



**UNITED FIREFIGHTERS UNION OF AUSTRALIA
UNION OF EMPLOYEES QUEENSLAND**

The Commissioner
Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry
PO Box 1738
Brisbane QLD 4001

COPY

Dear Commissioner,

Subject: Statement of QFRS witness at pages 1854 and 1855 of transcript

I am writing to you on behalf of our Cairns Branch who have concerns with the evidence provided to your Commission. Specifically, their concerns are that the Commission was misled with the evidence of Mr Steven Smith for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

Mr Smith's evidence to the Commission was that in regard to the numbers of staff, numbers of technicians and in particular, level 2 swift water qualified technicians, *"the numbers that have been indicated are based on the risk assessment in those regions. So the ideal number of those people is having people that are suitably and are able and capable of achieving the standards that we require in those areas and I think they're based on the current way we operate."*[p1854], 27-32

When asked who does the risk assessment Mr Smith replies *"It's the responsibility of the region to determine their own risk profile and what resources they need."* [p1855], 2 and 3

On page 1855 again at lines 5 and 6, he explains when asked who in the region does the risk assessment that it is *"the Assistant Commissioner in each region."*

After reading this evidence in the Commission's interim report our Cairns Branch sent correspondence to their Assistant Commissioner on 4th August referring him to the evidence given to the Commission and asked him to provide a copy or copies of the risk assessment/s done to establish the numbers needed for operations during the summer of 2010/2011.

Sometime later the Assistant Commissioner replied to the Branch correspondence advising that the *"Far Northern Region/State do not have a risk assessment in relation to your request."*

The region continues to monitor all Hazards within the region and provide advice/recommendations to the Deputy Commissioner for any increases deemed necessary to any of our staffing models. The original number of Special Operations staff provided to FNR by state in 2004 was a total of 16. In 2008 FNR requested an additional

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four Special Operations staff to be stationed at Innisfail and this was approved. The current state review of Swift Water Operations outcomes have yet to be released. These outcomes may impact on the staffing models and other aspects of Technical rescue for the region.

Regards

 MIFireE
*Assistant Commissioner
Far Northern Region"*

The Cairns Branch' concerns on reading this response took them back to the numbers of staff and deployment because of staffing shortages which resulted in the near drowning of one of our members back in at Watsonville on 4th February this year.

Given the evidence of Mr Smith for the QFRS, the Cairns Branch was very concerned that the Commission moves forward with the correct advice and situation for Cairns as it is believed that the Cairns region is not the only region which does not have risk assessments done to be prepared for any wet season let alone the last one and the forthcoming one.

The Cairns Branch believes that this clarification for the Commission is critical to the safety and wellbeing of its members but more broadly the Union from a state perspective has those same concerns.

Yours faithfully


State Secretary.

It's at the submission stage now, so approval would - it's an approval requirement that it has to go through before any timelines for implication - implementation can be determined.

Does that mean that you don't know when it's likely to happen?-- No, I can't tell you when it's going to be implemented. I can't tell you that it's going to be approved.

All right.

COMMISSIONER: Who has to do the approval?-- I'll make - a submission will go up through the Deputy Commissioner and approval would come back through the Deputy Commissioner in relation to that capacity.

Thank you.

MR KENT: I should ask you this in relation to that proposal. Do the motors on those vessels have guarded propellers?-- The submission certainly includes the use of guards on our - on any motorised vessel that we go down, yes.

Very well. In relation to - you deal on page 6 of your statement with numbers of staff, numbers of technicians and, in particular, level 2 swift water qualified technicians. As far as you're concerned, is there any ideal limit on the number of swift water technicians?-- Look, the numbers that have been indicated are based on the risk assessment in those regions. So the ideal number of those people is having people that are suitably and are able and capable of achieving the standards that we require in those areas and I think they're based on the current way we operate. So I think - they're part of the review process, that we will look at those numbers and make sure that they're still appropriate based on what we have experienced over the last - over that period of time to make sure that those numbers are still appropriate and that's part of the review process that we're involved in currently.

And there's another intake in the middle of the year?-- Yes, so those - those individuals that are completing swift water in July/August have already completed vertical, confined and trench. So they sit in where - the actual number in the middle and will move on to swift water.

As you say, the assessment or the determination of the number to be trained turns on a business case based on regional risk assessment, that's the way you've put it?-- That's correct, it's based on a regional risk assessment. And if you look at the numbers that we actually have in Queensland, it's more than the combined capacity for the rest of the fire services in Australia, so it's a significant capacity.

That might be right, Mr Smith, but there might be an exponentially larger need in Queensland, mightn't there? So comparing us to South Australia doesn't help, does it?-- That's right, and those numbers have been identified based on those risk assessments.

In relation to the risk assessment, who does the risk assessment?-- It's the responsibility of the region to determine their own risk profile and what resources they need. 1

And when you say the region, who in the region?-- The Assistant Commissioner in each region.

And do you know if the practice is that the Assistant Commissioner receives input from people throughout the service in making that risk assessment?-- The - the exact process that each region follows is at the discretion of the Assistant Commissioner. 10

I see?-- So I can't really comment on how they would - they individually act.

Can I suggest this to you: would it be a reasonable thing for an Assistant Commissioner making that kind of a determination to seek input from his local qualified SWT 2s?-- I would certainly believe that there would be a consultative process involved in that decision making process, yes. 20

Because they're the experts in that field, aren't they?-- They are.

Now, I want to again take you back to paragraph 49, which is on page 8, and you mention there the dynamic nature of rescue jobs, and my learned friend Mr Callaghan has taken you through the written documents which seem to suggest a certain number of personnel involved in these swift water incidents, don't they? That's what the written documents do?-- Yes, they do. 30

And I understand your evidence when he was asking you questions, you were saying that there has to be a degree of flexibility and that's part of their training?-- A degree of flexibility in how they operate not in how they respond.

How about numbers?-- The numbers - the response will be based on the - that fire centre directive in relation to a pump and a special will be responded to it. 40

You're not saying, are you, that no-one is going to get sent to a swift water incident unless there's a total of six, including two swift water technician available? You're not saying that?-- No. There may well be - to get two swift water technicians on - to an incident, it may well be that you need more resources than two vehicles responding. So the - by nature, you might have the closest or local pump responding with four level 1s onboard and then you may need another couple of appliances to get to, you know, that situation. So the initial response is a special and a - and a pump. 50

And did I understand you to say that there's a directive suggesting that specialised appliances should have two SWT 2s on them, there should be two on the appliance?-- In - under the south east region plan, which is a regional plan and is that - specific to that region, in those elevated conditions that's what that document indicates. However, from my