

Name of Witness	Sylvia NAYLER
Date of Birth	[REDACTED]
Address and contact details	[REDACTED]
Occupation	Retired
Officer taking statement	Stephen Platz
Date taken	30/03/2011

Sylvia Nayler states:

1. I am a [REDACTED] year old female residing at [REDACTED] Chinchilla with my husband, Robert George NAYLER and my grandson Benjamin Smith. I have lived at this address since 2000. Prior to 2010 I have not experienced any flooding on my property however the park across North Street regularly floods during times of heavy rain. This flooding is usually from storm water run off. The closest water course is Charlie's creek which is about one kilometre away and is connected to the Condamine River. This creek floods during heavy rain but has never been a threat since we have been here.

The day after Boxing Day - the 27th December, 2010.

2. I remember ~~Boxing Day~~ the 26th day of December 2010 I was at home with family after celebrating Christmas. I recall around 5.30am I was awoken by my daughter, Joanne, who told me that the park opposite our house was flooded and it was continuing to rise. It had been raining heavily for several days prior to this. I got up and looked at the park where I noticed that the water was across the road and creeping towards our front gate. We then monitored this flooding.

3. At 8.00am the water was rising rapidly and was now at our front steps. At this stage it was about four inches in depth. I was getting quite concerned and was wondering what we should do. I then decided to contact the State Emergency Service (SES). I looked in the local phone book and rang the SES in Toowoomba. I spoke to an operator who then referred me to the Western Downs regional council at Dalby. I rang this number, 1300 728 500, and received a recorded

Witness Signature [REDACTED] ... Signature of officer [REDACTED]

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message that directed me to an after hours number at Chinchilla, being 4662 7056. I rang this last number and finally spoke to a receptionist from the Chinchilla council. It was now about 9.00am.

4. I had a conversation with this girl and I explained to her that we had water creeping up into our yard and what was the procedure was to manage the situation. The receptionist put me on hold and when she returned she stated that someone would ring me back shortly. I waited for this call.
5. At 11.00am I still had not received any phone call and I was getting very concerned. The water level was rising and was now waist height at our front gate. A short time later I then received a phone call from the local police.
6. The male police officer stated that he received a phone call from the council concerning my situation. The police officer then advised me to get all people and vehicles off the property straight away. By this time the water was waist height and the road was not safe for vehicles to drive upon. I told the police officer that we were unable to get out via the road and asked him what we should do. The police officer abruptly stated it wasn't his problem and to get out the best way I could. I suggested to the police officer that I may be able to get out via the back fence to higher ground. He agreed and advised me to do so. I asked the police officer if the SES were available to get us out and he told me to give them a try. I also asked the police officer where we should evacuate to and he advised me to go to the Civic centre and to bring a pillow.
7. I then tried to ring the SES but the line was engaged each time I rang within the ten minute period. It was at this stage we decided to evacuate. My husband had asked the rear neighbour if we could knock down the back fence to get our vehicles out. The neighbour agreed and Robert began dismantling the fence. Once the fence was removed we then drove our bus and car out of the yard before they

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were inundated in flood waters. We drove the vehicles to higher ground and then returned to the house to put our other belongings up and away from the rising flood waters. The house is based on wooden stumps that are 1.2 metres high. At 1.30pm the water was three quarters the height of these stumps and was still rising. We then evacuated the house, taking personal documents and some food.

8. Our family drove to a friend's cottage which is out of the flood zone where we remained for seven days. The floods inundated numerous houses and businesses close to Charlie's creek. The floods covered the whole central business district and did not recede significantly until seven days later.
9. On or about the 3rd day of January 2011 I returned to my home. We suffered flood damage to the back shed, compressor, laundry, tools, the spa and other general property. The job of cleaning and getting the place back in order then commenced.
10. Within a fortnight of being at the house we then experienced a significant amount of rain again. We had two or three days of torrential down pour and we started to see the water rise again. It was now night time and I was quite panicked. This time, however, we evacuated our vehicles before the road was blocked off and drove out via North Street. With neighbours help, we put all our furniture up and evacuated the house. We did not contact any local government or emergency service this time as we now knew it was a waste of time.
11. The floods on this second occasion came a foot higher than the last one which was about one metre off the ground. We stayed at our friends place for at least ten days.

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Signature of officer [REDACTED]

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*Issues with regards to Terms of Reference**Preparation*

12. At no time did we receive any form of assistance with regards to the preparation for the floods of 2010/2011. As a result of the community consultative meeting I attended, the council indicated that they knew the floods were coming. The council members had not provided any information with regards evacuation plans or general advice concerning what to do in flood situations. I had no idea who our local disaster co-ordinator is and where to go in the advent of flooding.

Warning

13. I did not receive any warning that the floods were going to inundate our property to this level. It was explained by council members that through the flood warning network they had river height bulletins that indicated that the Condamine River was going to flood. I am angry that this information was not made public and disaster management plans were not disseminated.

Response

14. The SES response in these floods was poor and I would class it as, disorganised chaos. The SES never answered any of my calls and through information gained through other flood victims they failed to rescue or assist people in need. In one instance during the floods I asked the SES to transport some food across the flooded waters in their boat. This food was for family members who were cut off on the other side. The SES refused to assist with this request. The SES did not assist people in placing property to high ground and I think there role should be to generally help people where possible.

15. The local council did not seem to be confident in what they had to do and they seemed to just hide themselves away. As a result of my dealings with them on the day we were flooded and afterwards, I think their attitudes to the disaster were not consistent with the community's feelings during this crisis. The council had never communicated any disaster management plan to the community which I think is important for residents to understand prior to a flood emergency.
16. The only police contact I had been with the officer who advised me to evacuate via the telephone. I was disappointed that I received this information in a panicked state over the telephone. I was concerned for my safety and I think that the police or other emergency services should evacuate people in person and have the resources in order to carry this out.

Recovery

17. The community response to this crisis was generally very good. We received assistance with regards to the clean up by church groups but did not receive any immediate assistance from any local government authority or emergency service. Any assistance that they offered was too late and by this time these jobs had already been completed.
18. Our recovery has also been hampered by the continuing high cost of council rates even though we are now in a declared flood zone. I believe that the council is profiting from residents in these declared areas and there should be compensation or at least reduced rates, especially when these properties are virtually worthless in these zones.

Insurance

19. We are insured with ANSVAR insurance and they responded promptly and professionally to our claim. We received an immediate part payment and should receive the full payment at a later date.
20. I outlined a number of other issues arising out of the 2010/2011 floods on two documents which I prepared for the community consultative meetings that were held in Chinchilla concerning the floods. I am able to produce these documents (*these documents were provided to an officer from the flood commission on 30/03/2011*).

**Exhibit: Prepared documents outlining issues arising from
 Chinchilla floods 2010/2011**

Marked Exhibit No/...

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21. During the flood crisis I took a number of photographs of flooding to my property and the town in general (*I provided these photographs to an officer from the flood commission on the 30/03/2011*). I am able to produce these photographs.


**Exhibit: Series of digital photographs of Chinchilla floods
2010/2011.**

Marked Exhibit No/...


Justices Act 1886


I acknowledge by virtue of section 110A(5)(c)(ii) of the Justices Act 1886 that:

- (1) This written statement by me dated 30/03/2011 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to ⁷/₈ is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and
- (2) I make this statement knowing that, if it were admitted as evidence, I may be liable to prosecution for stating in it anything that I know is false.

..........Signature

Signed at ...Chinchilla....this.....30th....day of..March....2011

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WESTERN DOWNS CONFERENCE – AFTER FLOOD DEBRIEFING

QUESTIONS:

1. In an emergency situation – do you realise how hard it is to find information in the local telephone book? E.g. Open your local phone book, look for local council information P25 – then go as directed to P98 (first you follow through the yellow pages because the numbers continue on)– then you realise you need the white pages, and go to P98 where you find the SES Emergency number – After several tries because the line was busy, we eventually we get through to an operator at the Toowoomba Centre - who then directed us to ring Western Downs Regional Council at 1300 728 500 – They tell you to ring the Chinchilla number @ 4662 7056 which is a Business hours phone number! – you are then directed to an after hours number.

Finally you get through –

You are in a state of mild panic and are seeking urgent advice, but the person you are speaking to has to go and ask someone else and so you are kept on hold for several minutes. Finally you are told that someone will ring you back shortly – (which they don't).

Meanwhile two hours go by, and finally a police officer rings you and tells you to evacuate. (TOO LATE the floodwaters have cut off the access to the road out of our garden). The abrupt advice we are then given is to get out any way you can!

Then we try to ring the SES to get help to vacate – that line is busy – so we then realise it's up to us (two older people, both in their mid-60's, one a partially disabled person) to do whatever they can to save themselves.

LATER – when we complained to the Council – we were told that Procedure and Policy was adhered to by the Officer– and our phone enquiry had been put in an OUT basket to be actioned in due course!!!!

TWO HOURS IS A LONG TIME TO HAVE TO WAIT IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION

QUESTION:

1. Recently the valuation of our properties jumped from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] with a rates increase of 10%.
Now that our properties are seen as next to worthless because we are tainted by being in a "flood zone", and the valuation of our properties have dropped, could we expect to see a reduction in our rates?
2. Is there any long-term plan to reclaim or rehabilitate our flood zone areas? If so, can we expect a fair price to be offered in the way of compensation?

Organisational Services Directorate,
Western Downs Regional Council

(Local Disaster Management Plan)

Para 1 (Continue) – What do you believe worked well and should be continued?

1. Continue to use the Civic Centre as a rallying point and relief and information centre. What has worked particularly well has been the availability of all types of Government and Community “helps services” being in the one location, and that the help and pertinent information was available immediately.
2. What worked well was the voluntary “church?” and community minded people who organised money, food, clothing, furniture etc. replacements for those with needs. The “voucher system” was a touch of genius - it supervised and ensured that the right people got the right sort of relief and assistance without red-tape, greed or corruption interfering.

Para 2 (Cease or Change) – What processes need to be stopped or improved?

3. What should be stopped? – Council employees (of all types) with over-inflated ego’s and a sense of self-importance trying to be seen in all the important places with any of the “important people” who visited the town.
4. What should be improved?
 - Council employees (of all types) who actually know what is required of them in this type of emergency situation. The public needs to be confident that Council is working professionally within the situation. Unfortunately, in the beginning of the emergency, all we saw was councillors meeting behind closed doors and filtering odd bits of information out to the public – this was at best incomplete, and at the worst misleading in some cases.
 - Council employees (of all ranks) working in the field, and being seen to be willing to get their hands dirty serving the community that is paying their wages. (e.g. Kevin Rudd in Brisbane).
 - A better system of road warning signs and their placement.
 - A more professional and timely method of repairing the damaged roads not only in the town, but also in our outlying country roads.
5. What should be improved? - As the council are responsible for the co-ordination of all services in an emergency situation, then they should take a more serious role in the professional training and supervision of the SES. In many, many people’s opinion, this service would have to have been the most disillusioning, disappointing and disorganised aspect of the whole flood event here in Chinchilla.

Para 3 (Commence) – What suggestions do you have to introduce new processes to improve our response to a disaster event?

- In an emergency situation people want immediate help!
In our particular situation we didn't readily know where to find relevant phone numbers to get help, and when we did find them and rang the numbers, we were placed on hold, and then told that someone would ring us back (they didn't!). Several hours went by before the police rang us and told us to evacuate – by which time we were stressed to the max, and weren't able to get our vehicles out by any conventional means. Nor were we able to contact the SES as their lines were busy. We mistakenly believed at the time that there would be some sort of emergency contingency plans in place, and that we would be able to call on people to help us.

IN RETROSPECT WE REALISE THAT THIS IS NOT SO, AND THAT WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN SAFETY AND EVACUATION.

Therefore may I humbly suggest the following ideas that you might like to consider introducing as new processes to improve your responses to disasters?

- Formulate a Specific Hazard/Potential Hazard Information Paper, along with an Emergency Management Plan.
This should outline details such as :
 1. Who to contact, (with phone numbers).
 2. Who will be responsible to respond to a particular hazard (e.g. for Fire, Flood, Earthquake etc.)
 3. Where to go and what to take with you.

Make this information readily available to the general public either through a pamphlet posted to the home, a general well positioned noticeboard, or in a newspaper item.

- Instigate a warning system to be applicable to a particular threat.
For example in the case of another flood – prioritise a phone contact system for those homes in the immediate flood zone to warn them of any impending danger. (Not all homes have computers, TV's or radio's tuned in to ABC. Nor do all elderly people have mobile phones that they use.) A personal phone call where verbal communication allows for a clearer understanding is a great comfort.

Experience and Education are wonderful tools!

We now realise through experience that knowing what to do and being ready for an emergency is our best protection, and a personal responsibility.

- During our time of recovery we discovered on the information table at the Civic Centre a booklet published by the Red Cross called EMERGENCYREDIPLAN – this excellent booklet outlines everything that one needs to do to prepare for an emergency.

Would it be possible for the Red Cross people or Council to place this booklet in every home? We believe this could go a long way towards better preparing the community in the future.

Perhaps also a list of local Community Support Services phone numbers and emergency phone numbers could be placed in every home (if these were placed on a magnetic fridge strip they would remain highly visible).

Whilst we would hope and pray that we would not experience another flood like the last one for a long time to come, we can see that to “be prepared” is our best defence.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your Flood Event Feedback Form.

Sincerely,

ROBERT & SYLVIA NAYLER

