

To: The Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

The following information is supplied to the Queensland flood commission of enquiry as per your request received Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2011.

I have been a member of the Murweh Shire Council SES unit since October 1996 and during my time have held the positions of Group Leader (Charleville Group), Deputy Controller and am currently the Local Controller, a position I have held since 16<sup>th</sup> December 2003. During my time in the SES I have been involved in the response to three of the four major flood events in the Murweh Shire those being February 1997, January 2008, and March 2010. I have also had the opportunity to deploy to other locations within the southwest area of operations and also task force deployment to Brisbane (Gap Storms). In the 2010/2011 floods I was also deployed to the Lockyer Valley under the Council to Council Program (C2C) to assist in the Co-ordination Centre for a period of three weeks.

## 1. Structure of the SES

- 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.

The Murweh Shire Council SES unit consists of 2 groups at this time, those being Charleville and Morven. As at 5<sup>th</sup> October 2011 the Charleville SES has a total of 31 active members and 21 reserve members. Active members are those who are available to attend training on a regular basis and are also available for callout. Reserve members are those who have joined the SES, have completed minimal training but may be available for activation in a major event. Morven has 1 active member and 16 reserve members. Augathella has no active members and 34 reserve members.

Morven and Augathella are both supported by Council staff in the event of activation until suitably qualified SES members can be deployed from the Charleville group. In major events this support may be from the neighbouring shires of Blackall/Tambo or Maranoa Regional.

The following executive positions are filled within the Murweh Shire SES Unit.

- Local Controller – Allan Pemberton
- Deputy Controller – David Whitehead
- Group Leader (Charleville) – Robyn Schrader
- Group Leader (Augathella) – Dale Ney – yet to be formally appointed
- Group Leader (Morven) – Sandra Gordon

- 1.2 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.

No one is employed full time however one council employee is employed as the Local Controller. This is a role that is taken over and above his normal council duties as the Council's Technical Officer Roads and Drainage. If activated during normal work hours Mr. Pemberton is released from his normal duties to carry out his appointed role as the Local Controller. Mr. Pemberton is paid an honorarium of \$6,000 per year to carry out these duties.

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

I do not believe there is a need to have any paid full time members in the SES in rural regional areas however in the more populated centres I can see the need for the Local Controller to be employed on a full time basis. This may include some of the larger regional centres where there could be sufficient work load for the Local Controller's position to be a dual role eg Disaster Management Officer (DMO)/Local Controller.

I do believe there is a need for some form of recompense for members in the form of incentives. Some incentives that have been discussed in the past have included the tax incentives or discounted registration. These incentives would have to be tied to the level of participation of the individual. For example we do not want members joining just to receive the incentive and you never see them at training/ activations. EMQ has a doctrine that details the level of participation the member is required to undertake in the SES to remain in an active status.

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

This question is not applicable to this LGA

**2. Readiness for the 2010/2011 floods**

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

Yes we did. The Charleville Group trains on a fortnightly basis. This training focuses on the various functions allocated to the group. The group also participates in the various exercises held during the year, in particular the major LDMG exercise that is held in November each year. Members are also encouraged to attend area/regional training activities including the Roma Area Muster which focuses on general rescue activities.

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

There are sufficient members within the unit to respond to small/medium events however activations on a large or prolonged nature will require additional support from neighbouring SES units or by SES task force deployments if neighbouring units have also been impacted.

2.3 Did your unit have enough equipment and resources?

The unit holds sufficient equipment and resources to carry out our functions. There are also additional resources available at a area/regional level if required.

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

Yes, I believe that the unit was well prepared and although Charleville was not significantly impacted during this event we also were in a position to provide support through deployment of members to St George, Surat and Roma.

**3. Operations during the 2010/2011 floods.**

3.1 Please describe the activities undertaken by your unit and/or it's groups during the 2010/2011 floods (e.g. Requests for Assistance, Rescues, evacuations)

During the 2010/2011 floods the Charleville Group provided support to Augathella when a culvert in the levee bank started to breach. This support included a flood rescue boat with crew and transport of additional pumps. The Charleville crew was then replaced by a SES crew that came down from Tambo to assist. For the majority of the time during this event the Charleville SES crew

were active on a roster basis in Charleville to monitor flood waters and log details on the BOM website for flood heights at the Charleville automatic station (after the gas and telephone line to the automatic station was inadvertently cut by construction works in the area). BOM were unable to respond to the repair due to the large number of other issues happening around the state, and it was within the capacity of our members to take the readings and enter them manually on to the website. There were a few re-supply requests made from isolated properties with SES assisting with delivery of goods across the river.

The Charleville SES also provided flood boat operators and crew to assist in operations at Surat, Roma and St George.

#### 4. Command and Control

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

As the Local Controller of the Murweh Shire SES I have the overall responsibility for the unit as per the Disaster Management Act 2003 and the EMQ/SES Executive position description. During a major activation I hold a position on the LDMG and operate from the Local Disaster Co-ordination centre as the Liaison Officer for SES operations.

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

During all operation, I report primarily to the LDC and also the Area Director EMQ.

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

The SES unit receives requests for assistance via a number of methods, these include residents phoning into or attending the SES shed with a request, Calls received via 132500/RFA Online, the Local Government call centre and any inter agency requests through the LDMG Liaison Officer.

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

Once activation of the unit is approved by the Local Controller or his delegate (during LC absence) SES members are tasked through Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) located at the Charleville SES headquarters. Tasking at this level is usually carried out by the Group Leader. Tasks are prioritised by the urgency of the situations and the level of resources available at the time.

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

There were no competing requests in the 2010/2011 event however in previous events where competing requests were received they were prioritized on the level of need, eg life threatening, injury or loss/damage to property. Where necessary other agencies are requested to assist in these tasks.

- 4.6 During the 2010/2011 floods, did your unit receive any Requests for Assistance that it was unable to respond to? If so, how were these requests managed.

The SES received one request to assist with the evacuation of the Carnarvon Station property caretaker. We were unable to carry out this task due to the severe condition of the road up to the station, (approximately 290km northeast of Charleville). This request was then elevated to the LDMG for their action with a recommendation that this task be carried out using rotary wing aircraft.

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

Members were only deployed to other local authorities within the Roma area of operations. Local Controller was contacted via EMQ Area office to provide details of any members that would be available to deploy. A list of these members was supplied by the Local Controller and all deployments were then managed by EMQ staff in Roma in consultation with the Local SES executive.

- 4.8 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your unit's contact and co-ordination if any with the following:

- (a) Local Disaster Co-ordinator

The unit had daily contact with the LDC through the Liaison Officer in the LDMG and also made daily visits to the EOC to discuss any overnight operational issues. LDC also made himself available to EOC operational staff via phone throughout the night if the situation changed or required LDMG assistance.

- (b) Local Disaster Co-ordination Centre.

The Local Controller holds a position within the LDCC as the SES Liaison Officer.

- (c) The Local Disaster Management Group

The Local Controller is a member of the LDMG

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

- (a) District Disaster Co-ordinator  
(b) District Disaster Co-ordination Centre  
(c) District Disaster Management Group

Contact with the DDC, DDCC, and DDMG is on an as required basis. This is just for briefing on SES situational awareness not for tasking. If SES require tasking/resource assistance through DDC then this request is elevated through the LDC at the LDCC.

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

Regular contact is maintained with both EMQ Area and Regional Directors. Again this is for situational awareness, advice and forward planning throughout the activation. All requests resulting from forward planning process is then progressed through the LDCC for approval.

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

All emergency services in this area work very well together. This is a relationship that has developed over many years through the large number of major activations within the area. The Charleville SES also shares their building with the members of the South Charleville Rural Fire Brigade.

- 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 at all)?

One issue that was evident through the 2010/2011 flood event that stands out was the unnecessary use of a C130 Military Hercules aircraft that was utilized to resupply Charleville IGA with goods. The LDMG had organized through

produce suppliers in South Australia to resupply not only the township of Charleville but also the other towns within the 4 Shires in the southwest corner. This had been organized through the 4 LDMG's and was well underway when it was halted by the SDCC and the goods were dispatched by aircraft. Whilst this may have suited the IGA food stores it certainly did not help out the other produce vendors within the region. Communities are continually being told to become more resilient and this was good planning on behalf of the LDMG's involved given that transport routes into southwest Queensland from the southern states were still not impacted.

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

In my opinion the role of EMQ Area and Regional Directors is to provide expertise to local government in the form of advice, support and additional resource requests developed through local area, regional and state if required.

## 5. Communications

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

The unit has a full range of communication devices available to the EOC including telephone, fax, internet, UHF and HF radio. Additional internet and telephone support is available through EMQ free to move kits and communications trailer. Telstra also have additional resources that can be requested through the LDMG if and when required. The SES EOC has additional phone lines located in the building that can be activated if and when the need arises.

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

All devices worked well during operations with only minor outages to internet which were not due to equipment failure.

- 5.3 Generally speaking, are any of the communication methods your unit uses integrated or interoperable with other emergency services?

Internet, UHF and HF radio networks are all capable of integrating or being interoperable to other agencies.

**6. Funding**

6.1 Where does your unit receive funding from.

The unit receives an annual operating budget (\$50,000) from the Murweh Shire Council, State Government also provides an annual recurrent subsidy (\$3,200). The SES has also received funding in previous years from SES non recurrent vehicle and building funding programs. Council also replaces the SES unit vehicle approximately every seven years in accordance with its plant replacement program and has also provided funds for capital upgrade works at the Charleville SES headquarters. All these funds when provided are in addition to the annual operating budget.

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.

Yes, the unit applied for funding through the SES non recurrent subsidy program for the upgrade of kitchen facilities. The application process was found to be very easy and support is also made through EMQ with writing of submissions. We have also applied for funding through the current round of the NDRP program for funds to upgrade the EOC in the Charleville SES headquarters. The process for applying for this funding was also not difficult and EMQ staff were again willing to assist with the writing of the submissions if required.

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

As an employee of the Murweh Shire Council I am given total control of the SES operating budget with a delegated expenditure level of \$20,000 per order.

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 amount of funding provided by the Murweh Shire Council is more than adequate for normal operations and during major events there has never been an issue with over expenditure of the budget. The State Government funding provided to the Local Government for its SES unit however has not changed since 1974. Given that the State Government supplies the major equipment eg flood boats, trailers, generators it is still the responsibility of local government to maintain and insure this equipment even though they are not the owner of said equipment.



- 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.

Please refer to my statements in 6.3 and 6.4 above. EMQ currently register flood boats, register/insure flood\_boat trailers, however the insurance does not cover the load within a trailer, the boat is therefore classed as a load and not insured. It is also not insured whilst on the water. The Murweh Shire currently provides this insurance which is part of my operating budget at a cost of \$3,170 per year for 3 vessels.

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

- (a) What types of fundraising activities does your unit undertake?

The unit has been given a large marquee that was donated to the Council for use at civic events. The unit raises funds by charging a small fee to the end user for the erection and dismantling of the marquee. The unit also has a BBQ trailer that was donated to them from the local Lions club that we hire out to community members for various functions.

- (b) Approximately what percentage of your operating budget does this account for?

Money raised from fundraising activities goes to the SES social club that is used to assist members with out of pocket expenses (meals) incurred whilst travelling to and from training activities out of the local area. These funds are also used for social club activities and for additional training aids, e.g. TV, DVD equipment in the training room.

- (c) Does fundraising present any difficulties.

Fundraising in a small community such as ours has always been an issue as there is always a large number of community groups fundraising at the same time. It is also extra time the members have to spend out of their daily lives to go out and raise these funds. An example of this is the erection and dismantling of the Marquee. This takes a minimum of 6-8 members about an hour to erect and another hour to dismantle and pack up. For this service we charge \$100.00. It is only a small fee and it does not matter whether it is for a day or 5 days.

## 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?

Over the many years that I have been in the SES it has always been difficult to recruit/retain members in the SES. This is especially prevalent in small and remote communities. Again because there are such a large number of community groups vying for members, it always seems to be the same people who are members of multiple groups. In the Charleville SES we have members who are also members of the Rural Fire Brigade and vice versa. As would be noted from the opening question regarding the structure of the SES unit membership is very low in both Morven and Augathella. These towns have a population of 250 and 450 respectively. On a number of occasions myself and the Area Director have tried to arrange meetings with community members to try and raise the number of volunteers in the SES for these towns with little or no support from the community itself. This only places an additional burden on the members of the Charleville group who are now responding to tasks over an area of some 40,000sq km.

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