

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 28 April, 2011. In providing the information this statement will be relative to the information request for the years 2010/2011.

1) The process for formulating Council's Disaster Management Plan following the amalgamation of the Esk and Kilcoy Shire Councils in 2008.

- a) Following amalgamation, Council appointed a consultant with disaster management expertise to review the existing Esk Shire and Kilcoy Shire Disaster Management Plans, and to combine them into one regional plan.
- b) The revised plan was received by the LDMG in late 2008 and referred to Council for approval. That plan was adopted by Council at its Ordinary Meeting of 10 September 2008.

2) Reviews of the local disaster management plan conducted by Council, the District Disaster Management Group or Emergency Management Queensland.

Review by Council

- a) Members of the LDMG were asked prior to the scheduled June 2009 LDMG meeting to provide feedback on any issues they had with the content of the Disaster Management Plan. No submissions were received and no changes were made.

Review by the District Disaster Management Group

- b) After adoption by Council, the Disaster Management Plan was sent to the Queensland Police Service for its consideration. Council was advised on 23 December 2008 that the document had been reviewed in accordance with section 28c of the *Disaster Management Acts 2003* and that the document met the criteria as required by section 57 of the Act.

Review by Emergency Management Queensland

- c) I am not aware of any review of the Disaster Management Plan by Emergency Management Queensland.

3) The extent to which Council prepared for the isolation that occurred within the Council area, in particular Kilcoy, Fernvale, Lowood, Esk and Toogoolawah.

- a) Council maintains four Depots across the region, being Lowood, Esk, Toogoolawah and Kilcoy. The depot locations are wide spread and allow Council to service the region without long travel times and to provide a presence in the major population centres. Construction plant and staff are based at each depot. This spread of depots has been effective in reacting to disasters in the past.

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- b) Council also supports four SES units being, Lowood, Esk, Toogoolawah and Kilcoy, which provides a spread of response capability.
- 4) The extent to which the disaster management plan makes provision for isolation occurring.**
- a) The Disaster Management Plan does not specifically make provision for isolation. However, by maintaining four SES units and four Council depots across the region, there is an ability to cope with some level of isolation.
- 5) The steps Council took to inform and educate the community about flood risk and preparedness before the 2010/2011 flood events.**
- a) Council commissioned a flood study of the Lowood-Fernvale section of the Brisbane River in 2008. This report was received by Council in June 2009 and contained mapping of the Q100 inundation line from Wivenhoe Dam to Savages Crossing. The report has been placed on Council's website for the community's information.
- b) As a follow on to the preparation of the flood study, Council applied for funds under the Natural Disaster Mitigation Program to undertake further flood modelling to generate evacuation maps for a spread of flood events from Q100 up to a Probable Maximum Flood. The application was approved and Council contracted Brisbane City Design to undertake the work with a scheduled March 2011 commencement.
- 6) The steps Council took to inform and prepare the community for flood events following the EMQ 2010 Pre-season Flood and Cyclone Workshop and the Disaster Management workshop conducted by the District Disaster Management Group in December 2010.**
- a) No specific actions were recommended for informing or preparing the community at the Pre-Season Flood and Cyclone Workshop. The workshop involved more general discussion about what could be expected over the wet season. As a result, no specific steps were taken to inform and prepare the community subsequent to the workshop taking place.
- 7) The warnings Council received of flooding in its area (not including the Toogoolawah area), particularly in relation to flooding in Esk, Fernvale, Lowood and Kilcoy, and the steps taken to warn the communities in those areas.**
- a) Other than the warning received on 9 January 2011 from Toowoomba Regional Council on the release from Cressbrook Dam, I am not aware of Council receiving any specific warning of particular expected flood events. However, Council did receive general warnings from the Bureau of Meteorology updates at the State Disaster Centre telephone-conferences. These warnings were to expect wide spread rain and possible flooding across the south east.
- b) An SMS warning was sent to residents living adjacent to Lockyer Creek on Sunday, 9 January 2011, warning of expected flooding in low lying areas adjacent to Lockyer Creek. Those in areas likely to be affected were advised to consider evacuation. I did not receive this warning and to my knowledge this warning was not sent to Council. I believe this SMS was sent by EMQ. The Mayor was made aware of the warning by one of the recipients of the SMS. No further warning was considered necessary and the flood flows in Lockyer Creek continued at similar levels until the major event of 11 and 12 January 2011. The Lowood SES was activated on 9 January 2011 in response to the expected flooding.

- c) There is no record of the areas of the Esk Township, inundated on 10 January 2011, as having ever been previously flooded. The flooding in Esk was caused by extreme heavy rain west of Esk toward the Hampton Range. No warning was received.
- d) As a result of the loss of telephone and e-mail communications Council was not able to receive any warnings in the hours leading up to the decision being made to increase releases from Wivenhoe Dam. No information was received on the combined affect of the dam releases and the flood flows in Lockyer Creek, which caused the extreme flood event in Fernvale and Lowood on 11 and 12 January 2011.

8) When Council received warning about releases from the Wivenhoe Dam and the steps it took to inform the community of those releases and of the potential for flooding to occur.

- a) On the afternoon of 9 January 2011, Council was advised by Seqwater that the current strategy was to moderate releases from the dam such that when combined with the Lockyer Creek flows, a flow of around 1,600m³/second would be maintained in the mid-Brisbane River. Council was further advised that, sometime on the afternoon of Monday, 10 January 2011, it would be a necessary to increase the rate of release from Wivenhoe Dam to levels that would cut the Brisbane Valley Highway north of Fernvale. The intention was to minimise flooding of urban areas downstream of the dam. It was expected that flows in the mid-Brisbane would be kept below 3,500m³/second after this increase.
- b) A decision was made to call a meeting of the LDMG for the morning of Monday, 10 January 2011 to discuss the situation. Heavy overnight rain resulted in the need to close the Brisbane Valley Highway earlier than expected. Isolation of Fernvale, Lowood and Esk occurred early that Monday morning. The LDMG meeting was cancelled as parties involved could not get to a single meeting place. Also, there was now a telephone link up with the State Disaster Centre scheduled for later that day, which gave an update on the situation.
- c) On 10 January 2011, I advised Seqwater of the loss of e-mails via the Council system and asked that copies be sent to my home e-mail account. That evening, I received an update that had been sent via e-mail during the day, advising that gate releases would be increased to 2800m³/second with flows in the lower Brisbane River approaching or exceeding 5,000m³/second. At these levels, Lowood and Fernvale were not considered to be at risk.
- d) Power was lost in Fernvale on the following Tuesday morning disabling my home e-mail and phone reception became worse. No further messages were received until the e-mail system was restored on the afternoon of ~~Wednesday, 12 January 2011.~~
Tuesday 11 [redacted]

9) A description of the warning arrangements in place for the Wivenhoe Dam which did not function as planned due to loss of communications during the flood event.

- a) As a method of speedy contact, Seqwater would telephone me whenever there was to be a change in the release strategy for Wivenhoe Dam. Council would use this information to commence action such as SMS messaging or the erection of signage on roads to be affected. These telephone calls were also confirmed in an e-mail from the Seqwater Flood Operation Centre to Council's e-mail server.
- b) As Council does not have any expertise in the area of hydrology the Flood Operation Centre would assist Council by providing information on the likely flows in the mid-Brisbane River resulting from dam releases combining with Lockyer Creek flows.

10) How power and communications failures impacted on the warnings to Council about flooding that occurred in Council's area and releases from Wivenhoe Dam.

The effect on warnings about flooding

- a) Council did not receive any warnings after the State Disaster Centre telephone link up on Monday, 10 January 2011. This warning was general in nature and did not provide any specific information about likely flooding events in Somerset region.

The effect on warnings about releases from Wivenhoe Dam

- b) I did not receive any telephone calls on Tuesday, 11 January 2011 advising of the need to allow outflows to match inflows. I assumed that was as a result of the poor mobile telephone coverage on that day.
- c) The flooding of the Council office in Esk, on Monday, 10 January 2011 resulted in the loss of computer facilities, which did not allow access to Council's e-mails system.
- d) The reports from the Seqwater Flood Operation Centre for Monday afternoon, 10 January 2011 and Tuesday, 11 January 2011 were not received into Council's system until the computers were restored late on Tuesday, 11 January 2011.
- e) The Fernvale Coordination Centre was not able to access any of this information as telephone and computer access from Fernvale to the Council system was not restored until 14 January 2011.

11) The identification of potential evacuation centres prior to the flood event and how these were communicated to the community prior to the flood event.

- a) There are numerous local halls and schools across the region that can be used for evacuation centres if required. Prior to the storm season, the SES local controller confirmed the list of places suitable for use as the main evacuation centres for short term use. At the meeting of the LDMG held on 17 November 2010 members were reminded of the location of the five main evacuation centres and that local halls could also be used if required. The LDMG members were aware that Council's SES controller was the contact to use should they have issues with evacuation centre access or location. The list was:
 - i) Fernvale Futures Building – Fernvale;
 - ii) State High School Hall – Lowood;
 - iii) RSL Hall – Esk;
 - iv) RSL Hall – Toogoolawah; and
 - v) Memorial Hall – Kilcoy.
- b) The evacuation planning study referred to in 5(b) above will be used to review the evacuation strategy in the Lowood-Fernvale area.

12) How the locations of official evacuation centres were communicated to the community during the flood event.

- a) The SES, Police and Council are the most likely entities to be involved in any planned evacuation. These groups were aware of the plan to use the five locations identified in paragraph 11 above.

- b) In the case of Toogoolawah, where advice had been received from Toowoomba Regional Council and Kilcoy, where flooding in Sheep Station and Kilcoy Creek frequently require temporary accommodation of stranded travellers, evacuation centres were opened on Sunday, 9 January 2011. Police were advised of the possible need to evacuate certain areas known to be impacted by localised flooding and I believe this information, together with the location of evacuation centres, was then passed on to those likely to be affected by the local Police or SES.

13) The initiation, staffing and resourcing of the Fernvale Futures Local Disaster Coordination Centre.

The initiation of the Fernvale Futures Local Disaster Coordination Centre

- a) On the morning of Tuesday, 11 January 2011, a number of properties were inundated by localised flooding associated with Ferny Gully. Council's CEO and I were isolated in Fernvale and were aware of the local flooding issue. A decision was made to open Fernvale Futures as an evacuation centre. A number of people stayed there overnight.
- b) The extreme flooding experienced during the Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning resulted in the inundation of many more properties in the low lying areas adjacent to the Brisbane River. These evacuees were unable to get to Fernvale Futures and a majority of them made their way to a hall at the Fernvale Primary School. Council was not aware of the overnight situation until the morning when staff, including myself, arrived at Fernvale Futures. It was apparent that there was an extreme situation requiring the establishment of a coordination centre. As travel to Esk was not possible and the planned Coordination Centre in Esk was inoperable as a result of the flooding on 10 January 2011, a decision was made to use the Fernvale Futures building as an alternate Coordination Centre.
- c) On Tuesday afternoon, 11 January 2011, advice was received that power and communications had been restored to the Esk office. The planned Coordination Centre is not in the main building and it was confirmed that due to the level of damage to the building housing the Coordination Centre, it would be out of service for an extended period. Therefore, a decision was made to continue to operate out of Fernvale Futures.
- d) On Thursday morning, 13 January 2011, coordinating activities without reliable communications was found to be extremely difficult. As power was still out and communications were still non-existent, a decision was made to relocate the main Coordination Centre to Esk. Fernvale Futures was left as a secondary centre to assist with dealing with the high number of issues in the Southern part of the region.

Staffing and Resourcing of the Fernvale Futures Local Disaster Coordination Centre

- e) A number of Council staff live in the Fernvale area and had reported to the Futures building for work as travel to Esk was not possible. The centre was staffed initially using these people. As the event progressed the centre was staffed with a combination of Council staff, volunteers and other agency staff.

- f) The Fernvale brigade of the Queensland Rural Fire Service set up their incident management team in the Futures building.
- g) Australian Defence Force personnel deployed to the southern area also worked out of the Futures building.
- h) Until communications were re-established, I would stop in to the Futures building each morning on the way to Esk and each evening on the way home to communicate events of the day, deal with outstanding issues and to pick up anything that needed to be taken to main Incident Management Team in Esk.
- i) In order to provide better management of the Coordination Centre in Fernvale, on Friday, 14 January 2011, contact was made with the previous Manager of Operations of Somerset Regional Council, who had strong local knowledge and an understanding of the Natural Disaster and Recovery Arrangements, as he had been Executive Officer of the LDMG until January 2009. Arrangements were made for him to join the team at Fernvale and to manage the Fernvale Coordination Centre. This arrangement remained in place until the centre was closed on 25 January 2011.
- j) The Coordination Centre was set up with a temporary kitchen used to feed displaced persons and volunteers. This kitchen was staffed by local volunteers.

14) The establishment, operation, staffing and resourcing of co-ordination centres remote to the LDCC, and in particular, for Esk and Kilcoy.

- a) Following the events of 10 January 2011, it was not possible to establish a Coordination Centre in Esk until Thursday, 13 January 2011, at which time it became the LDCC. Due to the number of Council staff already deployed in other areas, a request was put through the DDC for provision of experienced disaster management staff to assist in running the LDCC in Esk. Gold Coast City Council provided five experienced disaster management personnel to assist, who arrived on Friday, 14 January 2011.
- b) Due to the loss of the planned control centre, the LDCC incident management team was housed in the largest meeting room in the main Council building in Redbank Street, Esk. The SES Incident Management Team was housed nearby in the SES building in Heap Street, Esk and the QFRS operated from a mobile communications van parked in Heap Street, Esk. The Queensland Police Service operated from their stations across the region.
- c) The Kilcoy QFRS station was set up as an incident command centre and operated until closure on 18 January 2011. Staffing of this centre was not controlled by the LDCC.

15) Council's SMS alert system for residents east of the Brisbane River and how it was utilised in the flood events.

- a) In 2010, following the refilling of Wivenhoe Dam, there were a number of releases that cut access roads to properties east of the Brisbane River downstream of Wivenhoe Dam. Council made contact with residents offering to use SMS to advise them of planned releases that may impact them through isolation. This service was used on a number of occasions prior to Christmas and was also used to notify residents of the release that was initiated prior to the major event.

16) Councils' SMS alert system for residents west of the Brisbane River, including residents in Fernvale, Lowood, Esk and Toogoolawah.

- a) Council has no SMS alert system for residents in areas of the region other than east of the Brisbane River. However, I understand Council is now seeking to have a warning system in place, which may be controlled by others or automated, noting that SMS alerts can sometimes be ineffective due to the high number of rental properties across the region, as well as messages being based on Telstra billing addresses only (i.e. the messages can sometimes be directed to persons outside the affected area).

17) The coordination of the resupply of isolated areas including the resourcing of resupply.

- a) The LDCC was responsible for the coordination of the resupply of isolated communities. Some requests for resupply were received direct by Council with others being by referred to Council via the SES, QFRS or QPS. The LDCC Incident Management Team would source supplies and a method of delivery. Under the new disaster management arrangements, Council is required to attempt to arrange activities using local suppliers. If this is not possible, the matter is then escalated via a "Request for Assistance" (RFA) to the District Disaster Centre.
- b) Some resupply was able to be undertaken for isolated areas using four wheel drive vehicles and flood boats. A number of locations were only accessible using helicopter. Council was able to secure the use of two private helicopters. However, as helicopters are not normally available in Somerset, the majority of air resupply was undertaken using aircraft sourced through the DDC.

18) The resources Council allocates to and has available for disaster management and in particular, flood events.

- a) Council has a staff of 180, made up of approximately 140 outside staff and 40 office staff. All outside staff and plant is available, if required, to assist with flood response activities.
- b) In the January 2011 event, Council Offices were run on a minimum service level regime. This allowed approximately 35 staff to assist with administration of coordination, evacuation and recovery centres.
- c) Council also supports four SES units across the region, as discussed in my earlier statement to the Commission and paragraph 3 above.



Tony Jacobs


9/5/11
Date