

QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Requirement to Provide Written Information to Commission of Inquiry

Tony Jacobs, Local Disaster Coordinator,
Somerset Regional Council

In accordance with section 5 of the *Commissions of Inquiry Act 1950* (Qld), I Tony Jacobs, Local Disaster Coordinator, Somerset Regional Council, provide the following statement of information as directed by letter dated 21st March, 2011. In providing the information this statement will be relative to the information request for the years 2010/2011.

- 1) **The local planning and preparation, including training, undertaken in advance of and/or in relation to the 2010/2011 flood events.**
 - a) Council has an approved Local Disaster Management Plan dated April 2008. This plan forms the basis and guidelines for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities of all the joint agencies within the Somerset region in relation to natural disasters such as flooding.
 - b) In December 2010, Emergency Management Queensland conducted Local Disaster Coordinator induction training for me and Andrew Johnson, who is the Council Works Engineer. The training was conducted at the Council Offices in Esk and involved a basic introduction to the reasons for disaster management and a summary of the recent changes in legislation.
 - c) In December 2010, the District Disaster Management Group conducted a Disaster Management workshop that I attended with the Council Works Engineer. The workshop was conducted at the Queensland Police Service headquarters at Yamanto, and involved a review of the principles of Disaster Management and an update of the expected season ahead.
- 2) **Any measures implemented immediately prior to or during the 2010/2011 flood events that were designed to mitigate the effect of any flooding (for example sandbagging, temporary levees), including an assessment of the performance of those measures.**
 - a) Prior to the 2010/2011 floods, stockpiles of sand and sandbag supplies were provided to all State Emergency Services ("SES") depots for use if required.
- 3) **Local participation, or otherwise, in Emergency Management Queensland's (EMQ) 2010 Pre-Season Flood and Cyclone Workshop, including an assessment of the local assistance gained thereby.**
 - a) I did not personally attend EMQ's workshop as it was held on a Council meeting day. However, the workshop was attended by Andy Bickerton who is the Council SES Local Controller.
- 4) **Local participation, or otherwise, in EMQ's 2010 Consultation Sessions concerning the proposed changes to the *Disaster Management Act 2003 (Qld)*, including an assessment of the local assistance gained thereby.**

QFCI

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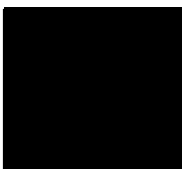
- a) On 19 July 2010, I attended a consultation session at the Queensland Police Service headquarters at Roma Street, Brisbane, at which the proposed changes to the *Disaster Management Act 2003* were explained.
- b) The consultation session was general in nature and provided little or no operational guidance for Somerset Regional Council in particular.

5) Any measures taken to train and/or equip the local State Emergency Service (SES), including an assessment of the adequacy and timeliness thereof.

- a) The Somerset region has four SES units, being Kilcoy, Toogoolawah, Esk and Lowood. Council supports these units by funding the training of members, providing equipment for use by these units and employing a full-time Local Controller.
- b) Council is aware that Somerset SES units undertake routine training in all activities associated with SES tasking. In the nine months from January 2010 to September 2010, the four local units completed a combined total of 7,989 hours of training. Council does not control the training program of the SES. However, should information on the training program be required, Council's SES Local Controller can provide further information to the Commission.
- c) Otherwise, over the past five years, Council has spent approximately \$1,147,379.00 on SES activities, made up of:
 - a) \$411,234.00 in employment costs for the SES Local Controller;
 - b) \$18,264.00 in training costs;
 - c) \$179,262.00 in vehicle costs; and
 - d) \$173,013.00 in building upgrades.
- d) The training and equipment level of all the local units have been generally adequate for the tasks performed. However, it was found that the flat bottom boats used by three of the units, which were purchased as they were the most suitable units for still water tasking, were found to be unsuitable in the 2010/2011 flood events, where some tasks involved swift water activity. It was necessary to bring in a boat from another SES unit to undertake swift water tasks. The need for a mixture of hull types will be considered when existing boats are replaced.

6) The local actions undertaken in advance of and/or in respect of the 2010/2011 flood events in relation to resourcing, coordination and deployment of any personnel and equipment.

- a) Following notification on 9 January 2011 of expected flooding in low lying areas adjacent to Lockyer Creek, the Lowood SES unit was activated and the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) assumed a watching status.
- b) On 10 January 2011, notification was received from Toowoomba Regional Council, as operator of the Cressbrook Dam, that the dam was close to full and was expected to overflow later that day. Council's SES Local Controller was notified accordingly and asked to activate the Toogoolawah SES and to make contact with the Toogoolawah Police to advise them of the situation and that evacuation may be necessary.
- c) The Kilcoy SES unit and Council personnel were deployed to assist Police with traffic control where the D'Aguiar Highway was cut near the town.



7) The local actions undertaken in respect of the 2010/2011 flood events in relation to immediate management, response and recovery operations, including the coordination and deployment of personnel and equipment.

Immediate Management

- a) On 9 January 2011, Council received advice from the Mayor that he had been contacted by residents in the areas adjacent to Lockyer Creek, warning of possible flooding in low lying areas. The Lowood SES unit was activated to assist with evacuations where required.
- b) The initial activation of the LDMG was planned for 10 January 2011. This was planned due to the flooding in Lockyer Creek, the isolation of Kilcoy and the forecast for continued rain; however, overnight rain resulted in further road closures isolating LDMG members. A Local Coordination Centre was therefore set up at the Fernvale Futures building using available staff. Coordination Centres were also set up and operating in Kilcoy and Esk.
- c) Full activation of the LDMG occurred on 12 January 2011 following a meeting of the available members of the group at Fernvale, as Esk was still isolated.
- d) On 13 January 2011, the Local Disaster Coordination Centre (LDCC) was moved to Esk as communications in Fernvale were severely limited and Esk was now accessible.

Response

- e) Numerous arterial roads were flooded, which hindered deployment of personnel and equipment. Therefore, Council personnel and equipment were deployed where possible. The SES and Queensland Rural Fire Service local brigades also assisted, while local contractors were used to supplement Council resources.
- f) The stand-down of the LDMG occurred on 21 January 2011.

Recovery

- g) Community Recovery personnel attended various locations from 14 January 2011. Recovery centres were then established in Kilcoy, Toogoolawah, Esk, Lowood and Fernvale.
 - h) On 25 January 2011, four recovery sub-groups were established, being:
 - a) Infrastructure;
 - b) Environmental;
 - c) Community and Social; and
 - d) Economic.
- 8) Any local measures taken or requested to preserve vital infrastructure and to manage, maintain or reinstate the supply of essential services (water, flood, power, transport, communications and/or sewerage) during the 2010/2011 flood events.**

Transport

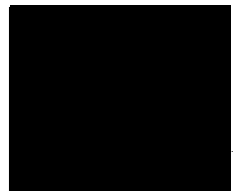
- a) Kilcoy was isolated due to flooding from 9 January 2011 to 14 January 2011. Fernvale, Lowood, Esk and Toogoolawah were isolated from 10 January 2011 to 13 January 2011.
- b) Council worked to restore access to communities as a priority. This was done by tasking all available Council road crews and contractors to undertake pavement repairs as soon as roads were no longer inundated. However, some arterial roads remained closed until 10 February 2011, resulting in the need for detours to access some communities.

Fuel

- c) Initially, service stations were asked to restrict the volume of individual sales.
- d) Lowood supplies dropped to a level where there was a need to restrict supply to emergency vehicles only, for a period of 24 hours.
- e) Fernvale's only service station was inundated on 11 January 2011 and closed until testing confirmed contamination had not occurred. Council sourced bulk diesel supply for emergency vehicle use only during this time.

Food

- f) The loss of power and communication created an issue with food supply. A number of food stores had supplies; however, their eftpos facilities did not function therefore cash was required. Banks could not access account information and ATMs did not function. This created a cash shortage within the community.
- g) Fernvale lost power due to the floods. However, the local supermarket continued to provide food to the community on a cash only basis. It also supplied food to the evacuation centre.
- h) The Esk Supermarket was flooded, resulting in the loss of power and some food stock. After cleaning out damaged stock, the supermarket re-opened to distribute the remaining food stock. While the supplies ran low, resupply was able to be achieved before stocks were totally depleted. The Local Disaster Coordination Centre was able to identify alternate supply sources; however the supermarket chose to wait until their normal channels were operational.
- i) There were also a number of rural communities that were isolated. These areas were monitored by the LDCC and were resupplied as required. This was done using helicopter, boat, four wheel-drives and, in some cases, by foot.



Power

- j) Power was lost in Fernvale and many rural areas on 11 January. Energex representatives attended daily LDMG meetings from 13 January 2011 onwards.
- k) Large mobile generators were sourced to provide power to the town of Fernvale. The first generator was connected 14 January 2011 and supplied power to the commercial centre of the town.
- l) The second generator was online on 16 January 2011 and provided power to those residential areas that had not been inundated and could be reconnected. Areas where houses had been inundated were not connected until safety checks were undertaken.

Water

- m) Water supply was maintained during the floods in most areas with the exception of Fernvale, Lowood, Tarampa and Minden, which are all supplied from the Lowood Water Treatment Plant. The intake pumps, located in the Brisbane River, were lost during the floods. Stand-by pumps were then sourced, resulting in full supply being restored to these areas on 18 January 2011.
- n) During this period Queensland Urban Utilities provided bottled water to areas without any supply. Supplies were flown in by helicopter, until road access was re-established.
- o) A "boil water" notice was put in place until flushing of the mains was completed and test results confirmed the safety of the supply on 24 January 2011.

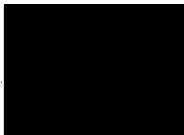
Sewerage

- p) The Fernvale and Lowood Sewerage Treatment Plants were inundated during the floods and were both subject to a loss of power. However, restricted water supply during the initial days of the flood lessened the load on the damaged plants. Queensland Urban Utilities began tankering waste away as soon as access was established.
- q) Lowood was the first plant to be back online. Queensland Urban Utilities continued to transport waste from Fernvale to Lowood until normal operations were resumed (i.e. when the other plants became operational again).

Communications

- r) Storm activity on 9 and 10 January 2011 resulted in damage to some mobile phone towers. Loss of power on 11 January 2011 and the failure of the

battery backup system at the remaining mobile towers resulted in the effective loss of mobile coverage that same day.

- s) Additionally, by midday on 11 January 2011, a fault at the local telephone exchange resulted in the loss of the landline phone system. It is believed that this was also a battery backup failure.
 - t) Telstra Countrywide attended some of the daily LDMG meetings via the teleconferencing facility. The LDMG was kept informed of the situation and the work being undertaken by Telstra aimed at restoring phone services as quickly as possible.
- 9) Any information received or obtained concerning weather and flood forecasts or warnings, and the steps taken to disseminate that information to the community before, during and immediately after the 2010/2011 flood events.**
- a) The State Disaster Coordinator provided Council with a number of telephone link-ups that provided updates from the Bureau of Meteorology ("BOM").
 - b) Seqwater provided e-mail updates to Council on dam releases. These included details of likely impacts downstream of Wivenhoe Dam.
 - c) Prior to the communication failures on 11 January 2011 (outlined above), I had been receiving regular telephone updates from Seqwater's Flood Operation Centre advising of any changes to releases or river flows.
 - d) Council has an SMS service to residents in areas east of the Brisbane River that are affected by releases from Wivenhoe Dam. Mayoral press releases and radio announcements were also used to provide information.
 - e) Communication with and notifications to Council SES units occurred via Council's SES Local Controller.
- 10) In relation to item 9, an indication of the source/s, accuracy and timeliness of that information for local purposes.**
- a) The advice received from EMQ and BOM relating to the flooding in the Lockyer Creek was general in nature.
 - b) Council does not have flood mapping of Lockyer Creek nor staff with hydrological expertise. Therefore, Council was not able to identify specific properties to be evacuated under different flow situations. The SES activations are responsive to identified needs.
 - c) Toowoomba Regional Council notified Council of expected dam releases. The time between the notification and the water reaching Toogoolawah was adequate to mobilise emergency personnel and to contact the local radio station to request on-air announcements. Based on previous events, local knowledge was used to identify properties likely to be affected. I am unaware of any actions to notify individual rural properties between the Cressbrook Dam and Toogoolawah, other than via radio announcements.
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d) Due to the proximity to town, the deployment in Kilcoy was timely and as required.

11) Any local measures undertaken to protect life and private/public property in connection with the 2010/2011 flood events (such as road/bridge closures, evacuation arrangements, etc), and the steps taken to disseminate information about those measures to the community before, during and immediately after the 2010/2011 flood events.

a) Seqwater notifies Council of dam releases. These releases can affect three roads downstream of Wivenhoe Dam. Council erects signage prior to road closures occurring. Council also sends SMS messages to the communities of Borallon, Banks Creek and England Creek that are affected by releases from Wivenhoe Dam and flows in Lockyer Creek. Other road closures are actioned as required.

b) Following the warning from Toowoomba Regional Council of likely outflows from Cressbrook Dam, evacuation of homes in low lying areas near Toogoolawah took place. Notification of the public in the Toogoolawah area was also achieved through announcements on the local radio station.

12) The circumstances of any rescues or evacuations performed in the local area in connection with the 2010/2011 flood events, including an assessment of the adequacy and timeliness thereof.

a) The LDMG believes there were a number of rescues performed as a result of calls to 132500 and 000. The LDMG was not advised of the circumstances of these rescues.

b) Following heavy rain on the morning of 11 January 2011, sections of Fernvale adjacent to Ferny Gully were inundated by flash flooding. The Fernvale Futures evacuation centre was opened to accommodate persons unable to return to their houses.

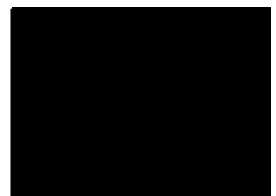
c) Following releases from Wivenhoe Dam on the evening of 11 January 2011, further areas of Fernvale were inundated. As no warning was received, evacuations took place during the flooding event.

d) Toowoomba Regional Council advised Council of discharges from Cressbrook Dam that would likely impact low lying areas adjacent to Cressbrook Creek. The evacuation centre in Toogoolawah was opened and people likely to be affected were evacuated to that centre.

e) Flooding of Esk on 10 January 2011 was unexpected. In response to the event, the Esk evacuation centre was opened to accommodate persons unable to return to their houses.

f) Some evacuations in the Lowood area were self evacuations based on the earlier warning of flooding in Lockyer Creek; however, the majority were after the unexpected releases from Wivenhoe Dam. The Lowood evacuation centre was opened to cater for the first evacuees.

g) The Kilcoy evacuation centre was opened as a safe house to accommodate travellers isolated in Kilcoy.



13) The circumstances of the establishment, and subsequent operation and performance, of any Evacuation Centre/s in the local area, including an assessment of any particular difficulties encountered.

- a) Evacuation Centres had been identified at locations across the region; however, due to the road closures many people from affected areas were unable to reach the planned Evacuation Centres. This resulted in a number of unofficial centres operating.
- b) Centres operated in the following locations:
 - i. Fernvale Futures (official)
 - ii. Fernvale Primary School (unofficial)
 - iii. Schmidt Road Fernvale (unofficial)
 - iv. Lowood High School (official)
 - v. Prenzlau Rural Fire Brigade (unofficial)
 - vi. Coominya Hall (unofficial)
 - vii. Wivenhoe Pocket Rural Fire Brigade (unofficial)
 - viii. Esk Primary School (official)
 - ix. Toogoolawah RSL Hall (official)
 - x. Kilcoy Memorial Hall (official)
- c) These Evacuation Centres were run by volunteers. The length of operation and the number of people being housed created fatigue issues for those running the centres. A request for assistance was therefore passed to the District Disaster Coordinator, following which the Red Cross provided assistance in management of the centres. The LDMG will be attempting to put more robust management arrangements in place for future activations.
- d) Some security issues were experienced at the Lowood Centre in relation to unruly behaviour. Police were called and following this incident a security guard was employed to attend the centre until its closure.\
- e) At the Lowood centre, the final occupants required special assistance to find other accommodation.

14) The circumstances of any flood-related human fatality within the region, including the measures taken to prevent and/or respond to any such fatality, during the 2010/2011 flood events.

- a) There were no deaths recorded by the LDMG for the Somerset Region.
- b) However, there was one unofficial report of a fatality in the Minden or Marburg area. The report was that a life was lost during an emergency evacuation. It was also reported that the evacuation was performed by personnel from an emergency service group from outside of the Somerset region. The Somerset LDMG did not receive any official advice on the incident.
- c) The matter of the reported but unconfirmed death was subsequently referred to the District Disaster Coordinator for further investigation.

15) Any involvement had with State or Federal agencies, including particularly the Queensland Police Service, in relation to the provision of emergency response measures, personnel, equipment, services or logistical support, together with an assessment of the adequacy and timeliness thereof, during the 2010/2011 flood events.



- a) The loss of the Disaster Coordination Centre at Esk, when it was flooded on 10 January 2011, presented a number of challenges to coordination of activities. It was not possible to get all parties involved into one room as planned. As a result, the Local Disaster Coordination Centre operated out of a meeting room in the Council Offices in Esk. The SES Incident Management Team operated out of the Esk SES headquarters. Queensland Fire and Rescue Service established a coordination/communications unit in a van located outside the Council building in Esk. Queensland Police would normally be asked to provide a liaison officer to support the LDMG; however, with the restricted accommodation, Queensland Police operated out of the local police stations. The separation of vital agencies resulted in difficulties in coordinating tasking and the provision of timely and detailed reports to the Ipswich District Disaster Coordinator.
- b) The LDMG met daily at 2.30pm in the room being used by the LDCC. Where possible, LDMG members attended these meetings using teleconferencing facilities in place for those that could not attend. Much of the information from the agencies was presented at these meetings. Written situation reports were rarely supplied.
- c) Queensland Police Service personnel were provided to the LDMG from each of the four stations within the Somerset region. One of these stations was not in the Ipswich Police District, which did present some issues as their chain of command was through the Caboolture Police District. Also, Police were unable to supply written situation reports directly to the LDCC.
- d) The SES, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Queensland Rural Fire Service personnel have command structures that are self-sufficient. This was a benefit during the recent event when the Coordination Centre was flooded. However, the LDMG will need to establish protocols for coordinated tasking of agencies in such circumstances, to avoid possible duplication of tasking.
- e) All the above issues relate to coordination and should not be a concern if all agencies can be accommodated in the same room. Council is looking at ways of establishing a second Coordination Centre in the new hall to be built shortly in Esk.

16) The nature and timing of any communications within the disaster management hierarchy, including particularly any communications had with District Disaster Coordinator (DDC), the State Disaster Coordinator or the State Recovery Coordinator, and whether any direction/s were given by the DDC and the nature of any such direction/s.

- a) No directions were given by the DDC to the LDC or the LDCC during the floods.
- b) The LDMG sent 32 requests for assistance to the DDC.

17) An assessment of the adequacy of equipment and communications systems in the local area during the 2010/2011 flood events.

- a) Due to the size of the Somerset region, and the topography, a number of arterial roads were flooded or closed due to slippage, the resultant isolation of

the command structure and the separation of resources was an issue. Better communications may overcome this in future events.

- b) The extent of impacts across the entire Somerset region resulted in a need to establish Coordination Centres remote to the LDCC, which highlighted Council's inability to provide staff to perform all functions in all the locations for prolonged periods and at the same time. The LDMG will be looking at forming alliances with neighbouring LDMGs or agencies to provide additional trained disaster management staff in major events.
- c) The reliance on computer systems, which became inoperable when power was lost, necessitated the use of paper based systems, which sufficed; however, Council will be investigating the provision of stand-by power supplies to critical buildings across the Somerset region.
- d) Telephone communications have replaced the use of two-way radio over time. The loss of an effective network was the major issue. Council will be looking at ways of providing access to Council's radio network. Also, it was noted that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Queensland Rural Fire Service radio network was very effective and access to that network may be an alternative and is to be investigated.

18) An assessment of the adequacy of the community's response in the local area during the 2010/2011 flood events.

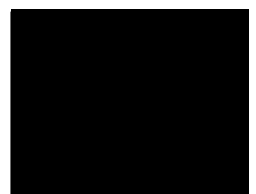
- a) In my view, ability of the community to adapt to the unexpected conditions and provide the necessary facilities and care for those most affected by the floods was more than satisfactory.

19) Any measures being proposed, planned or implemented to prepare for, mitigate or manage future flood events (such as the installation of automatic river gauges, culvert management, levee construction and the like).

- a) Council has received funding approval under the Natural Disaster Mitigation Program to undertake flood evacuation planning. This work was scheduled to commenced in March 2011.
- b) Council is also undertaking an assessment of the existing drainage system in the worst affected town, Fernvale. If any deficiencies are identified, rectification works will be placed on Council's forward works program.

20) Advice as to any special consideration that should be given the local area by reason of particular regional or geographical differences.

- a) There are numerous short duration catchments across the Somerset region. The speed in which inundation can occur makes it difficult to provide timely warning.
- b) Having four major dams in the region also affects the run-off during rain events and creates a perception of a reduced risk of flooding.



- c) In the case of Wivenhoe Dam, the towns of Lowood and Fernvale are close to the dam. This means that there is very little time from the time a release is initiated to when it affects the residential areas.

21) Advice as to any feature of the disaster preparation and planning stages or the disaster response and recovery operations which presented particular difficulty or may require practical or legislative change to improve future disaster management in the local area.

- a) There was loss of communication at a crucial point in the flood. When it became necessary to release water from Wivenhoe Dam, the warning arrangements in place did not function as planned. A more robust early warning system needs to be put in place. The operation of this system needs to be controlled either automatically or by an authority with direct knowledge of the flooding risks in the Region and any likely water releases from the dams.
- b) There are numerous catchments containing little or no early warning systems, Council is currently investigating the availability of remote monitoring systems that can be linked to early warning systems.
- c) The size of the Somerset region and the small population limits the resources available for deployment in disasters. The LDMG will investigate options to form alliances with larger local governments to share resources in major events.
- d) The timing of the event so soon after adoption of changes to the *Disaster Management Act 2003* (Qld) did not provide an opportunity to undertake the necessary training of operational staff.
- e) The loss of the Local Disaster Coordination Centre was also a problem. Council is looking to incorporate features in the new hall being built at Esk to allow it to be used if the main centre is lost.
- f) The loss of power did not prevent activities from being undertaken; however it did place major restrictions on the speed and effectiveness of activities. Council is looking to options for stand-by power to the official coordination centres and evacuation centres.



Tony Jacobs

5/4/2011
Date