



# QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

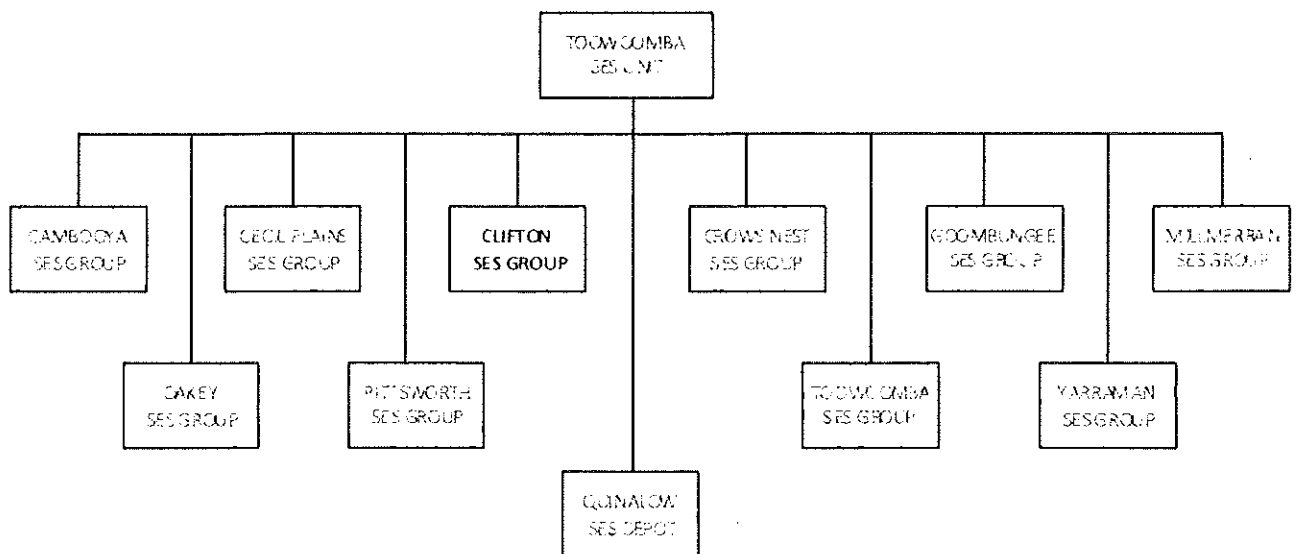
## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SES LOCAL CONTROLLERS

The following responses to the Questionnaire have been provided by Norman Fry, Toowoomba Regional Council's Disaster Management Coordinator/SES Local Controller.

### 1. STRUCTURE OF SES UNITS

#### 1.1 Please describe the structure of your unit, including the number and location of any constituent groups and the number of members in each group.

There is one SES unit for the Toowoomba Regional Council area comprising ten groups. The current structure is detailed in the chart below.



The number of members as at September 2011 in each group of the SES Toowoomba Unit is stated in the table below:

No.	UNIT/GROUP	The Number of Members as at September 2011
1	SES Cambooya Group	8
2	SES Cecil Plains Group	26
3	SES Clifton Group	12
4	SES Crows Nest Group	10
5	SES Goombungee Group	14
6	SES Millmerran Group	11
7	SES Oakey Group	11
8	SES Pittsworth Group	11
9	SES Toowoomba Group	89
10	SES Yarraman Group	13
11	Toowoomba Unit HQ	1
13	<b>Total SES Toowoomba Unit</b>	<b>206</b>

**1.2 Please indicate whether any members of your unit are employed on a paid, full-time basis. If so, how many are employed on this basis and what positions do they fill?**

There is no SES member employed on a paid full-time basis. The Council's Disaster Management Coordinator/SES Local Controller is employed on a paid, full-time basis but this person only spends about 60 % of his time dealing with the SES part of the role. The time given to SES outside of normal working hours is unpaid and on a voluntary basis

**1.3 Do you believe there is a need for SES members (including Local Controllers) to be employed on a paid, full-time basis? Please explain why or why not, including whether there are other ways in which SES members could be rewarded for their time.**

Yes. There are two levels of payment on a full-time basis that should be considered for SES personnel. These are:

Level 1 - The SES Local Controllers who are:

- a. controlling a Unit consisting of all the groups in their local government area; or
- b. controlling all the individual units/groups in their local government area.

Level 2 - The SES Deputy Controllers who are controlling a group of more than 100 volunteers.

These two appointment levels could be paid on a full-time basis, but at different levels of remuneration to ensure that:

- a. High quality personnel with the necessary background and experience in disaster management aspects including command and control put themselves forward and selection is not just based on long service in the SES; and
- b. The major increase in the requirements of command and control, administration, training, logistics and human resources can be achieved effectively, accurately and in a timely manner.

The SES Volunteer could be rewarded by governments at all levels providing tax relief (similar to those who serve in the Defence Reserve Forces), or for example on local rates percentage rebates. This would be subject to achieving a minimal number of hours undertaking SES activities (eg. operations, training and/or administration).

**1.4 If there is more than one Local Controller in your local government area, what effect does this have on operations?**

There is only one Local Controller in the Toowoomba Regional Council area. In my opinion, this provides for a stable command and control situation with clear lines of communication. Having more than one may produce some problems for operational control, especially where there might be personality clashes.

## 2. READINESS FOR THE 2010/2011 FLOODS

### 2.1 Did your unit have enough training to prepare it for the 2010/2011 floods?

Yes. There were not any tasks that were not completed and no major injuries to volunteers and there was no loss of equipment due to any lack of training.

### 2.2 Did your unit have enough volunteers to cope with demand?

Overall Yes. There were times during the period of the floods where the completion of some tasks were delayed as they were attended to in order of priority. Many SES volunteers like the general public were on Christmas holidays and could not get back immediately to their home centres. Some were involved in the saving of their own properties or involved with other emergency service agencies.

### 2.3 Did your unit have enough equipment and resources?

In general Yes. As a result of the floods it was recognised that there is a need to have an additional flood boat based in Toowoomba to react to Western and Northern parts of the Toowoomba Regional Council area.

### 2.4 Overall, do you think your unit was adequately prepared to respond to the 2010/2011 floods?

Yes. All required tasks were met. There were no SES casualties. No vehicles, boats or other equipment was lost or damaged. There was a requirement for more flood boat handlers and this aspect has been addressed since the floods with two boat handlers courses being completed in the Toowoomba Regional Council area.

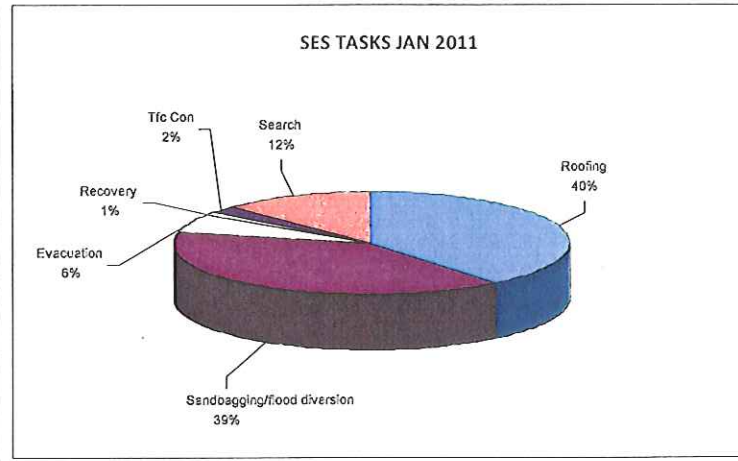
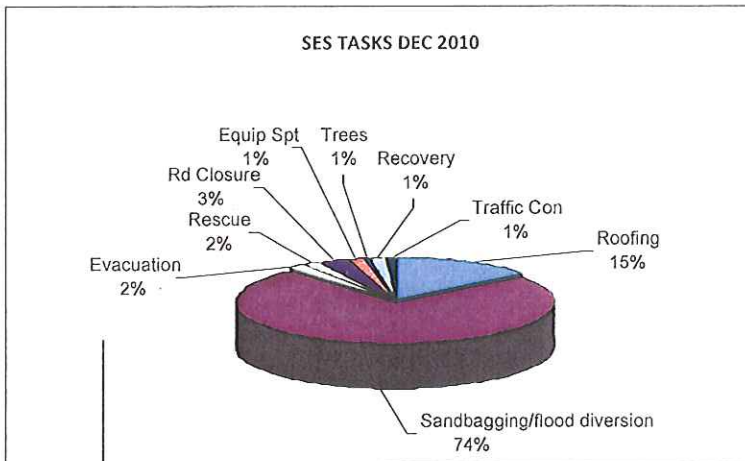
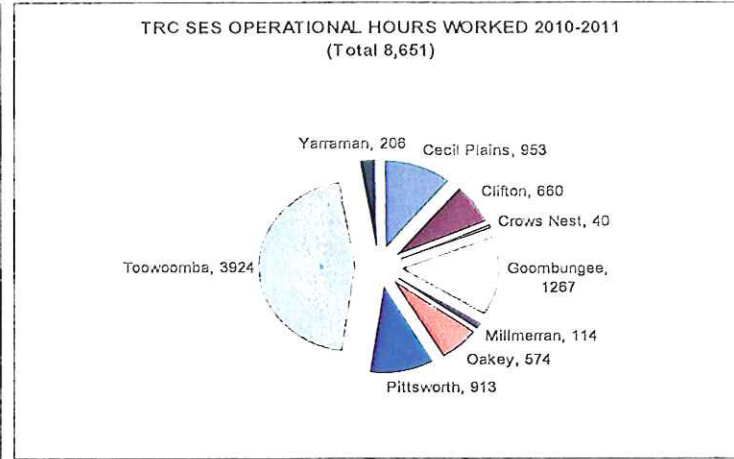
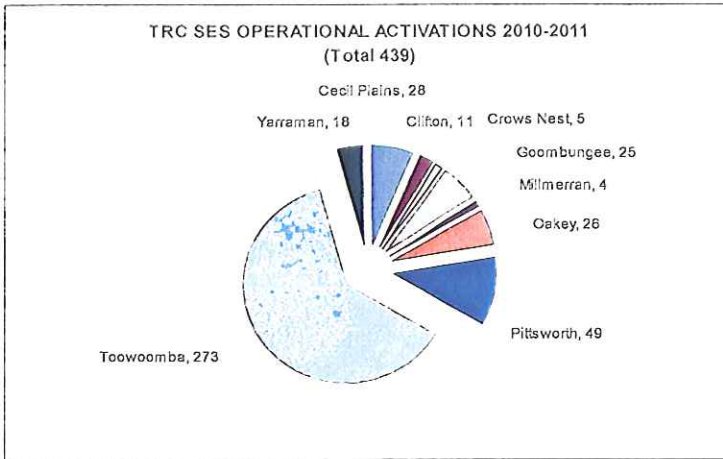
## 3. OPERATIONS DURING THE 2010/2011 FLOODS

### 3.1 Please describe the activities undertaken by your unit and/or its groups during the 2010/2011 floods (eg. Requests for Assistance, rescues, evacuations).

During the 2010/2011 flood period the SES Toowoomba Unit received over 500 requests for assistance. Activations were conducted for 439 of these. A number of requests were bogus, time wasters or non-emergency situations. The operational total hours worked by the SES volunteers was 8,651. This included 29 deployments outside the Toowoomba Regional Council area (East of Toowoomba and North Queensland). Some of the activation lasted an hour and some up to five days. The charts below show the breakdown of activations, hours deployed and the different types of the activities that were undertaken:

- Evacuation
- Rescue
- Search
- Recovery
- Roofing
- Road Closure

- Traffic Control
- Equipment Support
- Tree Cutting/Clearance
- Sandbagging/flood diversion



#### 4. COMMAND AND CONTROL

##### 4.1 Generally speaking, please describe your responsibilities as Local Controller during disaster response operations.

My overall responsibility during a disaster response operation is to manage the deployment of the groups to effectively meet the required tasks. This includes providing any aspect of support (personnel, vehicles and equipment) to ensure the Deputy Controllers can complete their given tasks.

##### 4.2 As a Local Controller, who do you report to during disaster response operations?

I am employed in a dual role appointment by the Toowoomba Regional Council. During a disaster event I report to the Local Disaster Coordinator. As the SES representative, I also report directly to the Local Disaster Management Group.

**4.3 Where does your SES unit receive Requests for Assistance from?**

During normal working days the Requests for Assistance come through the SES 132 500 telephone number and are passed onto me or SES groups which have computer contact established. Some requests come directly from other emergency agencies – depending on the task. During a disaster event requests also come from the Toowoomba Regional Council Local Disaster Coordination Centre via the Local Controller or the SES Liaison Officer. The majority of requests come from the public. In a major disaster such as December 2010/January 2011 the Local SES 1300 number was switched through to the Toowoomba Regional Council Call Centre/Toowoomba Regional Council Local Disaster Coordination Centre.

**4.4 What is the process of tasking SES members when Requests for Assistance are received by your unit?**

Each group, depending on size has a different system to call out their volunteers, depending on the urgency of the task. Most use the telephone system. Members report to their group HQ where they are briefed on the task and then deployed.

**4.5 During the 2010/2011 floods, did your unit receive any competing Requests for assistance? If so, how were these managed and prioritised?**

All requests are prioritised by the receiving unit. There were many occasions on which the tasks outnumbered the volunteer teams. Deputy Controllers prioritised the tasks. Where there were tasks that could not be separated, the Local Controller set the priority and despatched teams from other groups in the SES Toowoomba Unit to assist. Some competing requests also forced the revision and changing of processes. An example of this was the huge demand received for sand bagging. At the commencement of the disaster event the SES filled and delivered huge quantities of sand bags. As the event progressed the process was changed resulting in the members of the community filling the sand bags and the public uplifting the bags from a nominated point.

**4.6 During the 2010/2011 floods, did your unit receive any Requests for Assistance that it was unable to respond to? If so, how were these requests managed?**

Yes. There were a number of bogus or time wasting requests and a number of requests that were of a non-urgent nature or not a SES responsibility/role.

**4.7 Were any members of your unit deployed to any other region during the 2010/2011 floods? If so, how was this managed?**

Yes. On 29 occasions SES Toowoomba Unit volunteers were deployed outside the Toowoomba Regional Council area. This was mainly to cover for the SES in the Gatton/Laidley region. The tasks were in the Withcott/Murphy's Creek area. We also assisted in the searches in the Grantham/Gatton areas. Some SES Toowoomba Unit volunteers also deployed to North Queensland to assist recovery operations. The Laidley deployments were coordinated by an element from the Toowoomba Unit in liaison with the Queensland Police. The deployments to North Queensland were controlled and organised by Emergency Management Queensland.

**4.8 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your unit's contact and coordination (if any) with the following:**

- a. Local Disaster Coordinator
- b. Local Disaster Coordination Centre
- c. Local Disaster Management Group

In my role as Disaster Management Coordinator/SES Local Controller I had contact with the following:

- a. Local Disaster Coordinator. Daily contact with the Local Disaster Coordinator in the Local Disaster Coordination Centre and at the Local Disaster Management Group meetings.
- b. Local Disaster Coordination Centre. Daily. I was one of the rostered Incident Coordinators in the Local Disaster Coordination Centre during the flood event. An SES LO was also deployed in the Local Disaster Coordination Centre.
- c. Local Disaster Management Group. Daily contact at the Local Disaster Management Group meetings where I attended as the SES Representative.

**4.9 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your unit's contact and coordination (if any) with the following:**

- a. District Disaster Coordinator
- b. District Disaster Coordination Centre
- c. District Disaster Management Group

In my SES role, I had no contact or coordination with any of the three above personnel/groups.

**4.10 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your contact (if any) with Emergency Management Queensland's Area Directors and/or Regional Directors?**

I had the following contact with Emergency Management Queensland staff as follows:

- a. Area Director (South West Region). The Area Director was in the Toowoomba Regional Council Local Disaster Coordination Centre for a couple of days – daily contact. I was in contact with the Area Director via telephone and email regarding outside SES support coming into the Toowoomba Regional Council area. Also had contact with him at the Local Disaster Management Group meetings.
- b. Regional Director. Had contact on the odd occasion via telephone and email regarding the deployment of personnel to North Queensland.

**4.11 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your interactions (if any) with other emergency service organisations?**

Daily contact with the police, ambulance and fire in the Local Disaster Coordination Centre. Contact with individuals in the field when I was deployed. This was face to face or via two way radio/mobile telephone.

**4.12 During the 2010/2011 floods, were the requirements or expectations of local disaster managers ever in conflict with those of Emergency Management Queensland? If so, how were these various demands resolved (if at all)?**

No conflict was experienced. In the Toowoomba Regional Council area the Emergency Management Queensland staff were there to provide advice, which was accepted and acted upon in most instances.

**4.13 In your view, what is the role of Emergency Management Queensland's Area and Regional Directors during disasters?**

In my view, the role of the Area and Regional Directors is to provide accurate and timely advice to Toowoomba Regional Council and SES on matters relating to disaster management.

**5. COMMUNICATIONS**

**5.1 What types of communication devices were available and/or used during the 2010/2011 floods?**

The following types of communication devices were available and used during the floods:

- Land line telephones
- Mobile telephones
- Two way radios
- Hand held radios
- Computers/laptops
- Facsimiles

**5.2 Did any communication devices your unit used fail during the 2010/2011 floods? If so, please provide details.**

Yes. The email system went down for a short period due to the internet line being cut close to Brisbane.

**5.3 Generally speaking, are any of the communication methods your unit uses integrated or inter-operable with other emergency service organisations?**

Yes. The majority.

**6. FUNDING**

**6.1 Where does your unit receive funding from?**

The SES Toowoomba Unit receives funding from the following:



- Federal Government (grants)
- State Government (grants and subsidies)
- Toowoomba Regional Council
- Philanthropic organisations
- NRMA (grants and awards)
- Community Grants and donations
- Public donations

**6.2 Has your unit applied for additional funding from the State Government in the 2009/2010 or 2010/2011 financial years? If so, what was the funding program and did you find the application process easy/difficult?**

Yes. The SES Toowoomba Unit has applied for grants from the State Government under the SES Non-Recurrent Subsidy Program (NRSP) over the periods 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 as detailed in the table below:

	Year	Project ID	Submitted	Amount Received	Comment
	<b>SES NRSP 10/11</b>				
1	Accommodation Cecil Plains Group	ID 1882	2009	\$46,417	Approved Building completed
	<b>SES NRSP 11/12</b>				
1	Vehicle Accessories Cecil Plains Group	ID 2323	2010	Nil	Not approved
2	Toilet Block Crows Nest Group	ID 2324	2010	Nil	Not approved
3	Vehicle Accessories Goombungee Group	ID 2325	2010	\$3,800	Approved
4	Vehicle Accessories Millmerran Group	ID 2326	2010	Nil	Not approved
5	New Vehicle Yarraman Group	ID 2327	2010	Nil	Not approved

**6.3 Do you have input into how the funding received by your unit is used?**

Yes. I am consulted and involved in discussions regarding the Disaster Management/SES content requirement for the following year's Council budget. Based on funding requirements, the external grants and subsidies are then identified and applied to where they are needed.

**6.4 In your view, is the total amount of funding currently received by your unit adequate? If not, please describe how your unit would benefit from additional funding.**

The total amount of funding is adequate as the Unit is completing its given tasks. It is not additional funding direct to the unit that is required. What is required is an upgrade of the Unit's vehicles, most of which are twice the age of vehicles of other emergency

service agencies. The age of the vehicles varies greatly with the newest being six months old (Cecil Plains) and the oldest being over 17 years old (Yarraman). The average age of the vehicle fleet is 7.5 years of age which is higher than the normal working age of other Council vehicles (however, with the assistance from Toowoomba Regional Council and Emergency Management Queensland this is a 100% improvement over 2010). Similar funding is also needed to upgrade some of the SES accommodation. For example, the SES Crows Nest Shed does not have a toilet or shower. A bid was made last year through the SES Subsidy program for this but not approved.

**6.5 Do you think that the way in which funding is allocated and distributed to your unit is adequate? If not how could this be improved?**

It is assumed that this question relates to the SES Annual Local Government Subsidy. The base amount allocated to SES units/groups is calculated via a formula that does not reflect the changed current situation in many of the local government areas (ie. since amalgamation). Toowoomba Regional Council area now has one Unit which consists of ten groups. A new formula needs to be devised to take into account the changed circumstances. The formula might be based on the number of operationally active SES sheds within a local government area.

**6.6 Does your unit undertake any additional fundraising activities? If so:**

- a. **what types of fundraising activities does your unit undertake?**
- b. **approximately what percentage of your operating budget does this account for?**
- c. **does fund raising present any difficulties?**

The SES Toowoomba Unit and groups do not currently undertake any additional fundraising activities. There are the odd donations that are given to the groups. At the beginning of 2010 advice was received from Emergency Management Queensland that a policy covering fund raising was to be distributed. The policy was to list the activities the SES could undertake and how it was to be conducted. As at 5 October 2011 no such policy has been received.

**7. OTHER**

**7.1 Do you have any suggestions as to how the SES can attract and retain members, either for your particular unit or at a state-wide level?**

The SES needs to have a set of minimum entry criteria. It is acknowledged that by having minimum entry standards some people will be deterred and others will not make the grade. However, those that do will assist in the SES achieving higher than current standards and project a better public image. Recruiting campaigns must be effective. The recent State campaign was not effective in the Toowoomba Regional Council area possibly because the TV advertisements were not suitable for the audience and/or pre-warning of the campaign was received too late at the workplace.

**7.2 Please make any other comments you wish about SES operations generally and/or during the 2010/2011 floods.**

**Command and Control.** The line of command and control of the SES Toowoomba Unit and groups internally is clear and functional. As the Disaster Management Coordinator/SES Local Controller, I report to the Property Services Manager on a day to day basis and to the Local Disaster Coordinator (same person) during a disaster event. However, due to the change in the Emergency Management Queensland's role the line of command and control, if any, with Emergency Management Queensland is not clear.

**Public Advice.** During the flood events there were a number of announcements/commercials on the radio and TV that advised people to ring 132 500 if they required support or assistance. This approach caused the SES to receive a number of requests for assistance that were not within the SES Role/responsibility. Public announcements/notices need to be carefully vetted and clearly advise the public that the SES deals with matters of an emergency type nature.

**Deployment of Outside SES into a Disaster Area.** Prior to any SES volunteers being deployed into a disaster area Emergency Management Queensland needs to discuss with the receiving Local Disaster Management Group to ensure that the resources offered are firstly needed and secondly they can be strategically deployed to the best effect.

**Documentation.** Administration for the SES Toowoomba Unit and its groups is completed in the main by volunteers. Over the past 12 months the amount of documentation for training, operations, logistics and administration has increased substantially. A review of all aspects is required, including the use of electronic returns to replace the paper based system currently being used. The current system is not efficient.



Norman Fry

Disaster Management Coordinator/SES Local Controller.

12 October 2011

