

The flooding events that have affected Queensland are significant in our history and, although thanks must be given to all those who have assisted in responding to these events, overall there have been many fundamental failures of the disaster management system and the preparation, planning and response. This submission will highlight these failures.

## **The preparation and planning by federal, state and local governments; emergency services and the community for the 2010/2011 floods in Queensland.**

### **Risk Studies**

There have been many flood studies conducted across Queensland in recent times to identify risk models for vulnerable communities. Many of these studies have been jointly funded from Federal, State and Local Governments.

Unfortunately, there is no central library containing the outcomes of these studies, and generally, the smaller Councils didn't have the resources to prepare applications or manage the process so they miss out on the funding. Those that have undertaken the studies don't share that information which makes it difficult to manage events that affect multiple local government areas.

There is not a coordinated approach to undertaking these risk studies. The consequences of mitigation strategies, or lack of, can have a significant affect downstream in places like Rockhampton.

### **Disaster Plans**

Most of the disaster plans for Rockhampton, Banana and Central Highlands do not have designated triggers and decision points articulated in the plan. This was very apparent in Central Highlands given the experience of the 2008 floods. The same errors were made and, unless the disaster plans are made more robust, history will repeat itself.

### **Disaster Management Training**

The lack of knowledge of disaster management displayed by members of Queensland Police in Banana Shire and Rockhampton resulted in incorrect advice being given to members of the disaster management groups. Queensland Police lacked understanding in the scope of powers given under the Disaster Management Act and the appropriate application of those powers. The police have limited understanding of the reporting relationships when working in the disaster

management system including the positions of local disaster coordinator and the DDC.

This resulted in very negative messages were being reported through the media including comments about starving out the residents of Depot Hill. If the Police wanted to move the residents out, they had the powers under the Disaster Management Act.

There was a distinct lack of knowledge in the Rockhampton DDMG and LDMG of powers under the Disaster Management Act in relation to the use of the SEWS; the application of the Privacy Act; the Transport Operations (Marine) Act; and the powers of the DDC to overrule sections of the Electricity Act. This lack of knowledge resulted in poor advice being given to members of those groups.

### **State Emergency Service**

The State Emergency Service was poorly prepared for the events in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Rockhampton, Central Highlands, and Banana. Continual changes to training packages over the past few years have made it extremely difficult for volunteers to attain the level of training required to adequately and safely undertake the necessary functions. Additional paid training staff have been employed over the past few years to address some of these issues but funding restrictions have resulted in those trainers not being able to adequately train and prepared the volunteers for these events. Training in the management of larger scale operations is non-existent and the standard of storm and water damage operations is poor.

The treasury provides one-off grant funding to the State Emergency Service for the provision and replacement of major equipment like floodboats. These funding arrangements are ad-hoc and fail to acknowledge the serviceable life of the equipment. This type of funding arrangements would not be tolerated in the Fire or Ambulance services but is deemed acceptable for the volunteers who put their lives at risk the same as the other services.

Two of the floodboats used extensively in response to the flooding in Rolleston and Rockhampton are over 25 years old and both had engine failures whilst in flood waters. Although no one was injured this time, forcing the volunteers to use equipment that is well past its serviceable life should not be accepted.

The State Emergency Service facilities in Biloela and Rockhampton were not suitable for the effective management of this event. The hot, cramped conditions in the Rockhampton facility were inappropriate and the Biloela facility had limited resources

to conduct incident management. The positioning of SES facilities in Brisbane in known flood zones is not appropriate.

Most of SES facilities throughout the State fail to meet the current Workplace Health and Safety standards for a workplace. We would not accept it for paid employees but we force this standard of facility on our volunteers.

### **Information Systems**

To undertake effective disaster response activities, decision makers need timely and accurate information. During the flood events, large amounts of information were distributed electronically via the internet.

Many of the affected councils are using the 'Guardian' system for disaster management. This is a very good, robust system except that only persons who have access to the specific council networks, and have the software, have visibility over the information.

Requests for assistance from the LDCC's to the DDCC's and SDCC can not be tracked at the local level. Responding agencies (State government, NGO's, ADF, etc) are forced to use parallel information systems due to lack of access. This was very apparent in the Banana LDCC.

In the LDCC in Biloela, there were only one or two computers with internet which made it difficult to access current information regarding river heights, road closures, etc.

State Emergency Service units are using a variety of systems including RFA-Online, Guardian, and some only have access to pen and paper. This was the case with all of the SES Groups in the Banana Unit who responded to the flood event.

The State has provided the RFA\_Online software for SES Groups that wish to use it but failed to provide sufficient hardware and internet access in order for the system to work. This made it very difficult to gain a clear picture of the number of requests being received.

This was just a half-baked idea and needs to be appropriately funded for the information to be accurate. The 'Guardian' system should be rolled out to all LDMG/DDMG for consistency and electronic transfer to information and tracking of requests.

The Police and Redcross were tracking evacuees and other requests using different information systems that do not link with the systems that the LDCC in Rockhampton and Emerald were using. It is extremely difficult for Disaster Managers to get an

overall picture of the situation, but the use of all these different information systems just compounds the problem.

There were some issues in relation to information sharing between Ergon, Police, Council and other agencies. This needs to be investigated further.

The decision to locate critical State computer servers in a known flood zone in Brisbane is just not appropriate.

### **State Disaster Policy**

During these flooding events, the State attempted to implement major policy changes including the Emergency Alert Guidelines; draft State Resupply Policy; and State Disaster Plan.

The State Disaster Plan needs to be reviewed to reflect the changes in legislation.

The decision was made at the State level to implement the draft State Resupply Guidelines part way during this event. This document has some significant changes from previous guidelines and disaster managers were forced to use them without any training. Secondly, the guidelines are still only in draft format and have not been agreed to at the State level. This was a poor decision.

**All aspects of the response to the 2010/2011 flood events, particularly measures taken to inform the community and measures to protect life and private and public property, including immediate management, response and recovery**

The response by Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in Rockhampton was completely inappropriate. The establishment of 24/7 Regional Operations Centre and Incident Management Teams to manage four additional swift water rescue crews, which would normally be managed by FIRECOM had NDRRA not been activated, is a completely inappropriate waste of NDRRA funding and a money grab.

The use of swift water rescue crews to walk through contaminated flood water to assess if houses had been affected by water was a complete waste of time and money given that the QFRS assessments had no technical basis. Ergon & Q-Build staff had to conduct their own assessments before power could be restored. State Emergency Service floodboat crews, water police and council officers were fully aware of houses that were inundated and so, the QFRS crews were purely a media stunt. It was quite interesting to note that as soon as there was a suspected sighting of a crocodile, the assessments by swift water rescue crews were no longer required.

During the early stages of the Rockhampton floods, QFRS staff proactively promoted the Rural Fire Service of having the capability to drive through flood waters with their vehicles as a ferry service. This was completely inappropriate given the number of deaths due to vehicles being washed off roads and secondly, the vehicles are not appropriately configured to carry passengers. I find it very unnerving when these practices are endorsed by senior officers.

The promotion of QFRS as leading the clean-up was once again inappropriate. Rostering QFRS staff on overtime to lead the clean-up whilst the Rural Fire Volunteers; SES Volunteers; and staff from affected business made up the majority of the labour force was just a little over the top.

To my understanding, no QFRS crews on normal rostered shifts participated in the response to these flooding events.

The use of rotary wing aircraft has become the 'easy option' to moving around disaster areas in recent years but also comes with a price tag. Rockhampton airport became flooded during this event, but the 'all weather' airstrip at Hedlow was only used by the Queensland Police plane and some mining companies. This airstrip should have been better utilised which would have saved the State/NDRRA a lot of money.

If counter-disaster operations were not funded under NDRRA/ SDRA, I think that a more realistic response by QFRS / QPS and QAS would have occurred.

The deployment of additional Queensland Police Service officers into the Rockhampton area was, once again a money-grab. With the limited mobility around the affected areas, and the predictability of the Fitzroy River, normal roster patrols could have easily responded to the flooding events.

The response by the State Emergency Service was poorly managed with the scale of the events in Banana Shire and Rockhampton beyond the level of experience of the Local Controllers. There was no management strategy established to address fatigue issues and rostering of local members.

In Rockhampton, the SES were undertaking re-supply tasks with no consultation with the LDCC. These tasks were unnecessary given that the residents were not isolated. This occurred when SES crews used a vehicle to deliver a food re-supply into houses in Alton Down when the residents could have easily driven themselves. This unnecessary tasking stretched the local resources. The lack of resource management and financial accountability were highlighted.

Rockhampton has developed a culture where the SES with resources from the local and State governments, supply unlimited sandbags to anyone. This put a great strain on SES members and resources. Many sandbags were used in places where the predicted water levels were going to exceed. Other sandbags were used in places where the water was never going to get to. Media statements given by the Premier and other elected representative needs to reflect the mitigation strategies in the local disaster management plans instead of the throw-away line: 'Ring the SES and they will give you sandbags!' The volunteers receive the abuse by the residents when they are told that sandbags are not the answer.

### Resourcing, overall coordination and deployment of personnel and equipment

During these flooding events, it appeared that every agency was working in complete isolation from, and in many ways, in competition with, every other agency. This created duplication of functions and responsibility and resulted in a complete waste of tax payer money. The guidelines for NDRRA / SDRRA funding need to be overhauled to eliminate this wastage and channel the funding back to where it was intended – 'Relief and Recovery for the affected communities'.

#### **LDMG - Banana**

The LDMG at Banana was poorly resourced to coordinate the events in Theodore. Information was available that indicated that Castle Creek was going to cut access to the identified evacuation centre at the airport. The LDMG had over 24 hours to evacuate the residents by road before the creek flooded. This failure to make the timely decision resulted in the complete evacuation using rotary wing aircraft. Lack of computers and internet facilities limited the access to timely warnings and current weather observations. The Banana LDMG received three different reports from the Transport and Main Roads Department regarding the state of the roads which made planning difficult.

The clean-up was well managed.

#### **LDMG – Central Highlands**

The LDMG at Central Highlands was well resourced to coordinate the events. Unfortunately, the LDMG and elected representatives, struggle to make the hard decisions to evacuate parts to the CBD. The LDMG had over 36 hours to evacuate identified residences that were in the impact zone by road but decided not to. Given the daily changes in predicted heights of the Nogoa River, this conscious decision potentially jeopardised the safety of the residents. Fortunately, no one died!

### **LDMG – Rockhampton**

The LDMG at Rockhampton was well resourced to coordinate events. Given the record events up stream, The LDMG and elected representatives should have made the hard decision to evacuate residents in the forecast affected area. This would have greatly reduced the anxiety generated when the decision was made not to conduct ongoing daily re-supply to affected residences.

As the event unfolded, the DDMG merged with the LDMG with the DDC attending the LDMG meetings. This was not appropriate and the DDC lost sight of the bigger picture.

### **DDMG – Rockhampton**

The DDMG Rockhampton was a waste of time. Very few agencies were represented and any request was forwarded to the State for resourcing. The DDC failed to provide adequate direction and guidance to the LDMG's in Central Highlands and Rockhampton regarding evacuations given the predicted river heights and the risk to the communities. In Rockhampton, the District and Local Disaster Management Groups morphed into one group at the local level which resulted in poor visibility over the greater issues like flooding in Central Highland and resupply arrangements as a result of road closures.

The District level was merely a rubber stamping office with requests forward onto the State level. This level provides limited or no value adding to the disaster management system and, in many ways, slows the process down.

### **SDMG**

The SDMG failed to provide guidance to the Districts regarding re-supply strategies given the damage to the road / rail network and the duration of isolation for many communities. It is great to flick the problem to the ADF but the SDMG still needs to devise the strategic plan and how it will be sustained for the duration of the event.

### **Adequacy of equipment and communications systems; and**

Disaster management information systems are not compatible between agencies and many of the systems rely solely on the telephone infrastructure. This is a risk during major events.

### **Adequacy of forecasts and early warning systems particularly as they related to the flooding events in Toowoomba, and the Lockyer and Brisbane Valleys,**

The pre-season forecasts gave an indication of the season ahead but, like and prediction, sometimes they are correct; sometimes incorrect; and sometimes in the middle.

When you talk to our senior citizens, they are quick to remind you of the various events that have occurred over the past 100 years including floods. Unfortunately, and this was highlight in many forums during these events, people wanted to know exactly where the rain was going to fall; when is was going to fall; how long it was going to last and exactly how high the water was going to rise, and all of this information before the rain ever commenced falling.

When these questions were asked of the Bureau of Meteorology, the answer was quite simple – we won't know until it starts raining.

It is really easy to blame the Bureau for not providing the information in a timely fashion but, in reality, it highlights the lack of detail, triggers and decision points in our disaster plans. This lack of detailed planning on the part of LDMG's and DDMG's does not constitute a failure of the Bureau to provide an educated guess of what we may experience.

Given that, we need to have a thorough look at each river system and identify intelligence gathering opportunities. Additional rain gauges are always welcomed but disaster managers still need to monitor and react to what is happening around them not reply solely on a forecast.

The Rockhampton LDMG did this very well by preparing for a worst case scenario based on 500mm additional river rise than what was being predicted. This ensured adequate evacuation resources were available when necessary.

L. Green