

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 provide a submission to the review into the 2016 Tasmanian floods on behalf of the Tasmanian Flood Recovery Taskforce, in my role as State Flood Recovery Coordinator.

The attached submission is limited to the following term of reference:

The effectiveness of transition from response to recovery in the week following the June floods, including capacity and priorities for infrastructure repair and immediate assistance payments.

While the Taskforce is not in a position to comment on factors that may or may not have contributed to the severity of the floods or the extent of the damage that ensued, members of the public raised a number of concerns and potentially relevant issues with me prior to your review being announced. Accordingly, I feel obliged to formally report to you the following matters that were brought to my attention:

- cloud seeding
- Hydro dams
- Forestry debris
- responsibility for forest plantations
- culvert maintenance
- bridge design
- inadequate flood warnings
- inadequate preparation or preventative measures
- riverine and catchment management.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance to your review in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "P. Edwards".

Commander Peter Edwards BM APM
Coordinator

11 November 2016

Background

In the first week of June 2016, Tasmania experienced its worst floods in almost 90 years. Around 400 requests for assistance were received by the State Emergency Service and over 100 people were rescued. As the floodwaters rose, lives were threatened - and, tragically, lost – while properties and businesses were inundated, animals and livestock drowned and critical infrastructure was damaged or destroyed, preventing access to some essential public services. In the aftermath of the floods, the devastation to rural property, public and private infrastructure, homes and businesses, National Parks and natural attractions quickly became apparent.

In recognition of the severity of the event, the Premier of Tasmania established the *Tasmanian Flood Recovery Taskforce* (the Taskforce) immediately after the floods to work with affected communities and others in the recovery and rebuilding process. On June 8th I was asked by Mr Darren Hine, Commissioner of Police and State Emergency Management Controller, to lead the Taskforce in the role of State Flood Recovery Coordinator. Transitional preparations commenced the next day and the Taskforce was officially announced on June 14th.

To support local recovery efforts, *Regional Flood Recovery Committees* (Regional Committees) were quickly established in the North-West and Northern regions and a lead Mayor nominated for the Southern region to work in conjunction with the Taskforce. The Taskforce's work included supporting the Regional Committees, liaising with Tasmanian Government agencies and other key stakeholders and working in partnership with the Australian Government to ensure that maximum assistance for flood-affected communities was made available under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA).

From response to recovery

Three key factors contributed to the smooth transition from response to recovery:

1. The rapid establishment of the Taskforce, with staff from the State Emergency Service and Department of Premier and Cabinet being made immediately available in the days following the floods. Inter-operability arrangements were also activated resulting in across agency staff being seconded.
2. The agreement by mayors of affected municipalities to regionalise Affected Area Recovery Committees (established under the State Emergency Management Act 2006) into two Regional Committees and Southern regional arrangements. These arrangements were effectively realised through the commitment of Mayor Peter Freshney and Mayor Craig Perkins to act as Chairs of the North Western and Northern committees, respectively, and Mayor Martyn Evans to represent the Southern region.
3. The willing engagement of key stakeholders, in particular Forestry Tasmania, regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisations, Rural Alive and Well (RAW), TasRail, BlazeAid, Service Tasmania, the Insurance Council of Australia, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association and many service and not-for-profit organisations.

All three factors contributed to the responsiveness and inclusiveness of recovery arrangements.

To inform medium- to long-term recovery planning, an *Interim Action Plan* was prepared by the Taskforce, drawing on available impact information and existing Tasmanian emergency management arrangements.

The *Interim Action Plan* identified four key priorities:

1. Restoring major infrastructure and assets
2. Helping the local economy to rebound
3. Supporting environmental and cultural heritage recovery
4. Supporting individual families and communities.

The Taskforce and Regional Committees and representatives facilitated effective prioritisation among multiple stakeholders, without the need for formal chains of command. This allowed activities to progress rapidly through an established network, improving efficiency and timeliness of the recovery effort. The Taskforce quickly became a 'go-to' point for problem solving and linking key players; a great strength of the arrangements. Initial emergency assistance payments were rapidly disseminated and flood-affected individuals and families had cash in hand almost immediately, thanks to the cooperation of major banks.

Through its advocacy role, the Taskforce assisted with the prioritisation of infrastructure repair, predominantly concerning damage sustained to Tasmania's roads during the floods. This issue was complex, due to the multi-tenure nature of the road network, with ownership and management responsibility extending from the State Government (Department of State Growth) and Local Government authorities to Forestry Tasmania, Parks and Wildlife Service and Hydro Tasmania. A prominent example involved Lemonthyme Road, a flood-damaged road in the Kentish Municipality. Responsibility for repair of the road could not be definitively determined. However, repairs were urgently needed to gain access to River Road, a Kentish Council road and the main access to the township of Lorinna, which had been cut off by the floods. On the recommendation of the Taskforce, the Tasmanian Government prioritised repairs to Lemonthyme Road in order to restore access to the isolated community. Whilst ownership is being determined, Department of State Growth has been tasked with completing the essential works to the road.

The safety of those working to assess and restore assets was, and remains, a primary consideration in the recovery process. While it is acknowledged that some essential public assets, including bridges, have not yet been repaired, it is noted that excessive rain throughout winter and early spring has reduced the speed at which this could safely take place. In many cases, damage assessments and repair estimates could not be completed until river levels dropped significantly.

Recovery is a long-term process. Local people, families, communities, businesses, councils and community groups have led much of the recovery effort to date. As we move away from short-term measures and progress through the medium-term recovery phase, government-led programs will begin to take greater precedence. In the long-term, focus will shift to supporting environmental and economic recovery of the affected regions and implementing best-practice mitigation strategies for the future.

The Taskforce is currently preparing a final activity report on its operations, which will provide an account of statewide recovery efforts and inform longer term recovery.