

# QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

## Oaths Act 1867

### Statutory Declaration

QUEENSLAND

TO WIT

I, Gail Elizabeth Nixon, of care of Council Chambers, Corner of Egerton and Borilla Sts, Emerald in the State of Queensland, Councillor of Central Highlands Regional Council, do solemnly and sincerely declare that:-

The following is a true statement containing my response to the queries raised by the Commission in its letter dated 6 May 2011:

**The immediate measures taken by me to assist the Rolleston community before, during and immediately after the 2010/2011 flood events**

#### *Background*

1. I am a Councillor of the Central Highlands Regional Council, and hold the position of Deputy Chairperson of the LDMG. Formerly, I was the Mayor of Bauhinia Shire Council prior to the amalgamations in March 2008. I am also a member of the SES at Springsure, and I reside in Springsure. For the duration of the floods I operated out of my home office. Most locals know my home phone number and e-mail and I couldn't access the Springsure office of the Central Highlands Regional Council ("CHRC").
2. The activities undertaken by me during the floods were often a combination of my role in the LDMG and as an SES member.
3. Heavy rain fell around Rolleston on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2010. All roads in and out of Rolleston were cut by the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> December. The country was already soaked, and the heavy rain caused the creeks and rivers around the whole area to rise very rapidly. When the roads are cut by flood waters, Rolleston gets isolated from Springsure and Injune for a lengthy time.

#### *Communications*

4. My phone records show that from 6.45 a.m. on the 27<sup>th</sup> December 2010, I performed SES call outs in the township of Springsure. At 12.38 p.m. on the 27<sup>th</sup> December I phoned Lionel Jackson of the Rolleston SES to see how Rolleston was fairing. (As well as being an experienced SES member, Lionel is also a Council officer, and performs a town maintenance role in Rolleston.) I again called Lionel at 6.14 a.m. on 28<sup>th</sup> December. By this time I had received e-mails and phone messages from residents of the Rolleston district telling of record flooding rains, and sending photos of damaged roads. From that day on I called Lionel, or he contacted me, on a daily basis. Sometimes we spoke many times a day. I usually sent in a

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daily sitrep to Emerald. It is my understanding that the local Disaster Coordinator from Emerald was also in regular contact with Lionel.

5. Throughout the whole operation I had phone contact with many residents, but my main contact was via e-mails that were passed throughout residents in the whole area. I had supplied everyone with my contact details, but because I had limited e-mail addresses in my computer for residents in the whole Rolleston area, I used Trina Patterson to pass messages onto those residents. (Trina works for CHRC in the Rolleston Transaction centre, and has a comprehensive listing of e-mails on her home computer from which she circulated my messages.) This worked well.
6. QPS Sgt Bill Boon and Constable Aaron Rockley were in my office each day to assist with messages, and to assist in contacting people on isolated properties. My daughter, Karen, who was in my office with me from 30<sup>th</sup> December, began a spreadsheet with GPS readings, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, and names and addresses of people in the area. This has since been passed onto CHRC for input into the Guardian software for future reference.
7. Between Lionel Jackson, the QPS and I, we had the situation under effective control.
- 8.

#### *Flood Boat*

9. Damage to the propeller of the Rolleston boat necessitated repairs to be carried out in Rockhampton. On the 29<sup>th</sup> December, together with other Springsure SES personnel, I delivered the Springsure SES flood boat to Rolleston. Lionel and I arranged for the boat to be repaired in Rockhampton, and arranged for Rolleston locals to collect and deliver replacement parts to Rolleston by helicopter.
10. On the 31<sup>st</sup> December, the Springsure boat was relocated to Emerald, because there was no boat on the eastern side of the river when the Nogoia was out at Emerald, and a rescue had to be performed by the water police. As the Springsure SES boat was a more suitable boat for shallow water, it was returned to Rolleston on the 8<sup>th</sup> January as the waters subsided.
11. On 10<sup>th</sup> January the boat was taken from the river, but was kept in Rolleston in case of further flooding. The Springsure SES also ferried an SES volunteer to Springsure hospital for treatment, and I later returned him home when delivering re-supply food.

#### *Food*

12. I arranged the re-supply of food to residents in the area, and personally delivered food to the boat for distribution to the two Rolleston grocery shops. I later arranged for helicopter food drops to isolated rural residents and a welfare visit to rural properties. On these two helicopter trips, I was accompanied by the local QPS representative, Andrew Donohue. On the second trip a visiting Lifeline person and a Communities departmental representative joined us. I experienced a lot of difficulties in getting the

helicopter through EMQ, and I finally just asked for a chopper on the ground in Springsure. These difficulties concerned the need to provide names, numbers of passengers and GPS co-ordinates of the properties to receive the food drops. I considered this to be too much red tape, that unnecessarily delayed the requests for assistance. Local helicopter pilots already had information like GPS co-ordinates. If I had authority to order a local helicopter directly as a Local Emergency Coordinator, these problems could have been avoided. Fortunately, through Glen Bell, the EMQ representative in the control room in Emerald, I managed to resolve these issues. .

### *Health*

13. On the 8<sup>th</sup> January I visited Rolleston via boat, and with Constable Aaron Rockley I walked around the town to contact people. A man and a pregnant lady were privately evacuated. Also, Trina Patterson, who is a registered nurse, assisted with an injection for a lady in dire need. This was a good example of local knowledge being vital in disaster management. I knew that Trina was a registered nurse and I also knew that she had the e-mail addresses as mentioned above.

**The actions undertaken by the Central Highlands LDMG in advance of the 2010/2011 flood events in relation to resourcing, co-ordination and deployment of any personnel and equipment to the Rolleston area.**

14. Rolleston has always had an active SES and a flood boat. Satisfactory resourcing was committed to cover the Rolleston floods. There were no further resources that I consider could have been committed in advance of the floods.

**Any actions undertaken by the Rolleston community in respect of the 2010/2011 flood events regarding immediate management, response and recovery operations, including the coordination and deployment of any personnel and equipment.**

15. The local SES was active as soon as the need for flood boat operations became necessary. The SES members and the local community evacuated people and moved furniture from the 6 houses that were inundated on the south of Rolleston township during the night of the 28<sup>th</sup> December when the water was reaching record levels. The water peaked at 1 a.m. on the 28<sup>th</sup> December. One house on the eastern side of Rolleston was overlooked because it wasn't considered to be in the flooded area. Normally it wouldn't have flooded, but this was a record flood.
16. An Anglicare psychologist visited early in the recovery phase while Qld Health and DEEDI were in the area (once they could access the township). A local helicopter pilot voluntarily assisted with some food deliveries and transported many people who were stranded, or had other reasons to leave or return to the area. CHRC personnel maintained a watch on infrastructure. On the 28<sup>th</sup> December a water officer reported that there was 300mm of water through the Rolleston water treatment plant, and a sewerage pump was under water. Ergon flew into Rolleston and turned off the power to these service points, and disconnected inundated houses.

17. CHRC staff recorded and kept a watching brief on water levels and rainfall throughout the flood.

**Any measures taken or requested by the Rolleston community to preserve vital infrastructure and to manage or reinstate the supply of essential services (water, food, power, transport, communications and/or sewerage) during the 2010/2011 flood events**

18. As previously mentioned, requests included the use of the Springsure flood boat and re-supply to the grocery stores.
19. Power was available to the town (except for the inundated houses and infrastructure that was submerged).
20. Transport was impossible because for a long time there was no escape from Rolleston. Roads in every direction were either underwater or impassable because of flood damage. On the 8<sup>th</sup> January, the floods had receded enough for people to get out of Rolleston on the Moura road. The Rolleston community is regularly cut off, and is very resilient.

**Any specific information received or obtained concerning weather and flood forecasts or warnings and the steps taken to disseminate that information to the Rolleston community before, during and immediately after the 2010/2011 flood events.**

21. Local information was obtained and distributed by phone, e-mail and two way radio, my discussions with Lionel Jackson, and face to face discussions with the community. Approximately 60 people live in Rolleston. Because of Christmas, there were less people in Rolleston during the event. The community is cohesive, and face to face communication was usually all that was needed.
22. During the event, local information on the level of the Canarvon, Panorama and Brown Rivers, compared to previous events, was a good source of likely flood levels in Rolleston. No additional data was necessary, and in any event, I was too busy to look at BOM data. .

**In relation to the previous section, an indication of the sources/s, accuracy and timeliness of that information for local purposes and any suggested improvements.**

23. We had little official data. A large area had been affected by extreme rainfall, resulting in a flood of unexpected magnitude.
24. There are very few gauges in this region. A suggested improvement would be gauges in the Carnarvon, Brown and Panorama catchments. Gauges on creeks and rivers would assist in monitoring floodwater movements.
25. Also better dissemination of information would be great. In this vast, rugged, rural area there is very limited mobile coverage. Improved mobile coverage would assist

communications, but if power is disconnected by flood or wind damage, then communication is virtually non-existent. A two way radio is useful for some areas but only works on line of sight.

**Any local measures taken to protect life and private/public property in connection with the 2010/2011 flood events (such as road/bridge closures, evacuation arrangements, etc) and the steps taken to disseminate information about those measures to the community before, during and immediately after the 2010/2011 flood events.**

26. Rolleston is a small township that becomes isolated regularly, even as a result of much smaller rain events. The local CHRC town ganger placed road closed signs where possible.
27. An evacuation of residents (and their possessions) of land that would become flood affected was carried out during the evening and night of the 28<sup>th</sup> December. All those who were evacuated stayed with family or friends.

**The circumstances of the evacuations, both voluntarily and mandatory, performed in the Rolleston area in connection with the 2010/2011 flood events, including an assessment of the adequacy and timeliness thereof.**

28. Because of the time of year this event occurred, some of the homes in Rolleston were unoccupied. Two of the inundated houses were unoccupied.
29. All evacuations were voluntary.
30. Evacuations and transportation of possessions to safe ground was done as waters rose. This was done in a timely manner and was appreciated by all home owners.

**The circumstances of the establishment, and subsequent operation and performance, of any Evacuation Centre/s in Rolleston, including an assessment of any particular difficulties encountered.**

31. No evacuation centre was necessary.
32. No difficulties were encountered. Possessions were locked in the Emergency Services Unit shed and the town hall. Evacuated residents stayed with family or friends.

**The nature and timing of any communications that the Central Highlands LDMG had with the District Disaster Coordinator (DDC), the State Disaster Coordinator or the State Recovery Coordinator regarding Rolleston area and the nature or effectiveness of such directions**

33. I have no knowledge of communications between the LDMG and the DDC.

**An assessment of the adequacy of equipment and communications system for the Rolleston township during the 2010/2011 flood events.**

34. I have nothing further to add to my comments made in relation to communications above.

**An assessment of the adequacy of road systems in the Rolleston area during the 2010/2011 flood events, the effectiveness of road condition communications and the repair of roads by local residents.**

35. The roads around Rolleston are inadequate in routine flooding events, let alone a flood event like the one that took place in December 2010. The roads are cut by floods very often, even with relatively small amounts of rain falling within the catchment.
36. The road reports issued by the RACQ are of no help, as the information contained in them are often not updated quickly enough. For example, roads that were reported as being open were not.
37. CHRC provides road reports on a daily basis, detailing road conditions during floods. I received these reports, and passed them on. The reports also go onto the Council's web site. Beyond that, I am not aware of the extent of dissemination.
38. When flood waters isolate Rolleston, such that Council road machinery is unavailable, road repairs have to be carried out by local residents. During floods, damage often cannot be repaired by Council's conventional workforce, as they can't get there.

**An assessment of the adequacy of the Rolleston community's response in the local area during the 2010/2011 flood events**

39. The community responded quickly and precisely to all the needs of its citizens, having been used to experiencing floods in the past. We knew, from accurate local information, the likely extent of the flood. We had trigger points for a response, and had the capacity to implement an appropriate response. That response was achieved without fanfare or incident.

**Advice as to the effectiveness of the arrangements made in Rolleston during the 2010/2011 flood events and any feature of its operation that may require practical or legislative change to improve future disaster management in the local area.**

40. The initial flooding of roads occurred with fairly short notice. A spontaneous reaction was necessarily undertaken by the Rolleston population, to prepare rapidly for what was a record flooding event as no outside assistance could be delivered by road.
41. A suggestion for improvement is for there to be one single LECC for each of the Springsure/Rolleston, Emerald and other districts, based on the former shire boundaries or communities of interest. This area is too vast to be adequately covered from one central place. (We used to have an LDMG in Springsure before the Council amalgamations.) Each LECC could operate and make decisions in a more constructive and effective manner, cutting response time. An example of this might be having the authority to engage a local helicopter pilot to provide immediate assistance. Where the

scale of the emergency exceeds the capacity of the local response, the LDMG can provide support.

42. Further, as helicopters are the only effective means of transportation when Rolleston is cut off, it would be ideal to have a rescue helicopter based in the Central Highlands.
43. The road from Springsure to Injune urgently needs to be upgraded, because this is a major South/North truck route. Rolleston would possibly still be cut off, but would at least have better access to outside services.
44. Power supply for sewerage infrastructure has now been relocated above worst known flood levels. Nevertheless, unforeseen problems will always occur, and will need to be dealt with as they arise, so a trouble-shooting capacity is necessary. It does not matter what you do, you cannot flood proof everything.
45. One point of confusion was fodder drops to stranded livestock. This could be improved by identifying the lead agency for this, before the next flood event. Additionally, the provision of funding for such an operation is necessary.
46. Rolleston has been promised a new flood boat but it is yet to arrive.
47. As mentioned above, there is a desperate need for mobile phone coverage for this region.
48. Finally, a good lesson from the event is to use local information and knowledge, and if possible to manage the response locally. The flood highlighted the need for better contact information in Guardian and/or a register of personal contact details, maintained by Council.

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Declarer

Taken and declared before me at Springure this 17th day of  
May 2011, before me:

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Lawyer/Justice of the Peace/Commissioner for Declarations

