

To: The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

The following information is supplied to the Queensland Flood Commission of Inquiry as per your request received Monday 3rd October 2011.

1. Structure of the SES

- 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.*

Maranoa Regional Council consists of 5 units reflective of the former shires, each with their own local controller. These units are: Roma, Wallumbilla, Mitchell, Surat and Injune.

The Wallumbilla SES Unit is responsible for most of the original Bendemere Shire area. Our group consists of:

- Local Controller – Rowan Taylor (23 years of service)
- Deputy Controller – Stuart Maunder (15 years of service)
- Group Leader – Graham York (23 years of service)
- Deputy Group Leader – Wayne Taylor (27 years of service)
- Active members – 20
- Reserve members - 6

- 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.*

All members are volunteers. The Local Controller position is also unpaid.

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

Yes, in some cases where large workloads exist there is a need for a paid Local Controller to address the high administrative workload; to recognize the significant roles and responsibilities of the position; and to address the time/resources/business cost to the individual. This position may not need to be full-time in all cases. In larger geographical areas, a single Local Controller would be less effective due to lack of local knowledge. In this case, a paid part-time position may be more appropriate.

As regards members, payment in line with QFRS volunteers would be appropriate for a higher level of professionalism and recognition of the true cost of volunteering to the individual (eg. significant travel/fuel costs in regional/rural areas, unpaid time away from small businesses etc.). In areas with high workloads and significant training demands, paid fulltime employment may be appropriate, however in our area this would not be necessary. Other incentive programs may also be appropriate to recompense/recognize the valuable role of the SES. This could include possible tax incentives. Such payments/incentives would need to be reflective of actual participation/active membership to avoid system rotting.

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

Existing Local Controllers are reflective of previous local government areas. The effect on operations has been entirely positive, ensuring extensive local knowledge and experience is available at all times. To date, this structure has been invaluable in both minor and major events. Local Controllers have been able to support each other through information sharing; by supplying team expertise during events; by providing personnel during large events; and by providing personnel for fatigue management during ongoing operations.

2. **Readiness for the 2010/2011 floods**

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

Yes.

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

Yes. We were also able to assist other areas with well-trained volunteers.

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

Yes. We had sufficient equipment and resources to meet our local needs. However, an additional flood boat would have been an advantage when teams were deployed out of the group's area. In the past our team has supported Roma during flood events (as well as other western towns – Charleville, St George, Surat, Augathella, Chinchilla and Dalby). With our extra number of trained flood boat operators, access to an additional well-maintained boat would have been desirable.

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

Yes. We were also able to provide support through deployment of members to Dalby, Chinchilla, St George, Surat and Roma.

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 (e.g. Requests for Assistance, Rescues, evacuations)*

During the 2010/2011 floods the Wallumbilla Group

- Provided flood boat, vehicle and personnel to Dalby (Western Downs Regional Council area) to facilitate immediate evacuations due to rising floodwaters in response to Dalby boat being taken out of commission.

- Provided flood boat, vehicle and personnel to Chinchilla (Western Downs Regional Council area) to facilitate immediate evacuations due to rising flood waters; ferrying of - food, medical staff, medical supplies, police, visiting emergency services personnel, essential power and gas personnel for tasks and local business people to maintain vital services.
- Provided flood boat, vehicle and personnel to Surat (Maranoa Regional Council area) to facilitate evacuations due to rising floodwaters; food, medical and sandbag resupply; provided transport for media to facilitate information dissemination to residents; ferrying local residents; sandbagging; assisted HQ with communications.
- Provided personnel to St George (Balonne Regional Council); ferrying residents; acted as helicopter support crew for resupply of food and medical supplies to outlying properties and a hospital cut off by floodwaters.
- Provided vehicle, resources and personnel to Roma (Maranoa Regional Council area) to facilitate immediate evacuations due to rising flood waters; monitoring of stream levels; provided personnel for HQ and communications support; provided personnel for clean up operations.
- Maintained readiness to evacuate locally; monitored stream levels; monitored potential evacuation of expectant mother; liaised with local government and EMQ staff to support other areas in need; miscellaneous flood damage work eg. chain sawing and mediation of potential hazards; minimal RFAs.

4. Command and Control

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

As the Local Controller of the Wallumbilla SES Unit my core responsibility is to respond to situations in my local area. This includes ensuring I receive adequate information to make informed decisions and responses to mediate the impact of the disaster on human life and property in my local area. Having met this responsibility in our area, I then assess our capacity to provide some personnel

from our experienced pool of members and offer support and equipment/resources to other areas if needed.

(Note: My area of responsibility lies at the headwaters of the Murray-Darling system. We generally experience rapid stream rises and possible isolation, however we are not heavily impacted by floodwater inundation to homes/commercial businesses, with floodwaters falling earlier than in areas down stream. This means our well-trained and experienced members can be tasked to other areas on a needs basis.)

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

I report to a Local Government representative and the Area Director EMQ, or Duty Officer.

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

We receive requests locally via phone or in person; calls to 13500 Watch Desk; LDMG and other agencies, including Police, Fire Comm's and local government.

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

We are a small area, therefore tasking is completed as soon as the request comes in from the Executives' knowledge of members' skills and qualifications. Tasks are also prioritised by the urgency of the situation and the level of resources available at the time. If adequate resources and personnel are unavailable, we seek backup from our local government area and further afield as the situation dictates. Also, three members have recently completed RFA online qualifications and are awaiting final paperwork and other resources to implement this tasking process.

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

No.

- 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?*

No.

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

Members were deployed to Roma, Dalby, Chinchilla, Surat and St George. A list of members available for deployment was supplied by myself to EMQ staff and then deployed from there.

- 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*

In Surat: Daily teleconferences were held.

- (b) *Local Disaster Coordination Centre.*

No.

(c) *The Local Disaster Management Group*

No.

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

(a) District Disaster Co-ordinator

No.

(b) District Disaster Co-ordination Centre

No.

(c) District Disaster Management Group

No.

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?*

Daily or as required.

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

In our local area we liaised with Police and Council. In Surat, our flood boat crew completed a familiarization session with QFRS Swift-water Team. We also undertook an activity with water police to familiarize them with access to and from Surat in flood boats. We had contact with QAS, QPS, and QFRS in briefings in Surat. In Roma, we had contact with QFRS, urban and rural fire brigades and

QPS. In the other areas where members were deployed, they acted under that area's management system.

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.

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

Overall management of groups and areas and facilitation of two-way information flow.

5. Communications

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

- Telephones (landline and satellite);
- Private mobile phones
- Fax machines
- Email/internet (including private)
- SES UHF radios, CB UHF radios.

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

Yes.

Lack of repeater towers impacted on radio communications in the Roma/Wallumbilla/Surat area and some mobile areas, however mobile reception was generally good. Existing Internet downloads provided by local council was insufficient to meet the demands of the disaster therefore private Internet was used.

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

Internet, UHF is possible but is not generally used.

6. Funding

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

Local Government

- 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?*

Not to my knowledge. Volunteers have applied for grants in previous years. Volunteer Small Grants were easy and time efficient to complete, however other grants required excessive hours of volunteer time to obtain funding/resources for our SES unit.

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

As I am not a paid employee of the Local Council, I have a very small say in how funding is administered and spent. Emergency vehicle repairs have been quickly and efficiently dealt with by Council, however day-to-day expenses require

significant amounts of time to organize quite small but essential purchases and this ineffective use of my volunteer time comes at a personal cost to my small business. A simpler and more effective system is required to avoid unnecessary waste of time by an unpaid Local Controller.

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.*

No.

Despite volunteers organizing a grant to install a kitchen for volunteers to use, our unit still does not have hot water, a connected sink, gray water system, toilets or showers in the shed. (Members have primary road accident rescue and are often called out and return to base needing immediate cleanup). There is an expectation that radio operators at base (often female members) will walk across the showgrounds at night to access toilets, leaving radios, phones etc unattended. Speedier facilitation to meet basic needs is desirable.

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.*

No.

The \$3000 government funding is not CPI indexed and has not increased in years. I also receive very little information from Local Government about expenditure and funding. A more transparent system would be an advantage, with greater equity of funding compared to other groups, while considering activation rates.

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

(a) *What types of fundraising activities does your unit undertake?*

Yes.

Volunteers have completed numerous grants to augment funding and ensure our group has sufficient resources to meet its needs. Volunteers have also raised money through our social club to purchase resources such as building signage, batteries for GPS, extension leads, fridges, microwaves, TV and DVD player for data projection during training etc. It has also provided the funding to purchase tea, coffee, food, soft drink and water for activations, debriefing food and drinks, as well as food/drinks for other team building events. The social club also fundraises for needy causes within our community, eg. house fire victims, urgent medical assistance etc.

- (b) *Approximately what percentage of your operating budget does this account for?*

Difficult to assess, as Local Government funding is not transparent.

- (c) *Does fundraising present any difficulties?*

Yes.

It is an additional load on volunteers and comes at a cost to the individual's time/business/finances. While it can provide team-building opportunities, it can also contribute to volunteer burnout.

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 statewide level?*

Members need to be recruited early in their working lives before they become committed elsewhere. Our unit has had a high retention rate, as many of our long-

Rowan Taylor Local Controller

term members joined at 18 and now have in excess of 20 years experience and are still young enough to be physically active.

Payment of volunteers for activations may be an advantage, and/or tax advantages to acknowledge the true cost of income loss to individual's businesses. It should not be necessary for community minded individuals to lose more than their time to fulfil a voluntary role.

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

I believe the state government had an outstanding return on their investment in the SES during the Queensland floods.

Thank you.