



FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr W.E. Wendt MP (Chair)
Ms R.M. Bates MP
Mr M.J. Crandon MP
Ms P-K. Croft MP

Staff present:

Ms D. Jeffrey (Research Director)
Ms J. Mathers (Principal Research Officer)

INQUIRY INTO THE DISASTER READINESS AMENDMENT BILL 2011

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2011

Brisbane

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Committee met at 2.30 pm

DELANEY, Mr Gordon, Manager, Water Planning and Environment, SunWater

FOSTER, Mr Mike, Corporate Relations Manager, Seqwater

GILLESPIE, Mr Ian, Group Chief Executive Officer, Royal Automobile Club of Queensland

HALLAM, Mr Greg, PSM Chief Executive Officer, Local Government Association of Queensland

KEOGH, Mr Rob, Manager, Asset Management, SunWater

PRUSS, Mr Jim, Executive General Manager, Water Delivery, Seqwater

TURNER, Mr Paul, General Manager, External Relations, Royal Automobile Club of Queensland

CHAIR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I declare this public hearing of the Finance and Administration Committee's inquiry into the Disaster Readiness Amendment Bill 2011 now open. My name is Wayne Wendt, the chair of the committee and the member for Ipswich West. The other members of the committee are Ms Ros Bates, the member for Mudgeeraba; Ms Peta-Kaye Croft, the member for Broadwater; and Mr Michael Crandon, the member for Coomera. Mr Ray Stevens, the deputy chair and member for Mermaid Beach, and Ms Desley Boyle, the member for Cairns, were unable to attend today's hearing due to prior engagements. The purpose of this hearing is to enable the committee to get a better understanding of the impacts of the Disaster Readiness Amendment Bill. The bill was referred to the committee on 11 October 2011. The committee is interested in the practical implications of the policies being put into effect in this bill.

This hearing is a formal proceeding of the parliament and is subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I remind all those attending the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in these proceedings. In this regard I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. I also request that all mobile phones are checked now to make sure they are turned off and certainly no calls are to be taken inside this committee room.

You have previously been provided with a copy of the instructions for witnesses, so I will take those as read. Hansard will record the proceedings, as you see on my left. You will be provided with the transcript. For the benefit of Hansard, when you speak would you please state your name, title and organisation, simply because these Hansard reporters change every 15 minutes or so. Therefore, someone who was here the last time you spoke might not be here the second time.

We are running this hearing as a round table forum to facilitate discussion. However, only members of the committee can put questions to witnesses. If you wish to raise issues for discussion, I ask you to direct your comments through me. I would ask each of the groups to make a short opening statement. For SunWater, Rob or Gordon?

Mr Keogh: I have just a couple of things. With respect to the temporary full-supply level changes that are proposed, I make the point that, as that currently sits, that would not apply to any of SunWater's dams at present. We do not have any relevant dams with flood mitigation manuals. Most of our dams do not have the large gates on them that allow them to rapidly draw down storage levels. To change the configuration of those dams would be a relatively significant cost. Notwithstanding that, the other learning out of last year's wet season floods was that, due to the size of most of our dams, lowering the full-supply level would not have had any significant impact on flooding. By way of example, over the events of last wet season, the Paradise Dam near Bundaberg discharged 22 times its storage volume in a period of about three weeks. Therefore, the impacts are relatively limited on our portfolio.

In terms of the other sections about consultation with the Disaster Management Act and condition schedules, SunWater is quite open to those. We already go through a number of consultation processes with disaster management at this point in time.

CHAIR: Paradise Dam discharged 22 times its capacity over three weeks?

Mr Keogh: Correct.

CHAIR: Thank you. Jim?

Mr Pruss: Thank you very much to the committee for the opportunity to appear today. As everyone may be aware, Seqwater is a statutory authority established under the South-East Queensland Water Act and has been operating since 1 July. We own and operate catchments, bulk water storage and treatment assets for the South-East Queensland water grid. The assets under our ownership and control extend from the New South Wales border to the base of the Toowoomba ranges and north to Gympie, and include 25 referable dams, 47 weirs, 14 groundwater systems, 46 water treatment plants and, since 1 July, one desalination plant and three recycled water plants. We also have five irrigation schemes with over 1,000 customers and we own about 50 per cent of the recreation space in South-East Queensland.

CHAIR: Did you say 50 per cent total recreation space?

Mr Pruss: Yes, 50 per cent of the green space in South-East Queensland; that is right. If you take all those assets into account, our key services are high-quality drinking water to the distributors and retailers, raw water irrigation to our other customers, obviously dam management including flood mitigation, catchment and recreation management. We also have a role in alternative energy supply, especially hydro.

In terms of the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry, we have provided extensive experience to the Floods Commission of Inquiry and we continue to support that process. To date we have provided six detailed submissions, 10 witness statements, a number of expert witnesses, thousands of individual documents and we have been openly responsive to the process. Many of the recommendations made by Seqwater were adopted by the commission in its interim report and were made by us in our reports at the end of the floods. This included the review of the flood operations manual for Wivenhoe, Somerset and North Pine dams. The interim review of both manuals has now been completed as requested by the commission, has been approved by the regulator and has been gazetted by the government. We are also in the process of doing a detailed study on both dams, but for that to be informed we have to complete the detailed investigations process first, until we can get to do that manual review. We also have to take into account any recommendations from the commission as they do their final report in February.

Other key things that we have been doing in this process are that we have our new flood centre open and we have employed new people—again, these are all things that the commission requested us to do that we had recommended—increased the number of the rainfall gauges, had technical reviews done and undertaken enhanced modelling. We are committed to implementing all of those things from the commission's recommendations.

In relation to the Disaster Readiness Amendment Bill, there are three amendments relating to Seqwater, including the decision-making process around changes to the full-supply level. We have already participated in that process this year, giving advice to Minister Nolan, and the process is as we expected and as we presented to the commission of inquiry. The other two are notifications to residents immediately downstream and additional consultation with disaster management groups for the supply of water.

On that second one, the notifications to residents, we have been working very closely with the DERM officers to undertake the draft guidelines and to make sure that we have those residents in the loop. These are immediately downstream of the dams. We are working out ways and options to make sure that happens. There are a few ways to do that. We are investigating direct SMS, email services and text to landline if people do not have those services. We believe that we are in a position to make some announcements and newspaper advertisements either late this month or some time early next month. We are still working through the logistics and the costs, because there will be a cost implication but that is secondary to ensuring the effectiveness of the communications to people.

On the third issue of contact with local disaster management groups about defining roles, we have been in contact with every LDMG in relation to our assets and are in discussions with those. That will not be a blanket, one-size-fits-all approach because some of the LDMGs are better resourced and will have different expectations. We are still working through those outcomes at this point in time. The overall process is that it is a requirement and an understanding with our regulator that we will have those arrangements in place for the coming flood season. We will trial them and feed back what worked, what did not work and any improvements for next season. Finally, I emphasise that we are taking our role as dam managers seriously and we are committed to getting these recommendations in place. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Thanks, Jim. Ian or Paul?

Mr Gillespie: At the outset, I would say that the RACQ welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the committee today. The disasters that struck Queensland over the last summer were unprecedented and they certainly constituted one of the single largest weather events in Australia's history. As a result, they delivered a number of lessons for us to learn about how to manage those disasters and how to improve our processes and policies into the future. I thought it would be worthwhile to say a few things about the RACQ, its role and capabilities to put some context around us and what we are here for.

Firstly, it is worth pointing out that the RACQ is a member mutual organisation. There seems to be a fair bit of misunderstanding about this in the public and other places. We are owned by our members, not by shareholders. All of our earnings are reinvested for the benefit of our members. They are not distributed. The RACQ is 106 years old. We currently have a membership exceeding 1.2 million people, all Brisbane

of whom reside in Queensland. That represents members in over 52 per cent of Queensland households and nearly 45 per cent of registered vehicles. We do now own 100 per cent of RACQ Insurance. We have been in the insurance business, one way or another, for over 50 years.

In terms of our capability, RACQ has on the ground 350 fully fitted emergency roadside assistance patrol vehicles spread all over Queensland. We have 230-odd tilt-tray tow trucks and access to another several hundred if we need them. We have 11 traffic response vehicles which are contracted to the state government. Our operating network on the ground is served by a UHF radio network of ours, with our own repeater stations across South-East Queensland. We have a full digital data network that connects all of our patrol vehicles and our tow trucks. We have a voice-over-internet-protocol communication system between all offices and branches. We have some 42 fully serviced branches around Queensland, plus another 140-odd contractors and agents. One way or another, we can cover all of Queensland through our network. In terms of call centres, we have about 700 multiskilled staff working in call centres across our branches and agencies around Queensland, including 130 people who work in our 24-hour, seven-day-a-week non-stop service delivery call centre. In all, we have about 150 locations across Queensland.

We also have two mobile business centres that are capable of independent operations. In the event of a cyclone or whatever, we have the facility to get those into disaster areas. They have their own self-support systems for satellite communications, power and water and living, but they also provide direct connection to our call centres and our operating network. In fact, that mobile business centre was deployed into Tully within several days of Cyclone Yasi.

I have just a couple of other important things. We have a pretty outstanding communications network that includes our *Road Ahead* magazine. It has a readership now of about 1.7 million people and it goes out every eight weeks. In terms of the disaster more specifically, since 1925 the RACQ has been providing a road conditions reporting service to the community in Queensland. That is now comprised of a telephone recording service as well as a web service. In the period from December to January just past, that road condition telephone service received 150,000 calls compared to 10,000 calls in the previous period in the year before. That is some 15 times. The same went for the website, which received 20.2 million page views over that eight-week period, compared to 1.3 million for the previous period.

We also provide a trip planner, which is a web based system. It provides anybody travelling anywhere in Queensland with information about the best route to travel and it can be amended to deal with routing people around disaster areas. Similarly, the use of that trip planner in that period of time was 15 times what would be normal. There were some 450,000 unique visits to the trip planner over that two-month period.

I really just wanted to mention those things in order to give you a bit of a framework for who and what we are and what we do. We provide a lot of support not only to our members but also to the community. I forgot to mention that during that period we funded three of the community helicopter rescue networks around Queensland. We have just added a fourth in North Queensland operating out of Mount Isa. To finish off my opening remarks, the RACQ is generally supportive of the proposed legislation.

Mr Hallam: I will limit myself to the relevant legislation. I will not seek to comment on the Water Act or the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act, but deal with the Disaster Management Act, the Transport Infrastructure Act and the Sustainable Planning Act.

By way of introduction, the LGAQ, as people are more than aware, represents all local governments in Queensland. All 73 are members of the association voluntarily. We have a major role in our own right that has emerged over the last number of years in disaster management in terms of coordination. We formally lawfully are a part of the State Disaster Management Group. I sat through all of those deliberations earlier this year. We continue to be involved in the work of SDMG.

At a strategic level we help coordinate the local government response. In the event that there are councils with lesser capacity we have an intimate knowledge of their operations and are able to match resources or put our own people into the field, as we did in the case of the Cassowary Coast, Lockyer Valley and Somerset Valley councils. We had people up there on the ground within 48 hours doing all sorts of work—from assisting in media management through to engineering functions.

You might not be immediately aware, but the LGAQ is a series of companies. LGAQ Ltd is the prime company and we own or partly own eight other companies including insurance—but not property insurance—professional indemnity and public liability companies. One of the companies we half own with the Queensland Treasury Corporation is the Local Government Infrastructure Services corporation. Currently, that body is doing \$1.1 billion worth of reconstruction work. We act for and have an appointment from 13 councils. They are the worst-hit local governments, with the exception of Brisbane. We are talking about the Lockyer Valley, Somerset, Southern Downs, Western Downs, Cassowary Coast and Central Highlands regional councils. Through the officers of that organisation we are managing about \$1.1 billion worth of reconstruction work.

Beyond those matters—that is, the question of integration and the strategic oversight through SDMG and particular involvement through LG Infrastructure Services—we have been part of the response to the 65 recommendations of the interim report of the commission of the inquiry. We have dealt with each and every one of those. There is a small steering group, chaired by the director-general of the Department

of Premier and Cabinet and including the head of EMQ, the head of Main Roads and me, that has dealt with a bunch of the things that you have in front of you today. Water has not been part of that discussion for the purposes of the local government aspects of it.

In response to those 65 recommendations and in order that we get these things resolved as best we can before the next wet season, I will quickly touch on some things that are happening that might be of interest to the committee. Firstly, we have taken up the recommendations of the commission to put in place three protocols that have not existed previously at a state-wide level. The first is with the Red Cross and deals with identification, operation, supply and management of evacuation centres. I use that word very advisedly. They are not shelter sheds. The Red Cross does not have a role in those. Before I left I was looking at the last draft of a document that we will hopefully have signed off with local government by the end of month. Rather than have 76 agreements there will be an overarching agreement. It will talk about roles and responsibilities. It will set out all of those evacuation centres. It will be an all-hazards approach. There will probably be a different set of evacuation centres depending on the type of natural disaster or man-made disaster that we face. There will also be some protocols about if there are gaps—how we fill those gaps—and how we escalate issues in the proceedings.

Second is an MOU with the RSPCA regarding the transportation and management of animals in natural disasters which, people might recall, was a major problem in Cyclone Katrina. People lost their lives because they chose to stay with their animals. There are different approaches across the state as to how companion animals are dealt with. We are talking cats and dogs essentially. We are a fair way down the track of getting a protocol for the whole state between the RSPCA and ourselves concerning how that might happen. Clearly, the RSPCA is not in every local government area, but they are certainly in the majority of them.

The third document, and probably the most problematic, is an MOU with the Bureau of Meteorology. There are half a dozen recommendations in the commission of inquiry report. The MOU will deal with the flash flooding scenario. We have adequate warning and enough systems in place to deal with slow floods—if I can use that word—where we have three, four or five days notice and can take precautions. We are talking about flash flooding, particularly on the eastern escarpment of the Dividing Range.

There were recommendations about the identification of these cells by, for want of a better word, amateur groups and people who have an interest in these matters but who are not part of government in any way. It deals with the relay of that information to BOM and from BOM back to local government and how that messaging could occur. That is a very complex thing to do. As you would appreciate, it assumes you have unlimited resources in the Bureau of Meteorology and people sitting around to do this sort of thing. We are trying to be very practical and work through a system that does not ignore the current arrangement where, quite properly, the State Disaster Control Centre is pivotal. The recommendations did not actually deal with the SDCC at all. They dealt specifically with the relationship between BOM, local government and weather watching groups, which we think could cause an even bigger problem if we go around the central apparatus, the SDCC.

We are trying to resolve that. The greatest concern is the lack of resources in BOM. They have a very small office and people doing all sorts of things. They are not really in a position to take hundreds of phone calls and then make decisions about the veracity of those phone calls and then relay them back to local government. That is a significant challenge. That is probably the biggest challenge we face at the moment.

The final bit of information that I would pass on is that there were a series of recommendations around education, community awareness and communication. We have engaged a gentleman who is an expert in the area of communication and has had a lot of experience in and around disaster areas across Australia. He is a professional communicator and has worked with the ABC. We will develop a best practice kit for local government that covers everything from A to Z. It will be modularised so that we can feed material into it. We have a resources kit at the moment, but this is a much expanded kit that will pick up all the things I mentioned before and anything that you might care to think of. They will be able to put their hand on it. We are in the process of writing apps as well so that people in the field can use them. There will be internet versions. There will be hardcopy versions. There will be apps for aspects of it. As I mentioned, we are making a local government disaster education kit. I need to say again, because my North Queensland colleagues would flog me, that they are very well prepared. They have been doing this for a very long time. They have been having these sorts of processes run for 30 or 40 years without too many problems.

What we have sought to do is interface with what the state government is doing—the good work that EMQ has done in their programs; they are upgrading their TV, radio and other integration programs. There is no point us rushing off and doing something that does not fit and sit. Our work will be under their umbrella but will very specifically be about evacuation routes, evacuation centres, shelter sheds, defined radio signals, where to find flood markers and so on. That will be standardised across Queensland. That material will be finished by the end of the month.

The last aspect is a complex one and it is in part related to the Bureau of Meteorology issue I raised earlier—that is, communications. What we have done and we are doing with EMQ and the ABC—the national disaster broadcaster—is seeking to identify a triage approach or a protocol hierarchy of the appropriate communication in a specific event. As I mentioned earlier, if you have a week you would do

things very differently. You would use newspapers and general radio. In the event that you have hours you have to use all sorts of different communication systems and different messaging. So we are developing a process which says, 'Under these sets of circumstances, these are the recommended channels, media platforms and these are the sorts of messages you might use.' That is being done with EMQ, the police and the ABC. We think that it is very important to develop these things, because in a crisis we know from experience that you may have a matter of hours. Sometimes messaging gets mixed up. You have people worried for no reason and other people you might have wanted to get to.

It goes right back to, if you recall some of the media coverage, things like town sirens. When all else fails you have to use the most basic approaches to get people out of their homes to higher ground and the like. I will leave my comments at that.

CHAIR: I think it is important that we have those opening comments, because they lay a good platform for what you expect and where you have been and what you intend to do. That helps inform the committee. I call on Ros Bates, the member Mudgeeraba.

Ms BATES: My question relates to the amendments to the Water Supply (Safety and Reliability) Act 2008 and based on the recommendations made by the commission in relation to requirements to warn residents living immediately downstream of dams. I notice that we have been given a list of referable dams. I am wondering why large quarries and the like that may be upstream from areas that could be flooded are not included, given that we have the mining sector in here with their referable dams. Last week we had the first of these inquiries. I, like most Queenslanders, was under the impression that in the Lockyer and Grantham the water actually came off the top of the Toowoomba Range and into the river and that caused the flooding. Having been out there yesterday, I now know that the water went to the other side of the range and never came into the valley.

There is a quarry in Grantham that locals believe was illegally dammed at the time and that there was a build-up of water behind this dam at the quarry which, when it broke through, was responsible for the wall of water that crashed into Grantham. I am wondering whether you are aware of that quarry. Should it have been included in this legislation? Did you know about it? If you did, did the quarry have a licence to dam this particular area?

CHAIR: Is anybody prepared to take that on? I am not sure where the question would lie.

Mr Pruss: It is certainly not with us. We do not have any quarries in that space. We do not have any assets in the area.

Mr Hallam: I might be able to assist. That is not covered in the relevant pieces of legislation you cite in your notice of meeting. It is a separate act. It is obviously an issue, but it is not caught up in any of the pieces of legislation you mention.

Ms BATES: It was a submission to the floods inquiry.

Mr Hallam: Undoubtedly. I am not suggesting it is not a problem, but it is simply that it is not covered by any of those acts or any of these agencies.

CHAIR: It is an interesting question.

Ms BATES: Who would be responsible for this? If a quarry put in a temporary dam and did not have a licence to do it, who is responsible? Is it the quarry itself for not applying for a licence? If they were damming their quarry to make sure that the quarry did not flood, which then may well have precipitated the problem that occurred in Grantham, who is responsible?

Mr Hallam: Again, I might be able to assist the committee. Quarrying is dealt with under the minerals extraction act. Quarrying is defined in different terms depending on the volume of material for which there are limited controls. I think it is under 500, whatever the 500 is. Then it depends on the nature of the material that is quarried and its use as to which relevant agency it is. When quarry licences are granted, there is no provision for a quarry ever to be dammed. I will leave my comments at that, because it will be for others to make judgements about inappropriate use by persons. So basically it comes under the minerals act, and there are various interventions and thresholds about who is responsible. For a basic quarry it is the council, but if you have a large quarry, and depending on the use of the material, then it would go through DEEDI.

CHAIR: I think it is a reasonable question. I must admit that I have never heard about that. I think the committee might ask the minister for mines.

Ms BATES: I am still concerned. One of the things is their need for an early-warning system. Obviously if there are areas that you do not know about or it has not been dealt with in the flood inquiry, then it is something that needs to be looked at because, if there is a volume of water dammed up behind a dam that is not actually meant to be there in the first place, there do need to be early-warning systems for those residents, particularly in that area of the Lockyer Valley where it has never flooded before.

CHAIR: I think that is a reasonable question. I would probably support it. But the witnesses here today are not the appropriate people to deal with that. I think that is a question for the government and I am happy to take that on board outside of here.

Ms BATES: Thanks, Chair.

CHAIR: Does anyone want to stay on that?

Mr CRANDON: I would like to make an observation. This bill is about disaster readiness so, as far as the relevance of the question is concerned, I think there is some relevance to it.

CHAIR: I agree.

Mr CRANDON: Perhaps it could therefore come under this inquiry, because it is something that has been left out that perhaps should have been included in the inquiry. That is the only point I make.

CHAIR: The member for Mudgeeraba has a submission here that was provided to the floods inquiry. I do not know whether we have it.

Ms BATES: It is a submission by Mr John Gallagher that was provided to the flood inquiry.

CHAIR: I take the point, member for Coomera, that certainly they are relevant issues to the legislation. I have not heard that particular point of view, but I am certainly interested to know what basis there is for that. I think it is certainly worth looking at.

Ms BATES: You have a list of referable dams here. There may well be others that you are not aware of—this one being a case in point.

CHAIR: I call the member for Broadwater.

Ms CROFT: I have a question for Mr Pruss. You commented in your opening statement that Seqwater has expanded the number of water gauges. Could you explain to the committee why that was an issue during the last disasters? Were there any problems in relation to the water gauges? Why was there a recommendation that you increase the number of them?

Mr Pruss: In our submission and one of the expert submissions there was effectively a recommendation for Seqwater to look at the coverage of the gauges to see if they adequately covered the area. We agreed that we would then go and look at them. Effectively what we found was that the coverage was higher than anywhere else in Australia. However, we are going to put in a couple in close proximity to the dams. There were no issues or problems with it. The gauge network worked adequately the whole time.

Ms CROFT: Does anyone else have access to the information provided by the gauges? What other organisations use that information?

Mr Pruss: In fact, the gauges are owned by local government, ourselves and the bureau, and that information is shared amongst all of us. I think we own roughly half of the gauges, but we get all of the data from all of them, as does the bureau and as do the councils. So it is quite an open network of information.

CHAIR: Is that the best model, do you think, that some gauges are owned by one group and some are operated by others? It seems an unusual arrangement. To be honest, I thought they were all owned by you.

Mr Pruss: The gauges are owned for different things. For example, the ones in the Lockyer are not ours. Seqwater has no assets in the area.

CHAIR: Because you have no dams on that river.

Mr Pruss: No dams at all in that area, nor on the Bremer. Our gauges are specifically related to the catchments and to help us do flood mitigation—to know where floods are going. We also get the other information from the bureau on the downstream gauges to help us to work out what is going on with particular rainfall patterns.

CHAIR: Are they all the same variety? The reason I ask is that I have had somebody in my office this morning with a new type of gauge which is solar powered and which has been sold to Great Britain. It is a Queensland firm. Are the gauges consistent? Do we use the same technologies?

Mr Pruss: There are effectively two: one is a flow meter, a height meter, and one is a rainfall gauge. Both are used in the context of working out what we do with the floods and the rainfall. Most are powered; some are solar powered. There are all different sorts and different ages. We are continually updating those gauges and stations through funding on our own behalf and through the BOM. We have just put in another application to upgrade them as well. So there is a continual renewal program for them. The system is designed to have a bit of a failure rate, because there are hundreds; you are always going to get a couple out. So you overlap gauges so that you are not absolutely dependent on one gauge at any point in time.

Mr CRANDON: My question is to the LGAQ. As you would be aware, staff and equipment were made available fairly quickly from council areas that were untouched. The Gold Coast City Council and the Logan City Council come to mind. They were obviously provided very quickly. Was there some sort of management of those assets? Was there any cost recovery for the councils or did they bear the cost, because obviously it was staff and equipment, as I understand? How was it coordinated? Are there any changes proposed to the way that was managed?

Mr Hallam: Yes. There was a protocol in place between Emergency Management Queensland and the LGAQ regarding the coordination of resources. In truth, that got badly stretched to the point that, because of all the other pressures on EMQ, it got handed back to the LGAQ entirely during the disaster. That is no criticism; it was simply because of the magnitude of what was going on. It did not involve just Queensland resources; we had resources from across Australia and overseas. We have a set protocol and register where people register those assets—the type of asset, the sort of operator they need, the licences that are required and the supplies that are required to run them. That information was made directly available to the councils. They could view that.

What we need to avoid at all costs—and this happened after Larry—is people turning up with the best of intentions without telling anyone. In one case, someone from the Gold Coast drove a very long way, with nowhere to stay. So that is obviously something we need to be very careful about. They have to be able to coordinate and deploy with the Australian Army, EMQ, SES and others. There is a process in place. We did find, as I said, that the sheer magnitude of the last disaster stretched that. There are recommendations in the commission of inquiry interim report that we need to improve on that, and that is being done.

I suppose the biggest breakthrough in all of these areas is predeployment of assets, particularly around electricity assets, with gen sets and the like. We are going to have, in a very short time, across all the relevant state and local government agencies, only one database that picks up everything. So whether it is chainsaw or a pair of clippers or a gen set or a rubber duckie or whatever it is, we will have only one place—up to date, real time—that can be used to direct those resources. But from Larry to the most recent set of disasters it was immeasurably better. The sorts of problems we had in the past around power, which is fundamental to operate all of these things that we need, did not occur. Particularly in relation to Ergon, their workers were all predeployed—all agreed with us. But, for the next set of events, you will be able to look at a digitised cadastral database online.

Mr CRANDON: What about cost recovery?

Mr Hallam: To the extent that they are caught up by the NDRRA guidelines, there is cost recovery. But in a lot of instances councils did not seek to recover that money. They were eligible but in many instances they did not recover that money. Things that were really invaluable, to be honest, are things needed for post clean-up—such as mulchers, green waste, extractors, trucks to take things to the dumps. There seems to be enough of the absolute emergency equipment to deal with the disaster as it is at the time. But, as I said, they need things like entomological control such as mosquito smokers, green waste and things of that nature to get things back to normal.

Mr CRANDON: You said that it was stretched to the limit and handed back to you simply because they just could not manage it. What kinds of changes are in the recommendation?

Mr Hallam: The recommendation was basically to resolve the system. So the question is: how do we best educate people about how the system works? So we establish a system—

Mr CRANDON: Of education.

Mr Hallam:—of education and resourcing. How many people do we need at peak times? When, quite honestly, we have 150 councils around Australia offering to help, ringing in and wanting to do the right thing, how do we deal with that and not take offline EMQ's better people, who are trying to resupply in another area? We do not have the absolute answer at this point in time, but we are aware of the issue and we are working through it.

Ms CROFT: My question is to the gentlemen from RACQ. I refer to the changes that are proposed to the Sustainable Planning Act. Could you give us your comments in relation to how roads were repaired during the phase of this year's disasters and how the proposed amendments may address any concerns that you had or recognised during that process?

Mr Turner: We have just undertaken three major road tours on this very subject to have a look at the infrastructure as it is being rebuilt. I think it is fair to say that, while we do often complain about the state of roads, particularly the Bruce and the Warrego, we are pretty impressed with the flood recovery construction work that is going on at the moment and the amount of resources and financial assets that have been put in, not just on the major highways but also on some of the inland highways—the Capricorn and the Leichhardt. As an opening statement, I guess some of these roads were not too good before the disasters. They have probably improved, in actual fact, because of the level of construction. While we would like to see them widened and flood proofed—and that is not happening necessarily—they have at least been reconstructed at a higher level than they were before. So that might help with some flood resistance.

CHAIR: That means building in some resilience.

Mr Turner: That is right. In most cases it is just that the technology and the standards to which we build now are just so much better than they were 50 years ago when the road was first built. Because it has disappeared, they have been able to come back and build it at a better standard, so in many cases that has been great. I think the coordination was a bit patchy at the beginning of the year. We have been a member of the flood recovery committee for transport and infrastructure, along with the Trucking Association, the LGAQ, AgForce and a few other representative bodies, and I think that has been a very effective process and that is continuing. That committee met this morning, and it looks like it will be changing its name, obviously, but it will be continuing in some way as a consultative committee for major road infrastructure across the state. So I think that is another positive.

We are supportive of the changes to the Sustainable Planning Act. It would be unfair to say that we think there is enough money going into road funding, because there absolutely is not, and we will continue to push for that. In terms of flood proofing of particularly the Bruce and Warrego highways—and I can say this in this environment because it is largely federally funded, and I do not want to offend anywhere here—while it is virtually impossible to flood proof 1,700 kilometres of the Bruce Highway, there are certain areas that we all know quite well that go under at little more than a sneeze, the Yeppen roundabout in Brisbane

Rockhampton, for example. That is where we will be putting a lot of our focus as well. Our own road condition reporting reports that the Bruce Highway has been cut 530 times by floodwater in the last two years, the majority of those between Townsville and Cairns. We think that is way too high. Anything that helps build that sustainability we support.

Ms BATES: My question is to Paul or Ian. I am from the Gold Coast and we were very lucky that we did not have any flooding in the last lot of floods, but we may not be so lucky next time. There are two roads in my electorate that are usually cut by landslips: Beechmont Road, which if I recall rightly was 2008's worst state controlled main road, and Springbrook Road, which is a heritage listed road. Did the RACQ or the LGAQ have any concerns during the disaster last summer in relation to delays in repairs, particularly in relation to DERM?

Mr Turner: Yes. I think one of the things was that the sheer amount of water that fell exposed some of the key infrastructure routes not on just the major roads but also on some the state owned roads. The two you mentioned are obvious ones. I think you are right. I think at least one of them was in the top five in our Unroadworthy Roads Survey a couple of years ago.

Ms BATES: Beechmont Road.

Mr Turner: Without speaking to the specifics of that road, we have seen, for example, on the Toowoomba bypass and Cunningham's Gap where major roadslips have shut two of the major infrastructure routes into the state and what damage that can do, particularly at Cunningham's Gap, which was shut down on and off for about three or four months.

Landslips are very serious. We have seen some really good work done at the back of the Sunshine Coast if you get the chance to have a look around Kenilworth. There is some retaining wall work they have done to prevent landslips there, so we know it can be done. Again, it is a matter of funding commitments.

One thing we constantly see is that some of these areas go time and time again, and the only way to prepare them—and Beechmont is one of them—is going to be very expensive and costly to really ensure that there is no landslip. I do not know whether you had anything, Greg.

Mr Hallam: We really did not focus on the state roads. We focused on our own roads. We really did not have a problem. I suppose we got the work done and asked for forgiveness later. We are talking about, in essence, personal access. Through LGIS, which I mentioned earlier, and the Australian Army we had people on the ground within 48 hours in Lockyer, Somerset and the worst affected areas. We were putting through all sorts of rudimentary engineering solutions to give people access on and off their property—dropping logs in and doing all sorts of those things. It is what they call CDO and emergent work. No-one has taken us to jail yet.

Ms BATES: I understand that landslips on the Gold Coast in the big scheme of things during the floods was probably the least priority. However, both of these communities only have one road in. When it is cut off, which Springbrook Road and Pine Creek Road were, there are 785 people who were stuck on the mountain in Springbrook, and similar to Beechmont. I am sure the locals did some of the things that you mentioned. I know there was some access out of Beechmont Road, but we certainly did not publicise that to people who did not have four-wheel drives.

Mr Turner: You raise a really good point and one which has constantly come up for us and which is also tackled in this omnibus bill, and that is what people will do when the route in and out is cut. Flooding on the road is something that we have spoken enormously about. We are currently liaising with Swift Water and various other government departments about how we continue to make that better in the future. Whether it is landslips or flooded water, we all know that, if a town or a community is cut off, they will try to find another way in and out, and that is often a very dangerous way, unfortunately.

Ms BATES: Do we have a number of how many people did try to traverse flood affected roads and ended up in trouble?

Mr Turner: No, they are not telling us. It is one of those difficult things. I know there is still a discussion amongst experts in the RACQ, of whom I do not pretend to be one—but Steve Spalding and others who work for me—and even in areas of government about what a safe level of water across a road is. Some of us are much more conservative and we would say pretty much anything over the tyre rim you should not be crossing. There is no one fit, because if you are in a B-double it is a different height to if you are in a Suzuki. We tend to err on the side of caution when we are on the radio and just say 'Don't cross it'.

Mr CRANDON: A farmer will tell you that if you stand in the water side on to the flow and it knocks you off your feet, do not go in in a four-wheel drive. That is a farmer's way of measuring.

Mr Gillespie: That is a very important point. I think education is an issue that we have to address. We had a lot of complaints—just talking about road closure reporting, which is relevant to your question—by people saying, 'You are saying it is closed; we know we could get through.' The problem is that you might be able to drive through, but driving through might do a lot of damage to that road, which would then increase the cost of repairing it and getting it back to normal. Quite significantly, it could be very dangerous for the individual. People often think they know better. The people involved in making a decision about whether a road is open or closed—

Mr Hallam: The roads authority.

Mr Gillespie:—they balance all that up, and they have to be trusted. The second one is with regard to Swift Water, and I think your point is absolutely right: 600 millimetres of water is easy to drive through, but if that water is moving it is extremely dangerous and at that depth it will wash a car away. We saw what happened in Toowoomba. Some of those cars that were washed away were washed away in very deep water; some were only in very shallow water. It was the speed of the water that was the issue. Again, that is an educational issue, because most people would not be aware. We see there is a job to be done on the education side and in terms of warning signs and getting the information out.

In terms of services like our road conditions reporting service, new things that we are doing around iPhone or Smartphone applications that can link all this information together, I think in terms of disaster management planning and how we react are absolutely critical because we learned in this flood about the power of social media. The Queensland Police Service has talked a lot about how it became the single source of truth throughout the floods. We learned a lot of lessons out of that. There needs to be a single source of truth for these things as well, not everyone going to who they might believe has an opinion that suits them better.

CHAIR: The bill proposes amendments to the transport act, as you know, in relation to the content requirements for restricted road notices and approvals for driving past restricted roadblocks and so forth under limited circumstances. Are RACQ vehicles allowed to go past?

Mr Turner: We have applied to be one of the organisations that is allowed through in a disaster area.

CHAIR: That is what I was wondering about.

Mr Turner: During the floods in the south-east it was impossible to do because we could not physically get in there. Ian can speak to this more but during Cyclone Larry one of the things we found was the inability to communicate and get out information from these areas. So the RACQ developed the MBC, which is a really big truck that has its own satellite communication links. It provides insurance claim services, but what it did during Yasi was it, along with the rest of the convey, took 4,000 bottles of water into Tully because they did not have any.

Mr Gillespie: I think the issue was that we could not easily get through. It took a call from me to the Police Commissioner to get us through and up there.

CHAIR: That is what I am interested in.

Mr Gillespie: That has to be fixed. We are currently working with EMQ. We learnt a lot of lessons out of that. We did not have a disaster response team as such. We are now developing that, and we are going to equip them differently and train them differently. We are working with EMQ. We hope to be accredited by them, and that way we can get access because they know that we have the right equipment and the right training to do it. With all the best intentions, we probably did not have everything we needed last time. We did get up there and we did get through and it did make a significant difference.

That was based on lessons learned out of Larry. This semitrailer that we took in is fully self-contained and self-supporting so it does not rely on finding accommodation locally, but it is very difficult to get a truck that size through. That is another thing we have to address, but all of those different aspects of disaster response on our behalf still relied on one key thing, and that was getting access. If it was not well known amongst those people who are preventing access, then it would become extremely difficult. Every roadblock we had to talk our way through.

You have to bear in mind that RACQ vehicles are all fitted out. They have emergency lighting on them, they have highly trained people in high-visibility, high-resolution equipment. They are fully fitted out with communications equipment and so on. They really are an emergency response vehicle and should be treated as such.

CHAIR: I certainly agree, and obviously we are going to continue that discussion. Jim, in your opening comments you talked about the communication aspect, which as you and Mike would know, in my area in Fernvale and Lowood, which are directly below the dam, some of the residents felt very aggrieved with the ability to understand what was happening and how quickly it was going to happen for them. You mentioned methods of communication such as SMS, emails, phones and the like. I do not think I heard you say anything about the social media—Facebook and Twitter—radios, UHF and hand-held radios. There were people up there with their own radio stations as well as applications on your own iPhone, which someone mentioned before. Then there is the old trusted manual system of a siren. This is particularly significant to me and that is why I am asking the question. Places like Fernvale are quite compact when it comes to the issue of flood affected residents. Is that something we are also looking at? Do we have a wide view in relation to these communication aspects? If so, how quickly are we going to get some responses? I attended a Fernvale action group meeting last night, which is still quite active, and it is very keen to know some of the results of that communication strategy.

Mr Pruss: The ones that I mentioned in the opening were the primary devices we are looking at, because we feel that everybody would have access to landlines, mobile phones and whatever. Social media is really the secondary line of defence. But also remember that the same information does go up on our websites. It also goes up on the 1800 numbers. So all of that stuff is in the mix but SMS to landlines

and phones are really the prime mechanism of getting that information out. We have the package and we are starting to trial that now. That process will be facilitated by a newspaper advertisement for people to effectively log into the site, enter their details and then they will get those messages accordingly. The ones covered by the commission of inquiry will then go into the emergency response plans as requested.

In terms of sirens, we have had a bit of a discussion around the siren issue. We talked to Somerset Regional Council and it asked about sirens. Neither party thought they were particularly effective as a primary means. I do not think they have been ruled out completely as a no-go but they are certainly not the primary means of communication that we are looking at.

CHAIR: I do not think anybody expects that, but if there are going to be any decisions made on this then certainly the public need to be aware. That would be my big concern. As I say, Fernvale in particular and Lowood are very small areas that were affected and they will be the ones affected every single time. They are quite easy to accommodate in respect to something like that—some sign, whether it be flags and sirens or flashing lights or whatever. I am not sure I understood your answer in relation to the social media. Did you say that you guys are formally looking at Facebook and Twitter or not?

Mr Pruss: Absolutely.

CHAIR: I was not quite certain.

Mr Pruss: They are just not the primary mechanism at this point in time. On the topic of sirens, and again talking to the Fernvale community, we have been talking to Somerset Regional Council and it has invited us to talk to the action group again to tell them effectively where we are at, what we are doing and how the communication is going to be done and we have accepted that. It is just a matter of when we can get out there to do that.

CHAIR: I would certainly encourage you to do that ASAP if you do not mind. I know they meet every month. The last meeting was last night and there will be others coming up very soon.

Mr Keogh: Just to add to that, in terms of the communication downstream of the dams, I would just make the committee aware that there is a draft guideline that the dam safety regulator has put out and it very clearly tries to draw who is responsible for communication with downstream communities. That draft guideline certainly talks about the dam owner providing immediate communication to those people within about an hour's travel time for floodwaters downstream of the dam and the local disaster management groups having prime responsibility below that. In terms of sirens, certainly on all of the gated dams that we operate we have sirens, but that would not extend to communities that would be some distance downstream of the dams. Our communication would be through the local disaster groups to respond to that.

Mr CRANDON: Just to follow on from that, you talked about dam owners, and we have become aware that the Queensland Farmers Federation have expressed concerns about the potential cost impacts on their members. We will hear from them in writing because, unfortunately, due to illness they were unable to attend today. What about the cost impacts as far as putting these things in place? Can I have some feedback from LGAQ and then also Seqwater and SunWater?

Mr Hallam: I will not particularly refer to South-East Queensland but I will talk about other systems throughout Queensland. Almost all of those towns, without exception, have a rural fire brigade. If you are familiar with how rural fire brigades work, they actually have a siren—

Mr CRANDON: No, I am talking about the cost impact to the dam owners. You were talking about how they are required to put sirens—

Mr Hallam: Sorry, the point I was trying to make is that in some instances there is existing infrastructure that does not have to be replicated so there is no cost. The very big cost for us, and the one the LGAQ has been public about, is telemetry devices. The question was asked earlier about these devices. I will give you the example of the Central Highlands Regional Council. They have 15 devices in at the minute and they are \$50,000 each. They are all-weather, albeit you have to go out there and maintain them. They have to put another 20 in, so we are talking about a very substantial amount of money that that community has to bear. As it stands now, with 10 or 15 devices—I think it is 15—one man is working full time. This is a very big area, so he has to drive around and make sure the solar panel is clean and that the locals have not shot out the devices, which does happen. People do those things.

Effectively, you have a capital cost and then a recurrent cost. In an area such as the Central Highlands, which is a four-hour-long drive either way, it requires two full-time men, so they are talking about two per cent extra on their rates in that case just to cover the cost. These figures will give you the totality of the Central Highlands, which I am very familiar with because my chairman is the deputy mayor. It is \$1.3 million extra for hydrological studies, over and above what they have done already with flood mapping, and the best part of another \$750,000 for telemetry devices. Then when you employ a man—I am not being sexist—to drive around in a car continually, it is probably another \$150,000 by the time you pay salary, living-away-from-home allowances, the cost of fuel and everything else. This is not cheap. That would be borne by your cotton farmers and your people in viticulture and aquaculture out there.

Mr Keogh: I think there are three aspects to cost impacts. In relation to the first one around the emergency planning and emergency management, we do not see the recommendations out of the flood commission as onerous or a significant change or increase in cost. So we will continue to work with local disaster management groups and I do not see that as a major impact on cost.

The other two areas where there could potentially be cost impacts are, for example, if as a result of the legislation there was a need to modify infrastructure to increase outlet works to lower full-supply levels. That would be a major cost impact that would need to be either funded by government or passed on to water users. That would be one major impact.

The other one is, I note, covered by the proposed bill about the inquiry into impacts on water security. I will just make the point there that, within regional parts of Queensland, there is a difference around the impacts on water security in that most of the water supply schemes around Queensland only have one source of water—one dam—so any change to the operations of that does have a potential cost in terms of an economic impact for that region because there is only the one source of supply. In South-East Queensland, you have the difference where that water security risk can be offset through other sources of water, such as a desalination plant and other dams connected to the grid. I think there are three aspects to your question.

CHAIR: I am sorry, but the time allocated for this public hearing has expired. If members require any further information, we will certainly contact you. In fact, we will write to you because there are a couple of things here that we want clarification on. Otherwise, thank you for your attendance here today. The committee appreciates your assistance, and certainly at such short notice. I declare this briefing closed. Is it the wish of the committee that the evidence given here before it be authorised for publication pursuant to section 50(2)(a) of the Parliament of Queensland Act? If there are no objections, I so authorise that. Thank you very much.

Committee adjourned at 3.35 pm