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**Tasmania
POLICE**

14 November 2016

Mr Mike Blake
Review Investigator
Government Flood Review Team
GPO Box 308
Hobart. TAS. 7001

Dear Mr Blake

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on behalf of Tasmania Police to the Government Flood Review as outlined in your letter received on the 1st November 2016.

I understand that you have already spoken to the "Police Commanders" who, as a result of their positions are, "Regional Controllers". The "Regional Controllers" were directly involved in managing the response and recovery phases on the floods and I understand that their responses have already been provided to your office.

Tasmania Police were extensively involved in the response phase of the floods which required police to manage or respond to incidents that were a direct result from rising flood waters and heavy rain. The incidents were non-specific and ranged from, but not limited to;

- Road closures and/or road obstructions due to fallen trees, landsides or debris,
- Assisting in the evacuation of inundated residences by foot, vehicle, vessel or aircraft; and
- Provision of information to the public, primarily about road closures.

Tasmania Police provided response through various work units, however the majority of response was provided by local uniform patrols, search & rescue and our internal media and communications unit.

Your letter listed several strategic points to consider however upon review the only point that relates to Tasmania Police is the following:

- **The use and efficacy of forecasting, community alerts, warnings and public information by authorities in responding to flood events.**

Within Tasmania Police, The Media & Communications unit (M&C) of the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management provides direct assistance for public communication. This is achieved by media releases, social media updates and web page updates. The M&C provided significant assistance to the State Emergency Service during the June 2016 flood event.

Warnings for the flood event were issued via media release several days prior. On Friday 3 June, a police media conference was held providing advice on driving conditions ahead of the severe weekend forecast. A SES media release was also issued in relation to the Bureau of Meteorology warning on Friday afternoon. This information was widely reported, including by the emergency broadcaster, ABC. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-03/tasmania-on-wild-weather-alert/7476314>
A further media release with public safety messages was issued on Sunday 5 June.

On Monday 6 June, M&C embedded two media liaison staff in the State Operations Centre (SOC) to assist with media advice, public information and media requests. In order to relieve pressure on SES officers and ensure consistency in messaging, media organisations were advised that all queries should be directed to M&C. (Previously journalists contacted SES officers directly).

M&C staff in the SOC provided communications advice, responded to media requests, prepared Talking Points, organised regular media conferences and hourly interview updates for the ABC Emergency Broadcaster.

An AUSLAN interpreter was organised for the Monday media conference with SES Director, Nick Wilson, and the Premier.

Between 6-9 June, M&C issued 26 media release updates and talking points, and coordinated approximately 80 media interviews over four days. Further assistance was provided by office-based M&C staff, who shared the information across SES and Police social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and Sound cloud. Social media information regularly reached thousands of people, for example a post about evacuations at Invermay reached more than 171,000 people.

M&C staff also coordinated Community Alerts on the Tasmania Police website to ensure consistent road closure information across media releases, the website, and the maps on the TasAlert website. The efforts of M&C staff in managing public information greatly assisted SES officers by coordinating media requests and ensuring the availability of consistent, regular public information.

The response by M&C highlights the importance of regularly exercising responses to emergencies. M&C staff participate in annual training events to exercise responses in providing information in emergency incidents, and were well prepared to respond. Embedding media liaison officers in the State Operations Centre was an effective and efficient way to assist SES officers and maintain the flow of public information.

Nominating a dedicated SES spokesperson for media interviews was an effective strategy. However, this incident raised several issues in relation to public messaging which included numerous media requests, particularly from the ABC. Efforts were focussed on providing interviews for the local emergency broadcaster, however there were many requests from various interstate units within the ABC (Radio National, News Radio etc) who wanted their own interviews and were reluctant to share the local ABC's up to date interviews or the audio from media conferences provided

online. This added to the already considerable demand for information from the limited SES resources.

Other communication issues between work units within DPFEM were raised and have since been addressed.

If there are any further issues or matters that need further attention, Inspector Jon Cooper of the Commissioner's office can be contacted on jon.cooper@police.tas.gov.au and 6173 2350.

Yours sincerely



D L Hine
COMMISSIONER OF POLICE