

# Tasmanian Flood Recovery Taskforce

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Mr Mike Blake  
Review Investigator  
Government Flood Review  
GPO Box 308  
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Dear Mr Blake

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the review into the June 2016 Tasmanian floods on behalf of the Northern Regional Flood Recovery Committee, in my role as Chair.

The attached submission addresses a number of issues relating to the terms of reference which have come to the attention of the Committee in the course of its flood recovery work.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Craig Perkins  
**Chair**  
Northern Regional Flood Recovery Committee

14 November 2016

## **Background**

Shortly after the June 2016 Tasmanian floods, the Tasmanian Flood Recovery Taskforce (the Taskforce) was established by the Tasmanian Government on 14 June 2016 under the direction of the State Recovery Coordinator, Tasmania Police Commander Peter Edwards.

In order to support the leadership of local recovery efforts, Regional Flood Recovery Committees (RFRC) were established for the Northern and North Western regions to work in conjunction with the Taskforce. The role of each RFRC was to coordinate longer-term recovery activities and to support impacted communities to manage their own recovery.

The Northern RFRC (the Committee) comprised seven members: me as Chair (Meander Valley), Greg Howard as Deputy Chair (Dorset), Shane Eberhardt (Launceston), Commander Peter Edwards and representatives from the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE), Tasmania Health Service (THS) and the Department of State Growth (State Growth). Other stakeholders were invited to Committee meetings from time to time to provide specialist advice. The Tasmanian Government is to be congratulated on the timely establishment of the Taskforce and the Committee.

## **The recovery effort**

Cooperation with key stakeholders was an essential component of the recovery effort, particularly during the transition from response to recovery when these relationships were consolidated. Collaboration with key government, non-government and community organisations allowed the Committee to understand community priorities and to ensure that the recovery process was targeted effectively, while direct engagement with affected communities enabled community members to provide input into decisions that were being made at a local and State level.

Members of the Taskforce were seconded from various government agencies, initially for very short periods (generally two weeks at a time). Secondments to future taskforces could be for longer periods, such as three months or more.

The emergency management processes that were put in place by the Tasmanian Government and the Taskforce through Commander Edwards were instrumental in providing a timely response to the flood event. These processes facilitated effective collaboration with State Growth to assist affected business and DPIPWE to assist affected landowners.



Information stored in the knowledge base through the Common Operating Platform (COP) was helpful for both recovery management and prioritisation of works. However, timely data input by councils was problematic, in part hindered by a lack of phone coverage in remote areas. It was often impossible to upload data in the field, and difficult to do so later in an office in the face of competing priorities. To facilitate better data capture, thought could be given as to how data could be entered in the field then automatically uploaded when internet coverage becomes available.

While relationships with Government Departments were generally good, there was some confusion among community members as to which agency was responsible for what. It was perceived that decision makers who were not based in the regions were often not attuned to the urgency of the situation or the vulnerability of community members, particularly in those communities still feeling the effects of the bushfires of January 2016.

Communications via local newspapers and social media were generally good, however there were some communication gaps, especially in remote areas. Local community newspapers became an effective communication medium throughout the recovery.

Although updates on local radio during the flood event were helpful, the escalating urgency was not always effectively communicated. Regular similar updates create the risk that listeners 'tune out', missing important information when the situation escalates. From an information management perspective, thought could be given to how information shared during the flood event by Government could be clearly identified in the first instance as 'public' or 'not public' to enable more efficient communications with the media.

In the immediate aftermath of the floods, the dissemination of emergency assistance grants was generally excellent. However, Primary Producer Clean-Up grants were less well received by the community due to perceived inequities. These inequity issues mainly related to Local Government Area (LGA) geographical boundaries, which determined eligibility for the grants. In some cases, significant flood damage was recorded at properties which lay just outside an eligible LGA. Consideration could be given to including a capacity for site-specific eligibility in isolated/exceptional cases.

Members of the community also raised a number of issues about insurance with the Committee. There was a widespread perception that the role of Government was to remediate flood damage in areas where insurance was insufficient or non-existent. Consideration could be given to an education campaign, emphasising the need for adequate, well understood insurance cover and managing community expectations around Government assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters.

