

QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF RONALD JAMES POTTER

I, Ronald James PÖTTER, Local Disaster Coordinator, Gympie Regional Council make the following statement under oath as required by the Commissioner of Inquiry:

This statement is supplementary to the draft statement that I have prepared to the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry dated ^{25 March} 30 September 2011, which is now attached as **Annexure 1**.

A description of how the January 2011 floods affected the town of Gympie, Kilkivan, Goomeri, Woolooga and Widgee

1. I discovered that some areas in Kilkivan, Goomeri and Woolooga were impacted by flash flooding. Houses in Kilkivan were inundated as well as two (2) service stations. Some inundation also occurred to businesses in Goomeri. Businesses and homes located near the creek/gully which passes through Woolooga were also inundated due to flash flooding. The township of Woolooga had serious flash flooding on the 7th January 2011. No reports were received by the Local Disaster Management Group (LDGM) that houses or businesses at Widgee were affected by flooding. The Kilkivan Showgrounds was heavily affected with some buildings washed away and others suffering extensive water damage. Some houses in the Kilkivan area were inundated with water resulting in evacuees looking for alternative accommodation. The Kilkivan Public Hall was opened for

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the night then arrangements for alternative accommodation were made the following day.

2. The Gympie area had businesses and houses inundated by flood waters. As Gympie had warning via the Bureau of Meteorology website, businesses in the Central Business District (CBD) and occupants of houses in known flood prone areas had time to remove stock and personal belonging prior to inundation with flood waters.

A description of the Council's response to the January 2011 floods, including information about any actions taken by the Council's Local Disaster Management Group to protect people and private or public property

3. A Local Disaster Management Meeting was called for Saturday, 8 January 2011 at 9.00am. The meeting was held to discuss the predicted flooding impact on Gympie. Activation of the Coordination Centre was declared by the Acting Chair of Local Disaster Management Group – Cr Anthony PERRETT. Media statements were drafted following this meeting and released to the public via radio. Information regarding the predicted flooding impact on Gympie was also placed on the Gympie Regional Council website. Cr Anthony PERRETT was in regular contact with various media outlets in radio and television throughout the January 2011 floods. These media outlets included ABC radio, Channel 7 and Channel 9. Regular contact with the media during the event provided an opportunity to disseminate information to residents affected by flooding.

4. Gympie Regional Council assisted in moving a resident in the Gympie area that was identified on Council's flood maps as being likely to be affected by flood waters.
5. The Gympie Chamber of Commerce and members of the Local Disaster Management Group liaised with business owners in relation to businesses in the Central Business District of Gympie removing stock from premises when it was predicted that these premises would be affected by flood water. Mary Street, Gympie (located in the Central Business District) was closed to the public and only removal trucks, store owners and volunteers were allowed in the street to help remove stock from premises. The Queensland Police Service assisted by helping to keep the general public away from this area.

Details of any evacuation centres that were established in the Gympie council region, including information about the means by which their establishment was made known to the community, how many people attended such centres, and a description of any difficulties encountered

6. In Gympie, two (2) evacuation centres were established on opposites sides of the Mary River - one (1) on the southside of Gympie at the Pavilion (located on Exhibition Road, Southside) and one (1) on the northside of Gympie at the Gympie Civic Centre (located on Mellor Street, Gympie). Both of these facilities are owned and operated by Gympie Regional Council. The Local Disaster Management Group released media statements of the establishment of these evacuations which were broadcast on radio. Information regarding the

establishment of these evacuation centres was also posted on the Gympie Regional Council website. The majority of people who used the evacuation centre at the Gympie Civic Centre were motorists who could not find alternative temporary accommodation at a hotel, motel or bed and breakfast.

7. Seven (7) evacuees attended the evacuation centre set up at the Pavilion on the southside of Gympie. The Gympie Civic Centre had seventeen (17) evacuees attend during the January 2011 flood.
8. Late Friday night, 7 January 2011 or early morning Saturday, 8 January 2011 (I cannot recall the exact time), I received notification that there were approximately 17 evacuees from residences in Kilkivan area that required accommodation as their homes had suffered inundation of water due to flash flooding. It was subsequently arranged for these evacuees to stay in the Kilkivan Public Hall (located in Bligh Street, Kilkivan).
- 8A. On Saturday, 8 January 2011 most of the evacuees returned to clean up their homes however, a few families could not return as their homes had suffered extensive damage. A decision was made at this stage by the Deputy Local Disaster Coordinator – [REDACTED] to place the evacuees in the four (4) vacant pensioner units in Kilkivan until they were able to return to their respective homes. These pensioner units are under the control of Gympie Regional Council. [REDACTED] is also the Director of the Community Services Directorate of Gympie Regional Council.

Description of what weather and flood forecasts or warnings the Council received before, during and immediately after the January 2011 floods, and what steps the Council took to disseminate that information to the community

9. All weather and flood forecasts and warnings issued by the Bureau of Meteorology were used by the Local Disaster Management Group for decision making and media releases by the group.
10. BEFORE - On Friday, 7 January 2011 I was monitoring the Bureau of Meteorology website regularly throughout the day and into the evening. During the afternoon, warnings were issued that heavy rainfall with possible flash flooding was likely to occur within the Gympie Regional Council area.
11. DURING – Regular monitoring of the Bureau of Meteorology website. Media releases were disseminated to the community as per the Bureau of Meteorology forecast.
12. AFTER - Monitoring of the Bureau of Meteorology website and weather forecast indicated that the rain was clearing. Preparation for cleaning flood affected premises were under way as the flood waters receded. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Rural Fire operations assisted in the clean up efforts by hosing out flood affected houses and businesses.

An assessment of the source/s, accuracy and timeliness of that information for local purpose

13. Sources: Council used the Bureau of Meteorology website to monitor the height of the Mary River to assist in calculating the time line of the river as it was rising. I understand that the Bureau of Meteorology have a water height gauge at the Kilkivan township itself however, there are no other upstream gauges to provide an indication that Kilkivan may be subject to a flooding event.
14. Gympie Regional Council conducted its own assessment of the heights of the Mary River at Kidd Bridge on a regular basis before, during and after the flooding event. Council also received information from the public advising water over roads, bridges cut etc. Council has a flood operation procedure that assists in guiding Council's operations when the Mary River floods.
15. Accuracy: The information from Bureau of Meteorology was considered reliable however, Gympie Regional Council staff conducts its own assessment of the river height at Kidd Bridge, Gympie before, during and after flood events to confirm information from the bureau. During the January 2011 flood, Council did conduct patrols, where possible, to find any roads that maybe cut off by flood waters or wash outs.
16. In regards to Gympie Regional Council disseminating the information to the public, Council used it's website to advise the public of road closures and any other pertinent information. The Council website was updated hourly. Media releases were circulated to media outlets including television, radio and print. All information provided to the media via the Local Disaster Management Group Acting Chairman – Cr Anthony PERRETT was information obtained from the

agencies that form part of the Local Disaster Management Group. These agencies include the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the Queensland Ambulance Service, the State Emergency Service and Energex.

Description of the circumstances of any rescues or evacuations performed in the local area in connection with the January 2011 floods

17.

- a. A helicopter for food and clothing supplies drop for Cedar Grove, Amamoor and the evacuation of five persons.
- b. A helicopter was required for the evacuation of two adults and four children from the Cedar Grove camping area to Gympie due to ill health.
- c. A helicopter was required for the medical evacuation of one adult, who was oxygen dependent, at Tandur due to power being cut off. The request was made via Queensland Health at Gympie Hospital.
- d. A helicopter was required for a medical drop to the Matilda service station at Kybong.
- e. Medication was brought in via helicopter to Gympie and then supplied to the Grevillia and Winton House aged care facilities.
- f. A helicopter was required for a medical drop at Kandanga for isolated residents.
- g. An animal supply drop via helicopter for the RSPCA was required in Gympie due to isolation by flood waters.
- h. A helicopter was required for a food drop at Little Bella Road, Imbil for ten families in total.

- i. 7th January at 4.30pm, Police from Kilkivan rescued a motorist trapped by flood water at One Mile Creek on Fraser Road.
 - j. 7th January at 7.55 pm, Kilkivan Police rescued two elderly occupants of a vehicle trapped by flood water at Widgee Creek on the Wide Bay Highway
 - k. One (1) elderly person was evacuated via SES flood boat at Coondoo Creek, Toolara Forest area.
 - l. Two (2) persons evacuated for medical reasons via SES flood boat.
 - m. Medical supplies delivered to young girl via SES flood boat along the Wide bay Creek.
 - n. 4 persons evacuated in the Boobyjan area by SES vehicle.
 - o. 1 person in Goomeri by SES vehicle.
18. Council assisted in evacuation of one (1) resident, who had just moved to Gympie and had no one to assist them. Council assisted in removing the furniture (etc) from the property and then returned the furniture (etc) once the property was assessed and once the all clear was given by an electrician. Council then moved the resident back in.

Description of what communications were had with, and/or what requests were made of, the Gympie District Disaster coordinator or the Gympie District Disaster Management Group, or the State Disaster Coordinator or the State Disaster management Group

19. GDDC attended the LDMG meetings and gave current situation reports to the LDMG. Other communications were made via telephone and e-mail.
20. Requests that were made to the GDDC were helicopter assistance for rescue or food & clothing/blanket drop, a further request was made to the GDDC was assistance in policing the closed roads & bridges signs, motorists were trying to drive around the road closure or road closed signs getting so far and breaking down.

Details of the measures, if any, that have been proposed or implemented to prepare for, manage or mitigate future flood events in the Gympie council region (such as the installation of automatic river gauges, culvert management, levee construction and the like)

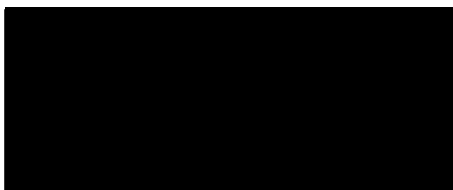
21. Council has preparedness procedures to protect vulnerable assets, as well as to enable an effective early Council workforce response. For example, disconnecting power to BBQs and removing floatable objects.
22. In respect of responding to future floods events, Emergency Response Groups have been formed in communities such as Kilkivan, Goomeri, Widgee, Woolooga and Imbil which get isolated by flood waters. These groups will assist the LDMG in collect information on what support/resources that community will need before, during and after a flood event.

A description of whether and how previous flooding of the Mary River has assisted the Council, residents and businesses in Gympie to prepare for and respond to flooding

23. After the major flood in the Gympie area in 1999, Council in conjunction with the Gympie Chamber of Commerce, developed a CBD Flood Plan which details flood heights and inundation levels at those heights as far as the Mary Street businesses are concerned. Included in this Plan are procedures for preparation of the flooding, during the flooding and the recovery/clean up of the flooding. This Plan is being amended to incorporate outlying businesses which were subject to flooding in January 2011.

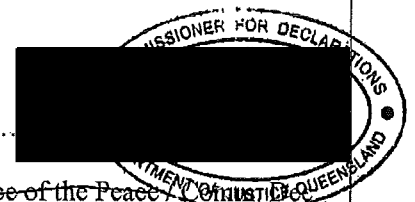
24. From past floods that have occurred of the Mary River, Council has developed a flood operation procedure (copy of procedure will be provide if requested). The procedure assist Council in identifying what heights certain road will be cut, that in turn will trigger a response crew to close the road or bridge which reduces the likely hood of motor trying to cross a flooded road or bridge.

Sworn by Ronald James Potter at Gympie this 4th day of October 2011 in the presence of:



Deponent

Solicitor / Justice of the Peace



ANNEXURE 1

STATEMENT made by GYMPIE REGIONAL COUNCIL – COMPLIANCE & LOCAL DISASTER CO-ORDINATOR - RONALD JAMES POTTER of 24 MELLOR STREET, GYMPIE in the State of Queensland.

1. On Friday, 7 January 2011 I was monitoring the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) site all day. During the afternoon warnings were issued that heavy rainfall with possible flash flooding was likely to occur within the Gympie Regional Council area. Our Council area has had very little experience with flash flooding and no one knew where the vulnerable areas would be or who was at risk.
2. At approximately 4.00 pm, whilst observing the BOM site, it became clear that heavy rain was likely to impact the western area of our region - Kilkivan, Woolooga, Goomeri and Widgee areas.
3. The Deputy Mayor - Cr Tony Perrett contacted me to provide him with information in relation to the current weather forecast. My advice to Cr Perrett was that heavy rain would impact the western area and that flash flooding was likely to occur with more rain predicted over the weekend. As Cr Perrett resides in the western part of our Council area it was decided he would return to his home, pack some clothing and return to the Gympie city area for the duration of the "flooding".
4. Cr Perrett was Acting Mayor at this stage as the Mayor of Gympie was away on annual leave and it was important that Cr Perrett be back in Gympie as was predicted that the Disaster Coordination centre would be activated.

5. I met with Cr Perrett at approximately 5.15pm at the Mayor's office where we connected to the BOM site. At that stage the BOM indicated that heavy rain was over the western area but we were never sure of how much rain would fall in this region.
6. Cr Perrett made a phone call to some Council staff out in the western area who indicated that the rain was particularly heavy and that flash flooding was already occurring. (Note: there are no river auto gauges to assist Council on what heights the creeks or rivers would rise to, to warn any residents going to be impacted by flood)
7. I phoned the SES Group leader – [REDACTED] in Goomeri for an update on the situation in his area. [REDACTED] advised that flash flooding was occurring and that they were deploying sandbags to some low lying areas. I inquired about the SES in Kilkivan and [REDACTED] replied that they could not contact anyone in Kilkivan. Contacting Council staff was also difficult as most of them were on holidays.
8. Later we discovered that some areas in Kilkivan, Goomeri and Woolooga were in fact impacted by flash flooding. Homes in Kilkivan were inundated as well as two (2) service stations. Some inundation also occurred to businesses in Goomeri. Businesses and homes located near the creek/gully which passes through Woolooga were also inundated with flash flooding. The township of Woolooga had serious flash flooding two nights in a row – Friday and Saturday nights.
9. Later that evening Kilkivan Police advised they had evacuees from the homes in Kilkivan requiring a place to stay as the homes had suffered

water inundation and they had no where to go. The evacuees stayed at the Public Hall in Kilkivan for the night.

10. The next day most of the evacuees returned to clean up their homes however, a few families could not return as their homes had suffered extensive damage. Council at the stage decided to place the evacuees in the four (4) vacant pensioner units in Kilkivan until they were able to return home.

11. On the 10th & 11th January there was another flooding event the impacted the western region again which result in the same houses being flooded. Wooloolga with flash flooding with stores/shop and homes being impact by flooding. In Kilkivan the homes that were impacted the first flash flood were affected the second but this time they were alert and moved out before the water inundated them and caught them unaware.

12. A Local Disaster Management Meeting was called for Saturday, 8 January 2011 at 9.00am. The meeting was held to discuss the predicted flooding impact on Gympie. Activation of the Coordination centre was declared by the Chair of LDMG – Cr Perrett (Please refer to LDMG notes that were provided by Council). Media statements were drafted and released to the public via radio and also Council website was available for the public to check what local roads were closed etc. Cr Perrett was speaking to the media radio and TV constantly to keep the public well informed ie; Sunrise, local channels 7 & 9 various radio stations ranging from local to interstate etc.

13. On Monday, 10 January 2011 at approximately 2.00 am, Gympie city was divided by flood waters. The SES provided a flood boat operation to provide medication and food drops to Southside, Gympie. The Mary Valley Heritage Railway provided transport and food to residents in the Monkland area of Gympie as the Railway Bridge stayed above the flooding levels.
14. Other activities that occurred while the DCC was operational are explained in the LDMG notes and/or the Situation Reports that have been provided. Attached are all the Request for Assistance, in number order, by SES and to Council.
15. Evacuation Centres were established on the Southside, Gympie and on the CBD area of Gympie. All Hotels/Motels on the CBD side of the river were full to capacity and had "no vacancy" signs up. Stranded people were then directed to the Evacuation Centres. Motorists, in particular, need to be "stopped" at Cooroy to the south and Maryborough to the north when closure of the Bruce Highway into Gympie is imminent. This would allow for stranded people to find accommodation at centres not impacted by flooding.
16. Food supplies were running low at most convenience stores and supermarkets, particularly in relation to bread and milk.
17. The LDMG stayed active until 5.00 pm Thursday, 13 January 2011 and after that time calls were taken by Council staff in normal business hours.
18. General thoughts – The Gympie area is well versed in flood mitigation as far as inundation of local homes and businesses. Gympie's Mary

River has flooded many times in the past and Council and residents are well versed in expected river heights and the time taken for water to reach Gympie from the headwaters in Kenilworth/Conondale and the amount of rainfall needed to generate a "major" flood which will impact the town. As a result evacuation of businesses and homes in the Gympie area is well underway prior to any floodwater reaching the streets of Gympie. Problems were encountered in our western Council area ie Kilkivan, Goomeri, Woolooga, Widgee as flash flooding of the magnitude experienced in January 2011 was unheard of in "living memory" and therefore no specific procedures/knowledge were in place to assist local residents and visitors.

19. After the major flood in the Gympie area in 1999, Council in conjunction with the Gympie Chamber of Commerce, developed a CBD Flood Plan which details flood heights and inundation levels at those heights as far as the Mary Street businesses are concerned. Included in this Plan are procedures for preparation of the flooding, during the flooding and the recovery/clean up of the flooding. This Plan is now going to be amended to incorporate outlying businesses which were subject to flooding in January 2011. This will allow Council to notify business owners when inundation of their particular premises is imminent.

DATED at Gympie this 25th day of March 2011.

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