

Queensland Flood Commission of Inquiry

STATEMENT

I, Desmond Allen Howard, Local Disaster Coordinator for the Barcaldine Regional Council, hereby submits the following statement to the Inquiry:-

1. The local planning and preparation, including training, undertaken in advance of and/or in relation to the 2010/2011 flood events.

Flyer sent out to households via any means possible (post, email, hand delivered, notice boards) on Thursday and Friday prior to the event.

October and December issues of Galilee Gazette published SES Disaster Preparedness Information to all households within the region.

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.

All residents were advised of pending flood by door to door visit, and an SMS was sent on Monday 27 December 2010. No additional physical barriers to mitigate the effect of flooding in Alpha or Jericho immediately prior to the 2010/2011 flood event. The relocation or lifting of residents' possessions and stocks from businesses recommended to persons living in the known flood area. This was conducted by volunteers, community members, business owners and Council staff. The preparation measures taken were very well executed and provided the basis for a quick recovery.

3. Local preparation, or otherwise, in Emergency Management Queensland's (EMQ) 2010 Pre-Season Flood and Cyclone Workshop, including an assessment of the local assistance gained thereby.

The local preparation was by way of information published in Council's Galilee Gazette which is distributed to all households throughout the Council area. The information contained therein covers Emergency Kit, Community Preparation and the SES Flood/Storm Emergency Call Number (132500). I would assess that local preparation was well done.

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.

We were made aware of proposed changes to the *Disaster Management Act 2003* and the role of Queensland Police Service and Emergency Management Queensland.

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

Alpha SES has trained flood boat operators and members who have been through floods previously. Equipment is in good condition and available for use should it have been required. Members were limited due to 1 member (D/LC) being out of town and the LC position being vacant. I was acting LC as I was a LC for the past 10 years approximately and familiar with the equipment and area. Advertisements calling for members were published in the Galilee Gazette (December 2010).

The SES members in the Jericho Group were not active at the time and the position of the group leader was advertised in the Galilee Gazette (December 2010). The SES equipment is basic equipment and the boat which was not utilised is not fully functional or suitable for shallow flood waters in town.

The training of SES members is difficult because training courses are usually held in locations which require members to travel long distances and spend extended time away.

I would assess the SES equipment was suitable except for the Jericho flood boat and the lack of trained members did not have an adverse effect as those who could be members all assisted in some way.

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.

As the flooding occurred whilst many people were on holidays, Council staff and SES personnel who were put on standby.

The Jericho police officer was on leave and the Alpha O/C (Sgt. Kelly) went to Jericho until 26 December when an officer from Barcaldine arrived and Sgt. Kelly returned to Alpha to concentrate on flood preparations in Alpha. An ambulance officer was sent from Barcaldine to assist in Jericho. Local volunteers in both Alpha and Jericho assisted with the preparation and set up of evacuation centres. Contact was made with known landholders upstream who could monitor and provide information on river heights and rainfall observations.

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.

Local businesses in Alpha were told of impending flooding and volunteers and Council staff moved as much stock as possible to higher ground. Food supplies were sent to the Golf Club and other secure locations to enable the controlled issuing to residents and evacuees.

This action continued until business houses were able to resume trading and prevented the need for external resupply.

On being made aware of heavy rain upstream of Jericho and Alpha the LDMG was activated by telephone and meetings commenced via teleconference. The Mayor (Chair of LDMG) was located in Barcaldine while I (LDC) was located in Alpha. Meetings were held morning and afternoon and included the DDC and EMQ representatives when possible.

Personnel were deployed to assist where necessary while most business houses made their own arrangements.

Several door to door visits were carried out during recovery to offer assistance, gauge the extent of the damage and check on the occupants' welfare.

8. Any local measures taken or requested to preserve vital infrastructure and to manage, maintain or reinstate the supply of essential services (water, food, power, transport, communications and/or sewerage) during the 2010/2011 flood events.

Mobile phones were the main source of communication with two-way radio available as a backup. The phone exchange in Jericho was threatened with flood waters but continued to work throughout the event. Telstra staff attended via helicopter to ensure the facility was ok.

Water supply in Alpha was compromised by a broken rising main. Residents were asked to conserve water and boil it until the main could be repaired and water testing showed the water was safe to drink.

Two teams of local electricians were deployed to Alpha and Jericho to check every house which had been inundated with water prior to the residents returning to their home.

Two teams of sewage pumping trucks were deployed from Longreach and Blackall to pump out all septic tanks in Jericho and Alpha which had been under water.

- 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. Include warning systems.**

Limited advice was available from the Bureau of Meteorology prior to the event that river levels were rising and could threaten the towns of Alpha and Jericho due to the recording stations being manual with the reliance of people reporting the information to the Bureau of Meteorology. New automatic flood recording stations at "Glencoe" and "Rivington" were not operational as previous rain had delayed their installation. Information gained from surrounding station owners and the manual recording stations at "Rivington" and "Glencoe" were vital in predicting peak levels of both water systems.

The ability to listen to the Bureau of Meteorology and Hydrology reports from the State Disaster Meeting provided valuable information.

- 10. In relation to item 9, an indication of the source/s, accuracy and timeliness of that information for local purposes. Include effectiveness of warning systems in place.**

Information from the Bureau of Meteorology and property owners was accurate and received in a timely fashion once the event became a concern. Since the event automatic stations have been installed and shown to be accurate. Levels can be obtained 24/7. The manual recording stations rely on someone being home to read and report.

Information from land holders and local knowledge forecast the flood heights in Alpha and Jericho accurately but given the short time span for water to travel from the recording station to town and continuing rain or storms, predicted flood heights can vary quickly. This was not the case during the 2010/11 flood.

- 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.**

Roads were closed early and remained closed until bridges had been checked by Main Roads and Council engineers for safety. Several people with possible health issues were evacuated from Jericho prior to the road being closed. Two people were evacuated from Jericho to the Alpha Hospital for precautionary reasons. All people in the flood plain in Alpha were asked to evacuate prior to the water entering the town.

Residents were not allowed to return to their homes until an electrical inspection declared it safe. Residents were advised to boil water for 3 minutes prior to use until water test results returned a safe reading. Hep B and ADT vaccinations were made available to volunteers and residents. Supplies of insect repellent were also made available along with PPE (gloves etc.).

- 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.**

Several people with possible health concerns were evacuated from Jericho prior to the road being closed. Two people were evacuated from Jericho to the Alpha Hospital for precautionary reasons. One man had to be evacuated by chopper from Jericho as he'd refused to evacuate with the earlier group to Barcaldine. Due to his declining health he was air lifted to Barcaldine and then to Brisbane for heart surgery.

Assessment: The Jericho helipad was not suitable due to access problems and animals seeking high ground however another area south of town was suitable. All evacuations were carried out in a timely and safe manner.

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.

Evacuation centres were established at the Jericho Town Hall and Alpha Golf Club.

Both were adequate in size however there were no bathing facilities at the Jericho Hall. Local residents used their camping equipment to provide a shower.

Most people in Alpha went to stay with family and friends and those who were at the Golf Club were comfortable and well fed.

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.

One fatality occurred when a car was washed from a crossing on the Aramac-Torrens Creek Road during the night. The road was closed at the time and normal emergency services procedures were implemented with police and ambulance dealing with the incident. This matter was not dealt with by the LDMG however the DDC kept us informed and available if required.

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.

The police officers involved all performed exceptionally well. Six additional police officers were sent from Brisbane to relieve local officers. The DDC (Insp. Mick Keys) provided excellent support and assistance with all requests.

QFRS Auxiliary officers at Alpha proved a valuable resource to disseminate information and assistance during cleanup.

16. The nature and timing of any communications within the disaster management hierarchy, including particularly any communications had with the 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.

The DDC was in constant contact with the LDMG and participated in twice daily teleconferences from Longreach and was available at all times. All helicopters were dispatched from Longreach by the DDC in an always timely manner. No directions were given by the DDC other than his request to arrange chopper services during the day if possible so as not to put pilots in any danger.

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

Mobile phone service was always available along with land lines. Teleconference services provided by Telstra were very effective in keeping parties in each area up to date on events. Council and SES two-way radio communications were available at all times should it have been required.

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

The communities in general responded very well to the flood given the frequency of events in the two towns. There were minor issues with some residents not wanting to leave their homes or wanting to drive on closed roads. The police in each town handled these issues swiftly and effectively. Industrial waste bins and machinery to pick up waste was available from the first day of clean up. This created some problems accessing dump sites but alternative arrangements were made quickly. Both towns recovered quickly mainly due to good prior preparation.

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).

Work is continuing on the Jericho flood levee. Two automatic flood recording stations have now been installed and are functioning well. Council planning requires floor level heights to be 300mm above the highest recorded flood levels in both Jericho and Alpha to prevent any new homes being inundated.

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

The size of the Council area and distance between communities could be a concern should a disaster be spread across the whole area.

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.

Jericho has no "high ground" and the airstrip is subject to inundation therefore helicopters are the only method of transport. Shower and toilet facilities in the Jericho Hall need upgrading to make it a more functional evacuation centre and solar hot water in case of power outages.

While no particular difficulties were encountered consideration of SMS messaging being used more often and the use of the Council website to disseminate information will assist in future events.

Dated at Barcaldine this first day of April 2011



(Signed)

Desmond Allen Howard



(Witness signature)

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