

STATEMENT OF WITNESS

Prepared by: Legal Services Unit

Date: 25 November 2011

Name of Witness: Philip Karl PAFF

Address of Witness: c/- Department of Community Safety

Occupation: Firefighter

Position: Station Officer

Telephone: (Work) [REDACTED] **(Mobile)** [REDACTED]

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry Requirement to Provide Statement No. 1776814

I, Philip Karl Paff, of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Department of Community Safety, state:

1. I am a member of Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.
2. I am currently stationed at 45 Station, Ipswich and hold the rank of Station Officer.
3. I am presently on D shift.
4. I am a Technical Rescue Officer Level 2 (Senior Instructor). This is a specialised rescue role which involves a swift water rescue capability as a component. I have held this competency since 1996.
5. I have been a firefighter for seventeen years.

Question 1: Who contacted you on 10 January 2011 requesting that you report for duty? What time were you contacted? Please provide details of the conversation?

6. Nobody contacted me to report for duty on 10 January 2011.

This is page 1 of a statement comprising 10 page/s.



Witness (Philip Karl Paff):
[REDACTED]

JP/Solicitor/Commissioner for Declarations:
[REDACTED]

Question 2: If no one contacted you on 10 January 2011 requesting that you report for duty, why did you decide to report for duty?

7. On the morning of 10 January 2011, I found (after getting up) that it was raining very heavily.
8. It was apparent to me, from the existing conditions, that there might be a high likelihood that some swift water rescue capability might be needed that day.
9. I came to this conclusion based on the fact that we had received a substantial amount of rain in the previous weeks and QFRS resources – in particular crews from Ipswich Fire and Rescue Station – had been used for water rescues on many occasions in previous weeks. I also consulted the Bureau of Meteorology website for prevailing and forecast conditions for the ensuing 24 hours and considered, based on the information I obtained, that the situation was unlikely to improve over the course of the 10th.
10. At about 0715 hours, I rang 45 Station and asked the on-duty Station Officer, Mark Stephenson, whether any special arrangements had been made regarding the provision of any supplementary rescue operators for that day.
11. I reported for duty on 10 January 2011 of my own volition, after reaching consensus with Station Officer Stephenson concerning the probability that the situation, based upon the prevailing weather conditions, would deteriorate and that some rescue capability would be required. It was my intent to assist in whatever way I could.

Question 3: Which fire station did report to for duty? What time did you arrive at the fire station?

12. I arrived at 45 Station on the morning of 10 January 2011 at approximately 0845 hours.
13. At that time, I had a conversation with Station Officer Mark Stephenson, who told me that he had requested that six additional technical rescue officers be placed on duty, but had received approval for only two.
14. By the time I arrived at 45 Station, overtime had been approved for me and one other technical rescue officer / firefighter.

Question 4: Please outline in detail your movements and activities on 10 January 2011.

15. I enquired about a QFRS presence at the Local Disaster Management Group, if a meeting was to occur that day. There was some uncertainty as to whether there would be a QFRS representative if a meeting was held, so I offered to go. I was concerned to attend this meeting as I felt that Ipswich could be subjected to some sort of flood event that day and I

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wanted to ensure that QFRS was involved in, and contributed to, planning in the initial phases to meet such an event if it eventuated.

16. However, at this point, I was responded to a swift water rescue job.
17. This incident was on the Warrill View / Rosevale road and involved providing incident support to a QFRS auxiliary crew from Harrisville. I responded on the rescue appliance from Ipswich station, designated 645 Mike. The crew consisted of Station Officer Mark Stephenson, Senior Firefighter [REDACTED] and me [REDACTED] also holds rescue qualifications.
18. On arrival at the scene, I observed the Harrisville appliance stranded by floodwater. They had rescued a stranded motorist, who was also in the appliance. Senior Firefighter [REDACTED] and I assisted the Harrisville crew in reversing the appliance out of the floodwater. We ensured they stayed on the roadway and checked the integrity of the roadway. This completed this particular job.
19. From that location, we responded to a person trapped in a motor vehicle in flooded waters. This was in an area known as Undulla. This is south of Ipswich. We were co-responding with a Bundamba fire appliance and a rescue appliance from Beenleigh Fire and Rescue Station.
20. We were held up by floodwaters at a submerged causeway on Ripley Road. The Bundamba fire appliance – 643 Alpha – had succeeded in crossing the causeway. However, the vehicle we were using – 645 Mike – could not cross. Senior Firefighters [REDACTED] and Staples and I swam across a dam at the head of the causeway and boarded 643A. We proceeded further through several flooded crossings and I then determined that it was too dangerous to proceed, so we returned to the causeway where 645 Mike was waiting. We transferred the crew of the Bundamba fire appliance across the flood, utilizing our Inflatable Work Platform, and they then left with Senior Firefighter Chadwick in 645 Yankee to travel to Ipswich in order to collect the spare fire appliance to stand by at Bundamba.
21. I boarded 645 Mike with [REDACTED] and Mark Stephenson and we returned along Ripley Road. We were then responded to rescue a person stranded on top of a motor vehicle at Murphy's Creek. We duly proceeded to the Murphy's Creek area.
22. Whilst on route, we were monitoring radio traffic between a Helidon auxiliary crew and FireComm. We ascertained from radio traffic that the Helidon crew were operating in the Murphy's Creek area, and had been responded to the same job to which we were responding.
23. The Helidon crew broadcast that the situation in their area was degrading in their immediate vicinity, with rapidly rising water.

This is page 3 of a statement comprising 10 page/s.



Witness (Philip/Karl Paff):
[REDACTED]

JP/Solicitor/Commissioner for
Declarations: [REDACTED]

24. Station Officer Stephenson instructed the Helidon crew, via FireComm, to move to a point of safety on high ground and not to enter the water. We were approximately five minutes from our destination at this point in time.
25. We proceeded onto Postman's Ridge Road from the Warrego Highway. At this point Nathan Chadwick arrived in 645 Yankee. There is a bridge which has to be traversed shortly after you enter Postman's Ridge Road. I am familiar with this area and when I looked at the creek it appeared that there was an unusually large volume of water present. This contained considerable amounts of debris. I was not used to seeing so much water at this location. The water was travelling at considerable speed. I would estimate its speed at 40-50 kilometres per hour.
26. Both vehicles crossed the bridge with 645 Mike leading. We continued on for about another five minutes consistently monitoring radio traffic. Based upon my experience as a firefighter and on the conditions which I was then observing, and on the content of the radio traffic which I was hearing, I formed the view that an extremely dangerous situation was developing.
27. I was becoming very concerned and I said to Mark Stephenson, "I think this thing is going south [by this I meant that I thought conditions were deteriorating]. I then said to him, "Mate, let's pull over here." Mark agreed that we should pull over and we did. I said to Mark, "We're probably going to get flooded in. I don't want to lose the CR [by this I was referring to 645 Mike which was a command rescue vehicle]. I'll team up with Nathan in the Yankee. It's a four wheel drive and has the IWP [Inflatable Work Platform – inflatable rubber boat] and between us [Nathan and myself] we have enough gear and we should be able to get the job done."
28. I then said to Mark, "We need to establish command. Even though I'm the more senior Station Officer, because I'll be in the water, you're going to have to be in command." Mark replied, "Agreed. Before we go, [redacted] and I will evacuate these homes here." I then replied, "I'm going to send this assistance message. Listen in and then it's all yours. Get going."
29. I then sent a message to FireComm as follows, "This is Station Officer Paff. Conditions are deteriorating rapidly. We require assistance. A senior officer will be required." I then alighted from 645 Mike and commenced boarding 645 Yankee.
30. At this point, Station Officer Stephenson shouted out to me, "I'm going to shut the highway at Helidon. All this water will be heading that way." I shouted back, "Do it" and I gave him a thumbs up.
31. I put my gear in 645 Yankee and inspected the vehicle to see what equipment it was carrying.



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32. I saw 645 Mike make a U-turn and proceed along Postman's Ridge Road in the direction of the Warrego Highway.
33. Further along Postman's Ridge Road, in the direction in which 645 Mike was travelling, the road dips to cross a watercourse. I was watching 645 Mike as it entered this dip and saw it struck by a wall of water about six metres high and travelling at speed. The water was roaring so loudly that I could not communicate with Nathan who was right beside me. 645 Mike braked and quickly reversed out of the torrent. Had it not done this, I believe it would have been washed away with the crew.
34. At this point, a male civilian tapped me on the shoulder and screamed, "Mate! There's a (expletive) family in that house down there!" and he pointed at a driveway about fifty metres from where we were.
35. Nathan and I mounted 645 Yankee and proceeded down the driveway. I observed a homestead dwelling with large volumes of rapidly moving water encroaching on it from all sides.
36. I estimated the water running between me and the dwelling as varying in depth between 900 millimetres and 1200 millimetres, and travelling at about 60-70 kilometres per hour. To the rear of the property, I observed the major body of water. There were a number of houses, structural elements, motor vehicles, concrete water tanks, hot water systems being carried along in the flood. I also saw large gum trees cart-wheeling along as well.
37. The water travelling across the front of the dwelling was, in my estimation, travelling at equivalent speed to the water described in clause 36 of my statement but it was of lesser volume in my estimation.
38. I saw an adult female with three children – one female and two males – at the house. The older female was on the verandah of the dwelling, while the two boys were on the front steps. The girl was running around in the yard and appeared to be trying to collect pets. I said to Nathan, "We might lose this house. We've got to get them out." He agreed and said, "Tension diagonal with the boat [IWP]."
39. I replied, "I'll take the line over and tension it." I said this because I was already clad in my wetsuit. Nathan attached the rope to the rear of my Personal Flotation Device (PFD) and I proceeded towards the house by holding onto a barbed wire fence.
40. When I could stand up in the house yard, I attached the rope to a fence post there and went and spoke to the lady on the verandah. She appeared to be very frightened and distressed by the current situation.
41. I said to the lady words to the effect of, "I'm not sure if it's going to get worse, but we'll take you and the kids out of here."

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Witness (Plaintiff):	JP/Solicitor/Commissioner for Declarations:
[Redacted]	[Redacted]

42. Nathan then came over and fitted PFDs to each person. I then reset the rope and we sent the IWP with Nathan and the family in it back to where 645 Yankee was positioned.
43. Once they were at the vehicle and were safe, I untied the rope and made my way back to them. The water had by then receded dramatically.
44. At this time, a member of the public arrived in a truck which was carrying a bobcat vehicle. We left the family with him and attempted to leave. We became bogged. The man with the truck assisted us in extricating 645 Yankee from the bog. He and the family then left, and we went up to the road in 645 Yankee. We then encountered the crew of 645 Mike who had set up incident command beside the road.
45. I quickly liaised with Station Officer Stephenson who informed me that persons were in distress at [REDACTED] Murphy's Creek Road. Nathan and I then proceeded to that location in 645 Yankee. Upon arrival there I found the house to be obliterated. There was just a patch of ground where the house had been.
46. I then radioed Station Officer Stephenson for more tasking. At that stage he had none. I informed him that I would do a reconnaissance along Murphy's Creek Road.
47. Nathan and I proceeded along Murphy's Creek Road to the west. Our intent was to establish the level of damage and persons unaccounted for. As we went along, we observed a large number of destroyed or heavily damaged dwellings.
48. We drove as far as the extent of the flooding would allow, and then proceeded on foot and liaised with various members of the public. We undertook a house to house check to establish whether any persons were missing. I made notes of our search. Except for any occupants of [REDACTED] Murphy's Creek Road, all residents where we checked appeared to be safe.
49. A short time later, I was met by the Helidon crew who told me Mark Stephenson had more tasking for me. Nathan and I drove back to 645 Mike and spoke to Mark Stephenson about further tasking. I had previously instructed the Helidon crew to complete the task which I had initiated at Murphy's Creek Road.
50. Mark told me that we had to respond to the rescue of a boy trapped in a tree at Ossian Drive, Murphy's Creek. A civilian who knew the area accompanied Nathan and I in 645 Yankee to the location.
51. On arrival at the location we were informed by a male person that his son had already been recovered uninjured.

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52. I then observed a lady with extensive lacerations at the same location. I told her to go to the Murphy's Creek hotel as I had decided to make the hotel an evacuation centre.
53. After this, I attempted to radio Station Officer Stephenson requesting that an ambulance be directed to the Murphy's Creek hotel to assist with incoming injured.
54. Radio communications at this point were poor, and I was unsure whether my message had been received or understood.
55. I was informed by a civilian that the lower half of Ossian Drive had not been checked by anyone. Nathan and I drove down Ossian Drive to a point where the road had been washed away. We then alighted from the vehicle. I had turned the vehicle off, which I don't normally do. Nathan began checking the creek bank in front of the appliance and I commenced shouting, "Fire service! Can anyone hear me?" I thought I heard something. I said to Nathan, "Did you hear that?"
56. I called out again and heard a faint, unintelligible reply. I then ran in a northwesterly direction through a paddock and up over a wall of flood debris about three metres high and Nathan followed.
57. Upon crossing the debris wall, I observed a woman about 40-45 years old. This person was clinging to a tree about 6 metres out into a creek. I immediately swam out to her and extricated her from the creek. The lady was suffering from severe exposure but was not suffering any apparent injuries. Nathan and I wrapped her in a blanket. I ascertained her identity and address, and I asked if she was with anybody. She stated that her husband and six year old daughter were missing and neither could swim.
58. We escorted the lady back to 645 Yankee and took her to Murphy's Creek Hotel.
59. At the hotel I spoke to a lady, who turned out to be the hotel owner, who agreed that the hotel could serve as an evacuation centre.
60. Nathan and I then returned to Ossian Drive. I left Nathan there to search for the husband and daughter of the lady whom we had rescued from the creek, and I went along Murphy's Creek Road with the Helidon crew who had arrived at Ossian Drive.
61. We conducted a search along Murphy's Creek Road in the direction of the Spring Bluff area. We searched properties for about four kilometres along the road. Along the way I spoke with several property owners who said everyone there seemed to be alright. The Helidon crew then informed me that it was not necessary to continue the current search as another crew had been tasked with that.



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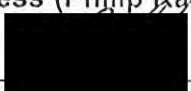
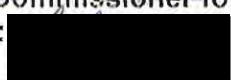
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62. I then returned to Ossian Drive and collected Nathan. He informed me that he had been unable to locate anyone in his search. We drove back to 645 Mike's location to refuel, and I then gave Mark Stephenson a situation report.
63. After refueling, Nathan and I proceeded in 645 Yankee west along Murphy's Creek Road. Our intent was to continue our search of homes along that road. We encountered a senior police officer and his aide, and I provided him with the list I had prepared of persons for whom we had accounted, as well as persons believed missing. I also told him that I had utilised the Murphy's Creek Hotel as an evacuation centre.
64. Mark Stephenson then radioed me to advise that he was terminating command and moving back to Gatton.
65. I then received a call on my mobile telephone from Station Officer Scott Beasley who is the Technical Rescue Coordinator South Eastern Region for QFRS.
66. Scott advised me that he was calling from the Regional Operations Centre at Beenleigh and he had a task for 645 Yankee. This involved investigating a report of persons in distress in a flooded house. Upon arrival we ascertained that the house was not under any threat, being on high ground. I rang Scott and advised him that there was no action required at the property in question.
67. Scott instructed me to return to Gatton Fire and Rescue Station where an Incident Control Centre (ICC) had been established. I am unsure of the exact time this occurred, however I remember that it was dark.
68. We returned to Gatton via Grantham. We found we were unable to proceed to our destination because of flooding. On the outskirts of Grantham, we were met by a member of the public who said he was searching for his family and was assisting an elderly lady for whom he was unable to care. We put the lady in 645 Yankee and took her to the highway, where we handed her over to another crew for transport to the Gatton evacuation centre. We then returned to Grantham, where half of the town was cut off by floodwaters.
69. At this point, I met an auxiliary firefighter from another crew named Mark Meier. He was from Rosewood Fire and Rescue Station. I asked him if he wished to join us and he agreed.
70. I then received a telephone call from Mark Stephenson who had arrived at the Gatton ICC. Mark advised me that a rural fire service vehicle and its crew were missing. He asked me to search for it. Mark Meier and I began a search of houses in the immediate area looking for residents. We had observed lights in the flooded part of Grantham, so Nathan deployed the IWP and went to investigate.



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Witness (Philip Karl Paff): 	JP/Solicitor/Commissioner for Declarations: 
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71. During our search I located a rural fire service vehicle in floodwater. This was branded as "Grantham 51". Upon searching the vehicle, which was then standing in about 1200 millimetre deep water, I could not see into the cab as the window was closed and obscured by dirt. I then opened the passenger side door and found three persons who appeared to be deceased. I checked each person for signs of life and found no sign of life present in any of the persons.
72. I immediately returned to dry land and telephoned Mark Stephenson to report my discovery.
73. A police constable arrived on scene and I told him what I had found. I then received a telephone call from QFRS Superintendent Peter Dawson, who informed me that I was on a teleconference with him and QFRS Assistant Commissioner Peter Beauchamp, and other unidentified senior QFRS officers, who were apparently present in the QFRS south eastern region Regional Operations Centre. I reported my discovery to them. This conversation took place, in my estimation, between 2330 hours on the 10th January and midnight.
74. Mark Meier and I then continued our search of buildings in the area. We located another deceased person – an elderly lady – in one of the houses.
75. I took the precaution of photographing all deceased persons whom I located during my search. I undertook this because I was unsure of when, or if, an opportunity would present itself for other investigators to obtain photographs. Copies of those photographs have been provided to the Office of the State Coroner.
76. I reported my finding of the deceased elderly lady to the police constable to whom I had reported my earlier discovery.
77. I continued my search with Mark Meier into the area of Railway Street, Grantham where we assisted a male resident from his dwelling. This person was suffering from minor injuries.
78. After searching Railway Street, I returned with Mark Meier to where I had parked 645 Yankee. Nathan returned at this point. At this time, which was at about 0130 hours on the 11th January, two additional crews of swift water technicians arrived on the scene. With these four additional officers and a second IWP, we were able to extend our search of the area. I coordinated the search from 645 Yankee.
79. At about 0230 hours on the 11th January, I was relieved by an additional swift water crew. I then returned with Nathan to Ipswich in 645 Yankee. We arrived at about 0340 hours on the 11th January, and I went off duty for about four hours.



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<p>Witness (Philip Karl Paff): [REDACTED]</p>	<p>JP/Solicitor/Commissioner for Declarations: [REDACTED]</p>
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Question 5: If not already answered above, did you have any contact (including by telephone) with Mr Stephenson on 10 January 2011? If so, please provide details.

80. I have answered this question earlier in my statement.

Question 6: Did you have any contact (including by telephone) with any member of senior management from Queensland Fire and Rescue Service?

- (a) If so, who? When?
- (b) What was discussed?

81. I have answered this question earlier in my statement.

Question 7: Please provide details of any other matters you consider relevant to the Commission.

82. I have provided details of all matters I consider relevant to the Commission in my statement.

I make this statement of my own free will believing its contents to be true and correct.

Justices Act 1886

I acknowledge by virtue of Section 110A(6C)(c)(i)(ii) of the Justices Act 1886 that:

- (1) This written statement by me dated today and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 10 is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and
- (2) I make it knowing that, if it were admitted as evidence, I may be liable to prosecution for stating anything that I know is false.

..... Signature

Signed at Brisbane this 25th day of November 2011



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Witness (Philip Karl Daffy):

JP/Solicitor/Commissioner for Declarations: