

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOHN THOMAS FRY

This written statement is provided in response to questions from the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry concerning the involvement of Ergon Energy in the flood event experienced in the Condamine Township in December 2010-January 2011.

I, John Thomas Fry of Ergon Energy Corporation Limited ("Ergon Energy"), [REDACTED] Tara state as follows:

Introduction

1. I am employed by Ergon Energy as a Work Crew Leader in Ergon Energy's Tara depot. I am Second in Charge of that depot. I am by training and qualification an Electrical Fitter/Mechanic and Linesman. I also hold Advanced Connection Officer accreditation.
2. I have been employed by Ergon Energy since July 2003. I was first employed at Ergon Energy's Dalby depot, and moved to the Tara depot in October 2004. I commenced working in the electricity industry in January 1999.
3. I live in the Tara township. I am very familiar with the Condamine area, and with the general Southern Downs area. I play rugby for the local Condamine team and have friends and acquaintances in Condamine and the surrounding area.

December 2010

4. During Christmas 2010 the Work Group Leaders (WGL) for both the Ergon Energy Chinchilla and Tara depots were on leave and I was the acting WGL for Chinchilla and Tara. The WGL for Tara was on leave between the Christmas and New Year period. I continued in the role of WGL for Tara until Tuesday, 4 January 2011. The WGL for Chinchilla, Mr Ross Cardillo returned to work on Monday, 27 December 2010.
5. Chinchilla and Tara are located in the same Ergon Energy operations area, which also includes the townships of Condamine and Miles. The town of Dalby is also in that operations area but

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is coordinated from Dalby. As acting WGL I had responsibility for oversight of the Chinchilla, Tara, Miles and Condamine areas at this time. Mr Dan Flegerbein, the Ergon Energy officer second in charge at the Chinchilla depot, was the "on call" supervisor responsible for any after hours' issues for Chinchilla.

6. In terms of geography, the Condamine River flows through the town of Condamine, and within approximately 10 kilometres of Chinchilla and approximately 20 kilometres of Dalby. The townships of Condamine, Tara and Meandarra are located on the southern side of the Condamine River. The townships of Chinchilla, Dalby and Miles are located on the northern side of the Condamine River.
7. To return home to Tara from Chinchilla on Christmas Eve 2010 I had to cross the Condamine River at Condamine because I was unable to cross the river near Chinchilla as the bridge was under water. As a result of the flooding which was occurring Tara became isolated from Chinchilla, and also isolated from the townships of Miles and Dalby.
8. At this time (the Christmas/Boxing Day holiday period) I remained "on call" in Tara as acting WGL for Tara and Chinchilla, pending the return to work after Christmas of the Chinchilla WGL, Mr Cardillo. However, as a result of the flooding, Friday 24 December 2010 was effectively my last day as acting WGL in Chinchilla. Mr Flegerbein was the supervisor for Chinchilla from that time on as everything was, in effect, "after hours" until the return of Mr Cardillo. Mr Flegerbein kept me regularly updated with the events occurring in Chinchilla over this period, and any major issues were also communicated to the Area Operations Manager for Darling Downs.

Weather Conditions leading up to 30 December 2010

9. Throughout much of December 2010 extensive rainfall had been received across the Condamine River catchment, as well as many other parts of southern and eastern Queensland. This rainfall had intensified from around Christmas, and Southern Downs residents living in flood zones had been warned to begin preparing for the worst as the Condamine River was rising rapidly.

10. By 27 December 2010 flooding was being experienced along the Condamine River and its tributaries. On 28 December 2010 the State Government declared a disaster situation for the flood affected townships of Chinchilla and Dalby. The flooding in Chinchilla and Dalby was caused by local creeks that run through these towns. These creeks are tributaries of the Condamine River. The flooding in the Condamine River did not allow the water from these tributaries to escape into the river which resulted in the creeks being backed up in the towns. These tributaries flow into the Condamine River upstream of the township of Condamine. Evacuations were occurring in Chinchilla and Dalby, and further evacuations were expected.
11. I was well aware of the flooding situation in Chinchilla and Dalby and, on the basis of my local knowledge, I was concerned as to the impact of the Condamine River flood on the township of Condamine. On around 28 December and 29 December 2010 I was in contact with Ergon Energy customers and personal acquaintances in Condamine to get an understanding of the "on the ground" situation. I was also in very regular communication with Mr Flegerbein over this period.

Ergon Energy supply of power to the Condamine area

12. Ergon Energy is responsible for the supply of electricity to the Condamine supply area. This area comprises the townships and communities of Condamine, Meandarra, Sunnyside, Pine Hills and Yulabilla. In total the Condamine supply area comprises approximately 300 Ergon Energy customers.
13. Electricity is supplied via a 33kV sub-transmission feeder supplied from the Chinchilla zone sub-station to Miles. There is then a further 33kV Miles-Condamine sub-transmission/distribution line supplying electricity from the Miles sub-station.
14. At a point approximately half way between Miles and Condamine there is a further sub-station from which the 33kV sub-transmission line continues, but from which a second lower voltage 22kV distribution line is also produced.

15. The 33kV line from Miles crosses the Condamine River at the township of Condamine, from the north eastern side of the town. The township of Condamine is located on the southern side of the Condamine River. The properties to the north of the river are primarily rural properties. The areas of Pine Hills and Yulabilla are also located to the north of the Condamine River.
16. Having crossed the Condamine River at Condamine, the 33kV transmission line continues on to the south, providing electricity to a large geographical area including the townships of Meandarra, Glenmorgan and Flinton and the areas of Sunnyside, Ingleston and Teelbah. The 33kV sub-transmission line has 2 distribution transformers running off it for the Condamine Township, one of which is the transformer for water supply to the Condamine Township, and the other provides electricity to residents on the eastern side of the township.
17. The 22kV distribution line also crosses the Condamine River at Condamine. This distribution line has 3 distribution transformers running off it, all of which provide electricity to properties in the Condamine Township. This distribution line is the primary source of electricity to properties within the Condamine Township.
18. At the locations where the 33kV and 22kV lines cross the Condamine River there are statutory clearance levels between the river surface and the transmission lines which need to be maintained for public safety reasons.

Thursday, 30 December 2010

19. At around 7:30am on Thursday, 30 December 2010 I telephoned some of my contacts in Condamine to get a further update on the position. I was told that the Condamine River was rising, that there was a likely risk of it rising significantly, and that some houses in the town were already inundated.
20. I contacted the Chinchilla WGL, Mr Cardillo, who by this time had returned from leave, and reported the situation to him. This information was also provided to the Area Operations Manager (OAM) for Darling Downs, Mr Matt Gleeson, who is based in Dalby.

21. In view of the impending flood risk and the report that some residences were already inundated, a decision was made that Ergon Energy representatives should helicopter into Condamine that day to assess the position. Helicopters were readily available in the area as a result of the evacuations that had been taken place around Chinchilla and elsewhere. Myself and Mr Kevin Ash, another Ergon Energy employee based in Tara drove from Tara to a location approximately 5 kilometres south of Condamine, which was as close as we could get to the township due to the flood situation. From that location we were picked up by a helicopter and flown into Condamine.
22. Also on board the helicopter was Mr Flegerbein. Mr Flegerbein and I were well aware of the extent of the flooding being experienced in Chinchilla. In travelling from Chinchilla to Condamine Mr Flegerbein had flown the course of the Condamine River. He identified that there was a significant amount of water flowing down the river towards Condamine, and from his observation the river was still rising and had the potential to rise significantly. Mr Flegerbein had already been extensively involved with the Chinchilla floods and knew what to expect.
23. We arrived in Condamine at approximately 10:00am on Thursday, 30 December 2010. On arrival the local State Emergency Services (SES) representative provided us with a four-wheel drive vehicle to undertake a reconnaissance of the town.
24. It was readily apparent that a number of properties were already inundated. This created a safety issue, with live electricity still being fed to these properties.
25. Ergon Energy Emergency Management procedures require that supply be turned off for all areas inundated or likely to be inundated by water. Having completed the initial reconnaissance we started isolating the electricity to the inundated properties individually, on a property by property basis. This process involved disconnecting the power to the property by disconnecting the low voltage service fuse on the power pole adjacent to each property.
26. Many of these inundated properties were already evacuated. However, where people were still in occupation we explained what we were doing and that this was a necessary safety issue.

The occupants readily understood this and we did not occasion any resistance to disconnecting power to the inundated properties.

27. Because the flood water was still rising, and with the benefit of Mr Flegerbein's observations of the Condamine River when flying into the township, we also considered that, as a safety precaution, power should be disconnected to properties that would be inundated if the flood level rose by a further half metre.
28. Myself and Mr Flegerbein discussed this proposal with Mr Cardillo (the Chinchilla WGM) and with Mr Gleeson (the OAM) who agreed with this course of action and instructed that we proceed accordingly. Throughout the course of the day on 30 December 2010 Mr Cardillo and Mr Gleeson were kept regularly updated with the steps that were being taken "on the ground" in Condamine.
29. We also discussed this course with the local SES officer, the local Police Sergeant who had arrived from Miles, and the local Western Downs Regional Council Councillor, Mr Andrew Smith, who were all informed of the courses of action we were taking and proposed to take, and raised no objection to those actions. Throughout the course of the day on Thursday, 30 December 2010 we were in regular liaison with the SES, the Police Sergeant and Mr Smith. At this time I was not familiar with who were the representatives from the Local Disaster Management Group or the District Disaster Management Group. However, it was clear to me that the local SES officer, the Police Sergeant and the local Councillor were the officials present "on the ground" in Condamine, and that they had taken charge of the developing flood emergency. It was also apparent to me that the Police Sergeant had assumed overall responsibility for the situation.
30. We occasioned some resistance from residents to disconnecting power to properties that were not yet inundated. However, as it transpired, it was not very long afterwards that these same properties were in fact totally inundated by the rising flood water.
31. At this stage, which was approximately early afternoon on Thursday, 30 December 2010 the disconnections of inundated and at risk properties were still being effected on a property by

property basis, or occasionally on a sectional basis. However, the 33kV and 22kV lines both remained energised, and it was only the inundated properties, and those which were very close to becoming inundated that were being taken off line.

Evacuation of the Condamine township.

32. At approximately 12:00pm on Thursday, 30 December 2010 the Police, SES and local Councillor convened a town meeting in the local hotel and proposed voluntary evacuation of the town. Subsequently, at around 4:00pm a further meeting was convened at the SES sheds. At this meeting a decision by the Queensland Police Service to effect a compulsory evacuation of the township was communicated to the residents.

Decision to isolate power to the residences that may be impacted by inundation

33. The power to those parts of the township that were not yet inundated was left on for as long as possible. These were the sections of the town connected to the 22kV feeder line. The three Ergon Energy distribution transformers that operate off this line to convert the 22kV power to low voltage electricity were not inundated by the Condamine River flood event, but almost all of the properties serviced by the low voltage distribution from these transformers were inundated.
34. When the decision was made to compulsorily evacuate the town, we contacted Mr Cardillo and Mr Gleeson, and following consultation with them a decision was taken, as a safety measure, to isolate all of the remaining properties feeding off the 22kV line that may be subjected to the inundation. Again, this decision was discussed by us with the local authorities. Because the work needed to be completed in daylight, it was impractical to disconnect every remaining individual property at the service fuse. To enable this activity to be carried out more efficiently, the low voltage was isolated from the isolation points on each of the three distribution transformers, rather than at the service fuse on the pole adjacent to each property. That is, the supply was isolated at the transformer where the 22kV power is converted to low voltage electricity for supply to properties.

Isolation of the 33kV distribution line

35. At around the same time as these events were occurring on the afternoon of Thursday, 30 December 2010 it became apparent that, because of the rising river level, the statutory clearance level for the 33kV distribution line could not be maintained. As I have explained the statutory clearance level is the minimum area between the river surface and the power transmission line. This was unsafe as water craft were using the river.
36. Following discussion with the OAM, a decision was taken, again for safety purposes, to de-energise the 33kV line. This occurred at around 4:00pm on Thursday, 30 December 2010. This had the effect of turning off power from the main line from Miles at the sub-station half way between Miles and Condamine and isolating the 33kV line across the Condamine River. Because of the flood waters all of the switching was carried out by helicopter.
37. De-energising the 33kV feeder line had little impact on most of the township which, as I have explained, is primarily serviced by the 22kV distribution line. The statutory clearance for the 22kV distribution line was maintained throughout the Condamine River flood event, and that line remained energised throughout the event. Disconnection of power from that line only occurred at the service fuse for individual properties, or at the transformer connection point.
38. However, de-energising the 33kV line meant that power was not available to the area south of Condamine (as detailed in paragraph 16 above). It was also not available to the transformer supplying power to the water supply to Condamine township and to the transformer supplying power to the properties in the eastern part of the township which were not otherwise affected by flood inundation. As a result of de-energising the 33kV line, power was also not available to the properties on the Miles-Condamine 33kV feeder line north of the Condamine River and to the communities of Pine Hills and Yulabilla.

Provision of emergency power

39. I did not attend the town meeting at around 4:00pm at which the direction to compulsorily evacuate the township was communicated. It was by this time apparent that the township

would be inundated, and I was actively engaged in ensuring that power generation was available to the Emergency Centre which had been established at the local football club for use by QPS and other emergency personnel. The club was situated at an elevated location. I took steps to ensure generation was available to keep cold rooms operating at this location so that food supplies from the local hotel and service station could be relocated and kept refrigerated. Medical supplies were also taken to this location so they could be stored in a refrigerated condition where required. Additional freezers were also connected to this generation so that some of the residents were able to keep food refrigerated and frozen. The following day, on my return to Condamine, I took steps to ensure generation was also made available to assist Telstra in restoring mobile telephone connectivity to the area.

Reconnection of the 33kV distribution line south of Condamine on Thursday 30 December 2010

40. Together with Mr Fiegerbein and Mr Ash, I flew out of Condamine late on the afternoon of Thursday, 30 December 2010. Mr Ash and I were returned to my vehicle just south of Condamine. I was aware that although the Miles-Condamine 33kV feeder which, because of the risks associated with the river crossing, had been de-energised, was the usual source of power supply to the Condamine area, an alternate supply route was available from the south through Tara-Meandarra-Condamine by utilisation of the Ergon Energy assets on the southern side of the Condamine River.
41. On being returned to my vehicle Mr Ash and I drove to Meandarra. This took some hours because it was necessary to take a number of detours to avoid flood waters. On arriving in Meandarra and using the power supply available between Tara and Meandarra, we were able to re-energise the 33kV line by back-feeding the line from Meandarra north to Condamine. This occurred at around 7:30pm on Thursday, 30 December 2010, with the result that all Ergon Energy customers from Meandarra north to the Condamine Township (but not including the township) were re-energised that evening. These areas were therefore without power for approximately 3½ hours.

Reconnection of the 33kV distribution line north of Condamine on Friday, 31 December 2010

42. On the morning of Friday, 31 December 2010 Mr Flegerbein, Mr Ash and I were flown back into Condamine by helicopter. That morning we were able to break bridges to successfully isolate the 33kV line across the Condamine River thereby restoring supply to the services that feed off the 33kV line north of the Condamine River. These included the areas of Pine Hills and Yulabilla and the Teys feedlot, which runs approximately 30,000 head of cattle. The reason that the three Ergon Energy officers returned that morning was that the exercise of breaking the bridges to re-energise the 33kV line required three people.

43. Following this operation on Friday, 31 December 2010, the 33kV distribution line was energised both north and south of Condamine, but de-energised across the Condamine River for safety reasons. However, because of their location adjacent to the river, the two distribution transformers off the 33kV line for the town water supply and for the supply of power to houses in the eastern side of the township remained isolated.

Restoration of power after 31 December 2010

44. As at 31 December 2010 there were approximately 120 properties within the Condamine area without power. These properties were primarily within the Condamine Township connected to the 22kV feeder line. Supply of power to these properties had been isolated because of inundation or the risk of inundation. In addition there were a small number (approximately 15) properties in the eastern side of the township that were not at risk of inundation, but were without power because of the de-energising of the 33kV distribution line across the Condamine River. This de-energising of the 33kV line across the river had also affected supply to the Telstra tower. As noted above I took steps on Friday, 31 December 2010 to ensure that generation was available to assist in restoring mobile telephone connectivity.

45. Mr Ash and I remained in the township from Friday, 31 December 2010 for the next week assisting, initially, with the supply of generation power, and taking steps to prepare for the restoration of power to the township when the flood waters receded.

46. An important step that we took during this period was to isolate every property individually at the service fuse instead of being isolated from the 22kV transformers. This meant that any property whose capacity to receive power had not been compromised by the flood waters could have power restored immediately when the flood waters receded. This included, for example, houses that were high set. It may have been that air-conditioners, pumps or hot water systems situated at ground level had been inundated and would have to remain isolated pending safety inspections, but the house itself was above the flood level and electricity could be immediately restored to those parts of the property that had not been subjected to inundation.
47. Some limited power from the 22kV transformers was able to be restored on Monday, 3 January 2011. By Tuesday, 4 January 2011 the flood waters had receded sufficiently for all power from the 22kV transformers to be restored. Also, on the morning of Tuesday, 4 January 2011 the 33kV distribution line was re-energised. That day, six electrical inspectors from Toowoomba were flown into the township to undertake safety inspections. Every property was inspected that day by Ergon Energy staff and properties were reconnected with either full power or with part power in circumstances where some flood affected circuits had to remain disconnected pending safety inspections.
48. By Wednesday, 5 January 2011 electricity supply had been restored to all properties. However, approximately 20 customers remained without power until major work on their installation was completed by electricity contractors. That is, although supply was available to these properties, they remained disconnected at the service fuse until repair work was completed. Seven contractors were made available to the Condamine Township to commence repairs and by Monday, 10 January 2011 power had been fully restored except for 10 customers (8 residents and 2 community buildings) still undergoing repair.
49. As the evacuated residents returned to Condamine over this period, I spoke with them and kept them informed as to the position regarding the supply of electricity to their individual properties. Where there was to be a delay in restoring full power to their property for any

reason, I explained this on a case by case basis so that the residents knew the position and what was happening.

50. The Condamine Township was flooded a second time on Thursday, 13 January 2011. Because I had to undergo some surgery, I was not working at that time and was not directly involved in the second Condamine flood event. However, I am aware from Ergon Energy records that power supply to the township was again isolated on the afternoon of 13 January 2011. The power was restored on the morning of Wednesday, 19 January 2011 and most customers inspected and reconnected that day.

Supply of power to the Wallumba feedlot

51. The Wallumba feedlot has approximately 4,000-5,000 head of cattle. It is located north of Condamine and is serviced by its own designated line running off the Miles-Condamine 33kV sub-transmission line. The line running to the Wallumba feedlot was de-energised when the 33kV sub-transmission line was de-energised on Thursday, 30 December 2010. When the 33kV line north of Condamine was reconnected the following morning, the line running to the feedlot had to be again de-energised on Friday, 31 December 2010 because statutory clearance levels across the Condamine River at Wallumba, located approximately 15 kilometres north of Condamine, could not be maintained.
52. Power to the Wallumba feedlot was restored at around 8:30pm on Monday, 3 January 2011 when the flood levels in the Condamine River had receded sufficiently to enable the statutory clearance levels to be maintained. However, the Wallumba feedlot was again isolated in the 13 January 2011 event and power not restored until the morning of 19 January 2011.
53. Ergon Energy representatives engaged in regular consultation with the feedlot customer during this period so that the customer was kept aware of developments and the safety reasons associated with the disconnection of power to the feedlot.
54. As a result of its experience in the December 2010-January 2011 flood event, Ergon Energy is examining achieving greater clearances for the Condamine River crossings in the township of

Condamine and at Wallumba, so that the 33kV feeder can remain energised throughout a flood event. However, taking these steps will not change the requirement for disconnection of supply to individual premises subjected to inundation in a flood event.

Ergon Energy protocol/procedures for disconnecting supply

55. The Ergon Energy approach to the disconnection of power in an emergency event is published in the Ergon Energy Network Operations Emergency Management Plan (Appendix 5).
56. This provides that supply will generally be retained as long as possible to assist in the orderly evacuation of any affected area, and to ensure essential lighting, traffic control systems, storm water pumping, portable water pumping, fire pumping systems and sewerage system pumping remain in service for as long as possible. Any request from the RIRT, Emergency Services officers or on-site Disaster Management officers to the contrary will result in de-energisation as soon as possible. In all cases, Ergon Energy field crews will only be dispatched when it is safe to do so. Field crews will not be requested to venture into areas designated as unsafe by any authority.
57. The specific guidelines in relation to flooding events provide that field crews will be dispatched to observe line clearances and inundation levels where practical and safe to do so. No local switching will be permitted where there is flooding underfoot. Supply will be turned off for all areas inundated or likely to be inundated by water. Removable equipment in substations likely to be inundated will be removed to higher ground. These guidelines are subject to any countermand by the Local Disaster Management Committee if the Committee has been activated.
58. I believe that the requirements of the Ergon Energy Network Operations Emergency Management Plan were followed by the Ergon Energy personnel involved during the Condamine flood event.

Dated this 15th day of April 2011



John Thomas Fry