

<b>Name of Witness</b>	John RYALL
<b>Date of Birth</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Address and contact details</b>	[REDACTED]
<b>Occupation</b>	Retired (Forensic Scientist)
<b>Officer taking statement</b>	Detective Senior Sergeant Mark Reid
<b>Date taken</b>	4 April 2011

John RYALL states:

1. I am a married man, [REDACTED] years of age and I reside with my wife at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Whittington Victoria.
2. This statement relates to the difficulty I experienced in obtaining information about the road conditions when travelling from Canberra to Brisbane on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> December 2010 over two days to visit family who live in Brisbane.
3. After spending Christmas with family, we left Canberra on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> of December to drive to Brisbane over two days to visit family who live there.
4. We knew that there had been flooding at Eugowra and planned to travel through Cowra, Molong and Wellington to Dubbo, thence on the Newell Highway northwards. Nevertheless we made inquiries at the Cowra Information Centre about roads further north. The staff at the centre had access to a computer but stated that they had no information for road conditions north of the border. They appeared reluctant to look anything up on the computer. We were told (a) the road through Eugowra had just opened, and (b) they were unable to tell use any information about road conditions north of the NSW border.

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Date: 3/5/11 JM

Exhibit Number: 218

Witness Signature [REDACTED] .. Signature of officer ..  
 Page Number 1 of 5

5. At Coonabarabran Information Centre we again inquired about roads north. Again we were told they could give us no information north of the NSW border, although this time we were given some phone numbers to call, namely NRMA (which was always busy) and SES which was not helpful with regards to roads in Queensland. The staff at the centre had access to a computer but they appeared reluctant to look anything up relating to roads closures in Queensland. From previous experience, we thought that the Newell Highway around Goondiwindi could be subject to flooding, so we chose not to go that way, travelling instead on the New England Highway.
  
6. At this time there were a group of tourists gathered around the Information Centre. They were sharing their experiences of travelling in flood-affected areas, and information they had been able to pick up from friends via their mobile phones. They were most uncertain as to the wisdom of travelling east to the Pacific Highway as it was believed that Lismore could be flooded and/or the floodwaters were heading to Grafton making that route doubtful. It was for those reasons that my wife and I decided to continue travelling north to Tenterfield
  
7. We had heard from our daughter in Brisbane via text messages that *'Warwick was an island'* and that the Cunningham Highway was closed due to a *'severe weather event'*. My daughter kept us updated, and tried to access the website provided for the RACQ. However, this website could not be accessed by her due possibly to the volume of people trying to use it. I was not aware of the Department of Main Roads website relating to road closures. We also heard that the Lismore-Kyogle Road was closed, although we had not intended to travel there.
  
8. On Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> December 2010 we arrived at Tenterfield at lunch time. At this point we were thinking to drive across to Lismore and then join the Pacific Highway which we thought would be very busy with vehicles trying to avoid the flood waters. Although it was not far from the Queensland Border, the Tenterfield Information Centre was not able to advise about road conditions north of the NSW border. The staff at the centre had access to a computer but they again appeared reluctant to access information relating to road conditions in Queensland.

9. As it happened, a truckie who had come from the north pulled up and we found out from him that the road to Warwick was now open, but that we would have to get to Brisbane via Toowoomba. And that is what we did, although the roads were badly damaged by floods and rain. We arrived safely and left on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2011, earlier than planned because of the weather forecasts. We avoided the worst of the Brisbane floods.
10. However, it seemed to be assumed by most people we spoke to *en route* that we could access a computer or laptop and get on to a website to find out road conditions in Queensland. We only had a mobile phone with us.
11. The people at the regional Information Centres were either unable or unwilling to look up on their computers any Queensland websites that would have provided the required information.
12. We also found that as the Test Cricket was being broadcast, the usual hourly updates of news, weather and road conditions were not coming from our so-called 'emergency broadcaster'. There seemed to be no consideration that conditions could be any different from those in Melbourne at that time.

**Submission**

13. Flood waters are no respecters of State borders, and yet it seems ludicrous that the travelling public cannot obtain information about road conditions beyond the borders of the State they are currently travelling in.
14. We would submit that consideration be given to having co-ordinated current interstate road conditions information available at the regional Information Centres. Ideally this should be available on a national basis, rather than just restricting it to NSW and Queensland.
15. We would submit that this information should be available at night, when the regional Information Centres are normally closed. This could be done possibly via regional radio or adequate road signage well in advance.

16. I also believe that there should be the usual hourly updates on emergency conditions broadcast on national radio, even if this means interrupting Test Cricket broadcasts.
  
17. The Tourist Information system that we visited in Cowra, Coonabarabran and Tenterfield did not provide a reason as to why they could not access computer information in Queensland on road conditions.
  
18. As stated earlier, my daughter made attempts to access the RACQ website in Queensland for up to date road conditions, but the website could not be accessed. The NRMA website also appeared to be inaccessible. I was not made aware of the Queensland Main Roads website by any of the information Centres. As stated earlier in the statement I did not have access to a computer during this journey.

J RYALL