

Storm Stories Transcript

Keith Stevenson

[silence for 5 seconds]

KEITH: Ok I think, I know many of you, some I don't. But if I don't know you my name's Keith Stevenson as Col said and I do a lot of things in council. Look after emergency management section but also council's LEMO which is the Local Emergency Management Officer. Ah there's a few acronyms in this presentation but I'll explain what they mean as we go through. The idea of today was to give a bit of an overview perspective of the response that was given to the storm event from what I call an emergency management perspective and I'll put that in the context of my role as LEMO. Before I do that, what I wanted to do was just give you a bit of an outline of what that role is and how it fits into the scheme of things from an emergency management point of view.

I'm gonna talk to these a bit so you don't really need to read the slides, I know everyone enjoys death by PowerPoint, but anyway that's what you're going to get. The LEMC which is the Local Emergency Management Committee and the LEMO's role which is the Local Emergency Management Officer is established under the state emergency and rescue management act. Now it is, if you like, directly associated with council but in a lot of ways it's separate to council as a committee it's not a council committee. The LEMC it's a committee made up of different agency representatives, it's actually chaired by me... and my role is to provide executive support to that committee and primarily the LECON, now the LECON is the Local Emergency Controller and that is ordinarily and always is the Local Area Commander which is the LAC.

So anyway keep going. The LAC obviously, he's based, he looks after the police, he's based at Boolaroo, and that's Alan Clarke. Again as I said my role is to provide executive support, what goes with that is a range of council resources that we supply to the LECON, that includes our emergency operations centre at the RFS, the operations centre at Cameron Park. It includes various nominated staff resources within council that essentially if the emergency operations centre is activated those staff are called upon to attend and support the activities of the LECON and certainly all the other agencies, response agencies, that are involved in an emergency incident.

Where that fits in the scheme of things from a sort of state level, a federal level. Each council runs a local emergency management committee which basically comprises the same structures that we have here which is the LECON, the LEMO and different agency reps. In our area, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie we run our meetings jointly so there's a lot of overlap between the agency reps with those committees so we just hold the one meeting every 4 months and those same agency reps attend and technically the 2 separate meetings are run as

one.

As to deal with emergencies at the local level and those matters that are essentially are, dealt with at the local level are typically are bushfires, would effect Lake Macquarie more so then Newcastle etc. The next level up is the district emergency management committee which again encompasses everything from Gosford area, right through up, up the Hunter Valley and I think around about Singleton out to maybe even Merriwa, I'm not sure on that one.

The District Emergency Management Committee in the hierarchy of things is just the next level up so if it gets beyond the scope of the Local Emergency Management Committee like the floods were on the 8th of June, the District Emergency Operations Controller or the DECON, he would call, call everyone in to activate the District Emergency Operations Centre. Getting above that is the State Emergency Oper..., ah the State Emergency Management Committee and again if it gets bigger then the district level the SEMC activates and at the moment its activated for the Equine Influenza outbreak that's running around New South Wales, Queensland and probably make its way through the rest of the country from what I hear. So at the moment that actual Emergency Management Committee and Operations Centre is active. So probably getting back to the way it operates, local level stuff the Local Emergency Management Committee deal with through where it escalates to a wider incident, like as I said the storms, District kicks in, from there it goes to the State and above the State is the Emergency Management Australia which is a department of the Attorney General's department. So you have a greater emergency that effects obviously more then the state, I'm not sure what that might be... the horse flu might be an issue that may actually activate the EMA, but they won't actually activate unless the SEMC requests it. So that's the hierarchy.

In terms of our role, council's role, we support the committee and any incident through the provision of resources and that's everything from admin support at the [SC?] down to plant and equipment. For example, during the storm with the SES, our stores were probably raided and also our small plant was raided with chainsaws and things like. So basically we open ourselves up for the use of those other agencies as much as we can.

That's probably all I wanted to talk about in terms of the Emergency Management Officers role, the LEMC role and so on. So really what today's presentation was about was actually the storm event itself and actually our response to it from an emergency management perspective.

We all know Friday the 8th of June was the big day. We all know that it was a storm event, hit Newcastle and the Central Coast. SES crews had begun to respond during the day for assistance to storm affected houses. Obviously the thing that got everyone's interest, nationally, was the Pasha Bulker and in fact that was the reason why the, on the Friday, the District Emergency Operations Centre was activated. For a whole range of reasons, mainly the Port Authority was involved as the lead agency but it involved the police, it involved um... the Westpac service, possibly Hunter New England Health, a whole range of people. But that's primarily why the District Operations Centre was activated, didn't really

effect us of course but it took um, provided a bit of a distraction.

During the Friday, through to the evening, we all know how heavy it rained, but I think Martin gave us a figure the other day between 5 and 6 pm there was about a 300 ml of rain in Lake Macquarie, which I think's described as a 1 in 30 year storm event and I know where I was and probably everyone else knows where they were in terms of trying to deal with that when it happened. I was actually in my garage trying to work out a number of things, not only how to get my wife home, how to get my daughter home, how to stop the water going through the garage, but then think about whether or not we need to activate the [?EAC?] and I spoke to Darrel Marshall, again the SES, being a storm event, was the lead agency and he indicated at that stage that they were handling it quite well except there might have been 200 - 300 evacuations from Cardiff, Barnsley area. He started to co-ordinate all, communicate with the Department of Community Services who would arrange the evacuations and potentially the Department of Commerce who may, be required to provide transport. At the end of the day though they actually worked with the RFS who had large transport vehicles to move people around and through the flood areas. [Speaker interrupted by a beeping sound]. I hope that's not me. Again in the late evening it was, there was an indication that Dora Creek was going to hit its flood levels and there would be evacuations there. There was some communications between SES again and DOCs and myself in terms of how they might be accommodated. Sorry earlier in the evening actually I had contact with the LECON as well who was in Sydney and he's advise was that he wouldn't active the [?OC?] at that stage, the SES had control of it. There was another issue with activating the S, sorry the EOC, the Emergency Operations Centre in that people wouldn't be able, wouldn't be able to get to it anyway.

So the course of that evening really was a process of communication through phone contact and working together as in if you like what I call a flying EOC, a small group of people who are coordinating the response at that stage. Essentially in terms of the initial combat agency response the SES were dealing with it, the police obviously were involved, I know some of our council crews were dispatched, to work on council related issues. What we really had was dealing with inundation by, for the SES and basically evacuations, they were the main issues.

Fortunately most of that went reasonably well, Club Macquarie was used for evac centre, early in the morning the Morisset Country Club was used also for Dora Creek. We did get a question about opening up one of the halls for overspill but that didn't eventuate, fortunately and as I understand it most people returned to their homes the next day.

Just on that, on the topic of actually activating the EOC, the council doesn't have a call in that. The SES as the lead response agency does, and then the LECON if he feels that the EOC needs to be activated and we need to start to pull people in. There's a bit of debate about whether or not the SES should've called it on, but that's their call at the end of the day. Also the LECON, the SES felt they had the resources to cope with what was happening at the time. Whether they did or they didn't or whether they needed to actually formally activate the EOC and get

people in there is still probably a bit of a question but at the end of the day that's the decision they made.

I've just thrown some photos on the side there I think that's near, I think it's Winding Creek near Tickhole Tunnel I think, I could be wrong on that. There's some Newcastle photos in this as well. That's probably just to give an example of the sort of damage that it did, it was picking cars up, I think everyone saw it, throwing them into creeks, throwing them across roundabouts, all sorts of things.

I jumped ahead a bit, um ahead of this a bit. The local area commando he confirmed that we wouldn't open the EOC in those initial stages. Again there were issues with that apart from the SES not calling it. It was the physical aspect of getting there. The SES actually was locked into the northern end of the lake because they couldn't get past I think Warners Bay and out past Barnsley and south of Teralba, so they had issues themselves.

Day Two, just again the photo is the car yard, I think Cardiff Toyota, there's I think stacked, parked a few cars out the back. Sorry, Saturday again I virtually operated out of the SES headquarters at Boolaroo and of course the SES crews were still getting calls right through that day. At the end of the day, just a figure on that, they ended up with 27 hundred requests for assistance and that would have, the bulk of those would have been within the first 2 to 3 days of the event. The area commander and I actually stayed at the SES headquarters to monitor the response needs of the SES. SES for example asked for staff to actually man phones, which we didn't provide anyway in the end. They had issues with, again as I said chainsaws and things like that so a lot of that was coordinated out of the SES headquarters.

I mentioned earlier the District Emergency Operations Centre in Newcastle. On Saturday morning, I got a call for, to provide staff in at the District Emergency Operations Centre at Newcastle police. I've got two alternate LEMOs that's Derek [?Marla?] and Scott Irwin and they actually went and liaised with the other agencies in at the, in the Newcastle office, in terms of the overall response, and I'm talking everything from Pasha Bulker right through to Maitland. They work with the district level in terms of providing some sort of resource tool, advice, back up if we need it, any plant and equipment from council.

The actual official activation of the EOC and I call it a flying EOC, doesn't occur until the LAC determines that. We had reports there was gonna to be a fairly huge storm front on the Saturday night and we decided to actually activate it in terms of what I call the flying EOC. It really only involved myself, the LAC, a DOCs rep and Darrell Marshall the SES controller. The idea was that we would just simply plan for evacuations that night, knowing where the flooding occurred the night before.

We, with DOCs particularly arranged locations to be manned and put on standby. That went through the whole afternoon we monitored the storm through to about 7 o'clock and then about seven thirty the LAC, the storm front went through and we decided to stand everything down. The issue with that is course if you open an evacuation centre you've got to man it and that includes manning by DOCs staff, by police to do victim registrations those sorts of things. So there's a fair bit

of work in running an evacuation centre and Saturday was a better day obviously but resources is still an issue.

Sunday, I don't know where this photo is, it seems to me to look like the weir at Barnsley but I could be wrong, Greg you might know it?... It might be Newcastle. Well, you know, the SES really had control of it, they were still getting calls, there were crews coming in from other regions, there was crews from Victoria, crews from Queensland turned up during that week, also from Sydney so a lot of people turned up to assist which obviously the SES needed when they were still dealing with over 2000 calls. We remained at the SES again to monitor things, again it wasn't an EOC per say it was just simply a case of having someone on deck ready to make decisions and make things move and happen if they needed to.

At 11 o'clock we got an interesting call from the fire brigade to go over to Teralba to look at a road that had failed but behind the road was a, I couldn't tell you how much water, but it was a dam behind the road and between the road, past the road and the, sorry, on the railway side was the railway line and the fear was that if the dam actually broke, or the road broke the rail line would only last for two hours and then that would undermine and actually wash through Teralba. So the LAC decided again to activate the EOC but only at a command post at the rail line site. It comprised, I couldn't tell you how many police turned up, SES, Rail Corp staff, Department of Commerce, a whole range of people, [?sorry?] that's Dora Creek. It included actually door knocking virtually all that lower section of Teralba making arrangements for the nursing home to be evacuated, door knock the residents and tell them they'd have 2 hours notice to evacuate. We had to get the evacuation centre at Club Macquarie manned and activated and all that time trying to work out how to fix this breach in the road, the road embankment. It actually ran through and after some debate through to about 9.30 when the LAC stood down the flying EOC and the command post. There was a debate by Rail Corp as to whether they were going to do anything at all because they were fearful that if they did work the thing, that it would make it collapse but the Department of Commerce were recommending that they start to do stabilisation works. When they finally sorted out that argument they decided to progress with the work and obviously that was the early stages, particularly at 9.30 at night. But the LAC took the view that there was plenty of Rail Corp there and Department of Commerce and SES staff there, that if it did fail the police would be notified and we'd start the evacuation process. It took through to the next Thursday, the 14th of June before that was declared safe and I really couldn't tell you where that's at, at the moment, they put some ballast in, they've got to do some further Geotech studies on those rail lines because those embankments were built probably a hundred odd years ago. They're built on ash and they know that if they get saturated they collapse. I think that was evident in an event down near Wollongong where they, where they lost part of the rail line through a house and it killed a couple of people. So that's an ongoing issue for Rail Corp.

For us, out of the event. Another issue that required a lot of management was about 40 landslip reports, 23 I think of those were on private dwellings the rest of em were on council land. We had to get a system in place to, I suppose, support those people by, effected by a landslip. Some were minor, some were major that had required evacuations, both voluntary and involuntary evacuations from

houses and there are still people evacuated now on the basis of landslip, up in Rankin Park.

That was gunna cause some angst obviously and the questions were going to come back as to what we were doing about it. From the outset we set up a system of special problem codes in the CRM system. We refer them to a central point of contact which was one of my staff to deal with, we liaised with the Department of Commerce to do inspections, initial inspections and then provide a report, initial report. Which probably tells them what they already know which is the block slipped and they need to get it fixed. But, again it was something that we were seen to be doing something or at least understanding what they were going through. That information was formally provided to each owner and also we referred, referenced to those sites to develop an assessment of compliance for them to deal with any issues they saw fit in terms of development controls. The landslip issue, as I said continues, even now we're dealing with some sites that have got storm water disposal issues, they're exposed as a consequence of the land slip most people are dealing with it through their insurers but I understand that areas of Rankin Park are getting some attention in terms of further investigation and I learnt yesterday from the Department of Commerce they're also funding some remediation work. A little bit unusual but I think that one became a bit political.

Premier's department established an on stop, oh one stop, did I say on stop shop? There you go there's a typo, that was a test. National disasters centre's assessed of Singleton, Maitland, Newcastle and Wyong and Tony was heavily involved with the, I suppose, executive committee that ran the one stop shops. That provided a central point of resource for people to visit. Welfare agencies, legal, insurance those types of things were ah, people were established, Centrelink, I think, was there as well. A range of different agencies, so people could go there and really with all their questions and problems go there and hopefully get all the necessary advice in one hit. For most they ran through up until only, I think Newcastle was left about a week ago, there's one that closed, more recently. Ok. Yeah most have closed and we've only I think got Newcastle open. Obviously the idea behind that was to provide again support to people affected by the storm. Didn't they? Oh ok. Wyong was the other one wasn't it? I was thinking of Gosford. Yeah.

As we do as an LEMC we run a debrief at the end to find out what went well and what didn't go so well. There were a lot of common issues come out of that. The district was the same, the council did it recently last week, might have been this week and come up with some recommendations that flow on into our planning, tools for future, future reference, future actions. A lot of the common ones are communications, always an issue, phones were an issue, mobile phone network was an issue. In terms of the EOC being activated there was some question about whether it should have been done earlier or later, and the LECON has taken that on board. A lot of learning experiences out of the exercise. You can do exercises, desktops and things like that but I certainly in my first event learnt stacks and I know Tony did too. A lot of people did, but I think it, sort of, the best thing about that is that we're gunna be a lot better prepared for the next event.

As I said the outcomes from the debrief now form part of committee agendas so we actually build it as an action plan if you like and our committee agendas and ah, reflected in the minutes and also ultimately it will be reflected in our disaster plan. Which is actually under review at the moment.

That's it, that's much of it, as much as I can briefly. Has anyone got any questions?

[silence for 6 seconds while someone asks a question]

I don't know, I just get the project number. 19 million, yeah, I mean that's, is that the, just the costs to council or the community? Oh it'd be bigger across the com...

[silence for 3 seconds]

Um I deliberately, sorry Damien, I didn't, deliberately didn't touch on the council activities if you like if I call it that, it was really from a LEMO perspective. I probably should mention that on the Saturday we had the cabling being done in the building so that hampered, if you'd like to call hampered our ability to get our systems up and running. We did get, activate the CEC, and we had power and access to the system on the Sunday and probably one of the features was actually getting the CEC running to deal with all those incoming calls and from a number point of view, I think I mentioned that civil lake had 27 hundred service requests probably over that first week I would suggested. The CEC I think took over 4000 all up, some figure like that, maybe during the month of June. They're still getting calls. So in terms of the council response certainly civil lake [? unclear?] because there's a lot of, you know, activity going out on the roads and parks and things like that. But internally the CEC I think was one of the features to get that activated and the staff to deal with all the issues that are coming in because there were a lot of emotional stuff coming in. People wanting to get assistance, wanting to find out where they go, houses being flooded, you know, usual story, old people with drainage problems, land slip was another emotive one., those people who were forced to evacuate and the, the bulk waste clean up and that was another major exercise. It was kicked off essentially as a result of the management team coming together and looking at what we needed to do in response to the event and they acted as its own if you like emergency management committee, they met daily got updates of where we were at and made decisions obviously about what was going to happen to move everything forward.

[silence for 2 seconds]

But that was another major component, but it... don't want to... not include it but it wasn't really part of the presentation so.

[silence for 2 seconds while someone asks a question]

Sorry Jenny.

[silence for 11 seconds while someone asks a question]

That's right. I mean how they deal with that is probably no different to probably the way we deal with it if we got an incident, a matter to attend to and we can't get to it or there's some thing to restrict us from getting to it. Basically on that evening, it was mainly because, and I was no different at Lakelands. I think the Esplanade was blocked, Medcalf Street was flooded, Cardiff was flooded, I'm certain parts of Teralba was flooded. So basically the physical nature of the event prevented people going in certain directions. You also had the traffic issues on the Friday night and at the district level that was one of the issues about traffic management, RTA sign boards, all sorts of things to try and manage that better. So the SES on that evening, a lot, a lot of problems. But of course that subsided into the early hours and they were able to extend their activities, certainly Saturday there weren't the same issues, apart from playing dodgems with cars floated across the roads.

[silence for 2 seconds]

I think a lot of police had to respond locally but it was, it was one of those things you were almost, almost helpless. I mean what do I do if water comes through the garage, phone calls coming and goin', you can't move, you can't drive anywhere, you just, and that's probably where the phone network came into a tone in that we were able to coordinate a lot of stuff just through that contact without physically being together.

[silence for 6 minutes]

In the [unclear] plan, the council is identified as the alternative location. The EOC is if I call it that used to operate out of the committee room originally. Sorry, yeah I mean interesting that you, you picture that the EOC operates and there's

all the phones and the books and the pads and the pens and the papers and all that sort of stuff but given that event we managed quite well with what we had, not to say that it shouldn't of be open. One of the other issues I didn't mention was the LAC felt that, and the SES certainly felt that it was just gunna pull resources away from where they were needed most. Given that the district, emergency operations centre had been active as well, that had already pulled resources so there was no real need to duplicate it and secondly we found that we were able to deal with the issues in the manner that we were doing it, and that was primarily by phone on the night and then actually setting up an office area down at the SES headquarters.

[silence for 2 seconds]

So at the end of the day it, we didn't have any critical failures, which is something we looked at in terms of how we responded. There were some deaths, around I think 9 all up, to do with a high range of things and not really to do with the actual the [unclear] of response. So yeah, we the LA, the LECON was reasonably happy with the outcomes and everything that came out of it will slowly move forward. Well, I think we're well prepared, there's a lot of hurly burly in the first hour or 2 but once that settles down, everyone gets into a mode and that's really what everyone did.

Nothin' else? Ok thanks, there's some survey sheets I think, have to be filled out. Yeah, no worries. No I'll leave it in there, see if anyone picks it up. Yeah alright, alright. They didn't pick it up at CNT either. Right I'll just turn it off.