

STATEMENT

I, **RICHARD WIGG** of [REDACTED] in the state of Queensland, 4306 ([REDACTED])

[REDACTED] say that:

1. I give this Statement in relation to the flood events of 10-12 January 2011 ("the floods") as requested by the Queensland Floods Commission of Enquiry.
2. I confirm I give this Statement based on the Commission's assurance that I will not be called to give evidence. I confirm that my family and I are in a dire financial situation at present and will suffer unnecessary hardship if I am required to take time off work to attend the Commission.
3. I have been a resident of the Fernvale area for 8 years in total, save for a two year period where I lived in Townsville for work. In Fernvale, I have always lived at the same address
4. I live at this residence with my wife, Kellie, my daughter, Emily, aged [REDACTED] years old and son, Thomas, aged [REDACTED] years old.
5. I am a qualified Justice of the Peace.

Flood Information

6. I have never been instructed by the Somerset Regional Council or any government agency on evacuation plans for the Fernvale area in case of natural disaster.
7. I do not know who our local Disaster Co-ordinator is and I have never been advised if there is in fact a Disaster Co-ordinator for the Fernvale area.

Events of 11 January 2011

8. I went to work as usual at 4.00 am. There was no sign of flooding or rain as I drove from Fernvale to my workplace in Wulkuraka.

[REDACTED]
Richard Wigg



[REDACTED]
Solicitor

9. At approximately 7.30 am when I was on my "smoko" break, my immediate supervisor came out to tell me that my "load out" supervisor was leaving as there was localised flooding at Fernvale. I was in disbelief as I never thought that Fernvale would flood.
10. I immediately called my wife Kellie and she was notably distressed. Kellie advised that there had been torrential rain and water was pooling in the yard. Kellie advised that the water was not flowing away from the property as usual (as property is on a slope) and that she was worried. She requested that I come home immediately. I dropped everything and told my immediate supervisor that I would be leaving also.
11. On my way home from Wulkuraka I noticed there was localised flooding coming from Glamorgan Vale.
12. As I was driving into the Fernvale area on the Brisbane Valley Highway the crossing near the Woolworths Shopping Centre was blocked due to flooding.
13. I was required to wait there for approximately one hour until the rain stopped. At this time the water receded quickly. I took photographs while I was required to wait this crossing.
14. I was able to continue on and I drove through approximately 1 foot of water. I was only able to travel approximately 800 metres down the Brisbane Valley Highway as it was blocked again near the Freedom Service Station. Again I waited for approximately an hour.
15. At the crossing there were other men in a similar situation as myself trying to get back to their families. As it appeared that the water was not going to recede, we decided to park our cars on the side of the road and walk to our homes.
16. I took a video of the water that was flowing across the bridge as I walked with these other gentlemen. We were required to walk through water that was up to our waists.
17. At approximately 10.00am as I neared the intersection of the Brisbane Valley Highway and Nardoo Street, I could see a torrent of water coming across the

property of Dennis Ward. I took video footage of the water running through Dennis' property.

18. I continued on Brisbane Valley Highway and turned right onto Schmidt Road, right again onto Poole Road and then finally left onto Azolla Court. It had rained the entire time it took me to walk and I had to walk through water that was up to my knees. I arrived home at approximately 10.30 am.
19. At approximately 12:00pm I noticed that the water had started to recede and that the sun had come out and it had finally stopped raining. I saw that there were people driving and walking around the streets and some were even walking their dogs.
20. Kellie and I thought that we had seen the worst and we were finally safe. I took my family to the crossing on the Brisbane Valley Highway to show them where I had to walk through waist high water.
21. When we had arrived the water had receded almost completely and there was no water flowing over the bridge. I saw SES officers trying to clear debris to open the bridge.
22. At approximately 3:00pm, once the bridge was finally opened, my family and I went to collect my car. There was an SES officer at the end of the bridge controlling the traffic as there was still some debris on the road.
23. As we thought that we were no longer in danger, we decided to go for a drive down to the Brisbane River to see the water levels. We stayed at the Brisbane River for a short period.
24. At approximately 3.15 pm we drove up Brouff's Road up to the hill behind the school to survey the damage that Fernvale had suffered.
25. I remember saying to my children, *"You better take a good look kids because you won't see this again in your life"*.

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26. We then drove up Schmidt Road at approximately 3.30 pm. From this point of view we could see that the Brisbane River was flowing fast and that there was localised flooding. I remember thinking that we were lucky that we lived so far away from the river that there was no way that we could get flooded again.
27. We went home at approximately 4.00 pm and went on with our lives as usual.
28. At approximately 6.30 pm, my family and I had just sat down to dinner and we heard a siren go off.
29. My family and I rushed to the front door and I was met by my neighbour, Julie Bounds who was hysterical. She shouted, "*The water is coming - run!*" I could see that water was flowing into her yard.
30. We already had some personal belongings in the car as we had packed them as a precaution earlier in the day.
31. We rushed to the car and saw that was flowing quickly past the driveway. It was coming at such an alarming rate that we had to abandon everything and escape through the back paddock.
32. We were followed by our immediate neighbours as no-one could get to their cars in time.
33. From the time we heard the siren to the time that we were escaping through the back paddock of our property onto Schmidt Road was approximately five minutes.
34. Myself, my family and my neighbours all went to my rental property as we had nowhere else to go. When we arrived Linda took us all in as I had called her earlier in the day as a measure of caution earlier.
35. At approximately 8.00 pm I noticed there were a lot of lights over near our property. At first I thought that people were just using it as a thoroughfare to escape to higher ground.

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36. However, when I noticed that the lights were not moving from the area I became worried about looters.
37. I walked down to my house and was walking through water that was up to my thighs.
38. As I got closer to our house, I heard people yelling and screaming. I looked up and saw torches being flashed from the top of a carport at 9 Schmidt Road.
39. I walked over to the property and noticed that there was a large family stranded on the carport. They were distressed and yelling for help.
40. I shined the torch to show them how they could get down and also assisted getting them off the roof.
41. I then took them through the same escape route I had used previously through my back paddock and found them accommodation with people on Schmidt Road that lived directly behind my property.
42. I then returned to my family we stayed with Linda for approximately three weeks.

Warnings

43. At no time prior to or on 11 January 2011, did we receive warnings of any kind regarding flash flooding and/or suggestions to evacuate.
44. I was listening to the radio on my way home from work the morning of 11 January 2011 and we had access to a battery powered radio for the entire time prior to evacuation. On the radio there was talk about weather events but nothing specifically relating to Fernvale. There was no warnings on the radio or any messages from the Somerset Regional Council warning of the impending flash flood
45. Before we lost power we also had access to television and the internet and there were no warnings for Fernvale of any of these media. I remember a news report

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stating that there was going to be a flood event in Brisbane which is quite a distance away from the Fernvale area. As such, I disregarded this report.

46. There was an SES siren which we heard at 6.30 pm on 11 January 2011 which was sounded just minutes prior to the flash floods. We did not understand what the siren was warning against. However, despite my confusion, I thought it best to act quickly.
47. Prior to this we were unaware the waters were rising so quickly or that we would need to evacuate.
48. It was clearly apparent that there was no warning system in place for the Fernvale area and that the siren sounded was a reactive measure that was luckily taken in time.
49. I believe that in the event of a future incident, a system of sirens across Fernvale would be required to effectively warn and manage an evacuation.
50. A possible system could work on a range of siren sequences. For example one "ring" means to be on alert and prepare for a possible inundation, two "rings" means begin flood preparations and pack vehicles with clothes and valuables and "three" rings means to immediately evacuate to higher ground or to a nearest evacuation centre.
51. Text SMS warnings would also be helpful together with radio announcements specific to our local area.
52. Education would be required for the Fernvale area to ensure that they were aware of how the siren system worked and have basic preparations ready in their homes in the case of an emergency.

Flood Preparations

53. There was no flood preparation for the Fernvale area. There was no organisation, contingency plans or warnings and no assistance. We personally took minor steps to put some personal items in our car, but these measures provide futile.

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54. While there was minimal SES and police presence on the morning of 11 January 2011, there was no assistance or preparation from emergency services that we received.
55. It was a miracle that no lives were lost. I believe it is unacceptable that the Somerset Regional Council had no Disaster Management Plan in place for the Fernvale area and it did not have an Emergency Response Team or Disaster Co-ordinator for our area specifically.
56. Without warnings or a Fernvale specific Disaster Management Plan in place, there were no preparations that we could take.

Response

57. In addition to poor preparation and lack of warnings, Fernvale also received poor response from the Federal and State Government and Somerset Regional Council in relation to the floods.
58. Whilst the SES did drop some water off to us in the days immediately after the floods, we received no additional assistance.
59. I had heard that the Australian Defence Force ("ADF") had arrived in the Fernvale area approximately 1 week after the flood, but they never came up our street.
60. It was approximately three weeks after the floods when the ADF came to our property to provide assistance with any "heavy" cleaning including the removal of damaged internal walls and furniture.
61. By this time my wife, and I had already completed the heavy cleaning and did not need their assistance. Further, we were restricted by our insurer from having any damaged walls removed.
62. The only response that occurred in the Fernvale area was that of a community effort. Zanows Quarry used their trucks and earth moving equipment to clean up the

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debris in the area. Zanows came up our street every few days and did what they could to clean up the steady flow of damaged property being removed from homes.

63. In relation to the Somerset Regional Council, their response was poor, delayed and inadequate.
64. We never received any mail or information from the Council regarding services that were available to flood affects residents.
65. In the weeks following the flood, I did not see any Council presence in the Fernvale area and heard nothing from them on the radio or other media.
66. In relation to the State Government response, we were denied funds from the Premier's Relief Fund because they did not believe that we had been flood affected. We were required to undertake an appeals process and wait in excess of six weeks before our claim was eventually upheld.
67. In addition to their refusal to acknowledge that we had been flood affected, I believe that it is unacceptable to take six weeks to process an application for emergency funds.
68. We were, however, assisted by Legal Aid who came out to the community and offered assistance. Legal Aid has been assisting us with our claim with our insurer.
69. There were no measures that were put in place to protect life and property in our area in the recovery period.
70. The Government or the Somerset Regional Council did not afford sufficient resources to our area and to the Rural Fire Brigade to be able to implement any effective response in the Fernvale area.
71. There were no adequate measures taken by the Somerset Regional Council or the Government to maintain communication systems, power or water in the Fernvale area. We had no water for approximately one week and we had no power for approximately a fortnight. For the weeks following the flood, communications were

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unreliable and we were unable to contact relatives to let them know that we had survived the flood.

72. We were given no information by the Somerset Regional Council or the Government in relation to road closures, evacuation points, water storage or food and medical supplies.

Disaster Recovery

73. The recovery process in our area, for which we primarily relied upon the Somerset Regional Council, was frustratingly slow. As described above, we had difficulties in accessing reliable communication, water or power supplies.
74. Many of the roads in Fernvale were significantly damaged. Three months on, there has been little done to adequately repair these.
75. We did not receive any updates regarding the status of the clean up from the Somerset Regional Council. We were advised that there was limited information of the Council website, but we had no power or computer to be able to access this. The only updates we received were from word of mouth from neighbours.
76. Further, the recovery response by the Federal and State Government was non-existent. They too had failed to assist or provide direction as to the recovery process in the Fernvale area.
77. We were never contacted after the floods by any recovery or Government personnel. The only contact we had was some three weeks later by the ADF when we were no longer in need of assistance.
78. We were even denied assistance from the Rural Fire Brigade in having our house cleaned immediately after the flood. This was because we had access to solar power and as the teams were using gurneys they refused to clean our house.
79. I advised that our solar energy source has an isolator switch which can be turned from off to on to ensure that where a gurney is used there is no danger of

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electrocution. However, this requires an electrician. As there was no access emergency technical services such as electricians in our area we were denied assistance in this time.

80. We believe that there needed to be improved notifications via local radio as the majority of residents had access to battery powered radios regarding the recovery effort. I also believe that updates should have focused on local recovery efforts rather than recovery occurring in the greater Brisbane and Lockyer Valley.
81. Although mobile reception was unreliable, we do believe this information could have also been communicated by SMS.

Insurance

82. Due to the floods we lost both our vehicles and 95% of our household possessions. The internals of our house need to be gutted and rebuilt.
83. We are currently insured with RACQ, however after 13 weeks we have still not been notified whether our claim will be honoured. This is despite twice weekly telephone calls requesting information.
84. RACQ have advised that there is a hardship payment available. However, we do not qualify for this payment as we received compensation for our cars lost in the floods which were insured with Allianz.
85. Much of our frustration and stress associated with the floods have been caused by our insurer and their treatment towards us. Despite more than a dozen requests and 13 weeks elapsing, they have still not processed our claim.
86. We have complained to Brian Hollis at the Insurance Council of Australia about our insurer's conduct but he advised that he was unable to get a response from RACQ. Mr Hollis' advice was to get assistance from Legal Aid, which we had already done at that time.

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87. RACQ have not returned our telephone calls and on several occasions we have been denied access to our case manager because we did not have our claim number handy. On one occasion, I was told that there was no information or file regarding our claim.
88. Their excessive delay and directions restricting removal of saturated internal walls has caused us further damage to our property and to our health.
89. We had to refuse assistance from the ADF as we were told by the assessor, agent of RACQ, "If you start pulling out the walls, be prepared to finish it yourself"
90. Although there was a significant amount of water that inundated our property, we had all our doors and windows closed and this preventing the bulk of the water from entering the house. However as we were unable to remove the affected sections of the internal walls, the moisture has extended throughout.
91. The moisture has risen inside our walls over the last 13 weeks. Over this time I have developed a chest infection, my wife is suffering from similar symptoms and my children have constant eye irritations.
92. The Emergency Architects of Australia, which is a volunteer group, recently came out to our property in early April 2011.
93. They advised that the moisture levels were approximately 30% and that our walls had significant mould. As such, for an extended period, we have been breathing in mould spores which have seriously impacted our health.
94. We have now been told that we need to leave our house and will not be able to move back in until the internals are completely stripped out, treated and rebuilt.

Richard Wigg

Solicitor

I, **RICHARD WIGG**, certify that the above history is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

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[Redacted]
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RICHARD WIGG

15. 04. 2011.
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Date

Witnessed by:

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Solicitor

15 / 4 / 2011
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Date

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