

I, *Rodney Phillip Ferguson of C/- 64 Fitzroy Street, Warwick Qld 4370, Chief Executive Officer*, state on oath:

1. I am the Chief Executive Officer and Local Disaster Coordinator for the Southern Downs Regional Council ('the Council').
2. I am providing this statement in response to a requirement issued by the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry on 25 March 2011.
3. The Council experienced flooding twice during the 2010/2011 flood events ('the flood events'). The first flood event occurred in Warwick on 27 December 2010. The second flood event occurred in Warwick and Stanthorpe on 10-11 January 2011.

## Council Preparedness

4. Council staff participated in a number of training programs prior to the floods. The Council participated in the Emergency Management Queensland ('EMQ') Exercise 'ORKO' (including an Exercise Planning Day in September 2010 and the Recovery Workshop following the Exercise) in November 2010. This involved a desk top training exercise as to how Council and the State Emergency Service ('SES') would respond to an extensive rain/flood situation.
5. The lessons learnt regarding gaps in our response to such an event were assessed and changes introduced to better prepare for such an event. Examples of lessons learnt mostly related to resourcing and procedural issues such as plans for positioning plant and staff within the region and identifying staff resources and roles for the Local Disaster Coordination Centre.
6. Other relevant external training prior to the events included:
  - participation in an EMQ discussion exercise 'Hamish' in June 2010;
  - attendance at the LGAQ Disaster Management Conference in June 2010;
  - participation in the Department of Communities Warwick Community Recovery Committee practical exercise in August 2010;
  - attendance at an EMQ Information Session regarding Changes to Disaster Management Arrangements August 2010; and
  - attendance at an EMQ Disaster Management Workshop in October 2010 ;
7. Council staff closely monitored Bureau of Meteorology ('BOM') reports in the lead up to the Council office Christmas closure on 24 December 2010. A general invitation to Council staff was issued in regard to their availability in the event of a flood. Roughly 70 Council staff made themselves available and a contact list was subsequently prepared.
8. The Local Disaster Coordination Centre in Warwick was pre-emptively resourced with information technology equipment prior to the Council office Christmas closure.
9. Council plant was strategically positioned within the region to ensure availability in all areas in the event of limited access due to flooding.

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10. The Council provided press releases prior to the December event advising people to be wary of the potential for a flood. This included a 100 year flood line map which was published in the local newspaper.

### **Early Warning Systems**

11. There is a long established Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) flood monitoring system in the Condamine River catchment. There is also a recent installation in the Severn River/Quart Pot Creek in the Stanthorpe area.
12. A general warning of possible flooding was issued by the Council to the community on 23 December 2010 (before the annual office closure), which was based on BOM forecasts and warnings.
13. The Condamine River catchment flood monitoring system worked adequately during the December flood event. However, two monitors (Murray Bridge AL and Warwick AL) failed in the January flood event and were unable to provide accurate warning of the river heights during that event.
14. Due to the flood waters, it would not have been possible to fix the installations while flooded. Manual readings had to be taken in Warwick after the gauge there had failed.
15. During the January event, BOM were very busy due to the flooding in major urban centres in Southeast Queensland. Council was unable to obtain ready advice from that agency during the January event. Council communicated with BOM via phone and email. Council did not have a regular contact person, but rather a regular contact phone number.
16. The system used in Stanthorpe operated adequately during the flood events. However, the gauges were only installed about one year ago and as such, there is no historical data available to be used to predict flood levels.
17. Overall, the Council considers the systems are a vital tool in flood prediction and management.

### **Measures taken during the flood events**

18. A significant number of Council staff and resources were deployed during the flood events in various capacities including:
  - disaster coordination and administration;
  - call centre operations;
  - assistance with traffic control and road closures;
  - assistance at Evacuation Centres;
  - assistance with recovery centres; and
  - assistance with debris removal, etc
19. The Local Disaster Management Group ('LDMG') was activated for both flood events, of which Council has various Councillor and staff representation. This group coordinated the overall response and recovery operations with the assistance of other agency representatives.

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20. The State Government agencies represented included the Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS), EMQ and SES.
21. Additionally, other State and Federal Government agencies provided response measures, personnel, equipment, services and/or logistical support during the event in various capacities including: the Department of Transport and Main Roads ('DTMR'), Queensland Health, Department of Communities, BOM and Sunwater.
22. Coordination between Council and most State and Federal Government agencies worked well. Local QPS representatives were particularly skilled at providing assistance with logistical support during the event.
23. Two Evacuation Centres were opened in both Warwick and Stanthorpe and one at Allora. These were not at the same location as the Local Disaster Coordination Centre, however a contact point was established between the two locations. The Evacuation Centres were managed predominantly by Council and Red Cross staff. Assistance was also provided by other organisations with associated requirements such as catering, counselling, bedding, etc.
24. The two Evacuation Centres in Warwick were the most utilised during the events and were strategically located on either side of the Condamine River to accommodate people who were isolated on both sides of the town.
25. Apart from an initial lack of trained local Red Cross staff resources, there were no significant difficulties encountered at these Centres. I believe that the establishment, operation and performance of these Centres were effective and efficient.

### **Essential Services**

26. The water supply to Warwick was available throughout the flood events.
27. The Stanthorpe Sewage Treatment Plant was inundated by floodwaters and this caused a precautionary warning to be sent out from the Council to local residents to boil their water before drinking.
28. The Killarney Water Treatment Plant was cut off from Council staff by floodwaters during the January flood event. During this isolation, the plant broke down and Council staff were not able to repair the plant until waters subsided.
29. In addition, Pratten and Wallangarra Water Treatment Plants experienced breakdowns during the January flood event, with Council staff not being able to access the Pratten Plant for a short period of time.
30. Warnings were also issued to residents in these areas to boil water before drinking as a precautionary measure. The Killarney Plant stopped operating for about 24 hours on 11 January 2011.
31. Council staff made phone contact with local supermarkets and service stations to gather information on food and fuel availability within the region. Re-supply of these items was not considered necessary due to this action.

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32. Power services were generally operational throughout the region. Some flood affected buildings (particularly in Warwick) were disconnected by Ergon Energy.

### **State Emergency Service ('SES') Assistance and Evacuations**

33. Both the Warwick and Stanthorpe SES Groups made approximately 7,000 sandbags in Warwick, Allora and Killarney and 3,500 sandbags in Stanthorpe. Sand was made available to the general public at various locations during both events. The use of sandbags as a flood mitigation measure was generally effective, particularly for smaller volumes of water.
34. The SES groups proactively made individual contact with as many residences and businesses which may have been affected by floodwaters prior to the event.
35. The Warwick SES was required to evacuate two people from their homes in Warwick due to mobility and access issues. It is believed that these evacuations were adequate and timely, however should not have been required under the immediate threat of rising flood waters if the affected residents had made appropriate evacuation arrangements as previously advised.
36. The Council provides minor capital and operational assistance to the local SES groups including general support, use of a Council building and maintenance of vehicles.
37. Other training and equipment needs are the responsibility of EMQ and it is believed that an audit of the training and equipment needs of each local group is conducted annually. The SES groups organise and undertake their own regular training at various times throughout the year.
38. Council is aware that two helicopter rescues took place, with one occurring near Pratten and one near Allora. Council and SES staff were not directly involved in these rescues so are not aware of the full circumstances of the situation and therefore cannot provide an informed assessment of the adequacy and timeliness thereof.

### **Communications**

39. The Council used a variety of communications systems to distribute and share information during the events including email, internet, telephone, fax, radio, tv, printed material/media, etc.
40. An initial assessment of ways to improve the use of communications systems for future events has been undertaken and any changes will be incorporated into Council's documents and procedures.
41. The Council's equipment and communications systems were adequate, however it is acknowledged that the associated staff resources required were stretched during the events. This can be attributed to the timing of the first event in Warwick which occurred during Council's annual office closure. Due to the widespread nature of the event, Council eventually ran short of adequate signage.

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42. Council utilised the QFRS (Rural Operations) communication network in small rural communities within the region to share information. This proved to be a very effective means of communicating with residents in those areas. The SES also used this resource effectively.

### **Dams and water storage**

43. The major water storage in this region is Leslie Dam ('the dam') which is 11kms west of Warwick and operated by Sunwater. Discharge from the dam resulted in flooding of the Cunningham Highway west of Warwick. This has occurred before on rare occasions when a release must be made.

44. Since the flood events, Council has met with Sunwater to improve communication channels and Sunwater is now invited to attend meetings of the Local Disaster Management Group. It is anticipated that this will improve the notice regarding potential highway closures. It will also assist in helping Sunwater recognise that significant outflows from the dam may result in flood waters in Warwick not receding as quickly due to the water from the dam flowing into Sandy Creek which in turn enters the Condamine River downstream of Warwick.

45. During the flood events, there were also concerns about the stability of some large horticultural dams in the Stanthorpe area. The Department of Environment and Resource Management ('DERM') advised that there is currently no requirement for the standard of construction and maintenance of these dams.

46. It is believed that this resulted in an increased threat of instability during the events and the subsequent deployment of engineering resources (who were not specifically skilled in dam issues) to respond to concerns.

47. These engineering resources may have been utilised for other response activities. Improved regulation of these types of dams may prevent the deployment of Council resources to respond to these types of issues during future flood events.

### **Roads and Transport**

48. Many local and main roads and bridges were closed during the flood events. In addition, the National Highways within the region were closed for a period of time.

49. The Council maintained a list of road closures throughout the flood events. This was communicated to:

- the general public (main access routes only);
- DTMR; and
- members of the LDMG (for emergency access).

50. Representatives from the DTMR were present at most meetings of the LDMG during the January flood event.

51. Upon flood waters receding, Council staff inspected the roads and bridges (under its control) and prioritised the opening of main access routes.

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52. Communication between government agencies in relation to road conditions/closures could be improved. During the first event in Warwick it is believed that a large number of people – possibly up to 300 individuals - in the southern Evacuation Centre had travelled from New South Wales only to find the roads cut at Warwick.
53. The QPS, when made aware of the numbers arriving, put in place arrangements at Stanthorpe to warn people and deter them from travelling further and thereby make use of the accommodation in that town.
54. Advice from DTMR representatives based in Warwick is that there is no coordination between the two states regarding road condition warnings.

### **Governance issues**

55. Members of the LDMG, including Councillors and staff, were in regular contact with the Warwick District Disaster Coordinator ('DDC') before, during and after the events. In addition, regular Situation Reports were submitted at intervals requested by the DDC.
56. The nature of communications from the DDC were varied but included issues relating to resupply requirements, Evacuation Centre resource requirements, BOM predictions, highway conditions/closures, event summary statistics, recovery status, etc.
57. Communications were an issue in regards to the Leslie Dam as Council did not have an established contact with Sunwater at the time.
58. Council believes that some of information requests from the DDC were as a result of requests from the State Disaster Coordinator or the State Recovery Coordinator (due to the disaster management hierarchy).

### **Future Measures**

59. The Council is currently in the process of completing a Flood Study for the Condamine River and tributaries (covering the towns of Warwick, Killarney, Allora, Pratten and Tannymorel) which, among other benefits, will assist with the identification and assessment of appropriate flood mitigation measures. This study had commenced prior to the flood events.
60. A similar study is proposed to be undertaken for the areas of Stanthorpe and Leyburn in the near future subject to Council funding. Once the flood study is complete, it will be incorporated into Council's Town Planning Scheme.
61. The Council and the LDMG have conducted reviews regarding the coordination of and response to the events and continues to implement the changes into plans, policies, procedures, training, etc.
62. Experience shows that lessons learnt from the December flood event were acknowledged and changes were made for the January flood event, resulting in improvements. This will be an ongoing process following the last flood event in our region.

Signed



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**Amalgamation Issue**

- 63. The recent amalgamation of local government areas created an initial problem with coordinating the response to the second flood event. During that flood event, the Local Disaster Coordination Centre at Warwick was immediately put into operation but there were no plan in place for the activation of a second Local Disaster Coordination Centre in Stanthorpe.
- 64. Fortunately, experienced Council staff in Stanthorpe at the time (who were staff of the former Stanthorpe Shire) were available to establish an operational Local Disaster Coordination Centre. Senior Sergeant Mark Ireland of the QPS, who assisted in the first flood event in Warwick, was also in Stanthorpe at the time and was able to take charge of the situation.
- 65. As a result, improved preparation for a dual event within the Council area will be carried out in the near future.

I swear that the facts and circumstances stated in this statement are from my knowledge except those which are from information only.

Sworn by *Rodney Phillip Ferguson* on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2011 at Warwick in the presence of:

Signed:

[Redacted Signature] \_\_\_\_\_  
Witness )

[Redacted Signature] *JODY KEIM* \_\_\_\_\_  
Commissioner for Declarations / Solicitor /  
Justice of the Peace



Signed [Redacted Signature] \_\_\_\_\_  
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Witnessed by [Redacted Signature]