

STATEMENT

I, **KATE GIROT** of [REDACTED] Fernvale, Queensland, 4306 (Date of Birth - [REDACTED]), say that:

1. I give this Statement in relation to the flood events of 10 - 12 January 2011 ("the floods") as requested by the Queensland Floods Commission of Enquiry.
2. I have been a resident of the Fernvale area for 1 year prior to the floods. My address at the time of the floods was [REDACTED] Fernvale Qld 4306. My husband, Brian, and myself settled on and moved to the Fernvale property on 9 January 2010.

Flood Information

3. From the time I moved to Fernvale to date, I have not been advised by Somerset Regional Council or related government agencies of any evacuation plans for our area.
4. I understand that the Somerset Regional Council is trying to develop a Disaster Management Plan for the broader Somerset region. However, I have not received any updates regarding this or any information specific to a Fernvale area Disaster Management Strategy.
5. As there is no Disaster Management Plan in place, there is no local disaster plan co-ordinator that I am aware of.

Events of 11 January 2011

6. As we had been listening to what was occurring in other regions, we had been concerned for our own safety throughout the night. By the morning of 11 January

[REDACTED]
Kate Girot

QFCI

Date:

13/05/11

SMM

Exhibit Number:

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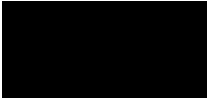
2011, the rain started again and I decided to take my children to higher ground as a matter of caution. I packed some spare clothes, snacks, drink bottles etc.

7. When I noticed the amount of water pooling around our house I decided we needed to evacuate and called to Brian to turn the power off.
8. I grabbed my eighteen month old son out of his cot and put him in his car seat. The water was ankle depth at that time. This was at approximately 9 am on 11 January 2011.
9. I then went back into my house and grabbed my four year old daughter and took her to the car, the water was then at my thigh. I then got my RAV4, a relatively high clearance vehicle and reversed out of the driveway. If I had a smaller car we would have been trapped at our property. I know this as my husband has a Barina which is a smaller car and we were unable to access it to try to move it out of the driveway.
10. I left my husband and our two dogs behind as he insisted that I leave immediately take the children to higher ground.
11. I took my children up hill to a friend's house [Chantelle McLean [REDACTED] [REDACTED]] and left them in her care.
12. I returned to my home with Rhyse Redman, Cody Callaghan and Charles Gelhaar who offered to assist me in my attempt to get my husband and dogs from my home. Once we got the dogs into my vehicle we all went about saving what contents we could.
13. Once these emergency measures were complete, My husband and I returned with our dogs to Chantelle's house to be with our children. We were required to stay with Chantelle and Rhyse for the next few nights until Thursday night when enough roads had been reopened to enable us to safely travel from Fernvale to Murwillumbah so we could have my children stay with my mother.
14. My husband and I returned to Fernvale and stayed with Chantelle until we were able to clean our home to a basic standard. As were warned about looting by

SES, even though our house was not strictly liveable, we returned home to ensure that we didn't lose more than we already had.

Warnings

15. Prior to the flood on 11 January 2011, my brother had rang on 10 January 2011 to warn us of the one in one hundred year flood. We assured my brother that according to the study that the Somerset Council had done, this does not affect our property. Other than this call we received no warnings of any kind from any other person or government agency.
16. We were checking the Bureau of Meteorology website and the Somerset council website on the night of the 10 January 2011 and there were no warnings on either of these websites.
17. There was no warning on radio station River 94.9 FM either which we were also listening to.
18. We were also watching the ABC 24 hour news channel and this was also not warning the Somerset Region of being at risk of flooding.
19. Our property was flooded due to the high volume of rain received in the few days prior to and including 11 January 2011. The current drainage system in Fernvale was unable to cope as it had not been upgraded to contain the runoff produced by the increased surface area consistent with developments approved by the local council that is expected to involve 1100 homes in the Honeywood estate by completion, (there is estimated to be 200 homes currently completed) and as a result water came through Woolworths carpark over the Brisbane Valley Highway, down Praine Lane and through our house.
20. The rising river systems around Fernvale did not directly affect my property apart from reduce the ability for the water flowing through my house to drain away as quickly.
21. Due to Fernvale being directly downstream from Wivenhoe Dam, I believe that a number or warnings should be in place to be activated via a number of different media and communication devices.


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Kate Girot

22. For example, I understand that other regions received a text alert. I did not receive such alert. However, if one was considered to be implemented in Fernvale for future flooding, I believe as a sole measure it would be inadequate as during the flood I had initially no phone coverage and after the event sporadic phone coverage for the next few days.
23. I believe reasonable measures which could have been implemented include text message warnings, email warnings or any internet warning system, recorded evacuation message to home phones, radio announcements and television broadcasts.
24. In particular, I believe that a Fernvale Disaster Warning System ought to have been implemented. This would need several sirens, set up so that each area within Fernvale can hear the siren and able to be manually activated if power is lost. The system should also include flashing lights from the Futures Complex (Community Centre) backed up by generators where power is unavailable.
25. Further, I believe that SEQ Water and Wivenhoe Dam management have a duty of care to Fernvale and other communities in the shadow of the Wivenhoe dam that are vulnerable to its releases. Residents should be warned of impending releases so as to minimise their exposure to injury or loss of life.

Flood Preparation

26. There was no meaningful flood preparation for the Fernvale area. I believe that this was due to lack of any warning of a flood and also lack of emergency infrastructure in place.
27. On the afternoon of 10 January 2011, warnings had been issued to the Lockyer Valley and Ipswich on Radio Station River 94.9, noting that the Brisbane River was expected to rise significantly. As Savages Crossing is 2.2km from our home, my family and I went to check the Brisbane River levels at Savages Crossing and we had been disturbed by the events that occurred in Toowoomba at that time.


Kate Girot

28. When we were down there, two young men were there blocking the road, who identified themselves as Rural Fire Brigade members. They advised that Savages Crossing was closed and minor flooding was most likely to occur in low lying areas in Fernvale and that there were some sandbags available for collection from next to the phone exchange which they had filled.
29. The phone exchange point was near Ferny Gully off Clive Street, within a couple hundred metres of our home, which we went straight to. There were approximately 30 sandbags left when we arrived.
30. Since we had not received any official warnings of flooding in the Fernvale area, we collected some sandbags as a matter of caution based on what the two young men had said.
31. We took these precautionary measures as there is a storm water drain behind the back of our property and where there was any significant flooding the water could potentially rise from the drain.

Disaster Management and Response

32. I am currently volunteering at the Fernvale Flood Recovery Distribution Centre, as well as trying to organise quotes and repairs in the recovery process of our property.
33. I have not been involved in the disaster management of the Fernvale community in any paid capacity. However, I have been actively involved in assisting people within the community since the floods. I, together with others, have organised, collected and delivered food hampers to nominated families by the Fernvale Flood Recovery Distribution Centre.
34. I have also sourced food for the Flood Distribution Centre through Foodbank, and I have created a pamphlet, which I have copied and distributed to the mailboxes of residents in Fernvale.
35. I have also used this pamphlet to help to get much needed supplies for the Distribution Centre, and to invite flood affected residents to access the Distribution Centre.



Kate Girot

36. I have also sourced information for flood affected residents, and referred them on to the relevant services.
37. The Fernvale Futures Complex was opened as the Evacuation Centre. I am unaware of who was initially in charge however I was able to get information from Rural Fire Brigade members, names unknown.
38. It was here that I was first advised, Thursday 13 January 2011, how to get to an Evacuation Centre at Lowood High School Hall that may have a doctor and access to medical supplies, which I needed for my son.
39. Approximately a week after the floods, I accessed a makeshift donation point at the local school, which was made possible with the assistance of the Principal. This featured donated goods from sources unknown to me.
40. In February a week or so after school resumed, the donation point closed at the school. The following week donated goods were available from the Fernvale Flood Distribution Centre which operated out of the "old" IGA, on the corner of Banks Creek Road and the Brisbane Valley Highway.
41. The Fernvale Flood Distribution Centre has been coordinated by Peggy and Geoff Towne, who were initially volunteers that came and assisted in Esk. Peggy and Geoff were asked by Somerset Regional Council to come to our area to set up the Flood Distribution Centre.
42. Fernvale did receive some assistance from the SES and the Australian Defence Force. The SES delivered us some drinking water on the fourth or fifth day since the flood and returned to our home a few days after that to assist us with transferring flooded items from our home to our garage and then assisting us with removing the mud from our home,
43. On 23 January 2011, the Air Force also assisted by removing much of the flood damaged items we had piled up on the side of the road.
44. During the response period, Centrelink workers and the Department of Communities attended the Fernvale area and offered assistance with grant applications.


Kate Girot

45. We were initially refused access to the Federal Disaster Relief Fund by the Federal Government on the basis that we did not suffer sufficient inundation to our property. On the 24 March 2011, we received assistance from Red Cross and Community Recovery in verifying that our house was flooded.
46. In all initial media responses by the Government regarding the floods, there was no mention of Fernvale or the broader Somerset region at all. I also do not recall any members of parliament coming to the Fernvale area in the first few weeks following the flood. I have however spoken to both State Member Wayne Wendt and Federal Member Shayne Neumann in the past few weeks in Fernvale in regards to Flood Recovery.
47. The main street got power within four days after Energex brought in a semi trailer mounted generator. However, other streets took up to two weeks or more to receive any services.
48. There was significant disruption with our mobile phone reception which continued up to a week after the floods. There was not enough signal to make a call and I would get incoming messages in sporadic clusters.
49. There was no water in our taps for days. When our water supply was restored, we were not allowed to drink it for weeks. Further, when tap water was considered safe for consumption, the Somerset Regional Council failed to tell Fernvale residents.
50. This information was sourced by my husband by checking the updates on the Urban Utilities website. In turn, I informed Community officers at the Futures Complex and only then was the declaration that our water supply was now safe was published to the Fernvale community.

Disaster Recovery


51. The recovery process, and in particular the action taken by the Somerset Regional Council, has been exceedingly slow. Much of the emergency work has still not been completed, for example guard rails on the bridge over Ferny Gully, and there are a few Fernvale residents still living in inadequate conditions.

52. There is a drain immediately opposite my house on Burns Street that was blocked by debris and gravel which was swept away from the Woolworths car park by the floods.
53. I requested Council to clean the drain, as the blockage caused water to collect and flow along the road and around the blocked drain. There is no stormwater drainage on my side of Burns Street. During moderate downpours of rain, water coming from off the road flows into our driveway and causes minor inundations into my property.
54. At first instance the Council cleaned out the drainage for Praine Lane, but not the storm water drain pipe that is blocked in Burns Street. Further, the debris was merely moved to the side and was not cleared away.
55. I again brought this to the attention of Council, and approximately early April 2011, they pulled out the entire pipe which was blocked. However, this drainage had not been replaced nor has similar areas of concern been attempted to be repaired where water collects and fails to drain becoming stagnant, smelling and a mosquito breeding ground.
56. I believe that were there is heavy rain, inundation will occur since there is no adequate drainage. The impact of the removal is simply that the inundation that occurs will no longer contribute to the road runoff which already comes into my property. This can be considered nothing more than a band aid response.
57. I also raised ongoing concerns with the Council about the sporting complex and connecting causeway situated behind our property. Significant debris has been allowed to collect in the causeway inhibiting water flow and allowing mosquitoes to breed.
58. In response to my complaint, Somerset Regional Council Deputy Mayor, Neil Zabel, attended our property on 25 September 2010. Mr Zabel advised that once works on the federally funded sporting centre was completed, this causeway would be cleaned.


Kate Girot

allowed to collect in the causeway inhibiting water flow and allowing mosquitoes to breed.

59. In response to my complaint, Somerset Regional Council Deputy Mayor, Neil Zabel, attended our property on 25 September 2010. Mr Zabel advised that once works on the federally funded sporting centre was completed, this causeway would be cleaned.
60. However, once the complex was completed, the Council merely cleared the debris at in the causeway near the sporting complex's storm drainage and at the edge of Banks Creek road. The causeway is still congested and the same problems remain.
61. I believe that cleaning out this causeway prior to the floods would have assisted getting water away quicker reducing the impact of the floods on our property.
62. While I have made numerous requests of the Council to rectify this situation, I have received no response.
63. I am also aware that the Council has submitted their Somerset Flood Reconstruction Plan, which has failed to include many things that need to be fixed as a result of the floods.
64. For instance, in Burns Street the Reconstruction Plan allocated funds for pavement repairs. I am worried by this, as the road is in significant disrepair and there is no pavement or kerbing or gutters in this street.
65. When I brought this to the attention of a Council representative, I was told that pavement repairs also applied to the road. I asked whether this was going to include the removal of significant debris and clutter that was in the roads, on properties and in causeways. I was told not to worry about it, that they needed merely just to get the paperwork in for assistance, and that this was not any of my concern.
66. Myself and immediate neighbours have asked whether we can personally put drainage in to prevent inundation to our properties due to the absence of stormwater drainage on our side of Burns Street.



Kate Girot

67. The Council said that this would be a matter of application, and we were sent forms to apply for access.
68. I was angered by this response because I had previously sought assistance from the Council for access to my property. There is significant road damage from the floods and access to my property is either severed or difficult for any vehicle without high clearance. I was advised that this was my responsibility to fix.
69. In relation to all these issues I have attended Council chambers in person, called and sent emails. I have received no meaningful response.
70. In relation to assistance and services provided by the Council in the Fernvale time of need, many of the obstacles faced by flood affected residents, have not been adequately addressed.
71. I received an information package from the Council dated 29 March 2011. By the time we received this package, a number of grants available were nearing the cut off date for example the First round of the Premiers Disaster Fund. As such residents where afforded very little time to complete flood verification requirements needed for a successful application.
72. The Council have advised that they would continue kerbside collections, but only at the request of residents, and where there are a sufficient number of requests to warrant the Council coming to area. The kerbside pickup of flood debris is due to cease on Friday 6 May 2011.
73. For the last three weeks I have noticed a pile of Gyprock and other substantial debris on the side of Schmidt Road. I can not confirm that the council has been contacted to have this removed.
74. I made a request to the Council over three weeks ago to collect a pile of flood debris which has been placed at the side of the road as requested and still nothing has been collected from my Burns Street property.
75. Whilst recovery action by the Council has been slow, and even though they held off on rates, they still sent them out to all residents, including those whose homes are uninhabitable.



Kate Giroto

76. The Council is covering the rent for the Flood Distribution Centre, however they are assessing the need for it month by month and at this stage it is due to close by the 15 May 2011.
77. Peggy Towne is fighting to keep it open, because there is such a great need still ongoing in the Fernvale area, and that this Centre also services the broader Somerset area which is still recovering from the flood.
78. Counselling is an important part of the recovery process and while this has been made available to residents on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at the Fernvale Futures Complex, for many flood affected residents, the physical recovery is considered paramount and the counselling is not understood to have importance. Having a Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) degree,, I understand the importance of dealing with the trauma that has occurred as there is a high likelihood of post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) occurring within the community.
79. To enable the community to cope with future events more effectively, strategies, planning and education must be implemented within the community to further reduce such effects.

Insurance

80. I am dissatisfied with the progression of my insurance claim. I can not provide any further comment in relation to my insurance claim because I have been told that discussing my claim publicly could render my claim invalid.

I, **KATE GIROT**, certify that the above history is true and correct to the best of my knowledge



KATE GIROT

18.4.2011

Date

Witnessed by:



Solicitor

18/4/2011

Date



Kate Girot