

To: [REDACTED] (Deputy Local Controller) for Local Controller

You have been identified as a State Emergency Service Local Controller. As such, the Commission is interested in finding out from you more about the nature, role and funding of SES units in Queensland. We are particularly interested in knowing how your SES unit and its various groups operate, and how operations were undertaken during the 2010/2011 floods. This will help us to understand better the arrangements for running the SES in Queensland.

We would appreciate your taking the time to answer the following questions. This should take about 15 minutes. Upon completion, please forward the questionnaire by mail to: Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry, GPO Box 178, Brisbane QLD 4001; or by way of email to info@floodcommission.qld.gov.au by **Friday, 14 October 2011**. If you are legally represented, you should forward it to the Commission through your legal representative.

Alternatively, if you do not wish to provide a written response to the Commission, we can arrange to have a Commission investigator ask you these questions over the phone. If you would prefer to respond in this way, please contact [REDACTED] on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] [@floodcommission.qld.gov.au](mailto:[REDACTED]@floodcommission.qld.gov.au).

The information you provide may be used in the preparation of the Commission's final report, which will be published in February 2012.

Questionnaire for SES Local Controllers

The following questionnaire is split into six sections. Each section contains a number of questions asking you to describe the nature of your SES unit/groups, and also the nature of response operations conducted by your SES unit/groups during the 2010/2011 floods. Please complete the questionnaire and return it to the Commission by Friday, 14 October 2011.

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.

There are 4 SES groups within the unit:

Alpha - maybe 2 members

Aramac – maybe 5 members

Mutuburra – maybe 5 members

Barcaldine. – 7 members during floods but now 11.

Each is led by a Local Controller (4 LCs) in total.

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?

None paid

Structure of SES units

1.3 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.

No need for payment – the reward is being part of the SES. Also, there may be some issues if some members are paid and some are not and it may cause friction.

Payments would also involve extra paperwork, which nobody wants.

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

There are 4 LCs as a result of amalgamations where 4 areas amalgamated into 1 regional council. This does not cause any issues as each has a lot of experience in their respective areas and work closely – all members of the LDMG.

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?

Yes. Flooding is a regular occurrence in the area and because the flood is slow moving people usually have enough time to prepare. Also, local SES are very experienced in floods and are well trained for these events

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

Probably not as some members were away for Xmas but no major problems were encountered

2.3 Did your unit have enough equipment and resources?

Yes, and they also 'made things happen'. The experience of the LCs was a major factor in dealing with issues and sourcing equipment from various people in the locality

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

Yes. No issues with this.

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. Requests for Assistance, rescues, evacuations).

In Barcaldine, it was mainly traffic control and getting word to outlying areas about the impending inundation. This was done face to face by attendance on properties or by using UHF radio. A lot of the work involved trying to keep people out of the areas most at risk of high flooding. Some people tried to enter past the SES but they had the authority and support of the local police so nobody persisted.

Provision of warnings to people is large part of the job – used experience to give people timeframes about the likely arrival of the flood.

Alpha and Jericho both had evacuations.

Fatigue management was an issue for police so they brought in some people from Brisbane to work shifts.

All SES contributed to clean-up in Alpha.

4. Command and control

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

Mainly coordinating the activities and tasking of the members of his group as well as participation in LDMG meetings (all 4 LCs are members). Also performs whatever hands-on work is needed during disaster and prioritises RFAs that are within the capabilities of the group.

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

Reports to the LDMG and sometimes Regional EMQ, but mostly LDMG. Provides LDMG with status updates through attendance at meetings – sometimes 2/3 times daily during floods.

4. 3 Where does your SES unit receive Requests for Assistance from?

From a variety of sources. They try to channel them through the 131500 number or through the general council number – council takes the call and then ring LC directly with the job. This way, jobs are logged and can be prioritised. He and other members also receive calls directly from the community as everyone in the area knows who is in the SES.

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

He is central point for RFAs and then undertakes a risk analysis of the job, including consideration of whether unit has the expertise to assist. If so, he will decide person best placed to undertake task and contact them by telephone, UHF radio or face to face. They also do a joint risk assessment to ensure that the member is comfortable with the task.

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

Because they operate in a small town the locals are pretty much aware that they are supposed to contact the council in the first instance with requests. Sometimes LC is contacted directly and this can cause problems as it is difficult to track competing requests. During the floods they did not really have many competing requests and where there were the situation was explained to the caller who was generally understanding that there was a process that needed to be followed.

Command and control

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?

Not that he can recall. There were some requests for filled sandbags that the SES were unable to fulfil but the locals ended up filling the bags themselves so there were no issues. This might be something they could plan better next time though.

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

Not during the floods but 3 were deployed to assist in Cyclone Yasi. EMQ organised this through the district office and sought out volunteers to go to Yasi.

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

Regular telephone contact and regular attendance at daily LDMG meetings.

b) Local Disaster Coordination Centre

Daily as this was the council office in Barcaldine but Jericho established an incident centre at the medical centre out there. The LC for Jericho was based there during the floods and got an award for her conduct.

Command and control

c) Local Disaster Management Group

Daily meetings and teleconferences with LDMG and other LCs, where they could not attend the LDMG meeting

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

a) District Disaster Coordinator

Daily LDMG meetings involved teleconference with the DDC who was the Police Inspector at Longreach

b) District Disaster Coordination Centre

As above, daily contact with DDCC and received some RFAs through the District office that had been forwarded through the 131500 number from Rockhampton

c) District Disaster Management Group

Limited contact with the DDMG itself and did not receive any tasks directly from this group

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?

Not really much contact with Area Directors but had some with the Regional Director through teleconference. Had no direct contact or reporting to EMQ during floods

Command and control

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

Daily LDMG contact with police, fire services and ambulance officers in the area where they discussed requirements and assistance for each other e.g. SES assisted the ambulance service to evacuate some people across a swollen river. This mostly occurred face to face and each of the emergency services representatives now know each other very well.

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)?

Not really, although it is conceded that things were happening very quickly and not all of the paperwork might have been fully completed or tasks completed in accordance with the EMQ operating doctrine.

They are a pretty self sufficient group and things just seem to get done without much need for a lot of EMQ involvement.

Command and control

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

They are really conduits for information during a disaster and there to provide logistical assistance by providing vehicles and helicopter support where needed at a local level. Big requests such as choppers would go through the LDMG rather than directly from an LC to EMQ.

5. Communications

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

UHF and VHF radio, a lot of face to face meetings. Normal mobile networks remained operational during floods but there are still areas where people do not have mobiles as there is no coverage anyway. People who do not have mobiles generally are all contactable by radio.

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

No failures.

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

The radio system is but it was identified that it needed to be upgraded and this has occurred since the floods as previously any person was able to listen in on certain frequencies. However, they need training in using the new equipment to

its full potential; this is occurring and EMQ is involved. Hopefully the training will involve members from other emergency services.

Funding

6. Funding

6.1 Where does your unit receive funding from?

Mostly from the council or through the normal EMQ supply. They are well off in terms of equipment and anything they don't have they can generally source from within the locality, either borrow or use.

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?

They don't really need any additional funding but they have upgraded the computers which has been worthwhile. Considers that seeking extra money would only be depriving another area that has greater needs.

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

Yes. As LC he decides what they need and makes a submission to the council. Depending on the nature of the request, the CEO or full council will decide if it is approved. They have not been turned down on any requests yet.

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.

Funding

Yes for their unit although they understand that other units around the state really require a lot more money, especially large councils that have lots of activations.

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?

Yes and the process is fair and seems to work well with council. They get what they need

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

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

None, not required

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

N/A

c) does fundraising present any difficulties?

N/A

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?

More floods bring more members as people like to get involved. Realises there is a lull overall in the amount of people joining but when things get desperate in times of disaster they seem to get the job done with the numbers of volunteers they have.

There should be a lot more recognition of prior learning, training and skills base of people who join. There is a real need to streamline this somehow as there is a current focus on getting a certificate rather than checking to see what skills that person already has. This is also having the effect of turning members away from the SES.

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

There is a bit of a vicious cycle in that if you don't train you can't get the accreditation, then you can't activate in a disaster, then people cannot get involved and eventually through lack of action they leave the SES. This needs to be addressed somehow and a balance found.

Their area also has a transient population which makes it difficult to retain members for long periods of time and to ensure that they have a good skills base among members. It would be helpful if they had somebody trained in swift-water rescue but EMQ advises that this is the responsibility of QFRS. They consider that the upcoming floodboat training will be very useful.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire