



In Profile:

Doug Angus

Sixteen Years in Emergency Management in Queensland

Doug Angus came relatively late to emergency management, entering the field well into his thirties from concurrent careers in the Department of Forestry in Rockhampton and in the Army Reserve where he had reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and commanded an infantry battalion. In 1982, following completion of Joint Services Staff College, Canberra, the preceding year, he took up a job as Assistant Director (Administration and Logistics) with the Queensland State Emergency Service in Brisbane. His background as a reservist was critical to the winning of the position but the experience he had had of public service administration and structures was highly useful to his functioning in it.

At the time the permanent staff arm of the SES in Queensland was a small organisation within the Queensland Police Service. There were only about 50 in the whole organisation, with training, communications, stores and administrative functions centrally coordinated and delivered through State Headquarters in Brisbane. Regionally, seconded police sergeants filled the role of Regional Operations Officers (ROOS), with the role of providing administrative coordination, training support, resource distribution and operational reporting relative to those SES volunteer units within their region. It was the legislative responsibility of local councils,

however, to raise and maintain a local SES volunteer unit. Angus found himself immersed in bringing the financial and resource management functions of the organisation into line with main stream public service requirements, while endeavoring to improve the level of such support provided to SES units. He also became involved in operations including big hailstorm operations in Brisbane in the mid 80s, fodder dropping operations during floods west of the Great Divide and 'mucking in' to whatever other operations were going on. This involvement included both the organisation and distribution of resources on a statewide basis and undertaking senior operations officer duties within the State Disaster Coordination Centre.

Late in the 1980s the SES was relocated from the Police Service to the Department of Administrative Services. There the SES had less independence than before, and Angus's job was in some danger of being absorbed into the larger entity. This would have taken him out of emergency management, but in 1990 there was another change and the SES became part of the Department of Emergency Services alongside the Queensland Fire Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service. In the new department the Director SES retained his role as Executive Officer of the State Counter Disaster Organisation, and the permanent staff of the

SES continued to be utilised to coordinate overall state disaster management arrangements.

Up to this point this coordination function was heavily oriented to disaster response arrangements—the traditional 'rushing out and dealing with the crisis' model. There was little effective comprehensive planning (Prevention, Preparation, Response and Recovery) at either a local or state level, which was the dominant paradigm in the emergency services generally in Australia, as promoted by the Commonwealth Natural Disaster Organisation (later Emergency Management Australia). Angus thought the Queensland structure weak to the point of being incapable of providing the whole-of-government, multi-functional approach, which the State Counter-Disaster Organisation Act of 1975 envisaged.

An evolution beyond the response focus, and a general broadening of thinking about the purposes and methods of emergency management, was needed to bring Queensland into the world of modern emergency management.

In 1990, serious flooding in the state's west and south-west provided an opportunity and a catalyst for change. The entire business district of Charleville and almost all the dwellings in the town of 4,000 people were inundated by the Warrego River

and in effect the community lost its ability to function. Neither businesses nor institutions nor the basic services of civilised life could operate. Bob Barchard, the Deputy Director of the SES, flew over the stricken town on the morning following the nighttime inundation of the town. His observations, recommendations and timely decisions about what would be needed to mount a true whole-of-government operation involving the state departments of Works, Health, Police, Family Services, Natural Resources and Corrections as well as federal agencies like Telecom and Civil Aviation and Centrelink, laid the foundation for a very successful operation.

There was no established plan to guide him, but a sense of what was needed allowed Barchard to set up a management system to drive both the response and clean-up operations and the restoration of the town's ability to function. Community members, housed in a tent city next to the airfield, were joined by hundreds of agency personnel from Brisbane and elsewhere in the clean-up which allowed the people to return home a short time after the floodwaters had subsided.

This was part of a very big operation which extended well beyond Charleville itself. It included the need to operationally plan for the evacuation of Cunnumulla—a complex undertaking, which had to be completed in a tight time frame—and the management of the flooding of several other western towns. At one stage there were 27 aircraft to be coordinated in the area. Angus did much of the operational planning work from Brisbane before running the latter part of the Charleville operation from the control centre, which had been set up at the airfield.



© Bob Barchard

Part of Tent City, Charleville, in 1990. About 3500 people were under canvas.

Angus saw the chance to use the experience of the operation to reform the way disaster management was run in Queensland. He acquired funding to set up a study to address the application of all phases of the PPRR model in a flood context and to apply the emergency risk management process (through to the development of appropriate risk treatments) in the Murweh Shire which included Charleville. The study, conducted by Michael Cawood of the consulting firm Geo-Eng and with Roger Jones of the Australian Counter Disaster College (now the Emergency Management Australia Institute) as a team member, in effect led to Charleville becoming a test case to guide the management of future emergencies in the State. The study was the first application of the Risk Management Standard (AS/NZS 4360) in an emergency management context in Australia, and it delivered a methodology that could be applied in other council areas in the State. This

ground-breaking initiative was the direct result of Angus's foresight.

What emerged was the evolution, for the first time in Queensland, of a comprehensive approach to dealing with disaster. All the phases of the PPRR model were addressed in what became a template for applying the risk management standard which itself was to govern the evolution of emergency management in Australia from the mid-1990s. The template was in place by the time of the next big Charleville flood in 1997, albeit one that was less severe than the event of 1990 and falling short of rendering the community incapable of operating autonomously.

In 1992, Angus had become the Director of the Queensland Disaster Management Service within the Department of Emergency Services. This gave him an across-government remit but few staff to build a genuine disaster management capability

© Bob Barchard



Drums of aviation fuel at the Charleville airfield. A DC6 and a DC3 were fully employed in transporting fuel to keep the other aircraft flying.

for the State. Nevertheless he reactivated the Central Control Group of the State's Counter-Disaster Organisation (which had been dormant outside times of operations in the past), brought in other departments such as Local Government, Natural Resources, Works and Health, and in effect set up a state-level emergency management committee. Here he was able to set agendas, using EMA documents to legitimise the approach he was taking. There was a lack of enthusiasm from within the Department of Emergency Services—it in itself not being oriented to a whole of government approach—but Angus as secretary to the Central Control Group was instrumental in the establishment of lead agencies for the various threats and sewing together support-agency arrangements. The group became a key tool in the establishment of a comprehensive risk management approach to emergencies in the state.

Angus also spent much time talking to senior people in Emergency Management Australia, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Department of Defence and the Australian Geological Survey Organisation (now Geoscience

Australia) so that the emergency management system could adequately deal with floods, tropical cyclones, and storm surges, all of them very serious threats in Queensland. Through these communications he was able to gain an enhanced appreciation of the threats and of the workings of the commonwealth-state arrangements for dealing with disasters.

In all of this work Angus became a champion of the risk management approach to emergencies. Indeed he brought Queensland, from a lagging position in the field, up to date with the leading states by the time the risk management model became the driving force in Australian emergency management.

Reflecting on his career, Angus believes that the only true disaster of his 16 years in the disaster management field was the Charleville flood of 1990. No other event in his time saw a substantial community rendered incapable of functioning: there was no water, no food, no sanitation and no communications, and the people were powerless to manage their affairs. Virtually everything had to be brought in from outside.

Such complete dysfunctionality of communities is quite rare during and after disasters. It did not characterise many of the most famous emergency events in recent Queensland history such as the Brisbane flood of 1974, the Rockhampton flood of 1993 or the impact of Cyclone Larry on Innisfail in 2006, though the last case probably came close. Cyclone Tracy at Darwin in 1974, the Ash Wednesday bush fires in parts of Victoria and South Australia in 1983 and the flood at Nyngan in 1990 were other instances in which substantial communities ceased to function for a time and became reliant on the outside world for instituting the processes of recovery and creating the means of return to normal life.

Angus also believes that the adoption of the risk management model was pivotal in changing the way in which governments (including local government councils) thought of emergency management. The model can be applied to encompass land use planning, floodplain management, engineering and the environment—indeed all of the concerns of government. Conscious decision-making about matters related to disasters begins with risk management; without it there is much less chance that decision-makers will focus on the key question of the risks their communities will have to take on as a result of particular courses of action being followed.

Councils, in particular, have been forced at executive management level (including mayors and general managers) to understand their roles in relation to the future of their communities and to treat risk as a mainstream concern rather than as a matter on the periphery of their thinking. Their strategic overviews of directions,

and therefore of managerial objectives and planning and budgeting processes, have been fundamentally altered.

Angus believes too that the thinking which was the norm in his early days in emergency management, largely founded in a concentration on particular hazards and on at-the-time responses to them, was seriously flawed. The single-hazard approach, he believes, was not helpful to the development of a whole-of-government view of disaster, and it detracted from a recognition that vulnerability is the central concern of emergency managers. Treating vulnerability, not dealing with hazards, is the core focus of the emergency management community.

Doug Angus espoused some powerful, pivotally-important ideas at a time when they were not widely accepted in the emergency management community in Queensland. In this he was a leader who promoted the emerging big picture in an era in which emergency management was undergoing fundamental and far-reaching change in Australia and when his own State was lagging behind. Most importantly, he made a major contribution to the acceptance and application of the risk management model in Queensland, and he was responsible for much of the development of the State's administrative apparatus for dealing with emergencies. On his retirement in 1998 he left behind a valuable and positive legacy.



The parts of Queensland that experienced flooding in April 1990. A series of tropical cyclones over the preceding three months had wetted the state up, and the rain depression which had formed from the remnants of Cyclone Ivor created the floods in the southern inland of Queensland and in NSW. Nyngan had to be evacuated as well as Charleville.