

Name of Witness	Craig Hewlett
Date of Birth	[REDACTED]
Address and contact details	[REDACTED] Caboolture
Occupation	Radio Station manager
Officer taking statement	Detective Sergeant Stephen Platz
Date taken	15/04/2011

Craig HEWLETT states

1. I am the station manager of community radio station 101.5FM located at the Town Square, Hasking Street, Caboolture. As a community radio station we obtained our licence in 1987. The licence was issued in part to disseminate official emergency information to the community in local disasters. We are staffed by about 220 volunteers. We operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week . Over two decades we have built up a strong relationship with local emergency services and have been an established partner in the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG). Council has promoted 101.5fm as a key outlet for official emergency information.
2. Between October and December 2010 we received significant rainfall. These falls continued into January 2011 and we were monitoring the Bureau of Meteorology website closely. It rained constantly for two days leading up to the 11th day of January 2011 and a significant portion of this rainfall was falling in our catchment areas and its surrounds. The likelihood of flooding due to this rain fall was high.
3. On Tuesday the 11th day of January 2011 I began work early, due to the high flood risk, and started disseminating information to the community at about 4.15am.

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Date: 06/05/11 JM


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Signature of officer [REDACTED]


400 George Street Brisbane
GPO Box 1738 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
Telephone 1300 309 634
Facsimile +61 7 3405 9750
www.floodcommission.qld.gov.au
ABN 65 959 415 158


4. Between about 6.30am to 6.45am the Moreton Bay Regional Council (MBRC) contacted the station and provided information about road closures due to flooding. Also around this time we received calls from local residents such as an ambulance driver telling us that the road closure information was incorrect. Callers were saying that roads declared closed were in fact open or that they had tried to drive through roads that were supposed to be open but were actually impassable due to high flood waters.
5. The information that was provided by the council was delayed by about two hours which resulted in the incorrect information. From my understanding of council operations I would suggest that this happened because of the hierarchy of the command chain, meaning everything filters up from the workers to the media officers through to the mayor before it can be released. The information about the road closures was rendered useless by the delay.
6. At about 8.30am we received a message from the Bureau of Meteorology asking all radio stations in south east Queensland to broadcast the mandatory warning signal concerning flooding. We received no further information at that time.
7. About two minutes later we then received a message from the police via e-mail and SMS. This message basically stated that all residents in low lying areas of Caboolture, Morayfield and Strathpine were to evacuate to higher ground. I then put this message to air. As a result of this message our phone lines became clogged with calls. People became panicked and wanted to know more information. I received a call from a woman from ENERGEX who had gone to work in Brisbane and left her daughter at Morayfield and was very distressed. There were a number of such callers. The message left people confused because there was no information on whether people were in low-lying areas or not and to where they should evacuate.
8. I then phoned the LDMG to try and find out more information with regards to the evacuation message. I spoke with Eleanor Davidson,(council staff officer LDMG) and requested information concerning the location of the low lying areas, evacuation plans and evacuation centres. She was unable to give me an answer and said that she would call me back. The call never came. I found this disappointing and worrying..

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9. As I was not getting a response from the council, I told listeners to come to the CBD. I knew from experience with the LDMG before the council amalgamation that the Lutheran church had previously been designated as a possible evacuation centre. I checked with the Church that they had mattresses and other supplies and I then put them live to air to tell listeners that there would be an evacuation point at the church. The moment the Lutheran Church went to air, I got a call from the Baptist Church and the church at Morayfield offering to do the same. We were running this information every five minutes but we were still receiving calls from people wanting to know whether they were in low-lying areas or not.
10. I then received a call from the SES and I can only assume it was directed by council. They told me quite sternly that the official evacuation point was at the RSL in Caboolture. It wasn't said as such, but it was implicit that I should stop broadcasting information about the other evacuation centres.
11. I phoned the RSL and asked them how many people they could take. They told me that they didn't want to do it at all and were closing at 10.00pm so people would not be able to stay overnight. Furthermore, they had only been told by council that they would be an evacuation centre half an hour earlier.
12. In a flood situation the MBRC area turns into little islands. No one can get from one side to another. My partner was on one side of the river and I was on the other. There was no information coming from Morayfield because the police movements were also restricted because of the flood water.
13. With regard to the Bruce Highway, we were lucky enough to get calls from motorists at around 3.00pm to say it was open. I was reluctant to leave the radio station with so many calls from motorists on the Bruce Highway coming in but I couldn't put their reports to air because they were not official. The Council and emergency services were not giving out any information. I drove down myself and discovered the Highway was open. I later returned to the station after checking a few other roads and put the information to air. The commercial stations were still saying the Bruce Highway was closed while we were saying that it was open.

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14. At 8.45pm we received an official email from the LDMG saying that the official evacuation point was now 33 King Street, Caboolture..
15. On Wednesday the 12th day of January 2011 at about 3.30am I woke up and saw on television (Channel's 7 and 9) that the Bruce Highway was closed. I drove out to the main arterial road linking Caboolture and Morayfield and saw that it was clear. The Bruce Highway was also open. I also checked the council's latest road closures and there was nothing about those roads on it.
16. I then put the correct information with regards to these roads to air, based on my own visual inspection. Calls started coming in from people waiting in Brisbane thinking the Bruce Highway was closed and trying to get back. I could assure them that it was open.
17. I called Channel 9 and told them that their information was incorrect. They said that they had no official notification that the highway was opened. It was only when I told them that it was open that they withdrew the information about it being closed.

Issues and further information

18. In my opinion the LDMG went into meltdown. It was an epic fail. There was a sense of everyone blaming someone else and there was no prior planning with regards to evacuation centres and evacuation routes. The evacuation centres that were hastily set up, the RSL and 33 King Street were not appropriate and they were not set up for this role.
19. I think our local politicians just went missing. There was no high ranking official from the council available to give information for us to disseminate. There was a lack leadership. I tried to get the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor on the local radio but I got excuses from their media advisors that they were unavailable. There was a definite lack of presence. The media officer wouldn't even get the SES officer on the radio to tell people where they could get sandbags. I compared that with what was going on in Brisbane with Anna Bligh and Campbell Newman on the TV who were informing people on what to do. At the end of the day, people just want to know someone is there providing clear direction and information for local residents.

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20. The council were not providing helpful information to the public. We had calls from listeners like one who said they called council to say they could not evacuate because the water was up the fourth step and council told them to call back when it was at the floorboards. Furthermore, after the disaster, the Mayor sent out a press release downplaying the local impact on the local flood compared to Brisbane. This really angered the community.
21. It has only been 3 years since amalgamation which may explain to some degree why local relationships, and knowledge about who has what and where, just was not there. There was also a real lack of understanding of the area locally. Trying to micro manage out of Redcliffe and Strathpine was a real weakness.
22. The Queensland Police were great. I received calls from individual police during the crisis updating me on pertinent information which I subsequently aired. This information was invaluable. I received information about people blaming the police evacuation message but I feel that it woke people up and was effective. There has been public criticism about the message but I think it was important because it demonstrated the seriousness of the situation.
23. The community response to the disaster was very good. The evacuation centre that was set up at Reverend Pattison's Anglican church, Caboolture took in 45 people the first night. By the close of business the next day they had managed to billet all of them to local families. The Caboolture Christian Church on Tomlinson Rd managed to clean up the entire caravan park which was very badly hit, in just three days,
24. As for the essential services, ENERGEX was fine. We had power during the crisis. The mobile phone networks were off and on but I was right in the middle of town near the exchange and tower so my phone never went off. The Bureau of Meteorology was great and provided me with as much information as possible.
25. What we need is community understanding and information about local disaster management to know who to contact in each local area. In the recent floods, many communities in the region from Kilcoy to the Pumicestone Passage were quickly cut-off by flood water and became isolated. An identifiable local contact person is needed in


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each of these vulnerable areas to ensure official updated information is readily available particularly if police and SES also become cut off. With this in mind after the January event, I developed a counter disaster strategy with local chambers of commerce.

26. For many years, the radio station has been an avenue for official information for local residents in times of an emergency or natural disaster. In this case, I feel we were badly let down by the lack of critical and timely information from the council.

C.HEWLETT

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 15/04/2011 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 6 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 ...Brisbane.....this... <u>19TH</u>day of.....April.....2011.....	

Witness Signature 

Signature of officer 