

QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

Oaths Act 1867

Statutory Declaration

QUEENSLAND TO WIT

I, Vaughn Alwyn Becker, of care of Shire Chambers, Cnr Kroombit & Prairie Streets, Biloela in the State of Queensland, Councillor of Banana Shire Council, do solemnly and sincerely declare that:-

The following is a true statement containing my response to the queries raised by the Commission in its letter dated 6 May, 2011.

- 1) The measures implemented by the Theodore community 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.**
 - a) Council provided sand, the SES provided sandbags and the local community accessed and filled sandbags as required. Residents were filling sandbags to replace those that they had taken for their own needs. Other community members assisted in filling sand bags for anyone who required them.
 - b) The Theodore community took action to relocate motor vehicles and machinery to various locations including the aerodrome and golf club. Those vehicles remaining in Theodore were moved to the highest elevated portion of town to minimise potential inundation. Only a few vehicles were inundated.
 - c) The community was also proactive in lifting furniture and household fittings where possible to above anticipated flood levels. The 1956 flood level was used as the benchmark as this was familiar to some of the local residents.
 - d) Pets were relocated to friends or relatives where flood waters were not expected to go. Also for some residents who were away for the Christmas break, their pets were checked on, cared for and relocated by neighbours or friends.
 - e) Some of the rural landholders who had machinery accessible were able to construct some private levee banks to protect crops. These levees were beneficial up until the major flood levels were reached; many were breached or failed as a result of the extent of flooding.
 - f) With the assistance of DTMR and the Police, an assessment of road conditions was made, advice on conditions was passed to the LDCC and appropriate action was taken (either signage and/or road closure) by both groups.

2) The actions undertaken by the interim Theodore LECC in advance of the 2010/2011 flood events in relation to resourcing, coordination and deployment of any personnel and equipment.

- a) The role of the Theodore LECC was one of information collection and dissemination and liaison with the local community and the LDCC.
- b) This included public information sessions twice daily, visiting local businesses, and providing information to community members who visited the SES shed.
- c) Further, an information newsletter was produced on at least a daily basis and distributed by email to approximately 400 addresses in the community.
- d) I contacted local council staff, many of whom were on holidays, regarding their availability to assist in flood preparations. All staff contacted indicated their willingness to assist. This assistance was supported by the LDC.
- e) The LDCC provided support to myself by providing Gail Roylance initially for a short period and replaced by John McDougall who remained at Theodore until the final evacuation was completed. These personnel assisted in disseminating information, coordinating the evacuation and identifying potential evacuation sites for helicopters to land. They also assisted with handling phone calls and enquiries.

3) Any actions taken by the interim Theodore LECC in respect of the 2010/2011 flood events regarding immediate management, response and recovery operations, including the coordination and deployment of any personnel and equipment.

- a) The Theodore LECC was the contact between the LDCC and the community. The LECC coordinated the instructions given by the LDCC.
- b) The primary focus and role of the LECC was to provide assessments and responses to community members' enquiries. This information was fed back to the LDCC.
- c) Upon deployment to Theodore, I walked the CBD area and spoke with all businesses to advise them of preparations being undertaken and that the first of the public meetings was to be held at the SES shed the following morning at 9:00am. I asked all businesses to advise staff and customers of the meeting. I didn't manage to contact the tyre service and sawmill on this day as time had run out. They had shut down their businesses for the day.
- d) From the response at the public meeting this approach proved to be successful.
- e) My next task was to organise community representatives to support me in the operation of the LECC. I followed the list indicated in the draft Terms of Reference. These people typically included the OICs (at the time) of QPS, QAS, QFRS, SES, Queensland Health and a community representative.

4) Any measures taken or requested by the interim Theodore LECC 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.

- a) It was not the role of the LECC to preserve vital infrastructure or to manage, maintain or reinstate the supply of essential services. Accordingly, I am unable to comment on these matters. I am advised that these issues have been addressed in more detail in the statement of Collin Head dated 5 April 2011. The Theodore LECC provided information regarding vital infrastructure and essential services to the LDCC as relevant issues arose.
- b) As a result, the LECC forwarded information to the LDCC regarding the impacts on the town water supply and sewerage systems. Prior to the water treatment plant becoming unserviceable, potable water was pumped to the water tower which was filled to capacity as a reserve in case of potential shortages.
- c) When the water supply failed we (the LECC in conjunction with the LDCC) immediately sought bottled water to support the needs of the community, this was additional to the reasonable supply available within the town. We assessed what water was available to ensure demands were met. Bottled water was transported to the coordination centre (RSL Hall) for distribution.
- d) Both Telstra and Ergon operational staff were based in Theodore and were able to provide advice to the LECC as to the continuity of their respective services. This advice was relayed to the LDCC. These services were only maintained due to the presence of these personnel in Theodore at the time.
- e) The quantity of food supplies was assessed to determine if sufficient food resources were available.
- f) I liaised with a local transport operator to provide assistance for food deliveries. Prior to the roads being closed he placed a forklift on the northern side of town. Supplies that were delivered to that location were then able to be loaded on to high clearance trucks and transported to the IGA coldrooms.

5) Any specific information received or obtained by the interim Theodore LECC 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.

- a) Rainfall reports for the Dawson Valley catchments were received by email and phone from landholders in the various catchments along the river and were passed on to the LDCC. This information was also disseminated to the community via email and at the community information sessions.
- b) I was in regular contact with Alan Harris (a Council Disaster Management Officer) based in Taroom, regarding rainfall and river/creek heights in the Taroom district. From this we were able to make reasonable predictions of the likely extent of flooding in Theodore (downstream of Taroom). All this information was passed onto the LDCC. Landholders in the catchment of Castle Creek would phone in rainfall information as events unfolded. Several of the landholders were longterm residents and were able to provide comparative advice on previous flooding including the 1956 flooding.

- c) Rainfall information coming from residents within the catchments without automatic rainfall stations was relayed by the LECC to the LDCC and in turn to the Bureau of Meteorology.
 - d) All rainfall and flood height predictions were disseminated to the community via public meetings and emailed to approximately 400 persons in Theodore and the surrounding district.
- 6) In relation to paragraph 5, an indication of the sources/s, accuracy and timeliness of that information for local purposes and any suggested improvements.**

Sources, accuracy and timeliness of information

- a) The information was provided by local community members and proved to be accurate and timely.
- b) The community members in the immediate catchment areas would phone in their rainfall information for a specified period and would also provide an anticipated outcome of the rainfall impact in their area and downstream. Given that many of the residents were longterm, their knowledge based on the 1956 flood event, generally proved to be beneficial. This was particularly relevant in respect of the rainfall event over the Castle Creek catchment when a resident (Roy Brown) who lives near the headwaters of Castle Creek advised of significant heavy rain and warned that this would have potential major flooding effects for Theodore. Again this information was forwarded to the LDCC and relayed to the community at the public meetings and via emails.

Suggested improvements

- c) Provision of additional flood gauges and rainfall gauges, particularly in the significant catchments around and upstream of Theodore. Castle Creek which flows into the Dawson River at Theodore is of major significance. My understanding is that additional rainfall and flood gauges are provided by the Bureau of Meteorology and that Council is required to maintain them. The specific location for gauges would be determined in close consultation between Council, BOM, Sunwater and the communities in Banana Shire.
- d) Council has provided funding for a flood study of the Dawson River, specifically including the townships of Taroom, Theodore, Baralaba and the rural residential community adjacent to the river near Moura. This allocation was approved in Council's 2009-10 budget. I am aware that the gathering of information for the flood study has been occurring.
- e) The technology of any gauges or devices should be such that they are capable of working in remote and adverse conditions, e.g. solar powered equipment and backup batteries or generators.

7) Any local measures taken 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.

Local measures taken to protect life and private/public property in connection with the 2010/2011 flood events

- a) This was controlled by the LDCC and the QPS. I am advised that these issues have been addressed in the statement of Collin Head dated 5 April 2011. The LECC's role was purely one of information dissemination and on the ground coordination of Council's resources and instructions provided by the LDCC.
- b) The LECC disseminated information provided by the LDCC in relation to the arrangements for the evacuation. The actual evacuation was coordinated by the Police.
- c) Road information signage was erected by Council staff under the direction of the DTMR, Police or the LDCC.
- d) The process of evacuation involved:-
 - i. Residents of the Theodore Retirement village being evacuated to the Theodore Motel adjacent to the RSL when the river reached a height of 13.7m. This was coordinated without incident.
 - ii. Voluntary evacuation of the community occurred following discussions between the LDCC and myself and this was effected immediately. Initially, only one family took up the offer to voluntarily evacuate. I pleaded with nursing mothers to take up this offer, but they declined.
 - iii. Mandatory evacuation was then ordered once the likely impacts of flooding in Castle Creek became apparent and significant flooding was occurring in the northern part of the town.
- e) Delays occurred with the mandatory evacuation due to the requirement for the LDCC to obtain quotes for helicopter services. The flooding of Castle Creek significantly altered the window of opportunity to evacuate residents in a timely manner, in particular, the opportunity to evacuate people by road, i.e. to the Theodore Aerodrome and further by fixed wing aircraft, was not available due to flooding.
- f) Some problems were encountered on roads where it was difficult to provide signage and hence provide advanced warning of road conditions or closure due to the fact that the number of signs required exceeded what was available to Council and that some locations were inaccessible. The matter of road signage during floods needs to be addressed state-wide, with signage which provides the location and type of problem.

Steps taken to disseminate information about those measures to the community

- g) Refer to Q2 response.

- 8) The circumstances of the evacuations, both voluntary and mandatory performed in the local Theodore area in connection with the 2010/2011 flood events, including an assessment of the adequacy and timeliness thereof.**

The circumstances of voluntary evacuations

- a) As a consequence of the daily information sessions community members were able to make informed decisions as to whether they should evacuate voluntarily.

The circumstances of mandatory evacuations

- b) LDCC had identified a river height of 13.7 metres as the trigger point for evacuations. This initially required evacuation of the retirement village. Going on the information passed on from BOM, estimates of when the height of 13.7m would be reached was available for a couple of days before the expected peak. However, due to the high rainfall over the Castle Creek catchment, this timeframe shortened up significantly to approximately 30 hours. Up to this point in time, the community were reasonably comfortable with the overall situation. Beyond this time, residents were getting nervous as levels were predicted to go above the 1956 levels. Some residents were getting concerned about household pets and whether they could take them with them or be forced to leave them behind. Once people knew they had to evacuate the township they accepted the evacuation by helicopter as an appropriate strategy. They accepted the need to be flown to Moura and the offer by Anglo Coal to accommodate people allayed many fears about going to Moura.

An assessment of the adequacy and timeliness of the evacuations

- c) The adequacy and timelines of the evacuations were appropriate and adequate until there were unexpected extreme rain events in the upper catchment of Castle Creek. A local property owner (Roy Brown of Glenleigh Station) made the LECC aware of these events, and the information was immediately passed on to the LDCC. This occurred at 4:30am on Saturday, 25 December 2010.
- d) Subsequently, mandatory evacuations were initiated on Tuesday, 28 December 2010 and I was advised of the decision at 3:10pm that day. I called a public meeting as soon as I was advised of this and informed the public of the mandatory evacuation. I was not involved in securing helicopters for the evacuation.
- 9) 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.**

The establishment, and subsequent operation and performance, of Evacuation Centre/s in the local area

- a) The Theodore town hall was the coordination centre for the evacuation of the town of Theodore. All persons processed through this centre were evacuated to Moura or Biloela.
- b) The LECC had no involvement in the establishment and operation of evacuation centres. Accordingly, I am unable to comment on these matters. I am advised that these issues have been addressed in the statement of Collin Head dated 5 April 2011.

An assessment of particular difficulties encountered

- c) As the Theodore LECC was not involved in the establishment and operation of evacuation centres I have no firsthand knowledge of any particular difficulties encountered.

10) Any involvement the interim Theodore LECC 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 involvement the interim Theodore LECC had with State or Federal agencies during the 2010/2011 flood events

- a) The LECC worked very closely with QFRS, QAS, Queensland Health, QPS and EMQ at Theodore.
- b) Formal meetings with all agencies were held daily, and informal liaison continued during the course of each day. These meetings were organised to discuss the latest information and any necessary actions. It was at those meetings that the details of information was prepared for dissemination to the public. The participants in the meetings would contact the LDCC for information and instruction prior to planning operations to be carried until the holding of the next meeting.

An assessment of the adequacy and timeliness thereof during the 2010/2011 flood events

- c) There were no issues with the adequacy and timelines of government agencies' involvement during the flood event.

11) The nature and timing of any communications that the Interim Theodore LECC 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 or effectiveness of any such direction/s.

The nature and timing of any communications that the interim Theodore LECC had with the District Disaster Coordinator (DDC), the State Disaster Coordinator or the State Recovery Coordinator

- a) NIL.

Directions given by the DCC and the nature or effectiveness of any such direction/s

- b) NIL.

12) An assessment of the adequacy of equipment and communications systems for the interim Theodore LECC during the 2010/2011 flood events.

- a) Phone landlines failed early in the event and there was reliance on the mobile phone network during the event. The fact that a Telstra technician resided in Theodore greatly assisted with the continuity of the mobile phone network.

- b) Power was also lost for a short period of time, and this resulted in the loss of computer and landline telephone capability and communications for a couple of hours until power was restored.
- c) The ability to have conference phone capacity between the SES facility and the LDCC control centre is an absolute necessity. A video link should also be investigated. Basically, up to and during the evacuation I was using my mobile phone on loud speaker for teleconferencing. This was a less than adequate arrangement given the number of people involved and ambient noise which was always a problem. My mobile phone was used constantly hence battery recharges were difficult. Land line telephones were not operational, nor were teleconferencing facilities available. A video link would provide face to face communications with several people at a time.
- d) The location of the SES shed in Theodore is an issue as it is located on a narrow lane adjacent to the Dawson River and susceptible to flooding during major flood events. On Tuesday, 28 December 2010 at 6:07am, the LDCC was advised that the SES shed had to be evacuated as it was inundated. As river height readings were monitored from this location, the ability to take further readings was hampered. The police monitored the readings as there were no other personnel remaining in Theodore.

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

- a) The critical role played by the LECC in disseminating information to the community assisted in ensuring the community responded appropriately and adequately during the flood event.

14) Advice as to the effectiveness of the Interim Theodore LECC and any feature of its operation that may require practical or legislative change to improve future disaster management in the local area.

The effectiveness of the Interim Theodore LECC

- a) The Theodore LECC achieved its primary objective in ensuring the gathering and dissemination of information within the community and coordination of on-ground activities by locals and volunteers alike. This resulted in the community responding appropriately and adequately during the flood event. A level of resilience to this disaster was demonstrated by the community in the response and recovery phases.

Any feature of its operation that may require practical or legislative change to improve future disaster management in the local area


- b) NIL.

15) Comments regarding the provision of donations to the Theodore community and their distribution amongst the community.

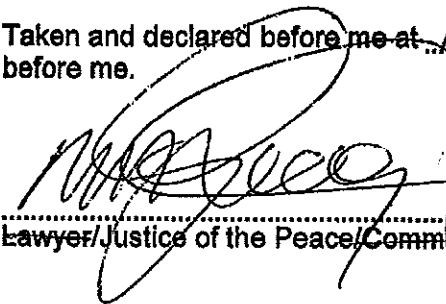
- a) There needs to be state wide coordination of donations, especially material donations.

- b) The delivery of containers with donations should not be allowed until the all clear is given by the LDCC. There should be a Manifest with each container clearly detailing the contents.
- c) Realistically, cash donations are much more beneficial to both community and local businesses.
- d) It is suggested that distribution of financial donations should be handled by local community groups.

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true, and by virtue of the provisions of the Oaths Act 1867.


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Declarer

Taken and declared before me at Silvora this 18th day of May 2011,
before me.


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Lawyer/Justice of the Peace/Comm. Sec.

