

# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

*Emergency Management Liaison in the aftermath of Severe Tropical Cyclone Larry  
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The third Monday of March each year commemorates the official founding of Australia's National Capital with the day marked by a public holiday. Canberra Day 2006 will however be remembered by me, and a number of staff at Emergency Management Australia (EMA), as the day that Severe Tropical Cyclone (STC) Larry wreaked havoc on communities located between Townsville, Cairns and Mt Isa in far north Queensland.

On the morning of Monday 20 March 2006 STC Larry was classed by the Bureau of Meteorology as having an intensity of Category 5 and had crossed the North Queensland coast near Innisfail at approximately 7am Eastern Standard Time. The next day (Tuesday) I received a telephone call at home requesting that I report to the National Emergency Management Coordination Centre (NEMCC) when I arrived at work.

I had no idea at the time that I was to spend the next 12 days as an EMA Liaison Officer (EMALO) working directly with Queensland Counter Disaster and Rescue Services (CDRS) staff, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) officers and other state and federal government departmental representatives co-ordinating the initial response phase of the disaster.

A few hours after reporting to the NEMCC I found myself in the thick of things at the Queensland State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC) in Brisbane. I received a briefing and handover from Peter Willett, one of two EMALOs who happened to be in Queensland on other EMA related business at the time. The focus of my work during

that evening involved a request for Australian Government assistance to aid in the transport of portable milking machines from Toowoomba to the Atherton Tablelands. A RAAF C-130 Hercules was allocated to freight the machines from RAAF Base Amberley to Cairns Airport the next day.

Wednesday saw me sent from Brisbane to Cairns to join another EMA colleague, Paul McAlonan. A decision had been made to relocate the SDCC to Cairns and, after a few hours sleep, I took over from Paul and worked the night shift at the newly established SDCC. The SDCC had become fully operational with the transformation of what was normally the training rooms of the Queensland Ambulance Station on Anderson Street.

By the early hours of Thursday the tempo (and associated noise levels) in the SDCC picked up dramatically with the QFRS shift changeover. With the relocation of the SDCC from Brisbane to Cairns, QFRS was to perform the core administrative, information management, logistical and planning activities. For the next 11 days the SDCC was a hive of activity with everyone working

collaboratively and cohesively in response to the devastation caused by STC Larry.

During my time at the SDCC I was joined by some familiar faces from EMA. Alex Boland assisted with the delivery of a truck load of tarpaulins and other relief supplies at Innisfail which had been transported from the Australian Government disaster stores in Sydney. Sally McKay joined the team and was involved in transitioning the relief effort from the response phase to the recovery phase. Peter Willett rejoined me to establish rotating shifts. Throughout the experience the staff of the NEMCC provided a welcome and reassuring voice in facilitating the Australian Government's response.

STC Larry was my first interstate deployment as an EMALO and the experience gained has been invaluable. It was a privilege to be a part of a response which brought together all three tiers of government to achieve a common goal. I was able to contribute to this in a meaningful way through the facilitation of some of the 38 requests for Australian Government assistance.



*Cyclone Larry destroys buildings and vegetation and floods the local area.*