

<i>Name of Witness</i>	William 'Stewart' DUNDAS
<i>Date of Birth</i>	██████████
<i>Address and contact details</i>	C/- Kitchener street Fire Station, Toowoomba City
<i>Occupation</i>	Firefighter
<i>Officer taking statement</i>	Detective Sergeant Paul Browne
<i>Date taken</i>	05/05/2011

I, William Stewart DUNDAS state:

1. I am a █████ year old married man, and currently reside in the Toowoomba area.
2. I am employed by the Queensland Fire Service and have been a Fire-fighter since 1998. I am currently performing Station officer (SO) duties and am stationed at the Kitchener street, Fire Station in Toowoomba City. I have been a Fire-fighter in Toowoomba since 2002 and prior to that I was based in Townville.
3. I have attained the rank of Station Officer 3 and have been performing this role since 2008. The Station officer is effectively the Officer in Charge of the station, appliance/s and crews who are performing duty on a particular shift. On my shift there are two SO's and we share the role, however the other SO is the rank of SO1. This does not matter at station level, however may come into play on the fire-ground where I would be more senior by rank.

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4. As part of their basic training at the Academy all Fire-fighters are accredited in Level 1 'Swift Water Rescue Techniques'. As an SO3 I have been involved in and responded to numerous swift water rescues throughout the South Western Region. The SO is also responsible for setting up command and control at any incident on the fire ground and also works as a part of the team.
5. It is my understanding that a Level 1 Swift Water Technician is more of a support role. Primarily they do not enter the water and instead offer support to Level 2 technicians who are performing the actual rescue.
6. Level 2 Swift Water Technicians receive more advanced training and can enter the water and perform rescues as required.
7. As the Senior fire officer at an incident part of my responsibilities are to ensure a safe working environment for both my crew and members of the public. With respect to Swift Water Rescue (SWR) or any other incident, I am required to make decisions and judgements based on the QFS Operational doctrine.
8. For example, level 1 technicians are not supposed to enter the water, however as station officer I make dynamic risk assessments, based on the experience of Fire-fighters involved and also the nature of the incident at that particular point in time. In some circumstances this requires decisions to be made in regards to carrying out a swift water rescue, where only one or in some instances no level 2 technician is immediately available.

9. On Monday 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 I was performing duty as the Kitchener street Station Officer from about 7am (start of shift) and became involved in the response to the flood event which occurred in Toowoomba later that day. As a result of that I would like to raise a number of issues to the Commission, as they relate to the Queensland Fire Service.

10. Those include:

- Lack of managerial support for Firefighters on the ground;
- Calls for more Swift Water Technicians on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2011;
- Performing SWR without adequate support or equipment;
- Issues relating to radios and communication, which resulted in a 'Code Red' call being missed;
- Confusion between Firecom and ground crew around tasking and responding, particularly in different Fire Service Regions.

11. My staffing at Kitchener street Fire Station on that day consisted of 6 Fire-fighters, made up into two crews. Alpha crew (Primary composite response Appliance) being manned by myself and three Fire-fighters, one of whom was level 2 accredited. Kilo crew (Rescue Appliance) made up of another station officer (SO1) and a Fire-fighter who was also level two accredited.

12. I was also aware that Anzac avenue station had an Alpha appliance working that same shift and also covering the Toowoomba area, with a crew of one SO and three Fire-fighters. Although we make contact between SO's at the commencement of shift this is usually to confirm staffing and not specific roles, hence I was unaware of whether or not

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any level 2 SWR technicians were performing duty at Anzac avenue station on that day. In effect this meant the Toowoomba area had a total of 10 Fire-fighters and three appliances operating on that shift.

13. It is my understanding that any SWR requires a minimum of two, level 2 technicians, with more level 2 operators to respond as necessary or as the incident unfolds, however I am not sure what the procedure is for this to occur when an incident is reported.

14. Following an incident in December where we had been involved with an SWR, I had spoken with the Swift Water Technical Co-ordinator. I am unsure exactly what all of the functions and responsibilities of the SWR co-ordinator are but do know that he is an on-shift SO, and co-ordinates training and oversees equipment for SWR.

15. On the occasion following the December rescue it was brought to my attention that we should not be trying to attempt a SWR without at least two, Level 2 technicians. This was relevant because during the December rescue we had only had one. I did not feel as though that was being said to me as a criticism, but more for more my information and future consideration when turning out to rescues of that nature and making those dynamic risk assessments.

16. Determining crews for a shift is done by the roster clerk, although I am aware that SWR training and accredited technicians is something they take into consideration and try to roster at least one level 2, and where possible two, level 2 technicians on each shift. This is not always possible as Kitchener street Fire Station has four shifts.

17. Fortunately on 10<sup>th</sup> January I had level two technicians available to me, John Ryan and Karl Noble. However following on from the incident in December, I was aware of an issue in regards to the level two accreditation of John Ryan having expired. I knew he had done the full level two training but that he wasn't doing level two swift water rescues at a particular time. Then as a result of the incident in late December he was brought back into the technical rescue squad. That was my information but as SO I never officially received anything to advise he was back in.

18. Despite that I have worked with John for several years. I knew his capabilities in SWR and was confident in his knowledge and the way he displaces his duty, that he was competent to perform such a role. As it turned out I was lucky to have him on crew for that shift.

19. On hand-over at about 7am that morning we were told by the other crew that they had been in the Grantham all night dealing with water down there.

20. Not long after commencing we turned out to a house fire in Toowoomba and following that there was a discussion between the two level 2 technicians on shift and myself regarding the need to get more swift water trained technicians in. This was based on what had happened the night before and the conditions at the time.

21. This would have allowed those additional staff to specifically man a third 'F' series utility vehicle, which had been set-up as a SWR vehicle, leaving our shift to maintain full manning for other duties.

22.As a result of that conversation and this being brought to my attention I agreed with them that there was a need for this to occur. For that reason I tried to make contact with our Inspector by phone but could not get in contact with him at the time.

23.The Inspector is our direct chain of command and had also been at the house fire (performing the role of Fire Investigation officer), but I am not sure if we discussed this at that point. After trying unsuccessfully to contact him by phone, I left messages and was waiting for a response. I did not try other methods as this is our usual chain of command for circumstances such as this.

24.As the SO my responsibility is only to the assigned job we are going too or the fire-ground we are operating on at the time. In the event something is identified or another issue requires attention we make contact with a Senior officer, advise them of the situation and circumstance necessitated by that situation.

25.In situations where we drive across another incident whilst en-route to a fire-ground, QFS procedure requires we pull over, render any immediate assistance and make a risk assessment call regarding the decision to stay or move on to our original destination.

26.Later on the morning of 10<sup>th</sup> January I remember it was starting to rain more heavily and I recall making another back-up call to the Inspector, following up from the first. That was also unanswered and I was not able to raise anyone at either the District office or on his mobile. The District Office is near Kitchener street, but housed in another building.

Apart from being at the house fire I cannot recall ever having direct contact with him on that morning.

27. At about 1pm we received a turn-out from the station to attend a life rescue (people on top of cars) in the Murphy Creek area. It was our (myself and my fellow station officer's decision) that we would separate our crews to provide coverage in both directions. This was for a number of reasons and mainly because of a lack of information about where the actual location was and also the possibility of being cut off by floodwater. By splitting up the two vehicles it was anticipated that at least one appliance would get to the job.

28. Separating the appliances like this is not general procedure but is how we would usually work in circumstances such as those. From that point on, I only ever had one Level 2 technician with Alpha and one with Kilo, however, on this occasion we were also aware that other crews had been despatched and were also responding to the incident from other Stations.

29. I recall whilst en-route we were requesting thru 'Firecom' for more level 2 SWR technicians. I can't remember whether this was via phone or radio, however we usually try to use the radio where possible as that is recorded. If those requests were via radio, recordings of the requests would be available.

30. As a result of the flooding and what was occurring in Toowoomba we were not able to get to Murphy's Creek and I made a decision to contact Firecom and inform them for reasons of not wanting to put my crew and our appliance in a potentially dangerous situation, we would not be proceeding to the rescue at Murphy's Creek. I then instructed my driver to turn around and make our way back in towards the City, where we responded to a report of persons trapped in a car in Holberton street.

31. Throughout the remainder of that shift we became involved in a number of rescues of persons in the Toowoomba City area. Because we had split up our crews to try and get to the rescue at Murphy's Creek and the flooding which occurred in Toowoomba we did not meet up again with Kilo crew. That meant Alpha crew whom I was with, consisted of myself and three Fire-fighters (one level 2 technician and three level 1 technicians). Kilo crew consisted of one level 1 and one level 2 technicians only.

32. On each occasion we responded to an incident I was required to conduct on-going dynamic risk assessments, before determining what capability we had and the level of response that could be provided. As with any incident my main priority had to be with the safety of my crew and potential risks to those Fire-fighters. With respect to SWR I took advice from my level 2 technician on a number of occasions, before making my final decision.

33. Those decisions were also based again on the operations doctrine and framework, from which we are supposed to work within. However,

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sometimes as an SO I have to make a judgement call there and then on the day and at the time of the incident occurring.

34. For that reason as part of my decision making I would have to consider all of the conditions that I believed my crew would be operating under and do all that we could, having consideration for crew safety and the safety of the public. This did not only include any casualty or person that needed to be rescued but also other members of the public who were in the vicinity. Often they are expecting us to do something and in some instances will try to perform rescues themselves if they feel nothing is being done.

35. On one occasion my Alpha crew were initiating and performing the swift water rescue of a young gentleman, when unbeknown to us another crew were also performing a rescue around 50 metres away.

36. We did not know at the time and were only informed of it later that during the course of that other rescue a 'Code Red, Red, Red' call was made over the radio. The definition of a 'Code Red' call is contained in the QFS radio communications hand-book, however these types of call are priority messages for someone in need and primarily used in life endangering situations. They are usually used for Fire-fighters in need but also other emergent situations on the fire-ground. To demonstrate the importance of such a call all other radio transmission is supposed to stop, so that this emergent transmission can proceed with priority.

37. As a background to this at the time of the call being made I was in the water. Although only a level 1 SWR technician the type of rescue

being undertaken and the risk assessment I undertook in the circumstances necessitated I work as and formed part of the team, to facilitate the safety of my crew.

38.As I was in the water I could not have radio communication as the radio equipment can physically hinder the rescue, doesn't work well in rain and especially if they are dropped in the water. Because of that we were oblivious to the 'Code Red' call and although being only 50 metres away and possibly in a position to assist we did not respond. Instead at the completion of the rescue we were on, those two other rescue technicians from the incident where the call came from, came to us and advised us of what had happened.

39.I believe the QFS are now considering the purchase of water-proof socks that swift water technicians and other Fire-fighters can carry. I am hopeful that this will eventually provide us with some better means of communication in circumstances such as this.

40.Accepting that it is my understanding that level 1 technicians are not supposed to enter the water, given the circumstances of the day this was something that was not avoidable. I know that it is in writing what a level 1 technician can and can't do and that there is a formal definition of what "entering water" means. It is my understanding that ankle height would be considered an entry, however because of the nature of what was required there were times throughout that day when all members of my crew were in the water. This varied from ankle, knee, waist and even chest height at various times, depending on what we were trying to achieve.

41.As with other circumstances of the day this was one more thing that I included as part of my on-going risk assessment and allowed in circumstances where I was able to ensure the safety of my crew. This was done through implementation of other processes, for example the placement of spotters up and down stream.

42.Personal flotation devices (PFD) are an item that I believe we need more of. Currently we carry four on an appliance which is effectively one for each Fire-fighter. This may be based on the theory that level 1 technicians should not be entering water, and may not need a PDF.

43.However for safety reasons and in circumstances such as those experienced in January there was a need for every Fire-fighter to have access to a PFD. That meant there no PDF left for a casualty or person being rescued. I accept level 1 shouldn't be entering the water but sometimes they have too and the need for them and casualties to have access to a PFD is something that needs further consideration.

44.The other issues I have with support from Management are not only in relation to the callout of additional SWR technicians. I cannot recall any planning or pre-planning that has been done in the Toowoomba area to prepare for inclement weather events. I also cannot recall any training in this area, however I understand it may have taken place but I was never asked to participate in anything of that nature.

45.I am aware that 'Firecom' received information of a severe weather pattern forming to a point where they had organised for other 'Firecom' staff, to be brought in to cope with an anticipated workload. I believe they had up to two to three hours notice of this before the

actual weather pattern hit, however at no time was this information relayed back to operational staff on the ground.

46. I am unaware of what the procedure is for this, but it would make sense that if additional staff are going to be required in the communications room, then additional operational staff are also going to be required on the ground. Perhaps policy could be introduced to ensure those arrangements are put into place at the same time.

47. Apart from the staffing issues, the fact that this type of weather was anticipated would have also been of value to the crews who were already working and may have allowed us some small opportunity to further prepare for those events that eventually unfolded.

48. Regardless of the policy, it would be my belief that as it currently stands a decision to call in more staff or put people on stand-by is one that would need to be made via the usual chain of command.

49. In respect of staff being called in it is worth noting that Auxillary fire officers are not trained as level 1 swift water technicians. I believe they receive swift water awareness training only and this perhaps further complicates the issue of what number of staff (at which levels) are required to commence or conduct a SWR and how individual appliances are manned and crews are made up.

50. In normal situations this is something I would consider as an SO. For example, in the event where a rescue was required at Oakey, Auxillary officers may turn out in that area, however I would need to ensure that the rescue appliance sent from Kitchener street contained the

appropriate staff, whilst maintaining other capabilities for another incident which may arise.

51. The last issue relates to management and also the communication between Management level and ground crews. This is sometimes further complicated by the fact that Toowoomba Fire District falls close to the boundary between the South East and South West Regions. Our 'Firecom' for South West are based in Toowoomba, however the 'Firecom' for South East are elsewhere.

52. An example of the difficulty this creates is when we respond to jobs at Gatton, that area falls under the South East Region. Often a call for assistance is received at South East Region Firecom, who then relay the job to South West Firecom, who in turn relay to us so we can turn out. When we respond appliances from South West to another Region this is something that is always in our minds, particularly what safety we are accruing. Whether it be motor vehicle accident, Hazham accident or structural fire, as SO's we will always send support of our fellow Fire-fighters, simply because we don't know what's already been sent.

53. Around 12<sup>th</sup> January we responded to a SWR in the Grantham area. Upon receiving that information I consulted my fellow SO and because of our past experiences and past procedure response, we responded both Kilo and Alpha crews. Halfway to the incident we were contacted by Firecom South East and advised we were no longer required. Once we booked back onto South West Firecom we were then informed that our Inspector would meet us on station.

54. On arriving back at the station Acting Inspector Goodman questioned why had we sent two trucks down to Grantham when it wasn't required?

55. I responded that after the previous incidents I deemed that for Fire-fighter safety we would send our two level 2 swift water technicians, plus the support of level 1 technicians. It was then identified to us that there was a directive, a temporary directive brought out from Assistant Commissioner Dawson in South West Region (via Grantham control), that the only response would be the response that they requested. In effect this meant that if only one appliance was requested or one level 2 technician then regardless of the circumstances, experience or knowledge of the officers this was all that was to be sent.

56. Unfortunately despite that directive being made in South West Region, this information had not been passed down from Firecom to the operational crews.

57. Once I had informed the Inspector of this he made phone calls to the Assistant Commissioner and Firecom, and it was identified then that this information had not been passed down. That was to us a really big kick in the guts to say well hang on we are doing what we have been told to do, and then informed later that no you shouldn't have done that.

58. To the credit of Acting Inspector Goodman, he came to our defence and from his follow-up inquiries was able to come up with the right information. That was good on his behalf, but it brings to task that the

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information received from Management, through Firecom did not even reach the floor.

59. On that occasion I had responded with what I as the SO thought was the right number of trained personnel required to do the job and to ensure the safety of those Fire-fighters. I was not party to the directive and knew nothing about it. This also contradicted advice I had been given in December with regards to having two level 2 technicians involved in a SWR.

60. In circumstances where we are responding into another region to assist we do not usually know if the crews that are already responding have a sufficient crew number, or whether or not they have had the training to respond to that particular type of incident.

61. I believe the cross over of regional boundaries is a really big concern that should be addressed urgently as a matter of Firefighter safety and also some clear direction for Officers in Charge to follow.

62. Despite the criticism of Management support, Superintendent Bruce Smith was present on the ground during one of the rescues we performed on 10<sup>th</sup> January. In that instance he provided guidance to me as the SO and also participated in the rescue as part of the team. At the same time we had requests for additional personnel and he tried to handle those at the same time.

63. Once that rescue had been completed he went on to another rescue with another crew and my crew returned to station, awaiting further

tasking. We subsequently started to manage station duties for on-coming shifts and any call backs that were required.

64. I would ask that the Commission give some attention to the issues I have raised and consider those when making any future recommendations regarding the Queensland Fire Service.

[Redacted Signature]

**William Stewart DUNDAS.**

6<sup>th</sup> May 2011.

**Justices Act 1886**

I acknowledge by virtue of section 110A(5)(c)(ii) of the Justices Act 1886 that:

- (1) This written statement by me dated 6<sup>th</sup> May 2011 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 16 is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and
- (2) I make this statement knowing that, if it were admitted as evidence, I may be liable to prosecution for stating in it anything that I know is false.

.....Signature

Signed at .....Toowoomba.....this.....6<sup>th</sup>.....day of.....May.....2011....