

Statement of Witness

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

<i>Name of Witness</i>	Emily LANG
<i>Date of Birth</i>	
<i>Address and contact details</i>	C/- Laguna Real Estate, River road, Gympie
<i>Occupation</i>	Real Estate Licensee
<i>Officer taking statement</i>	Detective Sergeant Paul Browne
<i>Date taken</i>	11/08/2011

I, **Emily LANG** state;

1. I am years of age and reside in the Gympie area. I am the Licensee and Office Manager of "Laguna Real Estate" Gympie office and have held this position since 2009, although I have worked for the company since 2007.
2. Our business premises are situated at River road, Gympie and were completely inundated during the January 2011 flood, as a result of the Mary River rising.

I am able to produce a series of photographs depicting the water height and damage to the property (Attachment 1).

Exhibit number

3. I have resided in the Gympie area since 2007 and prior to January, I had not experienced a major flood event in the area. I have no experience with the SES and other than my role as a manager I have not had anything to do with disaster management or planning. For these reasons I was relying on information from the 'BOM' and advice from neighbouring businesses about what to do, when to start packing up and where to go.

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4. The people who run the Telstra shop next door have been through a flood and they told me that they would tell us when to start packing. I knew from the flood plan that when the river height was at about 15 metres Laguna would be affected. Apart from that nobody from Council, Government representative or any other authority gave us any advice that we needed to evacuate. Nor did we receive any information about the height of the river or what that meant for our business and were mostly looking at and relying on the 'BOM' to get regular updates and information and relying on what other businesses were doing.
5. I had a copy of the Gympie CBD flood plan, but I found it mainly focuses on Mary Street. There is a section where you need to fill out your "Personal Evacuation Plan" however, unless you had been through a flood before, you wouldn't know a lot of the information ie: how long it takes to evacuate the premises. I appreciate that a lot of the organising and evacuating would vary for each premises / business, and I know that it is important for each business to have their own individual flood plan, but unless you have been through a flood before, it is difficult knowing what to do and who to contact.
6. Prior to the flood and evacuation I had no idea from what area the water was going to come from, how we were going to be flooded or to what extent. I tried contacting the Council prior to the flood for advice (probably a couple of days prior) but at that time things were already very chaotic for us and all they could give me was very general advice and it was left to us to make a call on what to do about evacuation and when.
7. I did not know when to pack up or move out and initially when we first started to prepare we were putting things up off the ground on top of desks. No warnings or advice were ever given to us and then as things got worse, I eventually decided we just needed to get everything out as quick as we could.

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8. At about 6am on the Saturday morning we decided to start packing up the office. At about 10am we decided to completely evacuate the premises hoping it was the right thing to do.
9. We came back early Sunday morning as our landlord had called us in to assist them in removing the ceiling panels from the premises. At that point the landlords' tradesmen removed the internal doors as well. I assume they do that to allow the water to flow more freely so it can drain quicker; and also stops these items being damaged with the force of the water. These were things that I had not even thought about. By then the water was lapping up over the park, just behind the 'PC Place' building.
10. The containers we had booked had either been given away or couldn't get into town due to the rising flood water. It was pure luck that a guy called [REDACTED] turned up and said he had 2 he could offer us. If he hadn't turned up I have no idea what we would have done.
11. On Saturday afternoon when we were trying to pack up and get everything out, cars with sticky beaks were continuing to drive past and there did not seem to be any co-ordination at all. There was no cordon in place to stop traffic from driving down River Road, yet there was a cordon in place stopping traffic in Mary Street. This made it hard for us to get things out, but the trucks were eventually able to get in and load the containers. I don't know exactly where they took them, only that it was in Barter Street somewhere.
12. I could not understand why they would have the cordons for Mary Street but not for our area, as the water floods our properties well before it gets to Mary Street, and some of those properties ended up having little or no water in them, when we were completely under. It would have perhaps made more sense for the cordon to have started in Monkland Street & River Road, because at that time it was more of a priority for the businesses in the lower areas to be able to get their things out.

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13. Things were basically just organised chaos in River Road, as opposed to the main street where it seemed to have been well co-ordinated and organised. It felt like we were fending for ourselves in that part of town as the local Government seemed to focus on Mary Street, and they had a lot more support and more time to prepare.
14. The water height peaked on the Sunday night, but it was Tuesday before we could get back in to have a look at what had happened and how bad things were.
15. After the flood waters started to reside we really didn't know what to do as far as recovery went, but as soon as we could get back in we started the clean-up process. I recall that my partner and I had no issue getting access to our office (we came in early and parked on the southern side of River Rd near the Gympie Pool and waded through the flood water to the office), yet all other staff were told by the SES that they weren't allowed to drive any closer than IGA. Their cars were packed with mops and all of the cleaning equipment we required, yet they had to carry it all by hand, even though they explained to the SES that they owned and worked in flood affected businesses (PC Place and Laguna). Perhaps the SES could have a list of business owners / managers and allow them access to their businesses to begin the clean-up? Fire trucks were coming down the street, working from business to business and hosing out all of the mud. They were really good because they knew what they were doing and they just got in and hosed out the shop.
16. Apart from the Firemen there was not a lot of co-ordination in our part of town and people were again driving through to sticky-beak. In some instances they were just sightseers who were waving and beeping at us while we were covered in mud and trying to clean-up. Some of them were driving down the street over the top of fire hoses to have a look and I think at that time, the street should have been cordoned off and closed to the general public.

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17. During the recovery process we did not have much at all to do with the S.E.S. but did have some Army Reserve officers who came and helped us clean up for a short time. Mostly it was staff, family, friends and again a few local people who just stopped and helped us with the clean up and recovery. One couple had driven up from Caloundra to help. They saw it all going on in Brisbane and thought that people in Gympie might need help too. That was really touching.
18. Our landlord had their tradespeople helping us and we also used our own local Handyman and Electricians to help out. It was only about a week before we had the office up and running again. It was by no means back to "normal", but we could receive calls and the internet was back on. This was mainly due to the hard work of staff, family, friends and our tradespeople.
19. The cost of repairs was extensive. Our landlord outlaid some costs, the rest being met by us (depending on our lease agreement with them). This has been a long process with some things having to wait as the initial outlay needs to be met by us, and then we submit a claim for reimbursement from the Government. We still have not got carpets in all rooms or blinds for the windows, as we felt these were not necessary items so they weren't urgent in our recovery process.
20. We were well aware the property was in a flood area and this was a decision we weighed up against the rent being cheaper when moving into the building.
21. As part of the rebuild process we have used materials that are more practical for flood and could be easily removed in advance. For example carpet tiles on the kitchen floor and corrugated iron design dividing walls, which can be quickly removed prior to a flood. Our new front desk was also built to be easily removed. The whole office now has ceiling tiles that are removable (before the flood one room had a proper ceiling, which collapsed in the flood).

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22. As a whole I would say preparation for the flood in Gympie was quite good, but in our direct area it was poor, as was the assistance that was provided to us and other businesses in this part of town. The Fire Brigade and Army Reserve was the only real assistance we were provided after the flood and I am not aware of any other resources which were being made available. There was no organised volunteer support as there was in Brisbane. Maybe we could look at putting a volunteer register in place for those businesses who need assistance?
23. Major flooding is not new to Gympie so the long-term residents were pretty organised and knew what to expect, because they had been through it before. Unfortunately there are a lot of people in town who are new to the area, have not experienced a flood and did not know what to do or when to do it. A phone call advising a suggested time of evacuation would have been extremely helpful in that situation.
24. I have since attended one of the Chamber of Commerce meetings in Gympie and that was good but it seemed to be focussed more on businesses in Mary Street. I think there is room for improvement in that regard.
25. I also feel that the Gympie CBD flood plan needs updating and that it should include more personal information for specific flood affected businesses. As part of this they need to find better solutions for the various precincts of town and perhaps include evacuation advice on a sliding scale. i.e. when the river reaches a certain height then a particular area should begin to evacuate.
26. Roads should also be cordoned off in all areas that are trying to evacuate and then again during the clean-up and recovery stages, not just the main street. Restricting entry to those who are directly involved in the evacuation or recovery (owners, staff) and those who are volunteering would stop on-lookers and make it easier for trucks to get in and out. It would also be a great benefit to have emergency services and other agencies trying to help in the clean-up after a flood, however I know that their resources are limited when there are a lot of people in need of help.

27. As part of the flood plan I would also like to see it include information on what do about electrical items pre-flood and also during recovery. I knew that the mains electricity was being turned off but we heard a lot of different stories about what to do with power points and switches inside the building. I think information relating to air conditioners and electrical sockets etc during a flood is something that should be considered.
28. It would also be good to include the process of who to contact about getting a shipping container, how it can be transported and where it can be taken to for the storage of goods. The actual availability of trucks and containers also needs to be addressed.
29. In regards to communication mobile phone services are pretty good and I maintained both my mobile phone and e-mail from home during the flood. As I live out of town and we had already evacuated the business I didn't need to contact emergency services during the flood, but believe I would have been able to, had I needed to contact them for any reason.
30. In relation to Insurance we did not have a policy that covered us for flood. We have been reimbursed from the Government (Relief fund?) for each invoice that we have submitted for our repairs.
31. From a Real Estate Agency perspective we manage approximately 230 rental properties and of those only 1 had flooding and that was restricted to the yard only. I have not seen a lot of issues in regards to Residential flooding and know that as Agents we comply with a Code of Conduct that includes a duty of disclosure when selling properties.

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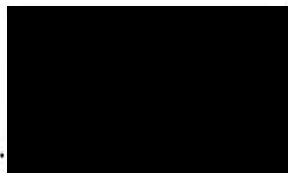
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32. Flooding in Gympie is a part of life and having been through one now I think it will be a lot easier to co-ordinate our evacuation for the next one. If it wasn't for our family and friends we would not have gotten everything out and not been able to get cleaned up and back operating again in such a short period of time. These were the people that assisted us the most, not the emergency services or local Government.

33. I ask that the Commission of Inquiry consider some of the suggestions I have made when making any future recommendations.



Emily LANG.

2nd September 2011.

Justices Act 1886

I acknowledge by virtue of section 110A(5)(c)(ii) of the Justices Act 1886 that:

- (1) This written statement by me dated 2nd September 2011 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 8 is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and
- (2) I make this statement knowing that, if it were admitted as evidence, I may be liable to prosecution for stating in it anything that I know is false.

.....Signature

Signed atGympie.....this.....2nd.....day of.....September.....2011....

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