

## **QUEENSLAND FLOODS COMMISSION OF INQUIRY**

### **Requirement to Provide Written Information to Commission of Inquiry**

**Peter Stewart, Chief Executive Officer,**  
**Goondiwindi Regional Council**

In accordance with section 5 of the *Commissions of Inquiry Act 1950* (Qld), I Peter Stewart, Chief Executive Officer, Goondiwindi Regional Council, provide the following statement of information as directed by letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2011. In providing the information this statement will be relative to the information request for the years 2010/2011.

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

- (a) Leading up to the floods, bi-annual meetings of the Local Disaster Management Group had been conducted in accordance with the requirements of the *Disaster Management Act 2003*. A record of proceedings at these meetings has been maintained and was provided to the Commission by Council pursuant to dot-point 22 of the Commission's request for information.
- (b) Since the amalgamation of Waggamba Shire Council, Inglewood Shire Council and Goondiwindi Town Council, significant work has also been put into the consolidation of the three previous Disaster Management Plans into one Regional Plan. The consolidated Disaster Management Plan was finalised and adopted by Goondiwindi Regional Council on 23 June 2010 (*resolution number OM-0130*). There were some sub-plans in relation to evacuation and welfare that were still to be completed immediately prior to the floods.
- (c) In November 2010, the LDMG participated in the Regional Training Exercise "ORKO" conducted by Emergency Management Queensland. This was an exercise based on wide spread flooding across several local authorities. Notes and action plans were prepared from that exercise, which were provided to the Commission pursuant to dot-point 22 of the request for information.

**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.***

- (a) Immediately prior to the flood events, the following measures were taken by Council:
  - (i) Sandbagging – sandbags were made available to residents of lower lying areas in preparation of protecting their properties; and
  - (ii) Levee Bank Surveillance - 24 hour surveillance was carried out of the existing Goondiwindi Levee Banks whilst water was in contact with the banks. Up to four teams of two staff continuously patrolled the levee bank looking for signs of leaking or over-topping. In response to these patrols emergency works to raise some sections of the levee were undertaken.

- (b) The measures put in place saw the integrity of the Goondiwindi Levee Bank maintained with only those outside of the levee area on rural residential lands affected by the event.
  - (c) Consultants have now been engaged by Council to provide advice on the areas of levee bank identified as requiring further treatment.
3. ***Local participation, or otherwise, in EMQ's 2010 Pre-Season Flood and Cyclone Workshop, including an assessment of the local assistance gained thereby.***
- (a) Council staff and Councillor Kearney, Chair of the LDMG, attended the EMQ workshop at St George on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2010. In my opinion, the long range meteorological advice was of some benefit to provide the impetus to revisit preparations for the coming season.
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.***
- (a) Council staff and Councillor Kearney, Chair of the LDMG, attended also these sessions at Toowoomba on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2010.
5. ***Any measures taken to train and/or equip the local State Emergency Services (SES), including an assessment of the adequacy and timelines thereof.***
- (a) Council has ongoing requirements to ensure that local SES groups are equipped and prepared to provide assistance during various types of emergency events. For example, Council provides buildings, vehicles and general support to local units. Council maintains all equipment including that supplied by EMQ to units including flood-boats.
  - (b) EMQ is primarily concerned with the training and specific operational aspects of the SES group. Council officers maintain regular contact with the Area Director for EMQ to gain feedback as to the operational readiness of local units and to discuss equipment needs as necessary. Council does not interfere with the operational actions of SES units as this is a matter for EMQ.
6. ***The local actions undertaken in advance of and/or in respect of the 2010/2011 flood events in relation to resourcing, co-ordination and deployment of any personnel and equipment.***
- (a) The flooding in the Texas region occurred so quickly that there was limited time to deploy resources. As the event moved east through the region, various resources were deployed by the LDMG through its plans as appropriate. Council also delivered its services, such as maintenance of water and sewerage services and repairs to roads, and was dealing with the recovery of areas in Texas before the event had even reached the Goondiwindi area.
  - (b) The most significant deployment of resources were in the areas of sandbag preparations, monitoring of levee banks, the door to door delivery of information and notices and the manning of call centres and other communication tools.

- (c) After the event, significant resources have been deployed in reinstating roads and other infrastructure and assisting those impacted with the removal of rubbish and debris.
- 7. *The local actions undertaken in respect of the 2010/2011 flood events in relation to immediate management, response and recovery operations, including the co-ordination and deployment of personnel and equipment.***
- (a) The timeline attached to this statement and marked "Annexure 1" provides a summary of the key actions taken during the flood events. In particular:
- i. Stage 1 of the 3 Stage Evacuation Plan was activated. The Evacuation Centre at the Goondiwindi Showgrounds was established and operational. Council staff commenced door knocking of all residences in the high risk low lying areas of the township (Brennans Road, west of West Street and the Glenoak Road Precinct, comprising approximately 500 households). Advice was also provided to residents regarding the option of voluntary evacuation to friends or relatives or to the Evacuation Centre at the Goondiwindi Showgrounds.
  - ii. Evacuation of the Goondiwindi Hospital and Aged Care Facility (Kaloma) was carried out as a precautionary measure. Patients were transported to Inglewood and Warwick.
  - iii. 24 hour surveillance was carried out on the town levee banks.
  - iv. Sandbagging of key infrastructure was performed, and the provision of sandbags to members of the public from the Council depot for private residences was also done.
  - v. Rural properties west of Goondiwindi along the river system (downstream) were contacted to provide an update on the flood information and also to ascertain whether or not they required assistance so that appropriate plans could be made.
  - vi. Department of Community Services [DOCS] arranged to open an outreach centre in Texas and Moonie for residents Council played a role in providing DOCS with appropriate office space and support and advertised and promoted their presence. Council provide much guidance to DOCS as to the areas that they should concentrate their activities upon and other background advice.
  - vii. Council staff assisted with clean up in the Texas area. The Mayor and nominated Councillor attended meetings in Texas and Glenarvon areas to discuss recovery with local residents.
- 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.***
- (a) Due to the presence of the floodplain, most essential infrastructure is designed and constructed to remain serviceable during most flood events. Where necessary, Council infrastructure was further protected by sandbags. At various stages during the flood events, aircraft were used to view impacts upon the road network to enable crews to be dispatched as quickly as possible to areas most immediately impacted. The Goondiwindi electricity substation had a temporary levee constructed around it and the local electricity providers were consulted

through the LDMG at all times to describe to the potential impact upon their service should certain events arise.

- (b) Prior to highways and infrastructure being impacted, the LDMG made contact with local food and fuel suppliers to ascertain the supplies on hand.
- (c) As the event moved slowly through the floodplain, and prior to the peak reaching Goondiwindi, rural properties west of Goondiwindi were contacted to provide an update on the flood information and also to ascertain whether or not they required assistance so that appropriate plans could be made to resupply or evacuate them as necessary. As a result, a semi-trailer of sandbags was sent to Talwood in the west of the local authority area to enable their local preparations to commence.

**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.**

- (a) The Bureau of Meteorology ("BOM") provided significant information in the lead up to and during the event. The LDMG Chair and relevant staff were afforded regular access to hydrology staff to query the latest predictions. The LDMG monitored the BOM website to see the various electronic gauge readings at river stations throughout the region in between the regular updates from the BOM. This information was posted on Council's website, distributed via Council media release, posted to boards at common public meeting places through the region's towns, hand delivered to local businesses and chambers of commerce and posted through Council's Facebook page.

**10. In relation to item 9<sup>1</sup>, an indication of the source/s, accuracy and timeliness of that information for local purposes.**

- (a) Council found the information provided in item 9 above by the BOM to be generally timely and generally accurate.

**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.**

- (a) The local measures specifically taken are identified in paragraphs 2, 6, 7, 8 and 12 of this statement, and more generally, in paragraphs 1, 3, 4 and 5.

**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.**

- (a) Evacuation of the Goondiwindi hospital and aged care facility were carried out based on the predictions from the BOM. The evacuations were carried out some 24 to 36 hours before the expected flood peak to enable the evacuations to be completed by road as far as possible. Voluntary evacuations were recommended to low lying areas 24 hours before the expected flood peak in

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission's request refers to item 6. However, for the purposes of this statement, it has been assumed that reference to item 9 was intended

response to discussions via teleconference with the State Disaster Coordination Centre.

- (b) Those in the low lying areas of the Texas region were made aware of the approaching flood by Queensland Police and were recommended to evacuate. In most cases this occurred with sufficient time. Those who did not evacuate made a decision to prepare and sit through the event.
- (c) The use of the National Emergency alert system, operated through the District and State Disaster Centres, to issue the voluntary evacuation notice caused some concern in that the message was so abbreviated as a result of the limitation of the system that many were confused by it and immediately called our call centre.

**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.***

- (a) Only the Goondiwindi Evacuation Centre was activated as other evacuations were to friends or relatives due to the small numbers involved. The centre was established quickly and was well resourced for the event that occurred. The site identified has some ongoing issues to be improved including more facilities for larger numbers of longer term evacuees. Ongoing planning and hopefully funding will address these issues, which were not significant.

**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.***

- (a) There were no fatalities recorded in the region as a result of the flood events.

**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.***

- (a) Those in the low lying areas of the Texas region were made aware of the approaching flood by Queensland Police and were recommended to evacuate. In most cases this occurred with sufficient time. Those who did not evacuate made a decision to prepare and sit through the event.
- (b) All interactions with Queensland Police were very productive and no issues were encountered.

**16. *The nature and timing of any communications within the disaster management hierarchy, including particularly any communications had with the District Disaster Co-ordinator (DDC), the State Disaster Co-ordinator or the State Recovery Co-ordinator, and whether any directions/s were given by the DDC and the nature of any such direction/s.***

- (a) Regular updates were provided to the DDC through the formal Situation Reports.
- (b) Requests for Assistance were sent to the DDC when necessary.
- (c) Otherwise, the Mayor, Chair of the LDMG and myself had regular telephone meetings with the SDCC.

(d) No formal directions were given to us during the flood events.

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

(a) The LDMG was generally satisfied that the equipment necessary for the event worked well and was adequate for the event.

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

(a) The community responded well to the event. Most evacuations occurred with sufficient time. Those who did not evacuate made a decision to prepare and sit through the event.

**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).***

(a) Council has now engaged a specialise consultant to analyse the integrity of the Goondiwindi Town levee banks and the viability of levee systems for Inglewood Town.

(b) Council's is also reviewing its Disaster Management Plan with the intention to incorporate outcomes from the January 2011 flood event, including the compilation of operational guidelines to support implementation of the Local Disaster Management Plan (i.e. Standard Operating Procedures for the Local Disaster Co-ordination Centre and Duty Cards for Individual Agencies - comprising checklists for each of the four disaster management phases ie Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery).

(c) Council is liaison with the BOM in order to request additional flood stations along Dumaresq River. Council will also provide the BOM with copies of Council's flood studies to enable it to update its modelling to take into account potential flows beyond their current historical data, which Council has had modelled.

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

(a) This is stated below in paragraph 21.

(b) Otherwise, greater investment should be made in flood warning equipment for catchment areas where sudden rain events can cause flooding to occur very quickly (i.e. flash flooding). This is particularly appropriate to the far eastern portion of the region.

**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.***

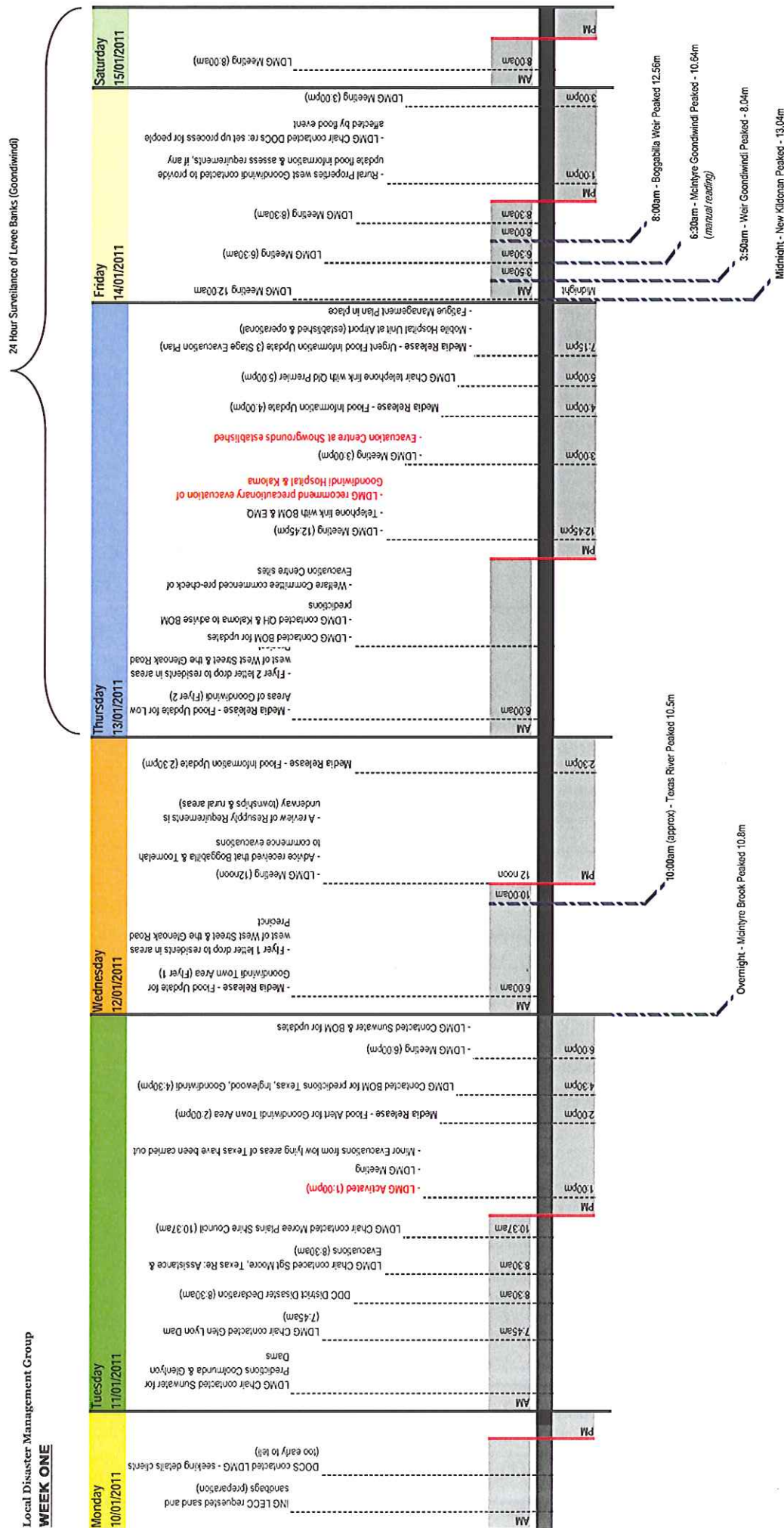
(a) Council encountered some issues with the co-ordination of activities across the State border. For example, a neighbouring town of approximately 250 people only ten kilometres away that relies entirely upon Goondiwindi for the provision of medical services was evacuated during the event. The NSW Council responsible

for that area then returned everyone to the town without communicating with the LDMG, which meant that residents of that town were returned even though Goondiwindi had evacuated its hospital and was operating out of a temporary facility. I believe that other local agencies experienced similar communication issues associate with other cross-border towns in going about their roles. Better communication from across the border needs to be in place for future events.



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Peter Stewart  
**Chief Executive Officer**





# Timeline of Key Activities January 2011 Flood Event

Local Disaster Management Group  
**WEEK TWO**

