

Questionnaire for SES Local Controllers

Moreton Bay Region SES Unit

1. Structure of SES Units

1.1 Please describe the structure of your unit, including the number and location of any constituent groups and the number of members in each group.

Moreton Bay Region SES Unit consists of 6 Groups:

Arana Hills, Bribie Island, Caboolture, Deception Bay, Petrie and Redcliffe.

We have recently commenced the development of an SES depot at Woodford which is linked and managed by the Caboolture Group until it is approved as its own group.

The membership of these groups as at 30 July 2011 is:

Arana Hills	50 members
Bribie Island	22 members
Caboolture	44 members
Deception Bay	22 members
Petrie	48 members
Redcliffe	70 members
Woodford	23 members

The unit is managed by a full time Local Controller who is supported by two volunteer Deputy Local Controllers and a SES member who provides administrative support one day a week.

The Unit has an administration building which is occupied daily by the Local Controller and is also being developed as a Unit Emergency Operations Centre when more than one SES group has been activated and a support and coordination function is required.

1.1 Please indicate whether any members of your unit are employed on a paid, full-time basis. If so, how many are employed on this basis and what positions do they fill?

This unit only has a full time Local Controller who is paid an honourarium. The Deputy Local Controllers, Group Leaders and other executive members of this Unit are SES volunteers.

1.2 Do you believe there is a need for SES members (including Local Controllers) to be employed on a paid, full-time basis? Please explain why or why not, including whether there are other ways in which SES members could be rewarded for their time.

It would not be cost effective to have full time SES members as there are not sufficient roles and responsibilities for these members. The SES has limited functions as over time the Fire service has undertaken these roles i.e. Road Crash Rescue and Vertical Rescue.

The administrative requirements and strategic planning and development for SES Local Controllers is huge which in some cases makes it very difficult for Volunteer Local Controllers to function effectively.

I cannot see at any stage in the future that the administrative and other functions associated with the position will be reduced but increased further especially with Workplace Health and Safety requirements, training requirements, reporting, strategic planning, operations management, daily management and problem solving of minor issues, membership management to name a few.

The position of Local Controller needs to be developed as a full time paid position with the support of a full time deputy, administrative assistant and training coordinator.

The Local Controller is a 24/7 position as there are always issues with membership, equipment or activations.

SES volunteers are just that, volunteers and providing them with payment removes that volunteer basis. This will then require a full HR management system as they will then be seen as employees on a shift basis.

The Australian Government has an incentive for employers to support Military Reserves and I cannot see why this incentive system cannot be explored to help the volunteer. SES members give freely of their free time but cannot give during work hours unless they take recreation leave.

The having to take leave or not being able to assist the community due to work commitments has on occasions prevented members from continuing with the service as they feel it is not worthwhile because they cannot get time off.

By supporting employers financially, it may be possible to provide high level skills training on a Monday to Friday basis which will provide better quality training as well as a wider scope of training at one time. This would reduce the need for some weekend activities as well as providing the continuum of training as members currently miss training nights due to ill health, family commitments etc.

1.3 If there is more than one Local Controller in your local government area, what effect does this have on operations?

There is only one Local Controller position in this local government area

2. Readiness for the 2010/2011 floods

We would like to know whether you feel that your unit was adequately prepared to cope with the demands of the 2010/2011 floods. Please provide a brief explanation in response to the following questions.

2.1 Did your unit have enough training to prepare it for the 2010/2011 floods?

During this flood event I was only a SES member of Caboolture Group and I cannot provide detailed information. From what I have observed since commencing in the role in March this year it appears that various groups were more prepared than others. This may be due to the history of this unit before amalgamation as each had its own role and responsibilities within their previous local government areas. From

debrief notes and discussions it appeared that the groups functioned well as the operation continued.

2.2 Did your unit have enough volunteers to cope with the demand?

As per the previous question I cannot provide detailed information regarding that period but as with any event the question of enough volunteers is always raised. I was working out of the Caboolture Group as a volunteer and it was identified that there was a shortage of volunteers at the time. This was due to members not being able to get to the building as they were cut off or that they went to work and could not get back in time. From my group perspective there was little advice on being needed until it was too late.

There were members available at the group but unfortunately they were not trained to go into the field but provided assistance at the group with filling sand bags and supporting the group. There were only two vehicles available at the height of the flood so even if there were a large number of members available we could only move 8 members.

2.3 Did your unit have enough equipment and resources?

The unit is adequately resourced to fulfil its functional role but as it grows there is always need for more equipment.

It is always wonderful to have a large number of volunteers but it becomes difficult to move them around effectively due to transport shortage especially if you need to move them quickly.

2.4 Overall, do you think your unit was adequately prepared to respond to the 2010/2011 floods

From my observations since taking on this role it is apparent that there were some shortcomings within the Unit as a whole but not to the detriment of responding to the floods. This was possibly due to changes in leadership at all levels and having the unit establish itself especially due to the recent amalgamation.

From information provided in debriefs and observations on the ground there was a huge gap in communications networks as once the phone and internet system failed so did the communications links across the unit. From my observations as a member there were no plans developed on communications and information passing or a control structure as at one point there were no means of requesting resources and supplies due to the communications blackout. The groups ran the operations locally the best that they could and were successful in their activities.

The unit has demonstrated that individually the groups are prepared to various levels and have the ability to respond to events.

3. Operations during the 2010/2011 floods

3.1 Please describe the activities undertaken by your unit and/or its groups during the 2010/2011 floods (e.g. Request for Assistance, rescues, evacuations)

Unfortunately I am not able to supply detailed information as I was only a member at the time. I am aware that the unit responded to the flood operations within the Moreton Bay Region but also provided immediate support to neighbouring local governments, to TC Yasi deployments as well as central Queensland floods.

4. Command and control

4.1 Generally speaking, please describe your responsibilities as Local Controller during disaster response operations.

My responsibilities during disaster operations include:

- Activating the group or unit in a timely manner
- Check to see if the group/s have responded to the RFA's
- Activate the unit emergency operations centre if the activation escalates
- Monitor and oversee the operation ensuring that the groups have sufficient resources and support
- Plan ahead from situation reports received to ensure that the tasks can be completed in a timely manner or that there is a need to request further assistance from other units
- Liaise and report up to EMQ for resources
- Monitor RFA on line to view task progress
- Re-deploy teams around the region to best utilise them
- Identify upcoming problems regarding flooding and access
- Liaise with Deputy Local Controller located within the LDCC to ensure that RFA's from the LDMG are addressed
- Monitor the progress and manage fatigue issues especially in projected operations
- Coordinate teams and resources as required
- Develop situation reports for LDMG and EMQ
- Provide media information on how and what the SES members are doing
- Ensure that the teams and IMT's receive appropriate welfare support
- Provide support and direction to Deputy Local Controllers and group leaders as required.
- Provide a management structure and advice as required to ensure that priority tasks are undertaken and completed in a timely manner.

4.2 As a Local Controller, who do you report to during disaster response operations?

This position reports up two lines, EMQ and Local Government.

This is achieved by developing Situation Reports and sending both parties the same information. This position has some autonomy to make decisions and provide direction during operations which is based on the information being supplied from Groups, RFA's, LDMG and other sources.

I have seen in some instances in the past where EMQ plays a management role and makes decisions on behalf of the Local Controller which undermines their authority to manage the Unit and effectively coordinate resources and teams

4.3 Where does your SES unit receive Requests for Assistance from?

Currently we have developed a system where individual requests are emailed directly to the Groups with a cc to me. If the requests escalate then the groups will activate RFA on line and manage the tasks from there. I will maintain a monitoring watch on the operations progress and advise accordingly.

For non disaster related tasks the requests could come from the SDCC Watch Desk Officers or directly from QPS for a search.

4.4 What is the process of tasking SES members when Requests for Assistance are received by your unit?

Teams are selected by the Group Leaders and are tasked directly by the groups via their IMT's. As the operations escalates, or is across the wider area of the Moreton Bay region, then tasking will be undertaken by the Group IMT but from a request from the Unit IMT on a "as needs basis" to redeploy teams to help elsewhere as required.

4.5 During the 2010/2011 floods, did your unit receive any competing Requests for Assistance? If so, how were these managed or prioritised?

Unfortunately I was not in the Local Controllers position so I am not able to provide any details

4.6 During the floods, did your unit receive any Requests for Assistance that it was unable to respond to? If so, how were these requests managed?

Unfortunately I was not in the Local Controllers position so I am not able to provide any details

As a member on the ground during the floods in Caboolture we had difficulty in responding to sand bag requests as there were so many, we did not have the vehicles to move the bags and we were also effectively isolated from most areas who requested the bags. Once the water subsided we made contact with individuals who requested assistance to see if they still required us as well as going out the next day to see if they still needed help.

4.7 Were any members of your unit deployed to any other region during the 2010/2011 floods? If so, how was this managed?

Many members from this unit were deployed to assist other regions and this was managed through EMQ Brisbane Region. The request came from the region office from which suitable members were called to see if they were available. This process was undertaken by the Group Leaders and Local Controller. Travel arrangements were made by EMQ which was disseminated to the members through the internal chain of command.

4.8 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your unit's contact and coordination (if any) with the following:

- a) Local Disaster Coordinator
- b) Local Disaster Coordination Centre

c) Local Disaster Management Group

Unfortunately I was not in the position of Local Controller so I cannot provide detailed information. From being an SES volunteer on the day of the floods it was apparent that the Local Controller was with the LDMG and LDCC.

4.9 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your unit's contact and coordination (if any) with the following:

- a) Local Disaster Coordinator
- b) Local Disaster Coordination Centre
- c) Local Disaster Management Group

Unfortunately I was not in the position of Local Controller so I cannot provide detailed information. My understanding is that all contact and coordination was undertaken by the Local Controller. There was a loss of communications during the event where it was not possible to contact anyone for advice, direction and sometime support.

4.10 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your contact (if any) with Emergency Management Queensland Area Directors and/or Regional Directors?

Unfortunately I was not in the position of Local Controller so I cannot provide detailed information.

4.11 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your interactions (if any) with other emergency service organisations?

Unfortunately I was not in the position of Local Controller so I cannot provide detailed information.

4.12 During the 2010/2011 floods, were the requirements or expectations of local disaster managers ever in conflict with those of Emergency Management Queensland? If so, how were these various demands resolved (if any)?

Unfortunately I was not in the position of Local Controller so I cannot provide detailed information.

4.13 In your view, what is the role of Emergency Management Queensland's Area and Regional Directors during disasters?

The role of EMQ Area and Regional Directors is to provide support to SES Local Controllers and be a conduit to obtain further resources and teams as required. They also provide support and advice to LDMG and DDMG's as well as being a liaison officer between these groups and SES.

5. Communications

5.1 What type/s of communication devices were available and/or used during the 2010/2011 floods?

Mobile Phones, UHF SES Radios, land lines and email.

Both types of phones and internet failed during the peak of the flood as we could not get any information out or in on a continual basis. It was very hit and miss. UHF network within our area worked well.

5.2 Did any of the communication devices your unit used fail during the 2010/2011 floods? If so please provide details.

Both types of phones and internet failed during the peak of the flood as we could not get any information out or in on a continual basis. It was very hit and miss. UHF network within our area worked well.

5.3 Generally speaking, are any of the communication methods your unit uses integrated or inter-operable with other emergency service organisations?

No

6. Funding

6.1 Where does your unit receive funding from?

The Moreton Bay Region SES unit is well supported by the Moreton Bay Regional Council. This funding is for the ongoing maintenance of vehicles, yearly replacement program of vehicles, building maintenance and upgrades and replacement of some equipment as required.

EMQ provides limited funding for buildings and vehicles and regional training. EMQ also funds vehicle registration, insurance, supply of uniforms and operational equipment.

6.2 Has your unit applied for additional funding from the State Government in the 2009/2010 or 2010/2011 financial years? If so, what was the funding program and did you find the application process easy/difficult?

The Unit applied for vehicle funding for two vehicles but was not successful. I am unable to comment on the complexity however from what I have notice for this funding round there seems to be some extensive work and research required as part of the process.

6.3 Do you have input into how the funding received by your unit is used?

Since I have been in the position I have not seen the budget allocation for the unit so it is difficult to provide input.

6.4 In your view, is the total amount of funding currently received by your unit adequate? If not, please describe how your unit would benefit from additional funding.

The funding received by Moreton Bay Regional Council is adequate. The unit would benefit from additional funding in areas of training, we ask members to give up their valuable time to train and on occasions ask them to participate on weekend courses but we are not funded to provide them with a lunch or morning tea. This is currently being donated by dedicated members. Additional funding would also provide extra

vehicles as we are building up our membership pool but we do not readily have vehicles to move them or use them effectively in the field.

6.5 Do you think that the way in which funding is allocated and distributed to your unit is adequate? if not, how could this be improved?

I feel that the allocation of funding is adequate.

6.6 Does your unit undertake any additional fundraising activities? If so:

a) what types of fundraising activities does your unit undertake?

Fundraising activities undertaken by the Unit is through supporting community groups and council community activities. On occasion the groups may undertake an activity to raise additional funds.

b) approximately what percentage of your operating budget does this account for?

The bulk of the operating budget is derived from Council. Funds raised on minimal occasion provides support for purchase of additional equipment.

c) does fundraising present any difficulties?

Fundraising itself does not present any difficulty but how the money is used need to be reviewed. The money is raised by the SES Support Group associated with each SES group but the group leader or the Local Controller have no say on how the money is used.

Having Support Groups separate from the organisation but raising funds on behalf of the organisation needs to be greatly reviewed to allow some proper management and use of the funds donated by the community.

7. Other

7.1 Do you have any suggestions as to how the SES can attract and retain members, either for your particular unit or at a state-wide level?

Currently we have a steady recruitment pool which we can easily handle. Recruitment is not the main issue but retaining them is. In the past members were used in the field under the supervision of a suitably skilled leader and successfully fulfilled the task.

This has been occurring for over twenty years but all of a sudden under new management by staff who have no concept or understanding of the culture of SES made these members jump through hoops before they could undertake simple tasks.

We need to review this process now that there has been a management change and start relaxing some of the requirements these new members must undertake before being able to go into the field.

This delay has driven good members away as well as delays in uniforms, membership numbers and certificates from courses they have attended (some can come up to 3 months late)

We provide members with accredited training which is valuable to them and the organisation. We provide Certificate II training to our members but they undertake assessment activities that are exam type with 100% pass and this at times also drives members away.

We need to make this training assessment process more simple and less onerous on the participant as well as the volunteer trainer.

We are no longer able to provide training more readily at a local level as now we have to have instructors with a full Certificate IV in Training and Assessment when in the past we were able to use Trainer Assessors who were members with partial Certificate IV.

Now there is no support either financially or physically to help the member get through the Certificate IV training courses as they are above some good volunteers capabilities who have the skills and abilities to pass on the knowledge to undertake SES activities.

Some EMQ management at various levels appear to treat volunteers as people with no skills where these members come with a wider range of skills and abilities which is higher than the skills of some managers.

This is the only emergency service that employs managers who do not have emergency service skills or background especially SES skills.

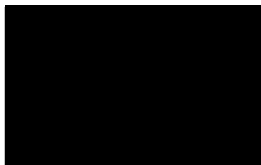
The membership process for new members is over the top where a member has to provide their details many times in one process. I have seen new prospective members leave because of the paperwork required to be completed or that part is missing or not correctly filled in. The organisation has gone from one membership form to many over the past few years.

By fixing some of these issues may assist in the retention of a lot of members.

7.2 Please make any other comments you wish about SES operations generally and/or during the 2010/2011 floods.

EMQ staff need to be trained, informed and inducted on how SES functions as they come into the organisation from various backgrounds, military, fire service, police and other non emergency government departments provide their individual views and processes on how the SES should be run. They should undertake SES training and skills so that they are aware of what SES members do and what training they have to go through.

It appears that EMQ does not have a clear position of their involvement during disasters especially regional staff and managers.



Henk van den Ende
Local Controller
Moreton Bay Region SES Unit