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5 April 2011

Justice C E Holmes  
Commissioner  
Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry  
GPO Box 1738  
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Commissioner,

Thank you for your letter dated 29 March 2011 requesting a written statement from the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ).

This request details a number of queries under the various headings in the LGAQ's first submission to the Inquiry, which was provided on 11 March 2011:

- Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships;
- Disaster Management Planning;
- Early Warning Systems and Communication;
- Evacuation; and
- Moderating Future Events.

These queries are addressed in the enclosed submission under the above headings.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me, and I look forward to appearing as a witness in the Brisbane hearings, which I understand will be between 5 May 2011 and 13 May 2011.

Kind regards,

  
Greg Hoffman PSM  
GENERAL MANAGER - ADVOCATE

cc: David Kevin, Partner, King & Company

QFCI

Date: 13 | 05 | 11 *Jm*

Exhibit Number: 370



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## Background to LGAQ Submission

It is important to note the basis on which the LGAQ Submission dated 11 March 2011 was prepared. Much of the information presented came from discussions with representatives of Councils and agencies involved in the flooding events.

In the time available to LGAQ, it was not possible to obtain formal written comments from all relevant councils.

A draft of the submission was circulated to all councils and responses provided by a number of councils on specific points. The submission was also discussed at the LGAQ Infrastructure and Planning Symposium on 14 March 2011. Member Councils supported the thrust of the initial submission and the comments and suggestions made. Some additional background was also provided verbally at that Symposium.

The following sections of this statement address the matters raised in the Commission's letter dated 29 March 2011.

### 1. Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships

#### Points 1-7 (pp. 4-5)

- 1. There is a need for continuity of QPS personnel in disaster management roles along with longer term development of relationships with Councils and Local Disaster Management Groups. For example, a District Disaster Co-ordinator (DDC) should not be changed in November i.e. just prior to the wet season.*

This timing issue will need to be recognised in QPS transfers and promotions.

- 2. The mutuality of roles between the DDC and District Disaster Management Group (DDMG) and the Local Disaster Coordinator (LDC) and the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) needs to be embedded into the disaster management system. This can be progressed through joint planning and training sessions and development of close working relationships and communication.*

The "mutuality of roles" refers to the fact that each element of the disaster management system (LDMG, DDMG, SDMG, etc) is an aggregation of effort, not a handover of control from one level to another.

- 3. Protocols need to be developed to streamline LDMG engagement with the DDMG, SDCC and SDMG during events, recognising the heavy demands placed on those at the local level in response to each event.*

*This may involve DDMGs representing their supported LDMGs on telephone hook-ups, with direct state - local communication occurring only by exception. Communication protocols should be strictly adhered to during events.*

The respective roles need to be clearly understood and communication protocols strictly followed to maximise the overall response results. Well intentioned interventions particularly from high profile visitors need to be coordinated and integrated to avoid confusion and duplication of effort.

Maintaining reporting protocols, avoiding ad hoc requests from individual agencies and stakeholders along with pressures to change the way things are done during an event, is also necessary. The accepted arrangements for this reporting is from the LDMG through the DDMG to the SDMG. Participation by LDMG in SDMG meetings should be by exception.

- 4. Local knowledge and experience should be recognised in the development of plans and operational responses, particularly involving LDMG and DDMG interaction. Strong links need to be established with local networks and services that support communities, particularly vulnerable groups e.g. culturally and linguistically diverse, frail aged, people with disability, youth.*

This relates generally to the comments above. Such local knowledge will be incorporated if the communication and reporting protocols of the system are followed.

- 5. Local Governments to ensure leadership of the LDMG rests with the mayor or senior councillor and involves comprehensive training and regular practicing of the role along with regular interaction between LDMG and DDMG leadership. Strong leadership at the local level is paramount.*

Because the Mayor is the local community leader, it is desirable that the Mayor is the chairman of the LDMG. This may not always be practical (particularly in larger councils), but the role should then be filled by a senior Councillor.

- 6. A system of mentoring and operational support by mayors experienced in disaster management for those new to the role should be considered.*

In recent events, councils that had not experienced events of the scale that took place sought support and advice from Mayors (and CEOs) that have handled similar events before. Local Government can work to formalise such arrangements.

- 7. Protocols should be established in relation to the responsibility of dam operators for alerting both the community and councils in relation to potential impacts of both low flow and emergency flood releases and the methods to be used in such alerts.*

This was a specific issue raised by Somerset Regional Council. It would seem logical that the entity responsible for releases should alert both the community and councils to ensure timely advice, through an efficient mechanism, is available.

### ***Other Matters***

#### **Uncertainty on new roles of SDC & SRC**

These changes in the *Disaster Management Act 2003* (DMA) were effective from 1 December 2010. While there were some initial visits and meetings to discuss changes, there was not sufficient time to develop a full understanding of roles and relationships in the new system. There has been no formal training for councils in relation to these roles and the leadership of the Disaster Management system.

#### **Lack of Advice on Skills or Experience of LDC**

Under S.35(2) of the DMA, the chairperson of the local group may appoint a person as a local disaster coordinator of the group only if satisfied the person has the necessary expertise or experience to be a local disaster coordinator. Guidelines need to be established on what the specific expertise and experience should be and how to access the necessary training to be proficient in these matters.

As a general comment, feedback from member councils in flood affected areas indicates that the current disaster management system under the DMA generally worked well, and there appears no need for fundamental change.

#### **Emphasis on Training at the Local Level**

The events of this summer saw many councils experience events that had not occurred in recent times. Other councils, particularly those in cyclone affected areas, experience regular events, and consequently place a significant emphasis on training to enhance preparedness and response. Increased emphasis on training by all relevant agencies will be necessary, however this will need to be adequately resourced. As the LGAQ submission notes, there has been a reduction in funding support for training through EMA.

## Other Observations on Local, District and State Coordination

As noted in the LGAQ submission, feedback from member councils indicates that the current disaster management system under the DMA generally worked well, and there appears no need for fundamental change.

Comments from councils on specific issues include:-

- All relevant groups including local politicians should be represented on, and participate in, LDMGs. This avoids the potential for bypassing the defined chain of command;
- A need to improve cross-State border arrangements to ensure a coordinated and appropriately resourced response to events along the Queensland/ New South Wales border;
- A need to improve cross-LDMG and cross-DDMG interaction within the same catchment to maximise information exchange and upstream/downstream communication.

## 2. Disaster Management Planning

Points 1-9 (pp. 6-7)

1. *The development of disaster management plans, particularly at the local level, should be seen as a strategic and systemic priority within the overall risk awareness, assessment and governance responsibilities of local governments.*

With limited resources and a wide range of service delivery responsibilities, it is always possible that disaster management planning is not given the priority it deserves, particularly in areas that have very infrequent events. This proposal is linked to Section 2.5 of this statement in terms of leadership and organisational priorities.

2. *More standardised disaster management planning systems including templates and manuals would assist local disaster planning. This would be facilitated by greater State investment in support systems and capacity building.*

Finding ways to streamline and standardise disaster management planning would assist councils.

3. *More active review of LGMG and DDMG plans and preparedness by Department of Community Safety (DCS) is encouraged.*

This is again about more effective risk management and ensuring plans are up to date. It is also important that there be established standards for these



documents - the existing guidelines provide broad advice but not the level of detail necessary to satisfy the intention of the legislation.

- 4. Disaster management plans should be reviewed to ensure the implications of multiple events in a local area and district at the same time can be responded to in terms of personnel and resources.*

This summer saw events taking place at different locations within a council area simultaneously. Prior to amalgamation, there was a significantly greater number of councils, each with its own LDMG. This is an element of transition and relates to comments elsewhere on what each new council inherited from the former councils.

- 5. The need for enhanced practice and training between events should be recognised. This will need to be supported through additional funding.*

Comments were made earlier in this statement on the need for enhanced training.

- 6. Plans at local and district levels should provide greater emphasis on interface between essential services i.e. water, sewerage, power and telecommunications. This is particularly relevant to recovery and reconnection of essential services. The plans should ensure the need for the pre-positioning of "assets" is clearly understood and addressed.*

Getting power restored as soon as possible is important in maintaining other essential services such as water supplies, sewerage treatment and telecommunications. Plans need to ensure, for example, that emergency generators are positioned appropriately. Where roads are cut it is often very difficult to move such assets after an event.

- 7. Where councils cover large geographic areas and a number of separate towns and villages, sub regional emergency coordination/management groups may provide important local inputs to disaster management and support the LDMG and local disaster coordinator. Where resources do not allow for the formation of additional groups, alternate solutions such as improved communications or greater use of emergency volunteers (e.g. RFB or SES) in these communities should be considered.*

Comments from a number of councils suggest that the problems of having a large number of small communities across a large geographic area in times of flooding and other disaster events can be reduced where local event groups are established. It is understood that councils such as Central Highlands, Banana, Western Downs and Maranoa had some form of local based coordination arrangement to support the LDMG.

8. *Improved reporting systems on the status of essential services should be established. This would be facilitated by a reporting template tightly focused on relevant supply continuity issues and situations.*

Councils received multiple requests for advice on status of essential services, often from central agencies. The importance of accurate and timely information on the status of essential services is recognised, but a standardised reporting system may avoid multiple requests for the same information which impacts on resources at the local level.

9. *Attention should be placed on increasing community awareness of potential dangers from flooding and other events at the local level. This should also include increasing awareness of what to do in specific events including location of evacuation centres. Specialised strategies will need to be developed and implemented for vulnerable groups in partnership with local existing networks, services and communities. Initiatives to build community resilience with better recognition of the need to take individual responsibility for their own safety should also be a priority.*

In some cases, there was a lack of community awareness of potential dangers. There was loss of life from people driving into fast moving water. As video from the Toowoomba event reveals, people placed themselves in danger crossing West Creek while the flash flooding event was happening. In some areas people refused to evacuate and were later at risk.

In other cases, there was little information available on where evacuation centres were.

### ***Other Matters***

#### **Difficulties for Amalgamated Councils**

As noted earlier, all councils formed in 2008 inherited disaster management plans from former councils. In some cases, different methodologies were used in flood studies to determine the Defined Flooding Event (DFE). While these differences can all be addressed in time, provided adequate financial resources are available, this has not been achieved to date. Comments from Western Downs and Maranoa Regional Councils highlighted problems faced where a significant number of smaller councils were formed into a large regional council.

#### **Sub LDMGs**

See comments under point 7 above.

## Back-up Generators

Loss of power was a significant problem in a number of areas. Comment was made earlier on the need to pre-position generators to assist early recovery.

Banana Shire commented that its LDCC was not appropriately wired to allow use of a generator as back-up. While this will be solved as a new LDCC is being built, it illustrates problems that need to be considered when providing back-up systems to maintain essential services.

## Improved Frameworks for Reporting on Essential Services

See comment under Point 8 above.

# 3. Early Warning Systems and Communication

## Points 1-9 (pp. 8-9)

- 1) *Clearer alert and warning messages for the public about the implication and timing of rising river/creek levels and an approaching cyclone and storm surge should be developed. Explanation of technical weather forecasting and hydrological terminology in “everyday” language and locally known references would be of great value to the community. Multi-lingual alerts and messages need to be made available in a timely manner, and distributed appropriately to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.*

It is very difficult for the public generally to understand the implications for their property of a flood defined by some height measurement. What they need is either information on the floor level of their dwelling relative to the stated flood height, or the ability to access information that shows where flood water will go to on their property.

Councils such as Brisbane and Central Highlands have web based systems that allow users to access information on their individual property which shows ground and floor heights, and the expected height of a flood event on that property. Better flood and storm surge mapping is necessary to implement such systems.

Terminology such as “1:100 year” flood may also result in some people not expecting the return of a similar flood event to what recently took place, when in fact it is just a probability measure which indicates a 1% possibility of exceedance in any year.



- 2) *Greater emphasis should be placed on capacity building at the local level in matters such as the interpretation and communication of potential event impacts, including enhanced technology to assist communication.*

This relates to the comments above at Point 1. Web based systems are an appropriate approach, and technology should allow a graphical illustration of an expected flood event at an individual property.

- 3) *Review should be undertaken of the form and use of the emergency alert siren used on radio. Suggestions have been made for the adoption of a flood warning signal or siren.*

No additional comment.

- 4) *Greater use of all forms of technology and communication should be explored in the dissemination of information, alert and warning messages e.g. radio, television, landline messaging and mobile telephones SMS (including phones without a billing address in the affected area), and web based - email, Facebook, twitter, etc.*

Comments were made earlier on use of location based SMS. Some concerns were expressed by councils on inaccurate information being posted on Facebook sites. Some councils have made use of these technologies to provide additional advice, warnings and information - however the issue of "reposting" of outdated information and the control of information remains problematic.

- 5) *Greater use should be made of commercial radio to convey public information, alert and warning messages to ensure a wider coverage across the various demographics reflecting diverse listening preferences. There should be recognition of radio and media coverage from neighbouring regions in dissemination of information.*

In some areas, there is no dominant media source. For example, in Somerset Regional Council, residents may listen to a Toowoomba station, an Ipswich station or a Brisbane station. It should be possible to ensure that all media likely to broadcast in an area provides emergency information.

- 6) *Ongoing public information and education, particularly at the commencement of the wet season, is required to ensure the community is aware of its vulnerability to natural disasters, personal responsibilities should an event occur and the various means by which information can be accessed.*

Comment was made on this in Section 3 point 9 of this statement.

- 7) *Local governments and LDMGs should develop improved plans for the management and support of the media pre and post disaster events to*

*ensure essential and accurate information is disseminated and to reassure the community that local leadership structures are operating effectively. The community looks to its local leaders.*

A number of councils reported multiple calls from different personnel in the same media outlet requesting interviews with the Mayor. It is important that the community hears first hand from the community leader but this person is also actively involved in day to day activities as chairman of the LDMG. There is a need to streamline and coordinate media interactions to avoid high levels of demand on the workload of Mayors during an event from the same media group. It could be possible for Mayors to pre-record an interview on the council website that could be readily picked up by media outlets.

- 8) *Councils should consider the development/adoption of greater redundancy in their Call Centre operations and ICT systems to ensure continued operation during and immediately after disaster events through the establishment of back-up systems outside of the city/town or region away from affected areas.*

Problems with power, phone systems (landline and mobile) were reported from a number of areas. There is a need to focus on back-up systems or alternative arrangements (eg “cloud” computing) to cover such problems.

- 9) *Alternative field communications should be developed to support on-the-ground LDMG and DDMG response and recovery operations to overcome the loss of mobile phone or radio networks through damage to transmission facilities and loss of power. This is essential to public safety. Strategies should include provision of information through outreach, such as door knocking and hand delivered information.*

This relates to the problems reported in Point 8 above. A range of options are available to mitigate problems. Some councils reported that two-way radio systems were very effective when telecommunications were down. In small communities it is relatively easy to use door to door methods. Greater engagement with community based agencies (such as Rural Fire Service) has potential to provide an additional communications channel with remote towns and communities.

## **Other Matters**

### **Using Location Based SMS**

Many communities have a high proportion of itinerant workers, travellers and the like where their mobile billing address is not within the target area for an Emergency Alert. In addition, many people rely on pre-paid mobiles that do not have a billing address. This means that a significant number of people within a potential disaster area cannot be contacted under current Emergency Alert arrangements. It is understood the COAG project to

evaluate the use of location based technology now has proposals from telecommunication companies which are being evaluated.

### **Enhanced Use of Technology**

See comments on Points 1 and 2 above.

### **Response and Performance of SES 132500 and MRD 131940**

A number of councils had concerns in relation to the state-wide 132500 number. Whitsunday and Hinchinbrook councils noted that requests for assistance took up to 8 hours to be transmitted back to the local SES. Comment was made on poor communication from Brisbane based 132500 operators and lack of local knowledge. Given this is a relatively new service, some initial problems might be expected. It is understood flooding in Brisbane meant that some operators could not get to the call centre and temporary staff were used. Better training of operators may assist.

Western Downs noted that a significant number of calls were about road conditions and that the 131940 information was not up to date. Council web sites often had the most accurate information. The number of hits on the 131940 website were understood to be part of the problem.

### **Capacity Building at the Local Level**

Comment was made at Points 1 and 2 above.

## **4. Evacuation**

### **Points 1-7 (pp. 10-11)**

- 1) Evacuation Planning needs to be more thorough, including identification of Primary Centres as well as Alternate/Supplementary Centres within LDMG and DDMG plans. Parallel arrangements need to be incorporated within Local and District Plans including arrangements for accommodating of mass evacuees into other local government and disaster district areas, particularly from populated coastal areas to inland rural communities (and vice versa).*

Situations were reported where there was little knowledge of where evacuation centres were located. In Ipswich, the scale of the event meant that a number of self-established centres developed. In Central Highlands there were concerns that up to 8000 people may have had to be evacuated, but with the bridge and rail crossing to the south and east cut, it would have been very difficult to move such a large number north. With Cyclone Yasi, some people moved to inland centres which were not prepared for such arrivals.

- 2) *Clarification of the roles and responsibilities for the management and service provision at evacuation centres between local governments and NGOs needs to be more fully addressed. This should include the review of existing Protocols, where they exist; including fallback arrangements should commitments under the protocols not be able to be met by any of the parties.*

There appears to have been some confusion at times as to who was managing evacuation centres or specific functions of the evacuation centre. The scale of events in some locations was well beyond what had been considered in planning.

- 3) *Management of evaluation centres needs to prioritise the safety of all evacuees, particularly vulnerable groups in line with legislative requirements (such as the Child Safety Blue Card). Special attention is required for people under the age of 18, frail aged, people with a disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In addition, for the safety and wellbeing of staff and evacuees, staff and volunteers should reflect the make-up of the community (e.g. ensure that there are both male and female staff working at the centre, and that staff (where possible) are from culturally appropriate backgrounds).*

Comments were made in relation to problems with ensuring personal safety of all evacuees. It was not always possible to ensure separation of people that should not be in the same centre, eg those with AVOs.

- 4) *Clearer definition and identification of pre-event cyclones/surge centres and post-event evacuation centres is required within plans, with appropriate resources for their respective short and long term operational roles.*

This is a particular problem in cyclone/surge areas where shelters are required initially and then evacuation centres. There needs to be greater clarification of the requirements for and functions of shelters (particularly “shelters of last resort”) to allow for better planning and management.

- 5) *Development of a local register which identifies where vulnerable people live who will require additional support in evacuation (e.g. people with a disability, frail aged). There needs to be clear articulation of roles and responsibilities in ensuring the safety of vulnerable people.*

No further comment.

- 6) *Better planning and provisioning for the evacuation of pets should be included in disaster management plans at local and district levels,*

*with an emphasis on individuals developing their own pet evacuation plans.*

There were examples where people would not leave homes unless their pets could go with them.

*7) Sufficient resources should be allocated to fast track the finalisation and implementation of the Queensland Evacuation Guidelines.*

No further comment.

### **Other Matters**

#### **Better Consideration of the Scale of Events**

See comments in Point 1.

#### **Supply of Evacuation Centres**

Western Downs Regional Council noted problems in relation to lack of planning for beds and food at designated centres. This relates in part to the scale of event. Comment was also made that re-supply was a problem because of road closures.

## **5. Moderating Future Events**

### **Points 1-5 (pp.12)**

*1) There is a need for additional funding sources to enhance emergency access to individual communities.*

Banana Shire Council commented that had access been available to the local aerodrome, then fixed wing aircraft could have been used in the evacuation of Theodore. A similar comment was made in relation to road access between Wowan and Dululu. Both these measures were regarded as being financially feasible in enhancing emergency access.

Flooding along the Bruce Highway at different times also illustrates the difficulties experienced in accessing and supporting impacted communities. Similar comments were made in relation to the Warrego Highway.

This should be a priority consideration of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority in identifying and funding “betterment” or upgrading of vulnerable road and transport links.



*2) Increase the number of monitoring and recording stations on streams.*

A number of councils commented on the need for additional recording stations to provide more accurate information to estimate flood impacts.

*3) Improve back-up systems to cover loss of automatic recording stations.*

No further comment.

*4) Additional Federal and State funding through the Natural Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP) should be provided to assist urgent update of flood studies and to put in place mitigation solutions such as levy banks, as well as to support other measures to improve community resilience.*

No further comment.

*5) Streamline approval systems for vegetation clearing for flood mitigation purposes.*

This is an issue in terms of environmental values versus risk management. A number of councils commented on problems in obtaining approvals from DERM (eg Lockyer Valley Regional Council).

### ***Other Matters***

#### **Measures to Improve Emergency Access**

See comments on Point 1.

#### **Accurate Rainfall Measurement at the Micro Level**

A number of councils reported variations between what official BOM rainfall recordings were and what was measured by other residents considered reliable. Such micro level variations would be expected. However, the intensity of rainfall in some localities appears to have been significantly higher, with estimates of stream rises based on area averages being unreliable. Councils including Toowoomba, Lockyer Valley, Central Highlands and Banana have noted such variations between official figures and those provided by residents.

It is understood Central Highlands has a local hydrologist who phones/contacts farmers to obtain readings to assist in providing as accurate a picture as possible of expected stream rises.