



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

1. 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.

Somerset Region SES Unit consists of the following four groups with membership as shown:

Lowood	15 – 20
Esk	5 – 10
Toogoolawah	10 – 15
Kilcoy	15 – 20

SES Unit management (Local Controller) operates from either Council admin centre or Esk SES Group headquarters.

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?

The only paid SES member is the Unit Local Controller who is employed by Somerset Regional Council as a Technical Officer with this role included in the position description.

Structure of SES units

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.

SES members can feel that their service is often not appreciated or recognised. Consideration should be given to SES members being remunerated for operational hours, similar to the arrangement for auxiliary fire fighters.

Executive officers (Deputy Controllers, Group Leaders and Deputy Group Leaders) should also receive an appropriate honorarium in recognition of the responsible position they fill within the local unit.

Substantial discounts on a range of items (holidays, dining out, vehicle servicing etc.) could be offered to members who meet prescribed criteria (defined minimum length of service)

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

Not applicable

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 2010/2011 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?

Training was considered to be adequate for the range of field tasks associated with these operations. Limited capacity in Incident Management, tasking roles etc. until external assistance was available.

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

No; local numbers were inadequate for the severity and extent of operations during this period – assistance from neighbouring SES Units was required to handle the volume of tasks generated by this event.

Impact of flood waters on local SES headquarters hampered response by SES members to requests for assistance.

Deployment of Somerset Unit SES members to other flood-affected areas in SE Qld reduced the capacity of the local unit to respond to the local situation in the initial stages of this operation.

2.3 Did your unit have enough equipment and resources?

Additional equipment (shovels, mops, brooms pressure cleaners, hoses etc.) were required to carry out clean up operations.

Limited access to electronic information (emails and relevant web sites) in the absence of suitable mobile phones impacted from time to time on the efficiency of operational response.

An additional flood boat located in Esk would have allowed transport to be provided in that area in situations where access was affected by flooded roads.

The lack of a dedicated suitable vehicle for use by Controller and/or Deputy Controller hindered the effective monitoring of and pro-active response to the flood event across the council region.

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

The rapid onset of the flood event in Esk and its impact on local infrastructure (SES headquarters and Council offices) partially negated the state of preparedness of the local SES unit, as did the absence of some members on deployment elsewhere.

Members were advised of the likelihood of operations to occur during the December 10 – January 11 period; this state of alertness contributed to the effective response by all groups. However, the sudden onset of the flood events and the extent of the affected areas were unprecedented; further preparation by way of additional resources and formal rostering of personnel may otherwise have been made.

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, rescues, evacuations).

The four groups within the Somerset Region SES Unit undertook a range of tasks including requests for assistance in:

- Removal of flood debris
- Temporary repairs to leaking roofs
- Transportation (including medical evacuations) of isolated persons
- Resupply to isolated communities (food, medication, fuel)
- Sandbagging and clean up of residences
- Evacuation centre management

4. Command and control

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

- Maintaining contact with 4 SES groups to support their local operations
- Liaising between SES groups and the Local Disaster Management Group's Incident Management Team regarding requests for assistance
- Reporting to EMQ Area Office regarding local needs for additional personnel & equipment
- Managing resources received through numerous offers of assistance.

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

1. Manager – Operations (Somerset Regional Council)
2. Area Director (Northern) – EMQ

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

- Calls to 13 25 00 and forwarded via email system to Unit and all SES Groups email addresses
- Calls received directly by phone to Council and directed to Unit mobile

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

Local operations teams allocate RFAs to members in relevant SES field teams for the various groups' allocated area of operation via 2-way radio or mobile phone. Tasks not able to be undertaken by SES teams are referred to other agencies as appropriate.

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

The large number of RFAs received was such that individual requests had to be prioritised (by either the LDMG's Incident Management Team (IMT) or the respective SES groups' operations team) on the basis of urgency and the efficient deployment of personnel and resources.

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?

Yes. Non-SES tasks (e.g. health-related requests) or those beyond the capacity of SES resources (e.g. transportation of resupply items) were allocated to other agencies as appropriate for prioritisation by those agencies.

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

Prior to the January flood events in Somerset Region, several local SES members were deployed to other regions. No further inter-Region deployment occurred during local flood operations, and those members returning from earlier deployment were incorporated into local operations after an appropriate rest period.

4.8 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your unit's contact and coordination (if any) with the following:

a) Local Disaster Coordinator

The Somerset Region SES Unit (through Local Controller, Deputy Controller and/or SES Field Operations Manager) liaised with the LDC (generally via the LDMG) providing regular situation reports as requested.

Requests from the LDC were typically conveyed via the LDCC IMT. General discussion also occurred during the course of each day regarding day-to-day events.

b) Local Disaster Coordination Centre

Tasks received by the Local Disaster Coordination Centre IMT were relayed by email, phone or manually (paper-based) to the SES Unit for allocation to respective field teams. Advice of completed tasks was subsequently relayed back to the IMT.

c) Local Disaster Management Group

As per 4.8 a) above. The coordination of local SES tasks (allocation and reporting) improved with the establishment of effective IMTs (at LDMG and SES HQ)), hampered initially by the impact of the flood on local facilities.

4.9 During the 2010/2011 floods, what was the nature of your unit's contact and coordination (if any) with the following:

a) District Disaster Coordinator

Other than as handled by the LDC, no formal "contact" or "coordination".

b) District Disaster Coordination Centre

Other than as handled by the LDCC, no formal "contact" or "coordination".

c) District Disaster Management Group

Other than as handled by the LDMG, no formal "contact" or "coordination".

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?

As these officers had access to SITREPs from the LDMG, only general discussion on current status of SES operations was necessary. Requests for EMQ assistance were typically handled by the LDCC.

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

SES operations ran concurrent to those undertaken by other agencies, in particular QFRS (Rural Fires) and QAS personnel; task allocation was generally managed by the IMT; tasks involving SES members working with QFRS and/or QAS personnel were conducted effectively and harmoniously.

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)?

No knowledge of any significant or unresolvable issues occurring.

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

As was experienced (and appreciated) during the January flood event, EMQ Area and Regional Directors provide valuable assistance to SES Units during such times through:

- Additional staffing arrangements (both permanent EMQ advisory staff and SES volunteers for operational support)
- Equipment supply
- Monitoring RFA status to assist SES groups / teams conducting field operations
- General advice and support to SES executives

5. Communications

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

- Two-way radios (SES UHF, Council UHF and CB)
- Mobile phones
- Landline phones
- Email

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

Mobile phones were affected by moisture (often difficult to avoid exposure to rain – need to be more resilient in adverse weather conditions).

Two-way radios reliant on the solar-powered UHF repeater for long range communication were ineffective (other than for short range use) when protracted periods of cloud cover prevented recharging of batteries.

Phone and computer landlines were unusable due to loss of power to, and high demand on telephone exchanges for an extensive period.

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

SES UHF two-way radios are fitted with a "common" channel to allow communication with other agencies (e.g. QFRS) – requires communication operators to manage specific arrangements between respective agencies. The use of UHF-CB channel 40 has potential to be used for inter-agency communication when "official" channels are unavailable.

6. Funding

6.1 Where does your unit receive funding from?

Somerset Region SES Unit receives funding from:

1. Somerset Regional Council –
 - purpose-built accommodation, office equipment and vehicles for group use
 - operating costs (including phone, power, vehicle running, insurance of flood boats, stationery supplies, maintenance of office equipment, grounds maintenance, salary for part-time Local Controller)
2. Local SES financial support groups – supplementing other sources of funding to purchase additional equipment (e.g. shade structures, GPS units, kitchen equipment)
3. EMQ –
 - annual subsidy towards Council's administration costs relevant to the SES Unit
 - specific requests (when successful) for accommodation, vehicle replacement and office equipment

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?

2009-10 – SES subsidy programme (vehicle replacement)

2010-11 – SES subsidy programme (accommodation improvements, vehicle replacement, office equipment)

2010-2011 – Natural Disaster Resilience Program – Queensland

The application process for both programmes was generally easy to use; advice from EMQ subsidy programme staff was readily available and helpful whenever requested.

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

Yes – within the guidelines and for the purposes for which funding is received, and under the oversight of Council management

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 level of funding currently allocated to this unit is generally adequate for the operation of the groups; however, an increased annual State government subsidy allocation (say \$5,000.00 to each group, in lieu of the current Unit operating grant of \$6,500.00) with expenditure overseen by the Unit Controller would significantly relieve the demand on Council funds, while ensuring readily available funds for minor capital equipment and resources for training and operational purposes.

Additional funding from either or both levels of government for the provision of a dedicated suitable vehicle to the Local Controller position would:

- ensure timely response to and enhanced management of SES operations
- allow ready transporting of SES equipment between groups and inter-region
- reduce the demand on SES group operational vehicles
- facilitate timely monitoring of developing emergency / disaster situations
- improve level of participation in EMQ and inter-agency events, meetings, workshops etc.

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

Please refer to the response to 6.4 above

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

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

Groups undertake a form of fundraising by way their involvement in supporting local community events and the expressions of appreciation received from those organisations.

The Somerset Region SES Unit is currently marketing an SES branded golf umbrella as a means of raising funds on behalf of the groups within the unit.

No regular fund-raising activities are conducted.

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

The funds raised as in 6.6 a) are not used for operating expenses; these funds are typically used for purchasing additional equipment not available through Council or State government funds. Monies received from local fund raising would represent approx. 5% of the annual funding for this Unit.

c) does fundraising present any difficulties?

Groups undertake this activity as convenient and necessary for their respective membership; no specific difficulties are highlighted.

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 a state-wide level?

- Simplify training requirements (streamline paperwork and record keeping)
- Improve system of recognising existing skill levels towards accreditation in specific field of training
- Reduce load on local volunteer instructors where possible
- Present higher profile in media advertising campaign
- Offer incentives by way of significant discounts on range of purchases (holidays, leisure, vehicle servicing, other purchase) to members who meet defined criteria (e.g. length of service)

(Refer also to Item 1.3 above)

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

The contribution made by the volunteer members and officers of the Somerset Region SES Unit during the response to the January 2011 floods played a significant role in easing the suffering of those affected by this event, and supporting the local disaster management effort.

Improvements to radio communication arrangements (as is currently underway) will enhance the effective operational management across Somerset Region.