

To: [REDACTED] (Local Controller, Gold Coast, Gold Coast City),

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]

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

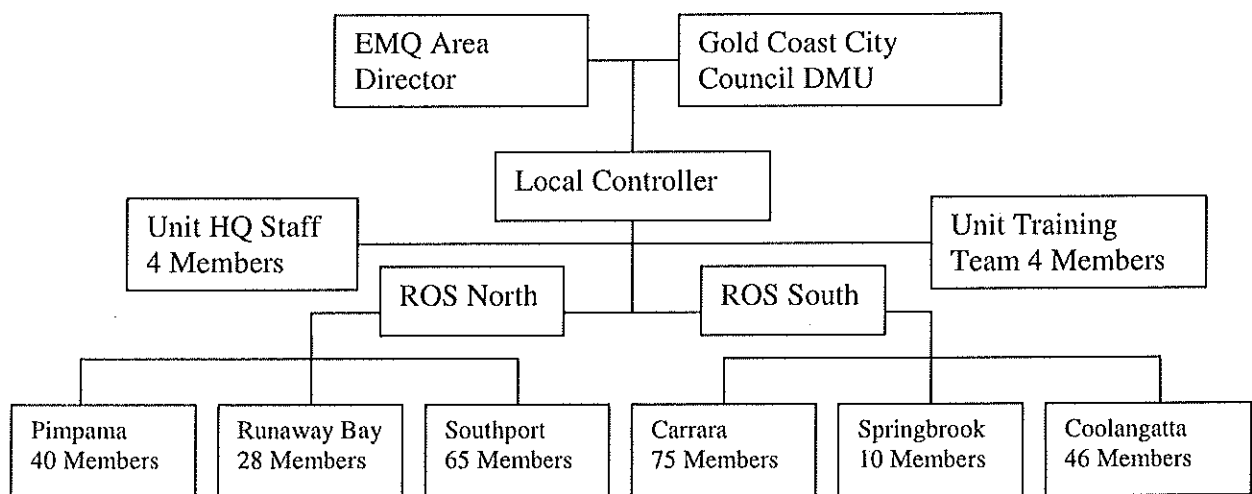
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Questionnaire for SES Local Controllers

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 SES unit/groups during the 2010/2011 floods. Please complete the questionnaire and return it to the Commission by Friday, 14 October 2011.

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.



The Gold Coast SES Unit is 275 members strong and divided into two Regions and 6 sectors, with 3 groups in each region and a Regional Operational Supervisor (ROS) for each. 1 Northern and 1 Southern. Each group within the Unit has an OIC (Group Leader) and Two 2IC's (Deputy Group Leaders). Each group also has a Training officer and a training assistant. This is the minimum staffing establishment set by myself for the Unit. This allows for Officers to be deployed, relieve in higher duties and be able to take holidays, sick relief etc without impacting on the function of the Unit.

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.

Every Gold Coast SES member is a full time employee, but none with the State Emergency Service. The entire 275 Gold Coast Unit members are volunteers including myself as Local Controller (LC).

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.

Yes!!! I have been the Local Controller for the Gold Coast SES Unit since 01/11/2009. The position prior to me being appointed was paid at approx \$100K a year + a vehicle. This was paid by Gold Coast City Council and the LC was employed by them and managed SES. This was then made redundant by GCCC and for the next two years we went through Acting LC's as the position was extremely time consuming.

I currently work as a full time Advanced Care Paramedic on the Gold Coast for the Queensland Ambulance Service and have been very fortunate that they (the QAS) allow me to fulfil most of my duties as the LC. I work 4-5 shifts (48-50 hrs) a week with the QAS on a rotating roster and the other 3-4 days/part days for SES as the LC (volunteer).

The paper work involved in running this unit is excessive as we report to two (2) different areas of hierarchy. They are EMQ (Emergency Management Queensland) and the GCCC (Gold Coast City Council). To add to this we also have to maintain competencies in our training and therefore weekends are usually taken up by competency maintenance or instructing on courses to allow our volunteers the highest level of training to be able to assist the community in our functions.

I have taken steps to reduce the LC work load by splitting the GC into two (2) regions and appointing two ROS's (Regional Operations Supervisors/ Deputy Local Controllers) to assist with the day to day function of the local groups and to attend the meetings I can't attend due to my commitment to the QAS. This impact's heavily on all our families and our support networks.

SES is a full time job for those who hold appointments, LC, ROS's, OIC's and trainers. The GC unit is one of the busiest units in Queensland and averages 1-2 jobs a week as well as playing a major assistance role to the QPS, QAS and GCCC with events such as the GC 600 (V8 Super Car Event, formally GC Indy), Schoolies week, Gold Coast show, Big Day Out (Major Music event), The Kokoda Challenge (3 night race through GC hinterland, Australia Day functions, Gold Coast Marathon (2 day event assisting QAS and Q Health), Lighting crime scenes, Forensic searching. These are all annual events which we have been a part of for the past 15 years. These events and our weekly operational responses to the community such as Storms, Flooding, High wind events, Vertical Rescue, and Land search, Marine Search, K9 Search and Rescue, would be a minimal basis for a full time SES team on the GC.

I believe that all managers should be paid or receive an honorarium. I don't believe all members should be paid but perhaps look at the systems used by the Army Reserve, QFRA Auxiliary Fire Service, SLSQ, all of whom have both paid and full time members as well as volunteers. For example, SLSQ has full time pilot and crew man as well as full time life guards (GCCC).

The QFRA Auxiliary Fire has part time staff as well as volunteers and the ADFR who are paid a tax free amount for their training and activations.

Without Volunteers we would not be able to achieve all we have or continue to grow as most members join the SES for personal gratification and be a part of a well trained team that gives back to their community, whilst at the same time obtaining skills that assist them in their own personal day to day lives.

In 2010 The Gold Coast unit submitted through EMQ a business study in relation to forming a full time team on the Gold Coast to help assist with the number of activations we attend each year. If the state was to look at this with some serious consideration it would help elevate the stress placed on the volunteers during work hours. If a team was placed in each major city i.e.: Cairns, Townsville, Brisbane, Rockhampton and the Gold Coast, then you would have a minimum full time response of 25 Staff and 5 OIC's. All members of these teams could assist in community education and would all be trained to support the workload for each area i.e.: Gold Coast, K9 Search and Rescue, Flood Boat, VR, Land Search, Forensic Searching etc... The team would be made up of 6 Members and an OIC. It would be controlled by the Local Controller.

The Gold Coast unit also has a K9 search Team which also so should be considered for full time service, not only to the Coast but to the Queensland community. The unit was utilised at Grantham (after units from Victoria?) and has also been deployed to Maitland and Newcastle in NSW. These members give up a large amount of time as the dogs and their handlers need to constantly train.

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

We only have one in our local government.

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 2101/2011 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 we had enough trained members to assist with the 2010/2011 floods. They weren't all activated as a result of the requests being sent to us by EMQ which stipulated the required number of members for each day.

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

Yes we had more than enough and sent what was required whilst still maintaining enough teams on the GC for events that may have happened here.

2.3 Did your unit have enough equipment and resources?

No.

We were stretched very thin but have since been endeavouring to have this rectified by both our managers, EMQ and GCCC.

Although as is with all we do on the GC this is proving to be difficult as the GCCC continually refer all to EMQ.

They have supplied most of the small equipment (hand tools) but the resources most in need we are attempting to have donated (vehicles, Generators etc) which also is proving difficult as the GCCC policy for donations is very strict.

For example, we wish to have a vehicle donated. GCCC policy states it must be NEW and accepted by inspection from them. Unfortunately all vehicles purchased through them or with assistance from EMQ are second hand usually with 40 000 + klm's on them.

This makes it more difficult for us to obtain.

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

- In regards to Flood Boats and crews, Yes.
- Equipment and plant, No.
- Operational logistics and function No.

We don't have a unit HQ, it's a little room tucked in the back corner of a Groups Head Quarters.

This is due to the GCCC down sizing the GC SES.

I strongly express that if we had a major event on the GC, as we did in 2010/2011 we would not be able to operate to our full capacity as our buildings are over crowded with members and we have no where to put them on training nights.

GCCC will not allow us to have appropriate buildings for a HQ or expand the ones we have that are currently being over populated but they (GCCC) reduce the ones we do have, which in our Unit HQ has 6 of us sharing 3 desks in an office that is 3m x 6m.

All of our groups still us 56k Modems and cannot access RFA.

GCCC won't allow Broadband into the Group buildings.

In summery if these events were to happen again we would put our best foot forward and cope as we have been, but we are not fully equipped to do what we are trained to do.

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, recues, evacuations).

- From New Years Eve to Boxing Day GC Unit was involved in 300 RFA's on the GC after a storm came through.
- Sent 1 Flood Boat crew to Ipswich for Flood relief, Resupply, Rescues from roof tops and evacuations.
- 5 boats on standby for deployment, only one (1) required. Four (4) kept on standby for duration of Brisbane, Ipswich and Grantham flooding but not utilized or requested.
- Teams deployed to Ipswich for wash downs, door knocking for RFA and clean up.
- Teams deployed to Esk for clean up duties.
- Teams deployed to Murphy's creek for Cadaver search.
- Teams deployed to Grantham for Land SAR and Cadaver search.
- K9 unit 1 week deployment Grantham for Cadaver search & recovery.
- Teams deployed to Grantham for general clean up duties in conjunction with ADF.
- Peer support team to Toowoomba.
- Peer support team sent to Brisbane.
- Peer support team sent to Grantham.
- Teams sent to EMQ/HQ at Ormeau for data entry and RFA.

4. Command and Control

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

- As LC it was my responsibility to manage responses from our unit to the affected areas of the event through EMQ and GCCC.
- To provide operational updates to EMQ and GCCC of our involvement in the event.
- Seek permission to send SES vehicles outside of GC area of normal operations from GCCC who has strict policy for vehicle use.
- All teams and members managed for appropriateness to tasking.
- Undertaking of correct resources and resupply for teams depending on their tasking.
- To implement a roster for deployments whilst maintaining enough personnel and resources to attend any event that may occur on the GC.
- Manage fatigue and personnel requirements.
- Maintain an effective operational unit at all times.
- Liaise with the media based on units function at the event.
- Participate in teleconferences for effectiveness and deployments for the event.
- Maintain my normal roster as a Paramedic for QAS.

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

- I report to the EMQ Area Director, for all administrative matters and policy.
- GCCC/ DMU officer for all Vehicle, Plant and Facility matters.

4.3 Where does your SES unit receive Requests for Assistance from?

Since the implementation of RFA we have and currently still rely on the information being sent through from EMQ to an email account. As we are volunteers we do not open up our inadequate HQ for one to two jobs. We have a limit agreed to with EMQ that for any greater than 20 jobs our staff will open up HQ and get the jobs direct from RFA.

We do not have the resources to do this any other way. The HQ is the only building with high speed internet as it sits next door to the GCCC DMU. We have asked for this to be made accessible to all Group Hq's but the GCCC denies this request constantly. Once the RFA is received it's then phoned through to the appropriate OIC (GL) for dispatch to a team.

When completed, the team phones back (on their personal mobile) for their next tasking. We have asked for the RFA system to be used in our vehicles and Group HQ's and have purchased our own laptops for each vehicle, to remove the cost from the member, but again we are denied access to any network through GCCC and EMQ. The group HQ's are still on 56k dial up modems for internet access.

All OIC's (Group Leaders) and GC SES Unit managers use their own personal internet connections for all SES matters.

EMQ does cover some of this with an annual honorarium to managers with the Executive Allowance. Unfortunately this does not show accuracy in cost recovery to the Manager.

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

- We receive an email from EMQ duty officer and send out a Group txt to all OIC's and managers notifying of an event.
- OIC's contact their members through a group text message to their members cell phones and await reply of possible numbers for the task/s.
- Members attend their HQ, pick up necessary vehicles and equipment for task/s and are phoned the jobs as they require.
- On completion they phone back in for next job. This is done on their own **personal** phones and the **cost** worn by them.
- GCCC won't supply phones for operational use in vehicles as it's against their policy.
- GCCC is notified by our DO that we are activated and are using SES vehicles and are also notified on completion.
- RFA's are then completed and teams stood down. If less than 20 jobs this is done by our Northern ROS at their place of residence or on the following Tuesday night.

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

No we received only current tasking.

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?

No, **all** Requests to our Unit were tasked and completed.

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

Yes, we were deployed to many areas at the request of EMQ. Members were placed on a roster for deployment and placed into teams appropriate to the task. They were managed on a daily basis and EMQ updated on any change of events. We implemented a deployment officer and logistics manager for core function; allowing for the rest of the unit to maintain its alertness for our local community.

4.8 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature or your units contact and coordination (if any) with the following?

- a) Local Disaster Coordinator**
Handled through EMQ
- b) Local Disaster Coordination Centre**
Handled through EMQ
- c) Local Disaster Management Group**
Handled through EMQ

4.9 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature or your units contact and coordination (if any) with the following?

a) DDC

Handled through EMQ

b) DDCC

Handled through EMQ

c) DDMG

Handled through EMQ

Command and Control

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?

Liaised constantly with the AD and RD for deployments. Had several Tele conferences to alleviate issues with staffing, logistics and members requirements, which we were unable to meet at unit level. They were the ideal Administrators for our units function and liaisons for deployment tasking. We have a very solid working partnership with our AD and RD.

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

At Grantham interacted with QPS for K9 searching and team land searching.
With the ADF in clean up operations at Grantham and Tully.
Support role to all ES.

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 in the presence of myself or my managers.

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

To facilitate the needs of their Units, provide assistance where necessary; when scope becomes greater than the unit is capable of handling assist in engaging other units. I see them as the support role for the Unit/s under their direction. For example it would be the same as the LDMG managing an event until it becomes too great then bringing in the DDMG to assist (AD) and should it grow greater, gaining assistance from the SDMG (RD) which allows them to complete the event/s and gain assistance from within the State.

5. Communications

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

UHF radios used by all our teams as well as mobile phones, computers and pagers.

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

No all systems operated normally.

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

Our portable radios have QPS CH: 65 on them but that is all. We have asked on several occasions to have Marine radios fitted to our boats for searches on the GC that will allow us to talk to SLSQ and QPS Water Police in the marine environment whilst searching, but have been declined due to funding.

6. Funding

6.1 Where does your unit receive funding from?

- We receive some funding from EMQ in the form of vehicles, boats and some plant and specialist rescue equipment such as VR.
- We also receive funding from GCCC for maintenance and servicing of buildings, vehicles, boats, small plant and perishable items as well as some training and catering for storms and training. They also fund all our stationery and some IT. They work from a budget that is kept secret and unknown to SES despite being sought several times in the past two years.
- All funding for the K9 unit is done through donation except their food and vet bills which are out of pocket expenses worn by the two handlers.
- We hold 3-4 fundraisers a year and rely heavily on donations to assist with the purchasing of equipment that neither EMQ nor GCCC will supply due to budgeting.

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?

Yes applied for 4 vehicles received three second hand ex council vehicles that were surplus to their needs.

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

- With EMQ yes.
- With GCCC no, and we continually get the same budget every year even with requests put forward for increases to purchase new vehicles and upgrade buildings.

- Money fundraised is spent in accordance with all managers agreeing on purchases for the unit.

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.

The current funding for the GC Unit is appalling. An increase in funding would greatly enhance our much diminished areas of operation and our over crowded buildings. We need to increase our fleet as members are driving their personal vehicles to callouts and we are constantly knocking back teams on storm jobs due to lack of vehicles. We could also use an increase to build or buy a Unit HQ with appropriate space and IT to run an event effectively and professionally and allow us to have RFA in all our vehicles and group HQ's. This would enhance our response to the community.

We are constantly over stretching our members in assisting the GC Unit to fundraise as well as continue with their training and service to the community. We are in the year 2011 and the GC Unit is still operating in the late 70's early 80's.

6.5 Do you think that the way in which funding is allocated and distributed to your unit adequate? If not, how could this be improved?

The first improvement would be to let the LC actually know what the funding and budget allocation is. We waste a great deal of time applying for vehicles, equipment etc to be told NO the budget won't allow that. If we actually knew what we had to work with would be a great deal easier.

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

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

Community day events (2-3 a year), BBQ stalls at Bunnings (2 a Year), General donations from public during storm repair.

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

2-3 %

(c) does fundraising present any difficulties?

Yes it's becoming harder as the financial burdens are straining the community as a whole. We are having to take our members away from their families again to assist with fundraising on top of the away time spent on callouts, deployments and training and retraining to keep a skill that only stays current for 12 months.

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 state-wide level?

I honestly don't believe attracting members especially on the GC is a concern. We always have an abundance of Volunteers' wishing to join each month. I'm not sure how the other areas are faring but I am aware that Brisbane has a waiting list that from what I understand is nearly up to two years wait. This to me is probably one of the draw backs, if I was going to look at giving up my time why should I have to wait up to a year to do it. At the Gold Coast we don't make anybody wait to join and run inductions 1st of every month. Unfortunately the waiting problem comes after they sign up, as they have to under go a 3 month long induction process, criminal history check for suitability and liability, which is ok if you are an Australian as there is no costs to the member.

Unfortunately if you are an overseas applicant living in Australia, then you have to pay for one from your country of origin and this constantly delays the potential member's application. This usually results in the potential member no longer attending as they become fed up and frustrated with awaiting their criminal history check to return.

This I don't claim to understand as they have passed and been allowed to enter our country through one of the most stringent customs and security checks in world and all have gained residency making them eligible to join.

There have been a few instances where the potential member has been born overseas and come to Australia as a young child (4 yrs old) and lived here basically his whole life, but requires a criminal history check from his country of birth. This process definitely needs to be re defined.

Retention is not overly difficult. After taking on the LC position on the GC, we were about 150 members strong and have increased that membership to currently a membership of just over 275.

The way we retain members who so valiantly give up there time is to give them strong honest leadership, varied training, more and more training options each year.

We constantly show encouragement in that we understand their needs and that we can still get our hands dirty with them. Lead by example from the top. I have always impressed upon my managers that they are to be a part of what their members do and where possible on occasions get out with them and let them see you tarping a roof or cutting up a tree etc.

I will not have a member do anything I have not or won't do myself.

All training department needs need to be met. As well as the training being relevant to the Units needs. The training needs to be interesting and varied.

One of the hardest avenues at the moment is the amount of paperwork being generated for a new member. It's nearly triple what it used to be 2 years ago. This in conjunction with the

paper work involved with training, is proving to create a down-turn in attendance for members as they are giving up their family time more and more just to attend training to qualify them to attend activations.

I am well aware that they go hand in hand but do we need to make things so hard for them? A course, for example (Flood Boat), has gone from being a weekend course to two weekends to now a 5 day course. We are allowing unlicensed members to drive a flood boat and be responsible for others lives in often dangerous conditions, yet by law they can't drive a boat any other time as they do not have a boat license. We are asking a great deal more of our volunteers and its paying dearly on our retention.

In addition to this we used to apply for a course that suited you and go do it. Presently you must meet mandatory requirements and pre requisites and compete with 20+ other members to obtain an area of competency, as we have ratios as to how many people can be trained at one time per instructor.

In all high risk elements (Vertical Mobility/Rescue, Flood Boat, WS@H) I totally agree.

With the Community based level up to Field Operator Level this is a little unrealistic.

We are a very active Unit which also helps with our retention as it keeps all our members involved in an array of different functions and events. This combined with our operational status being weekly a great deal of the year allows for an array of interest from our members.

Combining this with the support we receive from EMQ keeps the GC Unit in good stead, well represented for its community and highly efficient, broadly skilled, well-trained members.

We also hold 1-2 family days a year where possible, as families of volunteers are just as important as our volunteers.

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

As a result we are currently undertaking a greater initiative in preparation for the upcoming storm season. I realise that this was probably the first time our EMQ managers have had to deal with such a major event but the reporting structure seems to have been not overly accurate. For example, flood boat crews ready to respond but not utilised, as a result the interim obligations have been produced and in some areas will over populate the need or requirement for operators in their areas of operation.

There is a distinct need to have only State Government Agency with the appropriate legislative powers responsible for SES. The current configuration especially on the GC with Local Government (GCCC) and State Government (EMQ) sharing the responsibility is having ramifications on SES managers, SES retention, SES function and core business. The two levels of government are continually playing off against one another for responsibility and who is financially responsible for SES.

Under the DM Act 2003 the Local Government (GCCC) is to maintain a "**disaster response capability**, for a local government. This means the ability to provide equipment and a suitable number of persons, using the resources available to the local government," (SES) "to effectively deal with, or help another entity to deal with, an emergency situation or a disaster in the local government's area."

This could still be achieved and with only one form of Government having control of SES. EMQ is the appropriate State Government department to be in control of the States SES units and the Local Government (GCCC) could offer financial support to EMQ in way of a budget being given to EMQ towards the maintenance of utilities, plant, etc. This maintaining their commitment to the provisions under the DM Act 2003 Part 5, 80 (2).

SES needs a structured holistic approach with Leadership given back to the Local Controllers and guidance and direction given from EMQ. For example if the Gold Coast SES is activated I can send a crew anywhere as long as its within the local shire, I have been told that I do not have the Authority to send a crew across council boarders at the request of another LC. I quote, "You do not have the authority as you are not an employee of the Gold Coast City Council to authorize the use of any council equipment". We cannot continue to work under the frame work of two different Levels of government as this is remarkably reducing the SES being able to achieve its function. To achieve a unified response we need a unified leader.

SES should be recognised as the 4th emergency service and the other services, QPS, QFRA and QAS are only managed by one government, so should we be. We support the other services and in some areas are primary responders, but unfortunately have to obey two different sets of rules that can lead to a diminished and delayed response.