

<i>Name of Witness</i>	Russell Ray BERNITT
<i>Date of Birth</i>	[REDACTED]
<i>Address and contact details</i>	[REDACTED] Road, Borallon Ph: [REDACTED] Mob: [REDACTED]
<i>Occupation</i>	Farmer/grazier
<i>Officer taking statement</i>	Detective Sergeant Damien Watson
<i>Date taken</i>	15/04/2011

I, Russell Ray BERNITT state;

1. I am a married man, [REDACTED] and reside at [REDACTED] Road, Borallon. I have lived at this address since 1968. My house is a lowset brick house situated on the top of a hill overlooking the Brisbane River. The Brisbane River borders my property, and is located below the Wivenhoe Dam.

2. The house with sheds has its own tank water, uses town power and telephone. We normally have good mobile phone reception. We have generators should we need them for use on the farm, but don't store large volumes of fuel on the property. The house is situated well above the level of flooding that occurred during the recent flood event.

Exhibit Number:

QFCI

Date:

27/05/11
SOL

JM

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Signature of officer [REDACTED]

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3. The property I farm at that address is approximately 580 acres. The property has been in the family of my wife for more than 100 years. The property is now divided into three titles. There are three houses on the property all occupied by members of my family. All are above the flood level from the January flood.

4. At the present time, and this includes during the recent flood event, we have 80 head of cattle. This is down on what we would normally carry on the property but we had reduced the number of stock on the property as a result of the preceding drought, and had not yet increased numbers. Had we not done this we would have had to reduce the numbers due to the damage to the property anyway.

5. Of the 580 acres on the property we would have had 50 acres being farmed for crops. At the time of the recent flood event we had a crop of Lucerne sown. This we were able to do even during the drought as we would irrigate the crops from water in the Brisbane River. The Brisbane River is not tidal on my property.

6. The area under crop was relatively flat compared to other parts of the property and located closer to the river. The soil in this part of the property is loam on the top covering sand underneath.

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7. Along the banks of the river we had planted tea trees and she oak trees as erosion mitigation. This was done on advice from the Department of Natural Resources.

8. To get to our property we cross the Brisbane River and a number of other waterways. In the past these have been subject to flooding, and we are able to support ourselves for short periods of time should we get cut off. We have never lost power or communications as a result of these minor flooding events.

9. Normally we hear information about weather warnings from television new services, or from the Bureau of Meteorology web site. We also receive e-mails from the operators of Wivenhoe Dam should they be planning released of water from the dam.

10. These notifications of releases usually advise the volume of water expected to be released in terms of 'Cumecs'. It usually takes about 12 hours for water released at the dam to reach my property. These warning e-mails are usually more than 12 hours in advance of the releases, so we always have more than 24 hours notice of arrival of elevated flows through my property.

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11. Of concern to me is that I have no way of interpreting how a release of X number of 'Cumecs' will affect the level of the river through my property.

12. In the six months prior to the January flood we were getting higher than usual rainfall, especially given the previous ten years had been quite drought affected.

13. In October 2010 we returned from a holiday, only to find we could not get to our property due to flooding of the river crossing. We were unable to reach our property for five days.

14. Between then and January we were cut off at our property for about a week due to flooding. On each occasion we were notified in advance by the Wivenhoe Dam operators that water releases would be occurring.

15. The advance notification allowed us to stock up on food and other essentials prior to being cut off. On no occasion did we lose power or communications during these minor events.

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16. In the lead up to the January 2011 flood I am unable to say at what point we knew we would be cut off. We did not realise it was going to be as severe as it was. As much as possible we moved the stock to higher ground and what farm equipment we could.

17. In the end we were cut off by the flood for three weeks. For two of those three weeks we were without power. This affected our capacity to store food. We had not expected to lose power, and did not have sufficient fuel for the generators. We drained fuel from a boat we had to help run the generators as we needed to.

18. One of the reasons we ran the generators was to power the computer, so we could send and receive e-mails. We knew this was the way that the operators of Wivenhoe Dam communicated with us, so this was essential.

19. During the three weeks we were cut off we were without any communication for three days. This was concerning because had there been any kind of emergency, we would have been unable to obtain any assistance.

20. From the hill where our house was, we could clearly see the Brisbane River rising. It flooded all of our crop land and was flowing very

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quickly. We could see a great deal of debris in the water, including trees, cars and stock animals.

21. We were amazed and totally did not expect that the river would rise as high as it did. It rose to a height only a metre below the height of the 1974 flood on our property. We were partly surprised because the Wivenhoe Dam was put in place to reduce the flooding.

22. Twice while we were cut off we received phone calls asking what essentials we needed. We received conflicting advice about what we would get and how it would get to us. In the end the provisions never arrived. We were forced to put a boat into the flooded river to go and get supplies for ourselves. We were met on the other side and received some tinned food, and 30 litres of fuel for use between 10 generators on our side of the river.

23. We were visited at one point by an Army helicopter who advised us how to signal to a helicopter for help should we need it, and we were very grateful for this.

24. The water subsided very quickly once the operators of Wivenhoe Dam cut off the extra releases. The water had been subsiding prior to that, and

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we had been able to get to some of our property to inspect damage to the fences, irrigation systems, power poles, farm roads and crops. All the crops were destroyed as a result of the flooding.

25. Large areas of the crop land were washed away as a result of the flooding. In addition to the area washed away, because the crop land was so sodden, and the water level dropped so quickly, large parts of the crop land slumped into the river because it did not dry out sufficiently. We now have large cliffs along the river bed, some as high as fifty feet.

26. As a result of the flooding, I will have lost about 15 acres of crop land by the time the land has been repaired. I will have to do repair work to remove the dangerous cliff faces and fence them off. Previously the area between the crop land and the river bed was used to graze cattle. It is now too dangerous for the cattle to do this and that land is now useless. I have attached to my statement some photos of damage to the crop area caused by the flooding.

EXHIBIT NO _____

27. It is also obvious that much gouging of the soil occurred where the trees that we had planted had been washed away. This also occurred to a lesser extent to a few very old gum trees.

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28. Although the power was cut for two weeks, I am quite satisfied that this was repairs as quickly as possible under the circumstances. In the same way I am satisfied that efforts to restore communications were satisfactory.

29. None of our farm equipment and infrastructure was covered by insurance.

30. We received the \$5,000 grant from the QRRRA. We will be able to reclaim a further \$20,000 for repairs once we have spent that amount.

What is concerning is that we must have the repairs completed by September. It is unlikely that this will be the case, because tradesmen are in such short supply with everyone needing them at the moment.

Russell Ray BERNITT

17th ^{April} ~~March~~ 2011.

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 17th ^{April} ~~March~~ 2011 and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 8 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 Borallon this 17th day of ^{April} ~~March~~ 2011

Witness Signature

Signature of officer











