

Statement of Witness

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry

Name of Witness	Geoffrey Mervyn James DIXON
Date of Birth	[REDACTED]
Address and contact details	[REDACTED] Gatton [REDACTED]
Occupation	Fire fighter
Officer taking statement	Detective Sergeant Stephen Platz
Date taken	03/05/2011

Geoffrey Mervyn James DIXON states:

1. I am a [REDACTED] year old male presently residing at [REDACTED] Gatton. I am employed by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) and have been in this organisation for the past twenty five years. I am currently the Captain of the Gatton Fire Station and also a permanent fire fighter at the Ipswich Fire Station. I conduct routine fire and rescue work but also trained in swift water rescue to a level 2 standard and also qualified in urban search and rescue (USAR).
2. Between the 10th and 11th of January 2011 I performed duties relating to the flooding within the Lockyer Valley. As a result of my involvement in this event I was required to provide a statement to the Police concerning the coronial investigation into the deaths of residents. I am able to produce a copy of my signed statement, dated 11th February 2011.

EXHIBIT: Statement provided to Police on the 11th February 2011.

Marked Exhibit No/...

Exhibit Number:

QFCI

Date:

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JM

Witness Signature [REDACTED]
Page Number 1 of 3


Signature of officer

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Also sometime in February 2011 I was interviewed by the United Fire Fighters Union in relation to a number of concerns I raised from my involvement in the floods.

- 3. During the first two critical days of the flood event, the 10th and 11th day of January 2011, it became evident that due to the flooding and lack of capability in our fire appliances, that helicopter's were the most viable means of responding to incidents. Whilst I was at the Incident Control centre (ICC) I was responsible for tasking swift water rescue teams. Initially, there was poor use of helicopters to transport crews and assist in rescues but later on the use of helicopters became prevalent. On one particular occasion I tasked a swift water rescue crew to attend Forest Hill in relation to a swift water evacuation. Due to the flooding we were unable to access the area by vehicle. At this stage the Australian Defence Force (ADF) were assisting the emergency services and I arranged to have this team transported to the job via army Blackhawk and later an emergency services helicopter. The team was able to perform the rescue quickly and effectively.

- 4. The issue that I identified was that none of our staff had any training with regards to performing rescues from helicopters. The crews managed, but they had to develop procedures as the jobs progressed, which can have a number of implications in a developing environment. There has been pressure from within the fire service to conduct cross training with EMQ but unfortunately nothing has eventuated. Furthermore, I also identified deficiencies with the use of QFRS air observation staff that were deployed to the affected areas. These officers are trained to assist in co-ordinating air assets, usually in rural fire situations, but have little knowledge of swift water rescue operations. In addition, none of the officers were local to the region and some were brought in from Townsville. Without local knowledge and an understanding of swift water rescue operations their ability to co-ordinate air assets was reduced. This became evident on one such occasion when one of the air observation supervisors asked me which direction Plainlands was in order to marry up with a helicopter.

Witness Signature. 
Page Number 2 of 5

Signature of officer



5. Sometime between the 13th and 14th day of January 2011 I was at the ICC and we were well into the recovery phase. In one instance I had a crew from the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) come to me and offer their assistance in the recovery effort. This team was well equipped in that they had numbers of men, equipment and machinery and were available to do work immediately. I then started to make arrangements to task them with a job but I was then advised by the new incident controller that we were not allowed to detail other agencies and to tell them to go away.

6. This situation was born out of the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) being overwhelmed with offers of assistance and the overflow then coming to our ICC. I was quite shocked with this command decision as we deal with other agencies on a regular basis. I outlined to the commander this fact and reminded him that is why we have green tea cards. A green tea card is a command and control tool we use to identify outside agencies such as DERM, when controlling an incident. I think that in a disaster such as this, all agencies must be flexible in their procedures in order to accommodate all situations presented to them. Despite this instruction I tasked the DERM crew anyway.

7. Whilst co-ordinating swift water rescue teams at the ICC I made the observation that there were in-sufficient crews trained in this type of rescue to a level 2 standard. This standard is the official requirement needed for officer's to enter swift water to affect rescues. Unfortunately auxiliary fire fighters are only given an awareness package which is essential a DVD presentation and rural fire fighters do not receive any training. Auxiliary fire appliances also do not carry any swift water rescue gear, so often I would take my gear home with me at the end of every shift so that I had some personal gear with me.



- 8. The issue that this lack of gear and training creates is that auxiliary units get tasked with swift water rescue jobs but due to community expectations and our core responsibility, they would still perform these jobs without the proper training and equipment. The view from senior management is that the auxiliaries will travel to the event, secure the scene and then wait for swift water rescue is just farcical, as you cannot stand by while people are in distress and immediate danger. So basically auxiliary fire fighters are often doing things outside the scope of auxiliary operations purely because they have a moral obligation to the public in all types of situations.

- 9. With regards to equipment during this crisis I also identified that the lack of four wheel drive fire appliances prevent an effective response to jobs. As mentioned in my previous police statement my fire appliance became caught in the sudden flooding at Murphy's creek. The water came to above the wheel height of the vehicle and the ground was very boggy afterwards. The vehicle I was in was a four wheel drive appliance and we did not have a problem. Unfortunately a lot of the regional appliances now are only two wheel drives with low clearance that become bogged easily. During the flood a lot of these vehicles became stranded or could not attend jobs due to their lack of capability.

- 10. Overall the ICC ran reasonably well but there were some issues with co-ordination of resources. Initially there was no Duty Manager of Operations (DMO) who is a trained officer that has an overall view of the entire situation. Unfortunately the staff that were issuing crews to jobs, did not have an appreciation of the developing scenario. In one instance numerous appliances were being sent to the flooded areas in response to jobs but one by one they were becoming stranded due to the flood waters.

Witness Signature



Signature of officer

- 11. Another area I think they could be improved is the amount of reporting that is required by the ICC to forward to higher management. The reporting requirements seemed to take precedence over getting the job done. At the time, staff were too busy dealing with the situation than to be writing reports.

G.DIXON

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 04/05/2011 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 5 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.

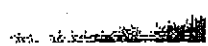
.....Signature

Signed at 1600 this Fifth day of.....May.....2011

Witness Signature

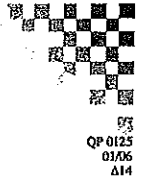


Signature of officer





QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE
STATEMENT OF WITNESS



Occurrence #: _____

Statement no.: _____ Date: **11/02/2011**

Statement of

Name of witness: **DIXON, Geoffrey Mervyn James**

Date of birth: [REDACTED] Age: [REDACTED] Occupation: **Fire fighter**

Police officer taking statement

Name: **STEVENS, Matt Duncan**

Rank: **Sergeant** Reg. no.: **9119**

Region/Command/Division: **Southern** Station: **Springfield**

Statement:

STATEMENT COMMENCED AT 1005HRS 11.02.2011:

Geoffrey Mervyn James DIXON States;

1. I live at [REDACTED]. My contact phone numbers are [REDACTED]

2. I am employed with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. I have been employed with them for 25 years and I am the currently the Captain of the Gatton Fire Station and I am also a permanent firefighter at the Ipswich Fire Station. My duties include fire response, rescue and Level 2 USAR (Urban Search and Rescue).

3. On Monday 10 January 2011 I was the officer, (senior member) on the auxiliary appliance 677E at Gatton Fire station. This is a QFRS 4wd truck which is usually staffed by four but on this day we only had three. In this appliance was myself and Gary Carsburg and Thomas Dixon. At Gatton there are no swift water rescue trained QFRS staff but on this day I had my kit with me.

[REDACTED]

(Witness's signature)


(Justice of the Peace (Qual.)/
Commissioner for Declarations's signature)

[REDACTED]


(Signature of police officer
preparing statement)

CONTINUED STATEMENT OF: **DIXON, Geoffrey Mervyn James**

4. Our FireComms for the southeast corner is at Southport and all reports via 000 are taken here and then detailed to respective crews as required. At 1340hrs we were tasked to a woman a children stuck in a house with rising waters on Murphy's Creek Road. I don't have the exact address but this would be recorded on our QFRS Fire report which is a log of events. The fire report number is 002741. There were other QFRS vehicles on this job too. We attended and found that no vehicles were able to proceed past the substation on Murphy's Creek Road. Just past the substation there is a dip in the road and the water was across the road preventing us from going further.
5. We were able to get a message through to FireComm that we were stuck but after that our communications were scratchy and broken. We did however have truck to truck comms with other QFRS vehicles in the area.
6. We then evacuated people from nearby houses at this location just from visual observations. We had people self evacuate and leave the area to move to higher ground. At this stage the water over the road was what I would call normal flooding but from communications with other QFRS trucks we knew there was more water coming.
7. We heard it first. The cracking and crashing of trees was one of the sounds then a bank or wall of water, maybe two metres was coming towards us from the northeast down Murphy's Creek and a second wall of water coming towards us from the northwest also. At this time we were parked on a highpoint on Postman's Ridge Road. We physically couldn't go anywhere. When the water hit the truck we watched it rise up above the wheel height of the truck to probably four or five feet deep. We were talking via radio to another QFRS truck that was near the substation at the corner of Murphy's Creek Road and Postman's Ridge Road. We had visual contact with them too but couldn't get to them or vice-versa.
8. We were stuck at this location for about an hour not being able to do much other than watch things float past. While we were there we saw lots of things


(Witness's signature)

(Justice of the Peace (Qual.)/
Commissioner for Declarations's signature)


(Signature of police officer
preparing statement)

CONTINUED STATEMENT OF: **DIXON, Geoffrey Mervyn James**

float past us. These things included tanks, a bit of live stock, part of a shed or house cause we could see it was a roof, a vehicle (white tray back utility), we could see in the vehicle and there was no one in this vehicle, a brown 20ft shipping container. We later located that vehicle during a subsequent search down Postman's Ridge Road near Withcott Seedlings' driveway.

9. After the water subsided we hooked up with the other appliances and changed some crews so that we would have a swift water rescue team. Kerry Weier came into 677E with his kit and additional equipment. Once we had done this we headed off to the original job at Murphy's Creek Road.
10. When we got there, with the other appliance 645M we found the woman and children standing on the front deck. They appeared to be OK and the 645M appliance attended and bought her out.
11. We then went to McCormacks Road, Murphy's Creek which is the road that goes up to Spring Bluff. We picked up comms after meeting with the other appliance. We were then detailed this job re reports of persons washed out of a house. (I am aware that our Firecomms kept a running job on all these events which is where they record everything against the one job number).
12. When we got up to McCormack Road we met up with some Queensland Rail staff who advised us there was a male person looking for his parents. I'm not sure of the exact address but the surname was Matthews. We spoke with the male person who was a bit frantic trying to get us to help him find his parents. We had to calm him down to get some sense out of him and I recall him telling us that he was helping his sister get into the roof when he saw his mother get swept out of the kitchen area of the house and then saw his father attempt to assist her. He was swept out also. The sister wasn't there when we first arrived.



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(Justice of the Peace (Qual.)/
Commissioner for Declarations's signature)



(Signature of police officer
preparing statement)

CONTINUED STATEMENT OF: **DIXON, Geoffrey Mervyn James**


13. Kerry and I had to get across a broken bridge to gain access to the property before we could speak with him. He told us that he had already got his sister across this bridge.

14. After he told us what had happened, Kerry and I started making our way down the creek doing a search for his mother and father. The creek was running pretty well. There was just masses of debris everywhere. We were doing bank searches. I would do one side and Kerry the other, then we would do searches closer to the water. By that time the water had subsided from where it had been to where it was now was probably four or five metres. There was other civilian family members doing searches too. They had started that before we got there.


15. We had been searching for over an hour before we got information from one of them, a male person possibly son-in-law, directed us to the first victim. He was quite a distance from the water on a bank. He was on the side of the bank closest to Murphy's Creek Road.

16. When we got the information where the victim was we went back to the appliance and drove it down the road and then walked in the rest of the way. The victim was partially unclothed, with just a shirt missing. The male who may have been the son-in-law was with the victim holding him. When we got there the victim was clearly deceased with no signs of life. We didn't have comms with FireComms at this stage but we were able to make contact with another appliance, I think it was 675A, who came to this area. We tasked that crew to stay with the deceased and we notified the police at this stage too. We met up with some police officers from Toowoomba. (Not sure of their names but both males). They then came with us to search the banks further downstream.

17. Quite a distance further, if you follow the creek maybe 500metres further, we located the female victim. She was entangled and partially covered with debris on the edge of the bank, again the road side of the creek. There were


(Witness's signature)

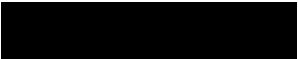
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Commissioner for Declarations's signature)


(Signature of police officer
preparing statement)


CONTINUED STATEMENT OF: **DIXON, Geoffrey Mervyn James**

no signs of life whatsoever. Her shirt was missing and she was face down entangled in the vegetable matter at this location. The bank was falling in a little bit here so the decision was made in consultation with the police officers to move the victim away from here so she wouldn't fall in the creek. We just moved her back up the bank a bit further. Before we moved the victim, one of the police officers took some photos of her in situ with a camera he had with him.

18. At that point the two daughters arrived at this spot. Kerry and I spoke with the two girls and also discussed with the police about the two girls wanting to see their mother. We used one of the raincoats of one of the police officers to cover the victim and then the daughters were allowed to come down and see their mother.
19. We then waited for the scientific officers to attend and after they had finished we carried the victims out to the roadside. There was a little, indent sort of cattle yard off to the side of the road and both victims were carried to this location. By the time we got them there it was dark.
20. During these events we gave regular SITREPS to our Firecomms via radio. We usually do this via phone but there was no phone reception in this area.
21. After we had finished at this location we returned to the Gatton Fire Station which had now been set up as an ICC (Incident Control Centre). From here we were re-detailed into different crews and they had basically set up a swift water taskforce of which I was one of the technicians. When we are in taskforce mode there is no rank as such.
22. In that taskforce we were detailed tasks from the ICC to attend different locations in the Helidon, Sandy Creek, Brightview and Grantham areas. These tasks generally related to evacuations from flood affected areas. Mostly from flood affected houses. On each task we would radio to ICC the results and whether we had made it to the location or not. Some of these tasks we


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(Justice of the Peace (Qual.)/
Commissioner for Declarations's signature)


(Signature of police officer
preparing statement)

CONTINUED STATEMENT OF: **DIXON, Geoffrey Mervyn James**

couldn't gain access safely due to flooded waters. The tasks we attended to would be recorded at ICC on an incident log. We weren't transporting any people at all. We would remove them if necessary and then Police or SES would transport them to the evacuation centres. I continued doing these duties until about 3am on Tuesday 11 January 2011.

23. On Tuesday 11 January 2011 I was working in the Operations Control Centre which is part of the ICC. My duties included tasking QFRS appliances and staff to attend to jobs. I recall that there were many tasks detailed on this day including searches of cars, reports of located deceased persons and more evacuations. As the waters subsided we were able to gain access to further properties. All these jobs and taskings are recorded in the ICC on incident logs.

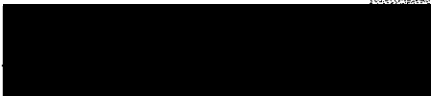
24. Since these events I have been interviewed by staff of the QFRS where I provided details of the events as outlined above. This interview was electronically recorded.

Justices Act Acknowledgement

Justices Act 1886

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

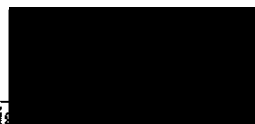
- (1) This written statement by me dated 11.02.2011 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 7 is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and
- (2) I make this statement knowing that, if it were admitted as evidence, I may be liable to prosecution for stating in it anything that I know is false.

..........Signature

Signed at Gatton this...11th...day of February 2011

(Witness's signature)

(Justice of the Peace (Qual.)/
Commissioner for Declarations's signature)


(Signature of person
preparing statement)