

Minutes of the Tweed Flood Event Media Coverage Meeting held Thursday 8 March 2018

Venue:

SES Headquarters, 7 Lancaster Drive, Goonellabah

Time:

1.30pm

Present:

Danny Rose, Leon McLean, Fran Silk (Tweed Shire Council), Mike Allen (Tweed Floodplain Management Committee, community representative), Mark Somers, Janet Pettit, Peter Mair (NSW SES), Justine Frasier (ABC North Coast).

Minutes:

The purpose of the meeting was to action previous recommendations of the Tweed Floodplain Management Committee, as endorsed by Tweed Shire Council, to discuss concerns with ABC North Coast and NSW SES relating to perceived lack of local Tweed coverage and content provided by the emergency broadcaster during flood events.

Mark Somers, Region Controller Richmond Tweed SES, spoke of their role as combat and control agency during flood emergencies. Public messaging and intelligence gathering is an essential role for the SES. SES is currently reviewing incident control processes and structures, taking into account the Owens Report from Ex-TC Debbie and other disasters around NSW.

Best practice incident control requires consistency in messaging – “one source, one message”, to avoid confusion, inaccuracies and contradictions. It also adds credibility to have one voice delivering messages.

SES is reviewing incident control structures, processes and procedures, and in doing so aims to improve the control of future flood events by implementing the following:

- Combined Incident Control Centres (ICCs) and Emergency Operation Centres (EOCs) for coordinated all agency response;
- Flexibility in the location and scope of the ICC to best address the risks required, rather than traditional map boundaries;
- Properly resourced public information personnel located within the ICC;
- Where possible, ABC North Coast located within the ICC;
- Issue regular flood information bulletins at appointed times, with flexibility to increase coverage for unforeseen circumstances or priority issues;
- Better integration between response and recovery phases of an event through the ICC;

Justine Frasier, Regional Program Manager ABC North Coast, defended past coverage of flood events, including the March 2017 flood. ABC aims for equal coverage between impacted areas, however this is often limited by availability of information. ABC North Coast primarily covers the regions between Grafton and Tweed Heads, but can expand to include Coffs Harbour to the Gold Coast. External studios can be utilised if there is a local problem (e.g. electricity interruptions) and to cover shifts.

Justine emphasised that ABC North Coast is also not just a radio station, but also provides TV and social media content. ABC Regional has recently attracted significant extra funding and resources.

All parties acknowledged the value of local “on the ground” knowledge in the coverage of and prioritised response to flood emergencies. This can be fed directly into the ICC system proposed by SES. It will be assisted by the SES’s proposed Community Action Team (CAT) project, where local community leaders are nominated and trained to act as an information source, and can be accessible to the media.

Currently ABC North Coast is the only emergency broadcaster for the Tweed region. Other stations, such as community radio or syndicated stations could also perform the role, however they would need to be able to demonstrate adequate resourcing to operate 24/7, as well as abandon regular broadcasting in the event of an emergency. Therefore it is very unlikely that there will be a return to the old “2MW model” that residents and committee members have requested.

Council and SES need to better coordinate public messaging. Questions were raised regarding the demarcation between the respective media units – who does what, and how does this accord with the “one voice” approach? Examples are messages about road closures, waste services etc. This will require further work, and possibly a desk top exercise looking at the respective communications functions during Debbie. The role of specialists, such as forecasters, flood engineers and politicians in the public messaging also needs to be considered further.

Actions – Fran Silk and Janet Pettit to explore public messaging undertaken during Ex-TC Debbie by SES and TSC to see how this can be properly coordinated and shared in future events, including links to ABC North Coast.