Statement of **STEPHEN JOHN JONES,** Mayor of Lockyer Valley Regional Council of care of Lockyer Valley Regional Council Chambers, 26 Railway Terrace, Gatton, Queensland 4343.

Preparation and planning

1. Since amalgamation in March 2008 to create Lockyer Valley Regional Council (LVRC) and particularly over the last 18 months, considerable work has been undertaken by the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) to consolidate and revise disaster management planning for the Lockyer Valley regional area.

2. The LDMG which I chair, is made up of representatives of Council, EMQ,SES, QPS, QAS, QFRS and other government departments and agencies. Regular meetings and training sessions have been important in preparing and maintaining disaster management capability.

3. The Lockyer Valley Local Disaster Management Plan was reviewed in September 2009 and was further reviewed in September 2010 with that review documented in a revised Local Disaster Management Plan prepared in early January 2011.

4. Members of the LDMG and the LVRC regularly attend external information sessions such as LGAQ sponsored disaster management conferences.

5. More recently Lockyer Valley Disaster Management Group participated in Exercise "Orko" which was held between 2 and 4 November 2010. This was a disaster management exercise prepared by Emergency Management Queensland and designed around a hypothetical but realistic extreme weather event affecting a number of disaster districts and local governments. The purpose of the exercise was to enhance the readiness of participating disaster management groups by having a sustained and detailed "practice run". It was a good opportunity to apply and test disaster management theory and practices in the context of an extreme weather event. As it turned out it was most timely given its proximity to the real events that occurred in the following December/January period.

The response

6. Because of the planning and training that had been previously undertaken, the LDMG was able to activate immediately upon the disaster threat becoming apparent. Persistent rain leading up to the Christmas weekend in December 2010 culminated in some very heavy rain events on Sunday 26 December 2010. The first major flooding occurred that night and the LDMG control centre in the Council's chambers became operational at 6:30am the next day. As the flooding intensified more services and agencies were formally notified even though their informal engagement had already occurred.

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7. The flooding that occurred on Sunday 26 December 2010 was the first of what was to be a series of events that would occur over the next two weeks. From a resourcing viewpoint, the timing of these events had significant implications. It being the holiday season, not all personnel involved in the LDMG and LVRC were available, although many were called back from vacation to fulfil their duties. Also, because of the timing of the flood events over the following two week period, the cumulative effect of long hours and constant pressure took its toll on the effectiveness of personnel over time. By the time the events of 10 January 2011 occurred, personnel had sustained several weeks of near constant activity. Notwithstanding this, decision- making and the coordination and deployment of personnel and equipment worked reasonably well. Both the control centre and the external workforce coped with the extended period of engagement but the general feeling was that resources were becoming "stretched".

8. Apart from the duration of an event, the magnitude of the event can be critical to the effectiveness of disaster management particularly in the short term. A steady and predictable flood event, even if ultimately severe, can be managed. A sustained series of severe events is likely to be more difficult and require back-up and re-supply. A sudden extreme event like the one that occurred on 10 January 2011 is, even for a short time, overwhelming until some degree of order can be restored. In the meantime, individual personal and unit initiative at the disaster scene, is paramount.

9. Generally, speaking for the different events that were encountered, the available equipment was adequate for most purposes. On the ground the use of heavy equipment to effect rescues of people trapped in their homes was effective. Rescue by helicopter in more extreme cases was necessary. Subsequent activities included search and rescue, monitoring of roads, surveying of damage, cleanup and recovery, which occurred at a reasonable pace with the available equipment. As the phases of the disaster management continued the provision of additional personnel and equipment by other levels of government, was essential.

10. Throughout the period, the effectiveness of communications varied depending upon the nature and phase of the disaster event. For the most part mobile phone communication was effective in terms of the preparation and response to conventional flooding scenarios. Even the lack of mobile phone coverage in the Murphy's Creek area would not normally be a big problem.

11. The disaster created by the events of 10 January 2011 tested existing communications to the limit. Given the suddenness and severity of the initial incident, warnings by way of radio and other communications were largely ineffective. The sheer scale of the physical damage to infrastructure and communications hardware significantly affected communications throughout the region. Following the loss of mains power and, in the days following, the exhaustion of back-up battery power, some systems further degraded. The use of movable mobile phone towers certainly made a difference.

12. Generally the community response to directions issued as part of the disaster management was good. A small number incidents occurred involving of motorists ignoring road closed signs resulting in some people becoming stranded and putting themselves at risk. Also there were some unconfirmed reports of people removing road closed signs, but these incidents were quite limited.

Measures to inform the community and to protect life and property

13. Authorised radio broadcasts began on 27 December 2010. These initially involved notification of road closures.

14. As the extent of the flooding intensified, a programme of door knocking was implemented at various communities (eg. Forest Hill) to warn of impending flooding.

15. When communications were lost (eg. telephones cut due to inundation of lands lines) helicopter flights were organised to make direct contact particularly with a number of isolated families to assure them of support.

16. On 10 January 2011 as a consequence of continuing rainfall, SES personnel and Rural Fire Brigade officers went to Grantham in the very early morning to provide assistance because of rising flood levels. Warnings were commenced based on an understanding of the situation as know at that point in time but not anticipate the events that actually occurred shortly afterwards.

Warning Systems

17. For conventional flooding events, LVRC and LDMG rely on a series of stream gauges and personal observations to alert communities downstream to potential flooding. These devices are generally maintained by the Bureau of Meteorology. In circumstances where the likelihood of downstream inundation is high, warning alerts are issued by radio broadcast and, where necessary, personal contact particularly in areas that are most likely to be affected. In the case of the events on 10 January 2011, for the western part of the region so little time was available to give warnings of the flood water coming down the system, that the usual warning processes were ineffective.

Measures to supply and reinstate essential services

18. The immediate task was to survey the extent of damage and the consequent loss of essential services. Numerous roads were impassable. Significant parts of the power and telecommunication network had been lost. Many residences, although not directly affected by flash flooding or inundation, were nevertheless without power and isolated.

19. Restoration of essential services began as soon as possible after 10 January 2011. LDMG meetings to manage the process commenced on 12 January 2011 and relevant agencies began restoring services from that time on. Details of this process are reflected in the Minutes and the Situation Reports.

Communications between LVRC, LDMG and DDMG and the State in relation to disaster management

20. Generally speaking there was good communication on all levels of disaster management. As previously indicated the level of preparation and planning culminating in Exercise Orko reflected the type of communications between the parties. In the midst of the disaster events, effective communication was maintained although the suddenness and severity of the events of 10 January 2011 temporarily overwhelmed systems including communications.

Provision of services by LVRC

21. In addition to activating the procedures in accordance with the Disaster Management Plan for monitoring the flooding events and coordinating a response, LVRC was active in providing personnel and equipment to assist with search and rescue operations.

22. LVRC was actively involved in surveying disaster hazards and providing warnings mostly through road closures.

23. Restoration of road access commenced almost immediately. This was dependant on the extent of damage to the infrastructure. Some roads could be made operational by removing flood debris whilst others required some temporary works to make them passable. In other instances the degree of damage to infrastructure (eg. severe damage to a bridge crossing) would require some time before remedial work could be completed.

24. LVRC chartered helicopters to assist in recovery operations after Australian Defence Force helicopters were diverted to other duties.

25. As part of the immediate response to the disaster LVRC set up an evacuation centre and organised the provision of flood and supplies for those in need.

Provision of services to LVRC by other agencies

26. Significant support by way of personnel and equipment was received from the Australian Defence Force and state agencies and organisations in the various phases of activity following the events of 10 January 2011. Significant resources were brought to bear in the search and rescue phase and the subsequent clean up and recovery phase.

Involvement between LVRC and Commonwealth in relation to the provision of emergency response

27. The on-ground provision of emergency response was primarily made by the Australian Defence Force through the supply of personnel, equipment and services which was reinforced by positive support and commitment at the highest administrative and political level.

Assistance in relation to immediate response in the recovery between LVRC and local ADF

28. Apart from formal requests through the disaster management system the provision of military equipment and personnel was coordinated by the ADF. No informal contact occurred.

29. It seemed that ADF units came from all over the place. I understand that Sea Hawk helicopters from Nowra NSW also participated in operations.

Local community assistance by individuals and local businesses

30. Significant unsolicited offers of support by way of provision of goods and services were received immediately after the disaster. Local food outlets did not hesitate in providing food for people involved in disaster operations.

31. When the clean-up phase began there were various offers from construction and similar enterprises offering the use of plant and equipment. This was of particular assistance in the immediate clean-up of debris from road pavements.

32. Much of this assistance was voluntary but in other instances LVRC paid for goods and services.

Regional or geographic differences particular to LVRC

33. This disaster has highlighted the need for alternative access and communications when normal services are lost. The most immediate impact is the loss of many roads and the time it takes to restore access even to a minimum four wheel drive standard. There needs to be a reliable method of contacting isolated communities and individuals.

34. There is a clear need for alternative telecommunications in times of disaster. When conventional telephone communications are lost when land lines are inundated, large areas of the region are affected. In some areas such as Murphy's Creek there is no mobile phone coverage and in other areas, this coverage may be lost for extended periods if power and other infrastructure is affected by flooding. More use of movable mobile telephone towers to allow temporary restoration of mobile phone communications, might be considered.

Practical and legislative changes to improve future disaster management

35. Consideration could be given to specific disaster management plans for recognised villages and townships contained in their own subplans that operate at the next level down from the local disaster management plan. Each area to which a subplan applies might have its own coordinator or warden.

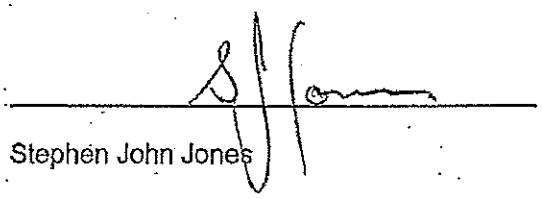
36. There needs to be a review of the level, type and appropriateness of equipment available for disaster management generally, and for particular categories and types of disasters. This review needs to be ongoing as practices and technologies change.

37. To achieve higher levels of trained personnel available to conduct disaster operations, more members of the community need to be encouraged to join the SES and incentives need to be provided to ensure that those new members become and remain active SES personnel.

38. Given the magnitude of recent events, LVRC is now considering the reorganisation of disaster management into its own department or section within council rather than being an adjunct to existing departments. It is likely that there will be clear benefits in having a group of Council officers dedicated fulltime to disaster management, but this will need to be funded.

39. To enhance monitoring and warning systems, there is a need for the provision of new equipment and technology for stream gauging and rainfall monitoring with effective telemetry capacity to provide real time direct input to LVRC and LDMG computer and communication systems.

40. A complete flood study review of the whole region using the data obtained from the most recent events, is a high priority. Commissioning of this exercise has already occurred.



Stephen John Jones