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Date: 20/09/11

Exhibit Number: 545

**Brisbane City Council**

**MEMORANDUM**

Date: 25 January 2011  
 Mr John Bradley  
 Director General  
 Department of Environment and Resource Management

To: Mr Jim McGowan  
 Director General  
 Department of Community Safety

Mr Graeme Newton  
 Coordinator General / Director General  
 Department of Infrastructure and Planning

CC: Mr Colin Jenson  
 Chief Executive Officer  
 Brisbane City Council  
 Gary Pittorino

From: Incident Controller, Local Disaster Coordination Centre  
 Brisbane City Council

Re: Hazardous materials moved into creeks during the 2011  
 Brisbane Flood

BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL  
LOCAL DISASTER COORDINATION  
CENTRE

Phone: 34038888  
Web: www.brisbane.qld.gov.au

**PURPOSE**

To propose a coordinated response lead by the Queensland Government in relation to emergent works to remove hazardous materials and bulk flood debris from Oxley Creek, Stable Swamp Creek, and Blunder Creek.

**ISSUE**

While there were numerous creeks across Brisbane which suffered flooding and contamination due to the 2011 Brisbane Flood, the areas of Oxley Creek, Stable Swamp Creek, Blunder Creek and associated tributaries are of significant risk due to the adjacent industrial/commercial facilities.

These inundated industrial/commercial facilities, many of which are high risk facilities of interest to both the Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Government, were the source of a significant amount of hazardous materials and industrial debris which was moved by flood water into these creeks.

**BACKGROUND**

During the flood response, Council has been coordinating its actions via the Local Disaster Coordination Centre (LDCC). In collaboration with the Queensland Government, Council's response focused on protecting and supporting people, cleaning up and removing flood debris, and repairing/reinstating critical infrastructure/assets.

During the initial response, Council undertook rapid assessments across the city of flood effected areas in collaboration with Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) and the State Emergency Service (SES). The rapid assessment process was initially focused on identifying inundation and damage to residential and commercial premises, infrastructure and key community assets (rather than creeks, riparian zones, open spaces, bushland etc).

With the aid of satellite imagery and aerial surveillance, it was identified that a very large number of hazardous materials containers, unmarked containers and other high risk flood debris has been

moved from industrial sites and deposited throughout adjacent creeks as flood waters receded. This was most significantly noted in Oxley Creek, Stable Swamp Creek and Blunder Creek. These creeks have large numbers of industries and commercial activities in adjacent inundation zones which utilise a broad range of chemicals, hazardous materials and other products.

While QFRS undertook initial safety assessments of some containers and hazardous debris close to occupied areas to ensure there was no imminent risk to safety, not all containers and debris in creeks have been appropriately assessed due to access and lack of intelligence on the locality of all such items. A further survey on foot was attempted by the Australian Army though restricted access limited the intelligence gathered.

Most of this hazardous material remains in situ due to complications with a lack of safety assessments in hard to reach areas, lack of specialist advice in relation to items and handling, poor access to make containers safe, problems identifying and controlling unmarked containers, access and availability of equipment to undertake safe removal of hazardous materials.

## **KEY ISSUES**

### **1. Risk to people, property and environment**

With the presence of a large volume of hazardous materials in an uncontrolled, uncontained and insecure environment along creeks and within waters it must be assumed that there is a very high risk of a serious incident including potential harm to people, damage to property and serious or material harm to the environment. Without a thorough, detailed assessment of these waterways it is impossible to make any informed decisions to the contrary.

### **2. Limited specialist capacity**

Council only has limited specialist capacity to provide advice in relation to hazardous materials and does not have appropriately qualified people capable of undertaking assessments, providing advice, making safe and removing hazardous materials. It would be undesirable for Council to attempt to provide specialist advice or arrange clean up of hazardous materials without first seeking appropriately qualified advice and expertise.

### **3. Emergent works funding approval**

With the conclusion of the primary response phase to the flood disaster, Council has limited financial capacity to undertake surveillance, engage qualified people to identify, assess and remove any hazardous materials without the support of Queensland and Commonwealth Government resources and disaster funding under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA).

### **4. Council's responsibilities in relation to HAZMATs**

While within the Brisbane City Council local government area, it is the position of Council that the magnitude of the disaster and subsequent movement of hazardous materials into adjacent waterways has created a substantial risk to the people of Brisbane and the Brisbane environment including the health of the river and the Moreton Bay Marine Park. Subsequently, Council believes that this does not fall under Council's jurisdiction as it exceeds the responsibilities of the local government under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*. As such, the Queensland Government should lead and coordinate the response to this issue.

### **5. Coordination in relation to regulated activities**

Both Brisbane City Council and the Department of Environment and Resource Management have commenced inspections of high risk activities in flood effected areas. This includes a large number of inspections in the areas of inundation adjacent to Oxley Creek, Stable Swamp Creek and Blunder Creek. Many of these facilities are of interest to both agencies and as such inspections should be coordinated where possible to minimise impact on business and the likelihood of conflicting advice.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Confirm NDRRA funding

Written confirmation is requested from the Department of Local Government and Planning that Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements will cover the subsequent costs of the assessment, identification, recovery and removal of the hazardous materials;

*If funding under NDRRA is confirmed by the Queensland Government, then it is recommended that the following occur:*

### 2. Establish a HAZMAT Sub-committee under the leadership of DERM

Under the leadership of DERM, Brisbane City Council will establish a HAZMAT Sub-committee to sit under Council's Environment (Recovery) Committee in response to the flood as outlined in Council's Disaster Management Plan.

The HAZMAT Sub-committee, under the leadership of DERM will coordinate:

- a. The search, assessment, identification and GPS tagging of all hazardous materials in key waterways adjacent to industrial areas including, but not limited to, Oxley Creek, Stable Swamp Creek, and Blunder Creek; and
- b. The making safe and recovery of all hazardous materials from identified creeks (including from associated riparian zones, swamp areas, and open spaces); and
- c. The removal of all hazardous materials to appropriate waste management facilities.

The sub-committee will include members from the following agencies:

- Department of Environment and Resource Management;
- Queensland Fire and Rescue Service;
- Hazardous Industries and Chemicals Branch (Workplace Health and Safety Queensland); and
- Brisbane City Council Natural Environment and Sustainability Branch, Compliance and Regulatory Services Branch, Local Asset Services Branch, and Water Resources Branch;
- Any other appropriate agencies.

Upon establishment of the HAZMAT Sub-committee, Council will make available resources, intelligence, satellite and aerial surveillance and other support as necessary to effect the efficient and effective operation of the sub-committee.

### 3. Confirm Queensland Government agreement with this memorandum

Brisbane City Council requests a written response in relation to acceptance of these recommendations and nomination of appropriate representatives. Due to the emergent nature of this matter, it is critical that a response is provided by 4:00pm Thursday 27 January 2011.

Should you have any questions in relation to this request please contact the Brisbane City Council Local Disaster Coordination Centre Incident Controller (please note the Incident Controller changes with different shifts) on 3403 8888. Alternatively, contact Mr Luke Forster, Compliance and Regulatory Services Flood Recovery Coordinator, on 3403 8888 or 0439 077 291.

Yours sincerely

Gary Pittorino  
**Incident Controller**  
Local Disaster Coordination Centre  
BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL