Name of Witness	**Ian Frederick BLAND**
Date of Birth	[redacted]
Address and contact details	**Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Ipswich Fire Station 4 Bunya Street Moogill Qld 4070 Ph.** [redacted] **email –** [redacted]
Occupation	**Firefighter/Station Officer**
Officer taking statement	**Detective Senior Sergeant Mark Reid**
Date taken	**29 April 2011 (amended 9 May 2011)**

Ian Frederick BLAND states:

1. I am a Station Officer for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service based at the Ipswich Fire Station. I have been a qualified Fire Fighter since 1988. I am fully qualified in all disciplines of Technical Rescue Level 2 which includes swift water rescue.

2. Swift Water Rescue Level 2 requires an operator to be assessed and competent on theory and practical skills to successfully enter the water environment and conduct rescues. Both theory and practical components of this skill are conducted at the Tully River North Queensland. Core skill maintenance is conducted throughout the year.

3. On Friday 18 February 2011 I participated in an interview with members of the United Fire Fighters Union where I discussed a number of various issues that resulted from the Flood Events of December 2010 and January 2011 in Queensland. These issues arise from my observations of practices and procedures utilised by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS).

QFCI
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4. On Monday 10 January 2011 I arrived back with a swift water team of four persons from Emerald at the Brisbane Airport. We were fresh and we were equipped and we knew the area and were ready to back up the teams that had been deployed to Lockyer Highway. After a delay we were told that were not required to assist in the incidents at Grantham. I wasn't particularly happy about that so I made a few more enquiries. I also checked with people who were up in the Lockyer Valley. I spoke to Nathan Chadwick at the time and the situation up there from his perspective was not a situation where it was under control, it was still a developing issue. I rang back, and again got the Duty Manager Operations at either Southport or Beenleigh and I spoke to him. I asked whether he was aware of the level and extent of what was happening in the Lockyer Valley, because I was concerned that he was bit isolated being in Southport. He responded with words to effect that the situation is under control and it's scaling down. That was at 6.30pm on Monday 10 January 2010.

5. Throughout the night I had numerous communiqués back with Nathan and with Mark Stephenson who was in the operations centre at Gatton. They informed me that the event certainly didn't look like it was scaling down, in fact it looked like it was ramping up. It concerned me at this stage that our senior staff at Southport at 6:30pm on the Monday afternoon were considering the event to be over and done with, whereas the crews on the ground were saying that it was escalating. This signified to me a clear lack of situational awareness on the part of the Operations Manager.

6. At about 5.00am on Tuesday 11 January 2011 I arrived at the Ipswich Fire Station, and it was fair to say that we were still very much in a response mode, we were rapidly trying to assemble additional crews. The duty crews were trying to co-ordinate re-stowing of vehicles and the co-ordination of getting those vehicles out in the field, fully equipped and with change over crews. What was lacking was an over brief on what we had, what we were going into and what we expected to find. Now in defence of the people at Ipswich they weren't aware of what was happening in Gatton, and in defence of the people in Gatton ICC they wouldn't have had a moment to scratch themselves to prepare briefings for oncoming crews because they were still trying to catch up with what was happening around them. They were still in, a very much an evolving incident. The immediate management of the response was at the

station officer level. There wasn't necessarily an overlying or governing body at this stage. What was occurring was each station officer was equipping their people as best they could and were responding to whatever incident allocated them. The ICC's were in reactionary mode. As at Tuesday morning and there still was not a clear picture of the situation as a whole. Ipswich QFRS was still in the process of setting up the Ipswich ICC.

7. With the deployment of personnel and equipment, overall I found it difficult on the Tuesday morning to understand why there wasn't more resources being deployed into the areas where they were most needed. We have a big resource base in the Brisbane and the South East area and I was concerned that we didn't appear to have the resources that I thought would be available to us. Now having said that I'm in the fish bowl looking out, I don't know what's happening around me. When I arrived back at Tuesday lunch time from the events of Tuesday morning, I would have expected to see a staging of vehicles and of urban crews in that environment. But we didn't. We probably could have managed the incident better with more resources. I saw two off-duty station officers, PAFF and STEPHENSON who had been on duty till two o'clock in the morning co-ordinating, crewing up on a second appliance at Ipswich by recalling staff. During the night this swift water crew had been on duty for approximately 22 hours. This is definitely not a normal process for crews to work this sort of shift, but there were no other crews to replace them. This was occurring during the period that Myself and Brendan ASHBY were told to stand down after the Emerald deployment. We currently only have ten swift water technicians for the Ipswich area. Four were already on duty for that continuous period. Two were on duty as auxiliary officers for that period. Two were on deployment to other parts of the state. This left only Brendan ASHBY and myself as the only available resource.

8. I want to address the relationship between local disaster management groups or councils and the QFRS in its role as a response agency. The QFRS is the response agency for swift water rescue and as such we deploy and respond under time constraints. Where conflict occurs is when there are still rescues to be conducted, we have the LDMG starting to task recovery operations from the same resource. The Local Disaster Management Group is a coordinating body that represents the local

Council incorporating response and support agencies within the area. These include QFRS, QPS, Queensland Ambulance Service, SES, Local Government, and support agencies such as Red Cross and Salvation Army. The LDMG starts setting its own parameters for recovery for the fire service. These get interpreted down to the local QFRS Incident Control Centres (ICC) and then the ICC is not sure whether it's in a response or recovery mode. Examples of that, the day after the Grantham event, which was Tuesday 11 January 2010, we had an ICC set up at Ipswich. The Ipswich ICC had been set up and it was co-ordinating the efforts of four stations, the Ipswich group. Typically the Ipswich group which is Ipswich station, Bundamba, Karana Downs and Camira would be responding normally into the Lockyer Valley on a day-to-day operation. As soon as the Ipswich ICC was established, we were brought back to the Ipswich District ICC Ipswich, who retained us as an asset that was not then available to the ICC Gatton. As is often the case, one ICC district may be in recovery whilst the neighbouring ICC District is still in response/ rescue. There were no boundary clear lines between the ICC Districts and what the resources were in each and how they were deployed.

9. This type of structure restricts the most skilled people from being released for events that they have been trained for. For example whilst on deployment in Emerald during the flood event in early January 2011 I was deployed as a swift water rescue team to relieve teams that had been there for 7 days. After 48 hours on scene the risk of swift water events occurring had significantly diminished. Our team was then used in Emerald for community recovery predominantly in washing down houses. Whilst we were doing these tasks, other swift water teams were being deployed out of Brisbane and placed in front of water flows through Central West and Western Queensland. This resulted in some technicians on continuous deployment whilst my swift water team were being used for community recovery tasks.

10. I believe the LDMG role should be focussed on preparedness and also recovery. The management of the response phase should remain with the Emergency Agencies. What we found was at some stages, the LDMG were unintentionally loading the response agencies up with recovery taskings impacting on the ability for timely response to emergency incidents. The Ipswich ICC was restricting the QFRS from

deploying to the most critical areas which at that time I believe was the Lockyer Valley area. They did not say no to deployment, but were holding local crews in their areas, and deploying Brisbane Crews to the Lockyer Valley. This resulted in the crews not being familiar with local road networks.

11. The local ICCs really need to focus more on the recovery and managing the less immediate response. Part of the problem here with the ICCs is we don't capture the data off the crews adequately when they're responding under an ICC. An example of that is if I respond via Firecom I transmit my acknowledgement, my arrival, my situation report, my updates and my stock message in code four, all through Firecom. If I respond via ICC I acknowledge the call from the ICC on another radio, which is not data logged and not captured. It is just a hand-written note in the ICC. I tell them when I arrive, again there's a hand-written note, if the person, if the incident control centre has been set up sufficiently that they have a radio operator answering and acknowledging. And then we start trying to track that vehicle through hand written notes. This resulted in a loss of data. I then make contact with Firecom at the completion of the incident

12. On Tuesday morning 11 January 2011, I arrived at Ipswich Fire Station and I crewed the 645 Mike Command Rescue Appliance with Fire Fighter AHSBY. I was told to report to Gatton ICC. And we proceeded there. I notify Firecom that that vehicle was heading to Gatton. I got to the Forest Hill Fernvale Road intersection and it was under a kilometre of water. I contacted Gatton ICC on the radio and they told me that the unit was not required, and had been cancelled a half hour earlier. I then communicate that fact back to Firecom. When I checked on the cancellation, the Gatton ICC had cancelled my services with Ipswich ICC before I had left, without notifying Firecom. That left me with a vehicle that was depleted of its equipment because it's equipment was in Gatton on a 4wd response vehicle. I proceeded back down the highway still not sure where the boundary was between ICC Gatton and ICC Ipswich and under whose control I was. I was also not sure what communication frequency we were to use at that point for either Gatton or Ipswich. Neither area have a fixed communication frequency for the ICC use and it creates confusion as to which

agency to report to. This creates issues in managing the deployment of vehicles and the subsequent vehicle taskings.

13. A further problem with this model, is that often the people manning the ICC are often not from the area and cannot relate to the areas being described by the caller.

14. Some ICC's, for example Ipswich, were staffed by QFRS Rural personnel and some urban personnel. And by no means am I criticising their staffing abilities, but the point I am making is they are trained in different incident management, and their expertise is in managing wild fire events.

15. Focussing on operational response, in regard to crew size, it's more the capabilities of the crew, it's a combination of equipment, crew size and placement, where you are in relation to in the incident. You can have all the technical rescue operators of South East Queensland on one side of the river but if the people are on the other side a kilometre and a half away, we can't get access to them. What we need, particularly in these sorts of events, is the ability to rapidly deploy to an appropriate area. This involves some flexibility. Now obviously we're starting to talk about aerial assets if we're going to move people from point to point or the appropriate vehicle that's going to be able to get them around the flood water or through the flood water. This means getting the appropriate resource to the appropriate location and by the appropriate means. And the only way we can manage that more successfully obviously is if we have more trained operators, we have less onus on us to get the ones that we do have to the right location because they'll be in situ and again as in comments we've raised before, every Queensland town sits on a water course so if the town has fire-fighters in it, the town should have a swift water capability in it, in the event that that water course floods.

16. The QFRS has approximately 160+ swift water technicians across the State as of June 2010. As an example in the month or in the six weeks from Christmas through to end of, or middle of February, with the rolling of disasters we've had, there, my wife commented that I slept at home nine times in that period because I was on numerous deployments or isolated from home.

17. With regard to swift water equipment levels the Central Region, North Coast Region and Far Northern Region level two swift water technicians don't have a personal issue of swift water equipment. They have to go to the station and open up the station store and see how much equipment is left and take what is available. So that can work if you only ever have four tech rescue people on duty at any one time and you have got four sets of gear. If that gear is being used the technician is unable to perform their core duties.

18. The next concern I have is the adequacy of equipment and communication systems. Obviously we are short of portable radios and we're short of swift water equipment for an incident of that scale. In a normal incident, on a normal scale, the equipment would be sufficient, but when we start up-scaling, Ipswich Fire Station being the focal point for a task force, it becomes difficult to get hands on the equipment. The problem is until recently we did have stores at Ipswich station, but under the new regional plan we now have a regional store which is situated down at Southport and that store only operates Monday to Friday, nine to five. This restricts rapid access to essential equipment necessary to fully equip these vehicles.

19. The fire service has been requesting work platforms with motors on them, these are effectively rescue boats. There is hesitancy getting work platforms with motors as currently the flood boats are the domain of the SES. All current work platforms deployed by the QFRS do not have motors. Now we're not requesting flood boats, there is a big difference between a heavy V-bottomed platform flood boats versus a swift water platform. A swift water platform is going to be an inflatable with a semi-rigid floor, it's going to be light, it's going to go over the top of water during swift water events. A flood boat from SES is designed to evacuate people from slow moving water.

20. What was an issue for us is we had no communication ability because we only have a limited number of wet packs for our radios, they were already been deployed with the swift water teams in Gatton. So we had no portable radio communication systems that were waterproof. I am aware now the waterproof radios are being trialled by the

Central Region by QFRS. And speaking of the radio communication system, QFRS acknowledges that on the fire appliance, every fire officer has a radio. However when we go away on deployments for swift water events or to disaster zones, we get one radio between four.

21. I believe, particularly on the day of the events at Grantham and the Lockyer Valley, there was an opportunity there to break those localities away from the rest of the fire communication network and either in Ipswich or use the repeater at Marburg, to establish a separate fire communication centre for the Lockyer Valley to capture all that was happening. This was because our Firecom operators at Southport were trying to capture everything that was happening in the Lockyer Valley and manage flooding impact on Ipswich and manage day-to-day fire operations in the South East Region. We were operating a number of localised disasters that were generating enough radio traffic for one centre to manage, let alone managing three separate events at of on communication centre. It would made make more sense to create separate communications networks for each separate event. This could have been achieved by utilising the Queensland Police communication centre at Yamanto or we had that ability where we could park a command rescue vehicle or the Tango (Fire communications vehicle) in situ and then run it as a communications centre. This reduces the communication traffic on the radio network to that specific incident only. This stops competition for radio communication time and acknowledges the addition resources operating in that area.

22. The adequacy of forecast, early warning system and in particular relation to flooding events in the valley and road closures. We need a more rapid ability to isolate the flood threat areas from the community. What has to happen is that information has to be entered into a database so that those police and fire officers who know the roads are closed and the public also can access it very quickly to know the road is closed. If we inform the public beforehand that that road is closed, then there's less likelihood of them attempting to go through floodwater because they can source an alternate route. This would limit the callouts for the QFRS to attend stranded motorists.

23. Part of my concern as a swift water technician is I go to events where people have taken cars into swift water because they haven't had early enough warning that the road is closed and then they attempt to get their vehicle and complete their journey. This becomes critical, the only access for emergency service personnel to road closures is to the government websites. The problem we have is that those government websites are being bombarded. We don't have a standalone system where we should have access to the most current up-to-date closures. Now the best people to manage that are the councils. Now whether we can access a council database or whether we can tie in the council database with road heights and flooding heights and determine the likelihood of that road to be closed.

24. The next issue is capturing community assistance to QFRS. Fire service does not have a process in place for managing impromptu volunteers. We had people turn up at the fire station at Ipswich over the next few days. They came to the fire station because they saw resources going in and out of the fire station and they wanted to assist the community. We don't have a system in place where we can capture those people, find out what their capabilities are, find out how long they can assist us and what they can contribute and then direct them to the most appropriate agency to manage them. When we do come across community members who are willing to step up we actually don't know how to manage them, or co-ordinate them. There are outside agencies in other parts of the country that do have guidelines on how to manage community volunteers and that's probably what we need to look at, across the State of Queensland.

25. Finally, an issue that I thought which was poorly managed is solar power. And I'm not pointing blame at the power industry, there's a point that they missed. They isolated electrical power to homes because of potential flooding. What they missed was the large percentage of homes that had solar panels in the flooded areas. Which means that those panels are live with solar electricity. Now that's not an issue until the flood water hits the wire that is live from the solar panel down to the inverter. Now that particular issue alone has been causing heartache for the QFRS because the power industry has decided that it's too expensive to put a $115.00 isolator switch at the bottom of the panel that can be accessed by the fire service or by any emergency

service to isolate those panels. They believe that the wire at the back of the box is satisfactory for isolation. Now we know about step potential on the ground, step potential still exists in water so if you have water up to your meter box and where that power is coming in to that inverter now makes the water around that live. So it's something that wasn't managed and wasn't communicated well to emergency service personnel and or to the public.

IAN FREDERICK BLAND

Witness Signature. [redacted] gnature of officer .....