

First-class effort behind the flood scenes

The events of the recent flood crisis in Queensland were well documented in the media, but the AFP's behind-the-scenes support during this and other natural disasters often stays largely in the background.

"Operation Clement has now been implemented. Manager AFP Brisbane Office Mark Walters has overall command of all AFP resources in Queensland."

An email to all Australian Federal Police staff signalled the start of an assistance operation to help the Queensland Police Service (QPS) with a flood crisis affecting 75 per cent of the state. Prior to the announcement, six Operational Response Group members had already been deployed to the devastated town of Grantham, 100 kilometres west of Brisbane.

While the events of January and early February were well documented in the media, the AFP's work during this and other natural disasters, including Operation Amicus for the Victorian bushfires and Operation Bede during the New Zealand earthquake, go on efficiently in the background.

Operation Clement involved two phases of support to the QPS. The initial phase saw 53 AFP members assist the QPS in search and recovery operations that canvassed an estimated search

area of 300,000 hectares and 205 kilometres of water courses. These members were primarily from the Operation Response Group located in Brisbane with additional support provided later by ACT Policing for specific diving tasks. The operations were coordinated between the AFP and QPS by AFP Coordinator Operational Response Group Brisbane Paul Jones.

While search and recovery operations were underway, another group was being readied for deployment to assist the state with the second phase involving general



policing operations in the hard hit Lockyer Valley area.

To ensure quick deployment, AFP staff postponed holidays and worked on their days off before returning to their official AFP roles. Countless hours were put into fundraising efforts and supporting locals with intensive clean-up activities.

AFP members deployed to help the QPS with general policing

operations were sworn in as special constables of the service, some joining former QPS colleagues west of Brisbane in the hard hit Lockyer Valley townships of Murphy's Creek, Helidon and Grantham.

A ten-strong AFP command team led by Police Forward Commander Operation Clement Peter Kuhnke and incorporating AFP Wellbeing Services also coordinated operations with their state counterparts.

Soon after being sworn in by QPS Deputy Commissioner Specialist Operations Ross Barnett, AFP members were reminded that the work would be confronting.

"The Lockyer Valley is by far the most devastated of all the communities in Queensland," he said.

"In the aftermath the people of the communities have, and will experience many emotions and

01: AFP Operational Response Group members during recovery operations in the Lockyer Valley and Grantham after the Queensland floods. Picture: Craig Borrow - Courier mail.

From one disaster to the next

Despite an already exhausting flood assistance operation in South East Queensland, nine members of the AFP's International Deployment Group Mission Component were then deployed to assist those affected by Tropical Cyclone Yasi.

On 14 February AFP members were sworn in as special constables of the Queensland Police Service and deployed to the Tully area of Far North Queensland, one of the small communities most affected by the cyclone. The members worked with their QPS colleagues in providing a high visibility general policing presence.

QPS Acting Senior Sergeant Gary Burkin was involved in the Operation and lauded the



efforts of the AFP members on deployment in North Queensland.

"Their appearance was professional and a welcomed surprise for the locals who felt that both state and federal authorities were working together to protect their interests."

Hidden skills called on

Those caught up in the floods weren't the only beneficiaries of the wide ranging policing and otherwise hidden skills of AFP members.

Federal Agent Scott Gilbert from AFP Crime Operations on the Gold Coast assisted Surf Life Saving Queensland at their Rescue Coordination Centre.

A member of the Tallebudgera Surf Life Saving Club, Federal Agent Gilbert helped with helicopter evacuations and assisted the State Emergency Service, Emergency Management Queensland, the Queensland Police Service and other emergency organisations.

Members of the AFP's Brisbane and Robina offices and Brisbane and Gold Coast airports also volunteered to assist with the enormous clean-up efforts in the Brisbane area.

Whether it was shovelling mud, lifting water sodden furniture

or hosing down footpaths, the mammoth effort left an exhausted and aching group of AFP volunteers to return to their office the next day.

Coordinator Crime Operations Brett Swan went to several homes and businesses in the Brisbane CBD to assist in the clean-up.

"The resilience of flood victims and the readiness, without question, of people from all walks of life to assist is something I have not seen before," he said.

Federal Agent Andy Eacott helped local shop owners sort through damaged stock in the inner-city suburb of Milton.

Team Leader Professional Standards Brisbane Lesley Wright lent a hand at her family's furniture shop in Milton.

"People who had absolutely no connection with the business arrived throughout the day to help as best they could. It was fantastic to experience the community spirit notwithstanding the extreme circumstances," she said.



you will have to confront and deal with these."

Back in the state capital, a major investigation room was established at AFP Brisbane Office, which constantly fed information to the AFP Incident Coordination Centre (ICC) in Canberra. And non-operational AFP Headquarters

staff including Corporate Communications stood by to answer media queries about the AFP's work.

AFP Operation Clement Commander Rob Gilliland said the ICC was critical for the AFP to provide effective crisis response.

"This incident demonstrates the key role that the ICC plays in the national emergency management architecture," he said.

"A significant planning effort has been undertaken to posture the AFP to meet additional requests for assistance from the QPS and the Government."

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02 (opposite): Federal Agent Scott Gilbert assisted Surf Life Saving Queensland in evacuation and recovery efforts. Federal Agent Gilbert is a qualified surf life saver. **03:** Federal Agent Marcus Boorman searches through debris on a railway line. **04:** Team Leader Professional Standards Brisbane Lesley Wright helps clean up a furniture store in the Brisbane inner-city suburb of Milton. **05:** An ACT Policing diver surfaces during a search of a dam in Grantham. **06:** Manager Brisbane Office Commander Mark Walters speaks to AFP members in Grantham deployed to assist with search and recovery operations in response to the Queensland flood crisis. **07:** Federal Agent Andy Eacott volunteers with the clean-up effort in the Brisbane inner-city suburb of Milton.



Manager Brisbane Office Mark Walters said the operation was difficult and prolonged, but all AFP members involved showed determination and commitment to helping out a state in need.

“The scale of the search and recovery operation, in what can only be described as extremely demanding conditions, was simply staggering,” he said.

“The AFP members who deployed demonstrated a high level of professionalism and resilience and their deployment further highlights the diverse capability of the AFP.”

08: Participants pedalling hard in the 10-hour bike challenge.



The AFP Flood Relief Appeal

At the height of the flood crisis, more than 60 people from the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands Participating Police Force and the Australian and New Zealand High Commissions gathered in Honiara for a 10-hour bike challenge to raise funds for the AFP Flood Relief Appeal.

Organised by Participating Police Force Advisor Lizzy Wiggins, participants collectively rode exercise bikes more than 2,000 kilometres in 10 hours—the equivalent distance from Solomon Islands to Ipswich in Queensland.

A total of 31,000 Solomon Island dollars, about \$AU4,000 was raised for the flood appeal.

Commander Participating Police Force Wayne Buchhorn said the commitment of AFP officers involved in the appeal was understandable.

“We have a contingent of Queensland Police officers here at the moment as well as other members who have family and friends who have been affected by these floods,” he said.

At the same time, AFP staff at the Gold Coast Airport collected essential items for the Grantham and Ipswich communities as part of the appeal.

The initiative encouraged all airline, commercial, services and security staff to contribute clothing, linen, and new toiletries for distribution throughout the affected areas.