

I, Stewart Lange of [redacted] Postman's Ridge state that I solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare the current statement of witness –

1. With regards to Level 2 Swiftwater technicians, (L2 SWR), in the south west region, we have 11 in the area, one of whom is based at Warwick. This number does not allow to have sufficient crews on all shifts at all times. If you look at our operations doctrine what is required for a minimum rescue, two L2 SWR's supported by level 1's is in an incident directive as is incident action guides.
2. From this perspective I feel we do not have sufficient numbers of level 2 swift water technicians per shift to enable an effective rescue for one person let alone when we get into situations where we have multiple persons as in multiple vehicles or a vehicle with a number of people in there, two swift water technicians conducting a rescue is insufficient.
3. Ideally with our south west, well if I look from a Toowoomba perspective, if we do have sufficient number for two per shift plus taking care of holiday rosters, as well as the basis we can build on to get to have sufficient personnel. Having more just level 2 swift water technicians per shift would be ideal.
4. Currently the training we have from a broader prospective in regard to auxiliaries. In Warwick we have at this point one L2 SWR and up to eight level 1 rescue technicians, which include the permanents and auxiliaries. Warwick is one of three regions across the state that has auxiliary's trained up in level 1 swift water.
5. With regards to the continual training or the proposed further training of auxiliary personnel, I raised this issue at the state coordinators meeting on approximately the 20th of February this year in Brisbane. I have a view point that auxiliary fire fighters should be trained up to level 1 due to the fact of the incidences where auxiliary fire fighters are entering the water to conduct rescues and placing themselves at risk.

Signed

[redacted]

1

Witnessed.....

[redacted]

.....

6. My perspective is due to a safety perspective, not from just the fact to conduct more rescues. They must be made aware of what the dangers are involved in entering water, not only in just turn out PPE as has been seen, but also not knowing the effects of flood water on personnel and vehicles. I will continue to pursue this task of getting auxiliary fire fighters trained to level 1.

7. In a continuation with that whilst I am in the Regional Training Department, I also have the intention of liaising with the State Emergency Service with regards to the potential co-training with their flood boats which would enable flood boat usage to be utilised during a rescue if the broad river conditions eventuate. Having swift water technicians operate within SES flood boats will still allow a dry rescue to be performed.

8. As we are a large region, the equipment cache that we have access to is quite small. It has only been at the end of December 2010 we did receive our first inflatable work platform. This item had been requested in the previous months prior to my appointment as the technical rescue coordinator and the inflatable work platform did arrive in December of 2010. Fortunately we also received Swiftwater rescue equipment that was being stored in Warwick early in January and it was dispersed to a number of vehicles on the 10th to be utilised throughout the rescues of that day.

9. Over the past two years due to the increase in rain, we've had an increased demand on the deploying crews throughout our region. We've sent crews to Roma, St George, Goondiwindi, Condamine, both in 2010 and 2011. We have done this on our own regarding utilising our own level 2 crews but as we found in 2011 we did require additional resources from the State as we were able to manage the fatigue level of our crews.

10. The equipment cache we have currently is insufficient therefore we rely upon the State to be able to provide equipment to us when we do fly to or we relocate to other areas of our large region. Plans are currently in place to set up mobile units or have equipment stored in locations such as Roma or St George in the event of further flooding.

Signed...



..... Witnessed.....



11. As far as request for information, as I touched on earlier I became the tech rescue coordinator for the South West Region in December 2010. We work on a 12 months basis in regards to skills maintenance so therefore I will stick with the 12 month time frame from the 2010/2011. The beginning of the 2010 financial year saw another person as tech rescue coordinator and we've had two others between July and December.

12. From that perspective I have taken over the tech rescue coordination role that was somewhat left in array. However the week after I started my role and had the floods, it has only been recently we're able to stop and take check. As far as equipment goes and ordering equipment, to date I have not been refused any equipment that I have requested.

13. In fact it's gone beyond what I have requested. Yes money is tight however I have been tasked to put a plan forward as we can support our region in the future. From the technical rescue perspective I deal with Chief Inspector Lindsay Hackett from a regional view point and this is where our support comes from. I also must liaise with our inspectors regarding our regions and to date I have had no negative response to my requests.

14. When January came around and the flooding that we've had in the region I was quite heavily involved in the floods in Dalby through the beginning of the year and with the affects of the flooded Condamine River right throughout the southern western district of our region. From a coordinators perspective I had to ensure that we were able to provide level 2 technicians to these regions as requested by their LDMG's and instructed to by our ROCC area ensuring that we did not over run our resources and utilising the state resources as a support.

15. It's only in situations where we've had people who are away from work, as on annual leave, that I've actually had people decline attending or participating in that. So from a coordinators perspective, I'm quite proud of what the L2 SWR did, put their hands up for in relation to having themselves available for the tasks when required and this is not to mention January the 10th because that is a stand-alone day.

Signed.....



... Witnessed.....





16. With regard to actual swift water jobs, the only incident that I have been involved in where the request came from an incident controller and it was not met by the senior on-call , was regarding an incident out on the Oakey to Pittsworth Road where the incident controller requested the set up of an ICC due to the immense number of calls we were getting that evening for swift water tasks. This is the only job I know personally that I was involved in that was not agreed upon by the senior on-call.

17. I support the incident controller in his decision requesting that information however it wasn't received on that evening. The other incidents that I was involved in, as the tech rescue coordinator, I received permission from the Chief Superintendent Lindsay Hackett, that whatever I requested I would get. This leeway was given to me due to the intensity of the flooding that our region was being subjected to and all requests that I did submit were met and we were able to achieve our outcomes.

18. However one thing that I will identify is the incidents that involve the south west region travelling into the south east region. This is one area I feel there is a big flaw in our system. The south east region closest rescue station is in Ipswich and this is approximately 40 to 45 minutes response time from Ipswich to Gatton. From Toowoomba to Gatton is approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

19. Historical evidence has shown the number of swift water incidents between Toowoomba and Gatton are quite high. From that perspective the liaison between south east and south west region and the utilisation of resources was somewhat limited. On the morning January 10th, as in early am when Grantham was in flood, the Incident Controller was a South East Rural Officer and the Operations perspective was under the command of South West Regions SO Tony Guse. Upon my arrival I was advised that we were the combatant agency regarding the response of L2 SWR. South East did send I believe 2 Aux Appliances but they do not have the Level 1 Swiftwater capability.

Signed...  Witnessed..... 

- 20. With regards to the Grantham incident in the early hours of Jan 10, we had almost depleted the Toowoomba swift water response capabilities due to the number of personnel we had in the water on the early hours of January 10th. It was only until afterwards we were advised that south east did not respond to that particular incident as South West Region had the incident under control. But regardless of who was responded and in what, the fact is its geographic location to Toowoomba stands out at the forefront. For any tasks that are required in the close proximity, the liaison between the two regions must be considered.

- 21. On the four days post January 10, and as I live down in the Lockyer Valley the only time L2 SWR technicians were utilised with the SE region was on the Wednesday to assist QPS to conduct searches in buildings and motor vehicles in the Grantham area. I had made requests to senior management to allow L2 SWR to assist but I was informed that was the South East Region. Because of that and because of the encouragement I've received from Chief Inspector Hackett, I've now set up a plan that I actually instigated today, (May 23rd 2011), where I contacted my counter-part in the South East Region to advise him of the amount of rain that we received at midday and the potential for a Swiftwater rescue. This plan is used to advise of the immediate availability of L2 SWR's to be able to respond to an incident.

- 22. So from that perspective, Chief Superintendant Hackett has said set up a process and we'll support you on that. Station Officer Scott Beasley is the south east coordinator and he knows what he has access to up here and he doesn't have to think he has to rely on his own crews to travel the 45 minutes under lights and sirens to conduct a rescue which most historically shows 45 minutes after a swift water incident, somebody's either gone or they've got out.

- 23. On January 10th and due to my involvement in the early hours of that day, I had handed over coordination control of level 2's to my deputy which is David Crighton and he was the instigator of the initial response to the flooding in Toowoomba.

Signed..



..... Witnessed.....



.....

- 24. Due to the size of the weather event and listening to what Station Officer Dundas had to say of the morning, I can only go by what Station Officer Dundas said when they did request for additional swift water technicians in the am of January 10th and they weren't permitted. For clarification of that I suggest you talk to SO Dundas or Acting SO Haddow.

- 25. This is something that we have to work on as a service; we do have the skilled personnel out there. We do have a basis of personnel who can make the decisions on when we are needed. Personally, as a swift water technician, if a station officer requests additional level 2's it is for a good reason because they are in a situation where they require additional resources there is a high perspective of a potential swift water rescue. This must be listened to and recognised. When we're having incidences where senior officers are making decisions regarding whether they do or do not allow swift water technicians is extremely short sighted and dangerous. Not knowing what is required in a swift water rescue is a downside.

- 26. In saying that I was approached today by the manager of regional training that I am to put together a course to instruct south west regions senior officers on level 1 swift water techniques. From that perspective they have now identified that situation and they are rectifying it, which I think is a good move in the right direction.

- 27. In conclusion with regard to January 10th, as I stated about where I live, I spent 1 ¾hrs trying to get from my place to Toowoomba city. I normally travel the distance in ten minutes. I saw a lot of flood damaged locations, a lot of flood damaged buildings. I assisted in a number of minor rescues in the town of Withcott, all the while listening to the rescues that were going on in Toowoomba. Not once did I consider where the water was going, not once did I consider the amount of water that was heading towards Helidon, Postman's Ridge or Grantham, and this is something I will just have to carry.

- 28. The liaison between the south east and the south west must be improved, yet there is something that we could have done more so. On that January the 10th at 6pm we watched the national news and we saw the rescues being undertaken only ten minutes from that location and we had no idea that was going on. I had nine swift water technicians available to respond and we weren't called.

Signed.....



..... Witnessed.....

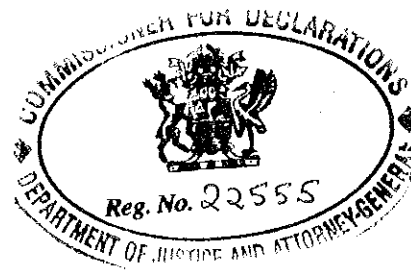


I swear/solemnly and sincerely affirm that the facts and circumstances stated in this statement are from my knowledge except for those which are from information only.

Sworn/affirmed by Stewart Lange on June 2, 2011 at Toowoomba in the presence of Paula Newman

Signed
Stewart Lange

Witness



Commissioner for Declarations

Signed.....



Witnessed.....

