
State Emergency Service Local Controllers - questionnaire

To Whom It May Concern:

I, [REDACTED] of Rockhampton, Queensland make the following statements to the questionnaire supplied by the Queensland Flood Commission of Inquiry.

I am the appointed Local Controller for the Rockhampton Regional Council State Emergency Service Unit and I am employed by the Rockhampton Regional Council in this position to oversee and manage the SES Unit.

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.

Response.

The Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit is a recently established SES Unit which consists of the previous amalgamated SES Units of Rockhampton/Fitzroy, Mt Morgan and Livingstone SES Units.

Due to the size of the Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit we have strategically broken the Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit into 4 sectors known as North, East, Central and West.

Each of these Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit sectors have a Deputy Local Controller position attached to them for the management of the SES Groups which are attached to a specific sector area.

There are a total of 10 SES Groups comprising of approximately 230 SES members that are 'active and operational' within the Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit. The attached table gives a breakdown of each group and their SES membership strength.

Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit

SES Group	SES Membership Strength	RRC SES Unit Sector
Marlborough Group	12 Members	Northern Sector
Stanage Bay Group	17 Members	Northern Sector
Yaamba Group	10 Members	Northern Sector
Yeppoon Group	41 Members	Eastern Sector
Keppel Sands Group	16 Members	Eastern Sector
Emu Park Group	24 Members	Eastern Sector
Great Keppel Island Group	03 Members	Eastern Sector
Rockhampton Group	71 Members	Central Sector
Gracemere Group	14 Members	Central Sector
Mt Morgan Group	17 members	Western Sector

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?

Response.

There is only 1 SES member employed on a full time basis which is the position of SES Local Controller.

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.

Response.

There is definitely a need for several SES positions to be of a paid nature within a SES Unit.

1. Local Controller
2. Deputy Local Controller (Operational Activations and backup to Local Controller when on leave etc)
3. SES Administration Support (due to the paperwork and telephone load)

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

Response.

Not applicable

2. Readiness for the 2010/2011 floods

2.1. Did your unit have enough training to prepare it for the 2010/2011 floods?

Response.

In most cases there had not been enough training in preparation to the 2010/2011 flood events. We have struggled to obtain training in Flood Boat Operations, Request For Assistance (RFA), Working Safely at Heights etc provided to us by EMQ who are the agency responsible for this training at the primary level. In the 2010/2011 EMQ Rockhampton Area Training Program there was only one training course listed for the entire 10 SES groups within the Rockhampton SES Unit which was a First Aid course.

There were no 'SES Approved Functions' courses offered by EMQ in the year of 2010/2011 and as such training is then left to the Group or Unit to facilitate and conduct appropriate training at the cost to the Group or Unit.

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

Response.

There were not enough SES Volunteers within the Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit to assist during the 2010/2011 flood event and a request was placed with EMQ Central Region for extra SES resources to assist.

2.3. Did your unit have enough equipment and resources?

Response.

There were not enough SES resources to provide a suitable response to the 2010/2011 event and as such there were requests for additional flood boats, vehicles and Emergency Operations Centre equipment for the basic tasking of crews.

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

Response.

Based upon reviewing and debriefing SES personal from this SES Unit, the Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit was not adequately prepared, in most cases, to be able to respond to this event without additional resources brought in from outside SES Units.

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 (eg Requests for Assistance, rescues, evacuations).

Response.

The Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit responded to over 2,500 requests for assistance from the beginning of the 2010 Flood event to the completion of the 2011 event towards the end of February.

Initially the response was for sandbagging and storm damage requests however there were requests for the Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit to provide Flood boats and Flood boat crews to surrounding SES Units for Evacuations, re-supply and medical evacuations. There was also a Search of a flooded waterway at Bajool for a missing vehicle and driver. SES and Water Police divers located and retrieved the body of a deceased who was washed from a flooded waterway.

During the response phase for the Rockhampton Floods, SES were involved in the notification of the community by door knocking and supplying letters to residents on behalf of the RRC LDMG in low lying areas to advise them of possible flooding.

SES sandbagged and supplied approximately 20,000 sandbags to the Rockhampton Community with assistance. SES were also involved in the flood boat response to the community in evacuations, re-supply of medications and food, assist allied services and agencies in flood boat requests, logistics assistance to the LDCC and LDMG, EOC tasking and control. SES also constructed the flood barriers to protect the Rockhampton Airport Terminal and Tower.

The SES Unit became responsible for all medical retrievals and critical incident transports across the Yeppen Flood Plain which cut all road and rail transport into Rockhampton from the south. This flood boat transportation was 24hours a day for

the entire time that the Bruce Highway was closed. Several hundred crossings were made during this time period.

In the Recovery stage SES were heavily involved in cleaning property and assisting residents and property owners in returning to their property. SES was also involved in logistics support and EOC Operations.

4. Command and Control

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

Response.

As the SES Local Controller for the Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit I am responsible for the overall SES response to a disaster or emergency operation that may occur, while ensuring and maintaining the operational effectiveness within my unit.

Further to this I would ensure that the Unit responds to any agreed functions or tasks within this disaster situation as safely and efficiently as possible.

4.2. As a local controller, who do you report to during disaster response operations?

Response.

Firstly I report to the LDMG as a member of this Disaster Group when my Unit is operational and activate within a Disaster such as the 2010/2011 event. I also believe that I have a joint management role and will report any issues and requests to the Area Director of EMQ, Central Region where appropriate.

4.3. Where does your SES unit received Requests for Assistance from?

Response.

During the Disaster event of 2010/2011, requests for assistance came from a combination of areas.

Firstly, initial requests for RFA's came from the State Government call centre via 132500 or via direct calls to SES HQ's via listed telephone numbers directly from the public. (Over 1000 RFA's)

Once the Rockhampton LDCC became operational and all calls from 132500 were diverted to the LDCC almost all RFA requests were received via the LDCC (over 1000)

There were some occasions where allied services such as QPS, LG and the QFRS contacted SES directly via local SES activation arrangements to advise of tasks.

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

Response.

During the 2010/2011 disaster event all tasking for SES personal occurred in the 'SES Regional Operations Centre' located within the Rockhampton SES HQ.

The Australasian Interagency Incident Management Systems (AIIMS) was utilised for the control and tasking of SES personal during the disaster event at Rockhampton.

The on duty Incident Controller was responsible for overseeing all tasks that were received in that shift and in conjunction with the Operations Officer the task would be assessed as to the SES function and qualification required and then tasked appropriately to the most suitable SES team or members.

Because of the duration and extent of the Rockhampton Flood Disaster Operations, rostering was essential for the following days and weeks tasks to ensure that enough teams of flood boat operators, storm damage teams, sand bagging teams, Operations staff, Welfare groups and Peer Support Officers were often organised by the rostering officer who needed to take into account fatigue issues as well as work and family commitments.

Planning and tasking allowed any requests for additional crews from outside of our Unit to be requested based upon predicted tasks. E.g. Flood boat operators or EOC Staff.

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

Response.

There were several competing requests such as flood boat teams that were tasked on a case only for a medical emergency to occur that required flood boat crews to be diverted to collect Paramedics to be collected while other flood boat teams were sent to the casualty to be treated prior to the arrival of SES and QAS. Flood boat crews were also prioritised for other medical emergencies where non emergent cases were suspended until medical transports were completed.

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?

Response.

There were many requests that SES were unable to assist the community in during this event.

Examples of these were requests from members of the public for hundreds and in some cases thousands of sand bags to 'moat' properties in order to protect their homes.

In some other cases there were hundreds of requests for members of the public to be transported on the flood boats across the flooded highway in order to get to or from

each side, and their personal situation in that it did not fit within determined 'essential staff', 'emergency services personal' 'medical cases' or 'personal hardship cases'. These cases were determined by the LDCC with assistance from the QPS and the DDMG.

Where possible the person requesting the assistance was spoken to by the most appropriate/senior SES members with an explanation of why the task could not be dealt with. Effective communication appeared to be the best tool; however some were still not happy with the outcomes.

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

Response.

All SES that were deployed were done so within our own SES/EMQ Region specifically for the floods.

We had SES from our Unit deployed outside of the Unit for the Cyclone deployments to the north where this was coordinated by EMQ.

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

a. Local Disaster Coordinator

Response.

There was a full and constant contact with the LDC of RRC and co-ordination was well established partially for tasking within the LDCC.

b. Local Disaster Coordination Centre

Response.

SES provided a 24hr presence within the LDCC when requested and in some cases where required this was reduced to day shift only. The co-ordination was very well established with 'Guardian' was the Incident Management System assisting in this co-ordination.

c. Local Disaster Management Group

Response.

There was a daily and in some cases 'more then once' contact with the LDMG. SES would provide a comprehensive report to the LDMG with very good co-ordination and co-operation occurring within the RRC LDMG.

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

4.9.a.1. District Disaster Coordinator

Response.

There was very little contact with the DDC apart when there were some addresses made at the LDMG by the DDC.

4.9.a.2. District Disaster Coordination Centre

Response.

There was no contact with the DDCC

4.9.a.3. District Disaster Management Group

Response.

There was no contact with the DDMG.

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?

Response.

There were numerous points of contact with the EMQ Area and Regional Directors. These were for situation reports, requests for assistance to EMQ for added resources or supplies, areas of concern regarding the injury to SES personal or HR reasons etc. In most cases the Area Director and Local Controller spoke several times per day.

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

Response.

The interactions with other Emergency services were daily and numerous at that, whether it be in the LDCC or within the field on tasking services like the QFRS were almost continual.

Likewise and most of all our interactions with the Queensland Police Service were perhaps the biggest service that SES liaised with in the day to day tasking.

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)?

Response.

The relationship between the LD Managers and EMQ appeared good from my observations with some minor issues within the LDMG regarding flood barriers etc. This appeared a communication issue and was rectified.

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

Response.

I believe that EMQ's Area and Regional Directors become the advisors of Disaster Management issues and play a role of support to agencies especially the SES during these disasters.

5. Communications

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

Response.

Communication devices used were Telephones – Mobile and landlines, Emails and internet for tasking and messages, pagers for response crews, portable radios, base station and mobile vehicle radios as well as HF radios,

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

Response.

We had no noted failures of communications during our event.

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

Response.

All SES radios have a common emergency channel programmed into them for multi agency communication if required, however this is only limited to these using UHF radios.

6. Funding

6.1 Where does your unit receive funding from?

Response.

The Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit receives all of the SES Operational Budget by the Rockhampton Regional Council. This current 2011/2012 operational budget was \$261,900. There is also a requirement for SES Groups to fundraise to assist in the Operations of SES groups within the Unit.

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?

Response.

The Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit has applied for funding during both years with the State Emergency Service Subsidy Program. This system is frustrating with no guarantee of success of the application regardless of the amount of work or importance of the projects. This program in some cases does not link to the Local Government Act for the 'Accommodation' section of amounts over \$150,000 (SES Buildings) and makes any applications in this area almost impossible to secure.

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

Response.

I have almost full input as to how funding received is used for the SES 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.

Response.

There is a requirement for additional funding for the 10 SES groups within this Unit particularly in the suitable building of premises and the ongoing maintenance of flood boats and other equipment.

In particular extra funds are required for training of SES in all agreed functions as EMQ can't supply the required training in these areas.

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?

Rockhampton Regional Council SES Unit in conjunction with the Rockhampton Regional Council manages these funds well.

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

6.6 a

What types of fundraising activities does your unit undertake?

Response.

The 10 SES groups within the unit undertake many different forms of fundraising to raise funds.

This is done mainly with the formation of SES Support Clubs/Committees and performing chook raffles or similar, stalls, requesting donations, receiving donations for services provided, applying for grants for similar.

6.6 b Approximately what percentage of your operating budget does this account for?

Response.

Across the Unit I would believe that it is approximately 20 to 30%

6.6 c Does fundraising present any difficulties?

Response.

Fundraising presents the problem that money raised has to be redirected into areas that could be funded by State systems. An example of this is the Yeppoon SES Groups has to assist the Rockhampton Regional Council in supporting an extension to the SES building after a SES Subsidy was refused. This money could be better utilised on equipment for upgrade such as pole saws, quad bikes and other equipment needed for operations.

When SES groups are out fundraising for funds, it impacts on training opportunities for these members.

Often SES members will forgo their own training opportunities to see that the fundraising continues, so as to provide training opportunities for their group as a whole.

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?

Response.

A very intense state wide media package driven by TV, radio and print showing stories of SES members and what they get for supporting the community in their times of need.

The biggest issue in retaining members is the opportunities in training members. There is no State wide standard in offering at the Region and Area level a package of when SES members join, that there will be a weekend course to get them at a point of Community Members as a first step then a second course at a predetermined date for the qualification of Field Ops. There is not cohesive approach in training at this level and it is left to the Executives of a SES Unit to try a get a process in place often without support from EMQ or the budget to get it done. Often this is the reason for members walking away dismayed.

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

Response.

1. Training must be approached far differently to how it is currently conducted if SES is to continue as a service.
2. Far more money needs to be budgeted to SES for the support of its members and the community.
3. Given that SES is not an agency in its own right perhaps we need to be overseen by an agency like the Queensland Police Service or Qld Fire and Rescue as they seem to have the operational experience, legislation and staff to support larger scale events. I would not see any changes to the Local Government arrangements or the support that is currently offered.