters are trained to Swift Water Rescue Level 1.
17. The third level is 'Swift Water Rescue – Level 2' which is the highest skill set and equips personnel (who are now identified at SWRT's) to undertake rescue activities at all levels of the rescue risk scale. The Swift Water Rescue Level 2 training module requires 20 hours of pre-course learning and 5 days of face to face training, and is underpinned by the comprehensive program of other rescue disciplines..
18. QFRS Swift Water training is based on a tiered risk scale which is designed to give Swift Water Rescue Technicians ("SWRT's") the tools to assess a rescue situation and proceed in a manner which provides the greatest level of safety for both the SWRT and the casualty.
19. Within the risk scale there are two rescue standards being "Dry" and "Wet" rescues.
20. Personnel conducting 'Dry' rescues are required to be aware of hazards and be able to respond by land based rescue and recovery.
21. Personnel conducting 'Wet' rescues are required to undertake water based rescues/response which may require entering the water and 'river reading', swimming and/or paddling to access a casualty.

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22. The risk scale goes from low to high risk and assists in determining the most suitable tactics to effect the rescue with the least risk to the rescuer or casualty. The following details the risk scale and also identifies which rescue standard (i.e. "Wet" or "Dry"):

LOWER RISK

DRY RESCUES - LEVEL 1 AND LEVEL 2

- 1) **Yell:** Instructions provided to the casualty which will stabilize the situation and prevent the situation from becoming worse;
- 2) **Reach:** Rescuer attempts to reach the casualty with a piece of equipment e.g. a pole, inflated fire hose or other object to extend the rescuers reach without the rescuer entering the water;
- 3) **Throw:** Use of throw bags or other line to recover the casualty;

HIGHER RISK

WET RESCUES - LEVEL 2 ONLY

- 4) **Wade:** Rescuers wading out to a casualty and bringing them back to higher ground;
- 5) **Row:** The use of boat based operations (use of Inflatable Work Platforms) which are used either with rope systems or as a "Free" boating technique;
- 6) **Go-Tow:** Involves a rescuer entering the water, making contact with the casualty and assisting their extraction from the water;
- 7) **Helo:** Direct extrication assisted by rotary wing aircraft.

23. The level 2 swift water training module requires personnel to perform rescues in fast moving water. This training is conducted in the Tully River (North Queensland). Some regions also undertake additional SWR competency maintenance activities at places such as "Wet and Wild" and other appropriately identified local water ways.

24. Technicians are required to complete an annual skills maintenance program to ensure skills competency is maintained. Additionally technicians are required to return to the Tully River every 2 years to refresh the skill sets acquired during training, ensure familiarity with any technique or equipment changes and to strengthen individual competency. Ongoing training prepares SWRT's for the rigours of responding to real swift water rescue incidents.

25. Training standards are maintained at a high level because of the associated risks to both rescuer and casualty when undertaking swift water rescue activities.

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26. Training levels are based on an organisational risk assessment and the ability to develop and sustain the training and maintenance of the skill sets. Providing equipment and initial training are only part of what is necessary. It is critical to ensure that skill sets are maintained, which requires a significant amount of time and commitment.

Equipment

27. The current QFRS radios are water resistant and operate effectively in most wet conditions. While they are not fully water-proof, most regions have purchased a number of water proof bags to enhance continuity of service in swift water environments.

28. To ensure that QFRS rescue technicians have all necessary equipment to perform rescues as needed, the QFRS provides:

- That each qualified rescue technician has their own Personal Protective Equipment ("PPE") including safety helmet, wetsuit, Personal Flotation Device ("PFD") complete with knife and strobe, headlamp and booties;
- Each region maintains rescue appliance/s with a suitable swift water inventory for regional risk and additional surge capacity to support severe weather events; and
- At a State level, the Technical Rescue Unit holds significant additional swift water rescue equipment that can be deployed throughout the state on request.

29. All urban and auxiliary appliances (fire fighting vehicles) are equipped with work lighting systems as well as both portable and fixed flood lighting systems. All rural appliances are equipped with work lighting systems and some are equipped with portable flood lighting.

30. In addition, all State Swift Water deployment kits contain a high powered torch for scene lighting and search capability.

31. All regions have Inflatable Work Platforms (IWP's) for use in swift water operations. There are two classes of vessel: class 1 being a 12 foot commercial raft and class 2 being a 14 foot purpose built rescue raft. These vessels are designed to reduce the risk to technicians and casualties and can be used in conjunction with rope systems. Additional vessels are located in the additional equipment for surge capacity at both State and regional levels.

32. QFRS is currently investigating how the use of motorised vessels may enhance Swift Water Rescue capability and service delivery.

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The number of Swift Water Rescue technicians across Queensland and specifically the SE and SW Regions and the targeted and maximum numbers of Swift Water Technicians across the state.

33. As of 25 October 2010, there was 203 qualified Swift Waters Technicians across the state.

<u>Region</u>	<u>Approved number of rescue technicians</u>	<u>Actual number of rescue technicians</u>	<u>Number of technicians that are Level 2 Swift Water Qualified</u>
Brisbane	86	72	57
South East	45	52	44
South West	15	14	10
North Coast	33	41	28
Central Region	32	32	21
Northern	22	24	19
Far Northern	20	23	21
State	0		3
Total	253	246	203

34. The above table details the number of Level 2 SWRT's in each region. It should be noted that many regions have the approved number of rescue technicians but not all technicians are trained in Level 2 Swift Water Operations. Another 31 personnel are scheduled to undertake training for Level 2 swift water rescue in July 2011.

35. QFRS, like all public authorities, has to operate within the confines of an allocated budget which impacts on the number of Level 2 swift water training programs which may be delivered.. Notably, in 1999 there were 0 SWRTs in QLD, in 2005 there were 56 Level 2 SWRT's and in October 2010 there were 203. This represents QFRS's commitment to building swift water operational capacity throughout Queensland. The QFRS has more Level 2 SWRTs than any other fire agency in Australia.

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How the approved number of rescue technicians is determined

36. QFRS has had a Swift Water Rescue Capability since 1999. Since that time, there has been an increase in approved rescue personnel numbers. Approved rescue personnel numbers were originally based on rescue station location, and on the basis of three rescue personnel, per shift, per rescue station. Approved rescue numbers are now determined according to a business case based on a regional risk assessment.

The Standard of Swift Water Training available to Rural and Auxiliary Fire Fighters

37. There is a "Swift Water Awareness" package which is available to all auxiliary and rural personnel. Selected auxiliary stations are also provided with level 1 training, based on regional risk assessment and business case submission to the Deputy Commissioner.

38. The following auxiliary stations are currently approved for Level 1 Swift Water training, Cooran, Pomona, Cooroy, Airlie Beach, Propserpine, Warwick, Port Douglas, Tully, Babinda, Mossman, Inisfail and Cairns South.

39. "Swift Water Awareness" covers personal safety, 'size up' and resource requirement identification. This will provide rural and auxiliary personnel with the skills to maintain their own personal safety, assess the scene, gather relevant and necessary information, carry out activities within their training (e.g. passive bank search) and request specialty resources.

40. For example, if a rural crew attended a job where persons have been reportedly swept off a vehicle (downstream) into trees, that crew can isolate the area to prevent the incident from escalating (e.g. preventing by-standers from being swept away), conduct a search from the bank to pinpoint the location of casualties, communicate with the casualty to provide reassurance, set up appropriate lighting, identify the closest/easiest access points for responding vehicles, and communicate that information back through FireCom.. These actions will expedite the rescue upon arrival of the responding crew..

41. As a result of the severe weather events in early 2011 which created significant demand for Swift Water rescue response, the QFRS has commenced a comprehensive review of its Swift Water rescue capability and service delivery. This review is ongoing and the findings will be made available to this Commission upon completion. In the event that this review is not finalised by 30 June 2011, a document detailing the interim findings will be provided.

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Page 5 – Non recognition of International Swiftwater Qualifications

- 42. QFRS policy recognises skills through an established Recognition of Prior Learning (“RPL”) process which is compliant with the national training frame work guidelines.
- 43. As part of the RPL process, we reserve the right to ‘challenge test’ and require training in QFRS specific techniques. A challenge test is a practical examination to confirm that a person is competent in the skill set that they are claiming.
- 44. To ensure competency and familiarity with QFRS specific techniques and practice, the QFRS requires all persons seeking certification as a SWT to complete a QFRS specific upgrade or familiarisation packaged to ensure that all SWTs are able to perform to QFRS standards.
- 45. In particular reference to Mr Burrows evidence (at page 5 of the transcript) I note that there was no internal QFRS standard with which to recognize (or otherwise) Mr Burrow’s qualifications for swift water operations at the time he commenced with QFRS (1998). From 1999 onwards QFRS commenced Swift Water Operations with all training being conducted by an external provider until QFRS developed its own training package in 2006.

Response to Page 8 – Shot-fired rope

- 46. I cannot comment directly on any requests made within the region for a specific type of shot-fired rope and for safety reasons, this style of line launcher is not an approved item of equipment for QFRS
- 47. For this type of capability, QFRS currently uses a Big Shot Line Launcher (a giant sling shot) to facilitate the crossing of a line across a water course.

Response to Pages 22 and 106 – Number of personnel required to conduct SWR

- 48. QFRS has a range of detailed Fire Communications Centre Directives that dictate the type and number of resources to be dispatched to respond to particular types of incidents (e.g. road-rescue, swift water, factory fire, HAZMAT, etc).
- 49. Due to the dynamic nature of rescue jobs, the response numbers provide for a standard resourcing approach which can be scaled up or down depending on the nature and needs of the incident. There are many circumstances where a swift water operation can be safely undertaken with less than the number of resources in the directive.. Ultimately, the number of resources necessary to complete a rescue will depend on the individual circumstance of the job and the skill, knowledge and judgment of the personnel in attendance.

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Response to page 31 - In water equipment

- 50. As detailed in paragraph 29 of this statement, there is in-water equipment available on every permanent urban appliance and on auxiliary appliances where Level 1, Swift Water Training has been delivered.
- 51. Additionally, regions maintain a rescue appliance at dedicated rescue stations which contain more extensive inventory of in-water equipment. This is off-set by additional equipment held by regions at strategic locations for deployment during larger scale incidents.
- 52. The Technical Rescue Unit (State Head Quarters), also maintains an extensive cache of in-water equipment to support surge capacity needs through deployment and equipment loans into regions as requested.

Response to page 99 and 109 – Knot tied incorrectly on a throw-bag

- 53. Mr Burrows is a level 1 (first responder) for swift water operations. The scope of this level includes throw-bag operation and a key component of throw-bag usage is ensuring the bag is in a functional state before use.
- 54. I note that at page 99 of the transcript of Mr Burrow's evidence, he indicates that he didn't have time to check his equipment. It takes approximately five seconds to check a knot and approximately thirty seconds to retie the knot if required.
- 55. It was Mr Burrow's responsibility to check his equipment and confirm that it was in a useable condition. I note at page 96 of the transcript Mr Burrows indicates that he had been waiting for some time for the arrival of Mr Peter McCarrom (a level 2 SWRT). It follows that he should have checked his equipment during this time in line with his responsibility as a swift water (first responder).
- 56. Further, in relation to Mr Burrows suggestion to rectify the knot-release of the throw-bag by adding a thimble and swaged end (a metal clip and ring to secure the rope), this is a device that has a range of uses in the swift water environment, by throwing either end to a casualty to recover/rescue them. The addition of metal attachments would pose a significant hazard to the welfare of both casualty and rescuer.
- 57. I make this statement of my own free will believing its contents to be true and correct.

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Justices Act 1886

I acknowledge by virtue of Section 110A(6C)(c)(i)(ii) of the Justices Act 1886 that:

- (1) This written statement by me dated 9/5/11 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 8 is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and
- (2) I make it knowing that, if it were admitted as evidence, I may be liable to prosecution for stating anything that I know is false.

..... Signature

Signed at Brisbane this .. day of 9/5/2011

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