

## Statement of Witness

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

<i>Name of Witness</i>	Simon John BOLITHO
<i>Date of Birth</i>	[REDACTED]
<i>Address and contact details</i>	[REDACTED]
<i>Occupation</i>	Self Employed Farmer
<i>Officer taking statement</i>	Det/Sgt Anthony VLISMAS
<i>Date taken</i>	6/4/2011

Simon John BOLITHO states,

1. I am married man [REDACTED] years of age and I reside with family at my property.
2. I am a self employed farmer dealing with beef cattle.
3. Prior to being self employed I was an airline Captain for approximately 25 years with Australian Carrier.
4. I joined the Rural Fire Service approximately eight years ago and I am currently the Trainer of the Killarney Rural Fire Brigade (RFB).
5. As a result of the recent floods in Queensland in early 2011 I made submissions to Queensland Flood Commission of Inquiry.
6. (Refer to attachment 1)
7. As rural fire service officers we are trained to control and extinguish fires predominately in bush and grassed areas. We are also able to assist urban units with fire control but not designated to enter structures as part of our control methods.
8. Our brigade is not trained in rescue situations.
9. In my submission I outlined that we were requested on a number of occasions to be on standby for assistance to resources to the Lockyer Valley. This standby mode entailed contacting crew members to ask if they would be available.

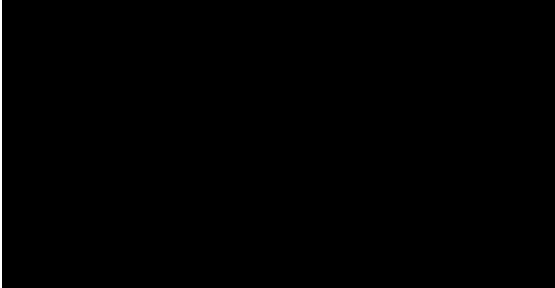
Witness Signature  
Page Number

Signature of officer .....

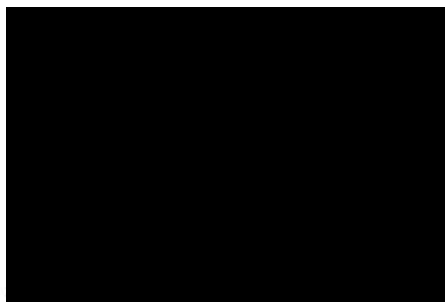
400 George Street Brisbane  
GPO Box 1738 Brisbane  
Queensland 4001 Australia  
Telephone 1300 309 634  
Facsimile +61 7 3405 9750  
www.floodcommission.qld.gov.au  
ABN 65 959 415 158

10. I personally received two calls to be on standby and the First Officer Bruce GUSTAFSON advised me that he had received three calls for assistance.
11. I was going to be part of a medium attack crew which comprises of 3 crew members a fire unit that houses 2000 litres of water, 38 mm hoses and the ability to hook up to a fire hydrant.
12. All rural and urban fire units operate on a common radio system. There is also the capability to contact from unit to unit in the field.
13. Killarney Rural fire brigade has previously carried out flood clean up work after a flood in Killarney. This work took the form of cleaning/hosing out of large garage that had been inundated by a Condamine River Flood.
14. I feel that the medium attack units could have been utilised to assist with the clean up efforts in flood affected areas such as the Rocklea markets or similar large venues.
15. Prior to the recent floods our fire brigade received no formal training in assistance and recovery efforts of this nature. In my opinion I feel that prior to these events no planning had been formalised.
16. Plans are implemented so that accommodation and meals can be supplied to volunteers at short notice. A financial consideration come into place it should be noted that I, unofficially, was able to arrange this provisionally in the Brisbane area, at what would have been no cost to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. (QFRS).
17. Government supplied Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) becomes filthy in flood recovery work each day and volunteers require clean wear each day.
18. All potential volunteers for flood recovery work should be on a register as being up to date with tetanus injections.

19. Further I have my own slip on ( can be put on the back of a utility vehicle) fire unit and I took this down to Ipswich and assisted with hosing out of two(2) houses, the first in conjunction with SES volunteers and RAAF personnel plus one other rural fire volunteers, the second house with only one other assisting me, so I had some actual experience in the field .



S J BOLITHO



Witness ..... re of officer .....  
Page Number 3 of 3



## Submission to Flood Commissioners

11/2/2011

Commissioners

As a rural fire volunteer I believe that more use of personnel and equipment available to the rural fire service might have well have been used to good effect in the initial clean up phase after the floods had receded,

At the time of the 1974 floods rural fire units were ill equipped, mostly farmer manned and were in reality a cooperative fire service for rural communities and with little or no ability to operate away from their own area.

Rural fire units are now well equipped and able to operate in conjunction with urban units (common communications) and whilst the level of training varies from brigade to brigade, there are many brigades that have sufficient training so that they can 'slot in' with urban brigades or operate separately but under the same command and control system through the area 'firecom'.

A group of say 6 rural medium attack units could have been given a task such as cleaning up the Brisbane produce markets and done it very efficiently with the on board equipment that is held on medium attack units.

Twice Killarney rural fire brigade was put on standby to proceed to a clean up area but then nothing more was heard. This was after we had organised volunteers to man a unit and who were prepared to be away for two days or more.

I suspect that the permanent staff had never before considered planning for any other event other than fires and also that state government liability in the event that a volunteer was injured or who contracted a sickness such as tetanus was a consideration. As at the time governments, both local and state, were calling for volunteers to assist with flood clean up, if in fact this was the case, then this consideration I find hypocritical.

Another consideration I understand was the necessity to provide accommodation and meals for rural fire crews. However this would have been no problem as there was sufficient goodwill in the community so that it would have been very easy to obtain accommodation from people who wished to help the flood recovery in some way but were not able to physically take part in clean up operations.

In the case of Killarney rural I had unofficially organised both accommodation and meals for a full crew from Killarney (3) in case of us being tasked with clean up in the Brisbane south side area and I believe that I could have quickly organised accommodation for other crews in the same area.

To conclude, I believe that faced with a new situation, the permanent staff were not able to rapidly adapt their thinking and very possibly public service culture precluded this.

Simon Bolitho