



North Queensland's Severe Tropical Cyclone Larry response and recovery (C)

In a few hours on Monday 20 March 2006, Severe Tropical Cyclone Larry did over a billion dollars' worth of damage to the region centred on Innisfail. Half of the cost was carried by the rural community, which lost a \$300 million banana crop on the point of harvest. Aquaculture, beef and dairy farms, sugar canes, tree crops and tourist attractions were also affected. Four days later, at a meeting lasting a couple of hours, the first steps were taken towards a sustainable long-term recovery for these industries, with the decision to establish the Operation Recovery Industry Action Group and 11 sector-specific working groups.¹ It was the first of what would be many meetings attended by Operation Recovery Task Force (ORTF) leader General Peter Cosgrove, and was held the day he arrived in Innisfail. Many at the meeting represented local businesses and sectors severely impacted by the cyclone. They emphasised this was "make or break time" for the region's economy. Their greatest fear was that the community would disintegrate and much of its skilled workforce would move away.

Bruce Turner, from the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries (DPI&F) left the meeting as co-chair of the action group, along with the Department of State Development. Turner had already seen that primary industry was the most impacted by the cyclone; he knew how many calls had already come in to the Recovery Advice Service. Representatives of DPI&F and the Department of State Development had visited the area and in informal discussions with affected producers were gathering data to demonstrate the extent of the damage done to the economy. A week after cyclone landfall, this was used to estimate a \$473 million loss of agricultural production, with a further loss of \$439 million and 5100 jobs from the local economy over the next 12 months. This data supported arguments that payments made under the standard Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) should be enhanced for the severe circumstances following Cyclone Larry.

This case was written by Janet Tyson, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, for Professor Dutch Leonard, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. The assistance of Justin Coomber, Frank Pagano, Peter Searston, Bruce Turner and Jeff Whalan is acknowledged with appreciation; however the responsibility for the final version of material rests with the writer. A major source for this case study has been The Final Report of the Operation Recovery Task Force: Severe Tropical Cyclone Larry, published by the Queensland Government, April 2007.

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¹ The Industry Working Groups were for sugar, bananas and papayas, tree fruit and nut crops, lifestyle horticulture, livestock; fisheries and aquaculture, forestry, tourism, and cross industry issues and secondary and tertiary industries.

From 24 March until September, General Cosgrove was permanently based at Innisfail, along with his support team. Besides the value of his daily visibility, the General felt it essential to be “at the epicentre.”²

“When someone in charge is in the place of least infrastructure, it is amazing how quickly they gather to themselves implements of recovery. If you stand outside and send things in, you often get it wrong. I think putting in some kind of ‘supremo’ is often a good idea. They will draw to them the necessary levers of government.”

One of the first tasks that Queensland Premier Peter Beattie had set for the Task Force (*Exhibit 1*) was to finalise their guiding principles. These reaffirmed its mandate to “to provide effective on-site leadership, to focus all necessary resources, and to achieve the most efficient and speedy recovery of affected communities,” and went on to say:

“...the Task Force has a mandate to conduct the widest possible consultation with: State, Federal, and relevant Local Governments; industry, including primary, secondary and tertiary sectors; community groups and organisations; Insurers; and all other groups associated with the Recovery effort. The Task Force will attempt to inspire confidence within the community, by processing and instigating recovery initiatives and focusing on achievement and progress, through a co-ordinated and comprehensive communications strategy aimed at maintaining community spirit and morale.”

The guiding principles were supported by a governance framework, a strategic road map to achieve long-term recovery, and a list of milestone events to mark progress.³ The road map set out target completion times, and divided response areas into Community Support, Health and Wellbeing; Housing and Reconstruction; Economic Recovery and Employment; Environment; Public Communications and Involvement (the special focus for ORTF member Sandy Hollway) and Appeal Funds and Offers of Assistance (ORTF member Terry Mackenroth).

As each day brought fresh evidence of the rising damage toll, and that the government’s initial contribution of \$100 million might have to be increased, both Premier Beattie and General Cosgrove appealed to corporate Australia to contribute cash for the recovery.

End of the immediate response

On 3 April, 2006, fifteen days after the cyclone crossed the coast, the “emergency” phase of the response was declared over, and most of the more than 4000 people who had contributed to it were stood down (*Exhibit 2*). It was still raining.

The estimated cost of cyclone damage to homes, property, infrastructure and industry was by now \$1.5 billion.⁴ Tropical Cyclone Larry had in some way affected thirty thousand people living in 17,000 square kilometres from the coast just south of Cairns to 300 km inland on the Atherton Tablelands, an area a quarter of the size of the state

² Cosgrove, P, ‘Is collaboration easier in a crisis?’ speech to ANZSOG Conference, June 28, 2007.

³ Final Report P 188-202, Attachments 31-35.

⁴ ‘In the wake of Larry,’ *The Bulletin*, 4 April 2006, downloaded from <http://ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=140820> on 20-11-2007.

of Tasmania. Johnstone Shire, including Innisfail, had been hardest hit, but the damage extended across nine shires or councils.

Rail and road access was fully restored, although some people were still without electricity and an astounding amount of debris remained to be cleared, with the disposal of hazardous and toxic waste a particular problem. Hospitals had been offering normal services since 27 March. In physical and in public health terms, Innisfail had come through the cyclone relatively unscathed, with only about 30 significant injuries reported, and no deaths. The greater concern was for mental health, and support programs including counselling were already being established.

Apart from Innisfail's State High School, part of which had to be demolished, most of the 156 schools closed for the cyclone had been open since 29 March, and 70 percent of the region's 10,000 pupils were back in class. Only 7000 customers were still to be reconnected to power, although 4000 homes had been declared unsafe to reconnect.

Already, the strategic approach taken by the ORTF was starting to show results.⁵ "There was such a lot of work across government, where the Task Force made sure that all the impacted agencies were involved," the DPI&F's Bruce Turner noted.

"The key challenge in Australia is working relationships between [politicians and officials in] the state and federal governments. This was an example where personal relationships between the Prime Minister and Premier were very effective... General Cosgrove was crucial because he was able to link into both arms of government."

By 30 March, the Attorney General had approved 37 requests for practical assistance from the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) (*Exhibit 3*) ranging from showers to satellite imagery.⁶ On 4 April Premier Beattie announced NDRRA funding for the Cyclone Larry Employment Assistance Package of \$18.56 million to subsidise work being done by unemployed residents, and payments of up to \$5000 for displaced workers. Within a few days, the first payments were being made.

The Department of Communities and other agencies and NGOs involved in the State Community Recovery Committee had decided to bring all community recovery services, from housing to counselling, together in "One Stop Shops". Thirteen One Stop Shops operated in the first days, with longer-term presence at Innisfail, Babinda and Malanda. The centres were also valuable for monitoring community needs and moods.⁷ For Centrelink Chief Executive Jeff Whalan, who had arrived on March 25, they also confirmed the importance of having senior decision-makers on the spot. "The view from Canberra is not good enough. [The extent of the disaster] and] how long the recovery would take...can't be understood unless you are actually there."⁸ Whalan, who was replaced by senior manager Grant Tidswell, recalled:

⁵ Final Report, page 9

⁶ Final Report p 50

⁷ Find reference.

⁸ In "Touching Lives: Centrelink's Response to Cyclone Larry and the Katherine Floods"; Centrelink video, December 2006.

“I would send a daily update direct to [Prime Minister’s Department head] Peter Shergold, with a copy to all relevant Secretaries of Departments. This was invaluable because we were able to respond to what was happening on the ground and to cut through all the usual bureaucracy. For the first few days after my arrival we were introducing new payments and changing payment rules on a daily basis as we fine-tuned what was required. There were a number of payments that were new for example the subsidy to buy and run a generator. We also worked through the rule for unemployment payments for farm workers who were without any income, and structured them in a way that allowed the banana farmers to keep a skeleton staff who would be paid to assist them in the clean-up.”

For the first time, policy was being driven by information from the front line which was worked through overnight by policy departments in Canberra, overseen by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet which in turn was liaising with the Queensland Premiers Department to announce new payments jointly, Whalan said.

Three weeks after the cyclone landfall, 10,000 tarpaulins were protecting damaged houses from the rain. The Department of Housing, working with Tourism Tropical North Queensland, had helped 900 people to move into motels or caravan parks. Many whose houses had been branded with “NO” as uninhabitable were able to relocate with family and friends in the many towns within easy driving distance of Innisfail. Others moved into demountable [prefabricated or relocatable] housing set up on available hard ground; still others toughed it out under canvas.

In the biggest operation in the history of Queensland’s Department of Emergency Services, 1950 staff, including 1055 volunteers, had been deployed for the immediate response. More than 6000 cyclone-related tasks had been co-ordinated over three weeks, and the unified command, multi-unit, multi-tasking approach initiated by EMQ’s Frank Pagano had by and large worked well, with command rotated between EMQ and the Fire and Rescue Service.⁹

By mid-April, 1000 energy company staff and contractors had completed the marathon task of restoring power.¹⁰ The 400 Australian Defence Force troops moved out at the end of April and in mid-May the response phase was completely wound down. As outlined on the Task Force road map the recovery phase was fully under way.

Going to see the General

General Cosgrove’s arrival had made an immediate and positive impact on the community mood and the recovery effort (*Exhibit 4*). Word quickly got round that he had arrived, and many people turned up to speak to him, at his Shire Hall base in Innisfail, or as he travelled the stricken area. “We spent the first two weeks literally driving around, meeting with people face to face, taking every opportunity he could to

⁹ FR 49; In mid-May the Queensland Counter Disaster and Rescue Services was renamed as Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ), which almost immediately proved a stronger and more memorable identity, especially for the media.

¹⁰ Frank Pagano, EMQ Critical Infrastructure Presentaion on Cyclone Larry, 2006 v 2.

say I'm here to help, I'm here to listen, come and tell me what you need," recalled Justin Coomber, media adviser on the Task Force support team.

Cosgrove himself saw his ORTF leadership role as doing what nobody else could do, taking an overview and acting as "co-ordinator, problem spotter, proposer of solutions." Local, state and federal government agencies were already operating in key areas such as needs assessment, housing, medical support, financial support, he said. However he began to see "a stovepipe effect, where people were working very hard but not connecting. Part of my job was to build bridges. I found myself attending a lot of conferences, sitting at the back, then wandering up and saying, 'I was at another meeting where they did something you might want to try.'"¹¹

With a direct line, if needed, to the Directors-General of the Prime Minister and Premier's Departments, the General was uniquely placed to pass on concerns in ways that would result in practical action. As Frank Pagano observed:

"Without the presence of a General Cosgrove we could have had a lot of people doing what they did, but not any one person being able to draw it together in a confident, communicative manner....He had a very strong empathy for everything going on in the community, and he was able to articulate very clearly to State and Commonwealth and get a good ear there. He was never just a figurehead, actually did do things, did have great ideas, and did implement initiatives that were seen for the first time."

Building Coordination

One of the initiatives the General encouraged was the Building Coordination Centre, which opened for business on 13 April, in the hall made available by the Countrywomen's Association in Innisfail. The Centre, a key player on the Housing and Reconstruction segment of the road map, was designed to bring together and speed up all the processes involved in repairing the estimated 19,000 homes that had been damaged by the cyclone: planning, supply of materials, accreditation of trades for Queensland building codes, and final inspection, and, crucially, insurance.

By mid-April, John Mulcahy had joined the ORTF as its fifth member, representing the insurance industry. "We knew immediately that, unless insurance was going to act very quickly and in a co-ordinated manner, the recovery would take a long time," General Cosgrove said.¹² He described the commercial-government relationship that brought the insurers "inside the tent", as a "mighty marriage."

"We could reach out through the industry to all of the insurers, instantly. They were part of the team. They did things which, if shareholders asked why did you do that, [they could say] it was for the public good, which did their brand and reputation a bit of good."¹³

A prime example was gaining the insurance industry agreement to the BCC's target of having all houses weatherproofed by 1 December, the start of the wet season.

¹¹ Peter Cosgrove speech to ANZSOG conference.

¹² FR p14 Also 158-9.

¹³ Cosgrove, P. speech to ANZSOG conference

This would mean focusing on fixing roofs first. “They operated in an anti-intuitive way because they would have preferred to have finished each house one by one, then moved on to the next one, [but that] would have left people standing in the rain,” Cosgrove said.

At least half of all the damaged homes were either not insured or under-insured. Following the example used after the 2003 Canberra Bush Fires, the BCC included two independent insurance assessors, each with long experience in the business, but no company ties. They were able to sort out the majority of insurance disputes without having to resort to the ombudsman.

Insurance companies varied widely in their individual response to the disaster. Some established a local base, and regularly contacted clients. Other companies that kept their distance would “[figure] disproportionately in adverse media reports.”¹⁴

Constant communication

Moving into the recovery phase, the Task Force maintained a relentless schedule. Task Force media officer Justin Coomber recalled that

“The five of us [the General and his support team] worked, lived and breathed cyclone response every day. We all lived at the same motel and every evening was a planning session for the next day, plus all the countless meetings with taskforce level, management level and other groups like the [Operation Recovery Industry Action Working] groups.”

The complement to Cosgrove was fellow Task Force member Sandy Hollway, whose different operating style was equally effective. His track record including leading the organising committee for Sydney 2000, acclaimed as “the best Olympics ever”,¹⁵ and the much-praised community recovery from the Canberra Bushfires.

On frequent visits to the affected area, Hollway gave a reality check. He talked and listened to people outside formal structures, individually or at other meetings, finding out what was really happening on the ground and if the many strands of delivery were doing what they were supposed to do. Reporting back to the Task Force, his findings would feed into strategy. Hollway’s mantra was “We’ll not only build back, we’ll build back better.” Recovery should leave its own legacy, he felt, through workers trained to higher levels of skill, or better new buildings like the Tablelands libraries.¹⁶

With General Cosgrove a formidable communicator, at ease and able to relate to people from all walks of life, and Hollway a straight talker and “unflappable fixer”¹⁷ the Task Force had a head start in getting its message across. It left no communication option untried, but one of the most popular was the weekly newsletter, first published on 26 March and distributed by Australia Post to 30,000 households. The newsletter

¹⁴ Final Report 161

¹⁵ By then International Olympic Committee head Juan Antonio Samaranch.

¹⁶ Van de Wetering, J, ‘Learning from Larry: ten steps to cyclone recovery,’ ABC Backyard, 8-12-06. downloaded from <http://www.abc.net.au/backyard/stories/s1807569.htm>

¹⁷ ‘Cyclone Cosgrove’, The Bulletin, 18 April 2006.

would increase in content and sophistication, but it always incorporated one element: a full-page listing of useful contacts, ideal to tack on the fridge (*Exhibit 5*).

Cosgrove set up the Task Force Consultative Committee to keep local government mayors and chief executives in the recovery loop.

“We would insist these guys came along, even as they were trotting along nicely into the recovery programme. It gave them a voice, gave them a chance to tell me what was on their minds....Our job was to monitor [progress], identify problems and solutions, set goals, refine timelines, and polish relationships.”¹⁸

The other on-ground entity created by the Task Force, the Building Co-ordination Centre, also made a point of working in and with the community. The BCC was headed by the Building Services Authority’s Ian Jennings, and took a proactive case management approach, aiming that, after a first site visit, a solution should have been found or the way to a solution identified. It kept a watch on prices for building supplies, which at first had risen by 50 percent or more;¹⁹ it provided a stream of useful information like roof rebuilding standards and ensured, through “compliance blitzes” that out-of-town tradesmen worked to the Queensland building code.

Industry recovery plans

Two months after cyclone landfall, the first sector recovery plans were ready for the Operation Recovery Industry Action Group. Tourism, keen to advertise that it was back in business, was among the first. “It was a quick process, but that was required to keep the focus on the main game,” the DPI&F’s Bruce Turner recalled. Pulling the plans together involved a lot of work across government, and was made possible by the full and willing involvement of all the impacted agencies, he said.

“It was a way [for the affected farmers to] focus on the future. It also gave us an opportunity to explain the machinery and processes of government to them, how [funding applications] are evaluated, how decisions are made...’This is the process to go through to get a grant increase, these are the arguments that will carry the day in Treasury, this is the time that it takes.’”

At the same time, peak industry representatives were meeting with DPI&F representatives in a series of “dialogues for action” designed to ensure the industry plans had a smooth ride into policy.²⁰ Because of existing concerns about the viability of the sugar industry, an Innisfail Business Retention and Expansion Program was already in early development. Babinda had begun a recovery plan in 1999.

While the planning process continued, Industry Development Officers posted to the region worked with primary producers to find alternative income sources, such as converting empty banana trucks for waste disposal. The farm financial advisers included in the recovery package were widely used; there were also requests for help to prepare disaster plans that had been notably missing from most small businesses.

¹⁸ Cosgrove, P, speech to ANZSOG conference.

¹⁹ Innis, M., ‘A disaster area’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 February 2007.

²⁰ Final report, p 94.

Discouraging news was that the damaged Mourilyan sugar mill would not reopen, costing another 150 fulltime and 60 seasonal jobs.

One group that emerged during the consultation, and took part with the help of interpreters, was the 500-strong Hmong community. These hill tribe immigrants from Vietnam were significant banana producers but had been almost unknown to the wider community.

At the end of July the unseasonal and continuous rain at last came to a stop, making clear-up and rebuilding work much easier. By that time nearly fifty recommendations had been put to government as the Business and Economic Recovery and Renewal Strategy. Government responded at two community meetings. Almost all the recommendations were agreed and implemented, including the appointment of more Industry Development Officers, the extension of wage subsidy schemes like the Cyclone Larry Employment Assistance Program, business re-establishment grants, tax alleviation or moratoriums, and financial and personal counselling services. New funds from the NDRRA went to Operation Farm Clear, specifically designed to speed up the removal of debris from productive land. The State-funded Community Jobs Program was added to existing employment subsidies.

The recovery road map provided for the Task Force to be dissolved on 31 October 2006, and for the State Disaster Management Group to become the single oversight body, with a reduced Operation Recovery Management Group remaining on the ground and reporting to it. General Cosgrove wanted to see a successful transition:

“The longer term programs and legacy programs were all fielded by September 2006. [We] could have pulled out then and leave it to the ordinary operations of government, except that we understood, by feeling the pulse, [that] people were nervous about the forthcoming wet season...[so we] went through a process of Groundhog Day, which I defined in Timor as producing one successful day after another, day after day. Groundhog Day is what we were doing after September in the cyclone area.”

The Cyclone Summit

The end of September also marked the last of DPI&F's Dialogues for Action, but the actions specified in industry recovery plans continued and were promoted at an Economic Development Forum. Banana growers were beginning staggered plantings to ensure there would not be a glut of fruit at the first harvest. As Operation Farm Clear continued, a new \$4 million, state-funded Preventive Waterway Debris Program had begun, specifically targeting streams and rivers.

In October, education authorities held a series of breakfast meetings to thank all the teachers and school communities for their work in getting schools back into business. At the same time work began on a Far North Queensland disaster response framework for schools which incorporated lessons from Cyclone Larry.²¹

²¹ Final Report p 40

The One Stop Shops recorded their 50,000th client contact, some of it through outreach, in November.²² Late that month, the BCC moved into permanent premises in Innisfail. By the 1 December deadline, all but 50 houses had been weatherproofed, and on half of those the work had been delayed at the owners' request. The BCC's work was far from over, and it was decided that the centre would operate for another 12 months. Ahead of the wet season, the BCC now controlled the issue of tarpaulins.

In early December, the Queensland government hosted a Cyclone Summit to share the learnings from the recovery to date. ORTF member Sandy Hollway reviewed the "ten steps to cyclone recovery", including the need to engage the community, establish alliances including private sector and non-governmental bodies, and:

"...put money out the door, fast. Slow, carefully calibrated budget and response will only cause recovery problems to fester, and require more resources to be thrown at them later on."²³

Among the international speakers were American experts on the Hurricane Katrina response that had loomed so large over the early activities in North Queensland. While acknowledging the psychological and political legacy of Hurricane Katrina, those involved with the Tropical Cyclone Larry response were quick to point out that they were two very different events and on quite a different scale. As well, in a number of ways the North Queensland community had been lucky; their storm hardly touched the bigger population centre at Cairns, and time and tide meant there was no storm surge. The speed with which the cyclone passed over Innisfail limited the amount of damage that could be done by flying debris.

"The more you plan, the luckier you are," Frank Pagano said, but there was also an element of chance in the low injury and nil death toll from Cyclone Larry.

"It was a small community and a big target area. If it had occurred to the north or the south with a bigger population base we might not have had the [good] experience people in Innisfail had. There's no doubt in my mind that larger communities are less resilient than small communities."

The Final Report

The banana industry held an employment summit in early 2007, kicking off new training programmes ahead of the first "recovery" harvest in February. The Mental Health Disaster Recovery team, held a "recovery and beyond" workshop, knowing that for some people it might be up to seven years before they were completely free of the effects of the cyclone.

A year after the cyclone struck, in March 2007, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet hosted a special ceremony was held at which 12,000 certificates of recognition were distributed to people who had played a part in the response and the

²² Final Report p 33

²³ Van de Wetering, J, 'Learning from Larry: ten steps to cyclone recovery,' ABC Backyard, 8-12-06. downloaded from <http://www.abc.net.au/backyard/stories/s1807569.htm>

recovery.²⁴ The Hmong community made a presentation to DPI&F for its help in restoring their banana business.

A month later, the *Final Report of the Operation Recovery Task Force* was published. With an overview by General Cosgrove, the report included contributions from all the government agencies that had participated, giving a snapshot of their approach to the disaster, their immediate response, lessons and recommendations.

The scale of the recovery was shown in figures like the over \$189 million in assistance paid out by Centrelink to meet 60,000 claims (*Exhibit 6*). In total, the Federal government had paid out nearly \$500 million, \$216 million through the NDRRA, provisions of which had been extended because of the severity of the disaster.²⁵ The State, with its proportionately smaller resources, had contributed \$200 million. The cyclone had affected the customers of 25 different insurance companies in what was the largest insurance claim to be made in Australia since the 1998 Sydney hailstorms.

The Task Force made few recommendations in the Final Report, in part because “it can be taken as read that the organisational and strategic model adopted by the Queensland Government for the recovery from severe tropical cyclone Larry has very largely been successful” and could be widely replicated. Also “much of the credit for recovery operations lies with the agencies of Government and each of them has conducted their own process to learn the lessons and formulate recommendations for the future.”²⁶

Recommendations

The eight Task Force recommendations included distributing the Report widely to assist with future disaster management issues. Acknowledging the enormous contribution made by “ordinary Australians”, non-governmental organisations and volunteers, the report recommended formally involving such groups in future planning and preparation for natural disasters.

As both the One Stop Shops for human services, and the BCC as a one-stop shop for building and reconstruction had proved so successful, consideration should be given to co-locating them in any future major disaster.

The report strongly recommended finding ways to improve broadcast capability, perhaps by a radio frequency dedicated entirely to disaster information, that could operate even if all power was off. For similar reasons, a centrally-located Media Operations Centre should be considered. A co-ordinated, succinct, practical and flexible public communications plan should be developed as a high priority in recovery from a natural disaster. “Effective public communication is not some optional add-on but a recovery service in itself.”

²⁴ Final Report p 91

²⁵ Final Report p 97

²⁶ Final Report, page 19.

The report's final recommendation, endorsed by the Queensland Government, was to maintain transitional arrangements to ensure as far as possible the smooth completion of the recovery, and the ultimate return to government operations as usual in the cyclone-affected area.

An Operation Recovery Management Group presence remained at Innisfail for 18 months after the cyclone landfall. It was not until 30 June 2007 that the Malanda One Stop Shop was closed, and 30 September before Innisfail's ceased business. A number of other programs including the industry development officer visits and farm financial counselling continued further, as did the cassowary feeding program.

Lessons applied

On 20 March 2008, as General Cosgrove returned to Innisfail to mark the second anniversary of Cyclone Larry, lessons from Operation Recovery were being applied during an extended period of flooding in Central Queensland. The collision of two weather systems dumped 500 mm of rain in 24 hours on the town of Mackay, damaging up to 5000 houses. Premier Anna Bligh's²⁷ response included establishing a two-person task force to oversee the recovery; early on, she spent a night with emergency services workers. A Mackay Rebuilding Centre was quickly established with NDRRA funding, however due to differing circumstances, it was not co-located with the One Stop Shops that were also set up.

The Building Co-ordination Centre concept is now embedded in the operations of the Building Services Authority, acknowledging that whether it is flooding, fire, storm or something man-made disasters are likely to involve rebuilding. The information database it developed to keep tabs on possible sources of assistance and supply, and to keep a record of the locations where specific repair jobs were needed is a permanent fixture, which the BCC recommends other agencies should also develop.²⁸

By and large, the Department of Emergency Services was pleased with the way that all participants in the Cyclone Larry response and recovery played their part. Its²⁹ "where to improve" list emphasises the need for even greater co-ordination, for instance with a single nationally agreed incident management system, and whole of government disaster management capacity. It also recommends a dedicated emergency radio frequency, minimising the use of 1800 (free-phone) numbers and web-based services, and ensuring that information is real time, reliable and robust.

There should be more scenario-based exercises and planning, with a focus on flexibility and scalability, and some groups and structures might need to be reviewed. Other departments also found there was room to improve cross-agency protocols. More agencies and entities should have a formal role in disaster response, for example Employment and Industrial Relations in matching job opportunities with employers.

²⁷ The former deputy premier, Anna Bligh was sworn in after Peter Beattie stepped down on 13 September 2007.

²⁸ Final Report p 165

²⁹ Critical infrastructure presentation, 2006 v. 2, Frank Pagano

Other agencies underscored the importance of having a “family priority” policy for employees, whatever their role, in a stricken area; similarly, first response teams should be fully self-contained and not assume that local infrastructure or local personnel will be available. Centrelink was one of the departments to highlight that when the disaster is large-scale and the response protracted, it is also important that staff can be rotated and responsibilities shared. People proved willing to work very long hours, but needed encouragement to take breaks. DPI&F was one of several departments suggesting that selected staff be trained for roles in disaster response.

Two years after the cyclone, a few people remained homeless, usually because they remained in protracted insurance negotiations. There was a longer list of positive legacies. The Department of Corrective Service’s Cyclone Larry Work Camp, having contributed 12,000 hours of community service in a year, has with strong community support become a permanent fixture. DPI&F noted a lasting improvement in relationships between government and industry following the consultation over industry action plans. Two SES volunteers from Whitsunday Shire have developed software to give explicit directions to emergency workers unfamiliar with an area, and highlight areas of need on a map.³⁰ James Cook University’s Centre for Disaster Studies has developed a useful series of checklists for community preparedness and response, including “intangible issues” to be aware of.³¹

Cyclone Larry has become a local legend, recorded among other ways in a book with contributions from local residents, and another where children describe their experiences,³² part of a suite of mental health initiatives designed to help youngsters overcome the effects of the cyclone.

The *Cairns Post*³³ reported General Cosgrove saying that he counted Innisfail’s massive reconstruction effort as one of the truly amazing things he had accomplished in his career. “In the military, you’re taught to plan for the worst and hope for the best,” he said. “But after situations like [Innisfail] and working with some of the best people we often began to plan for the best. I think you can never discount the ability [of Australians] to come together, work together and overcome adversity.”

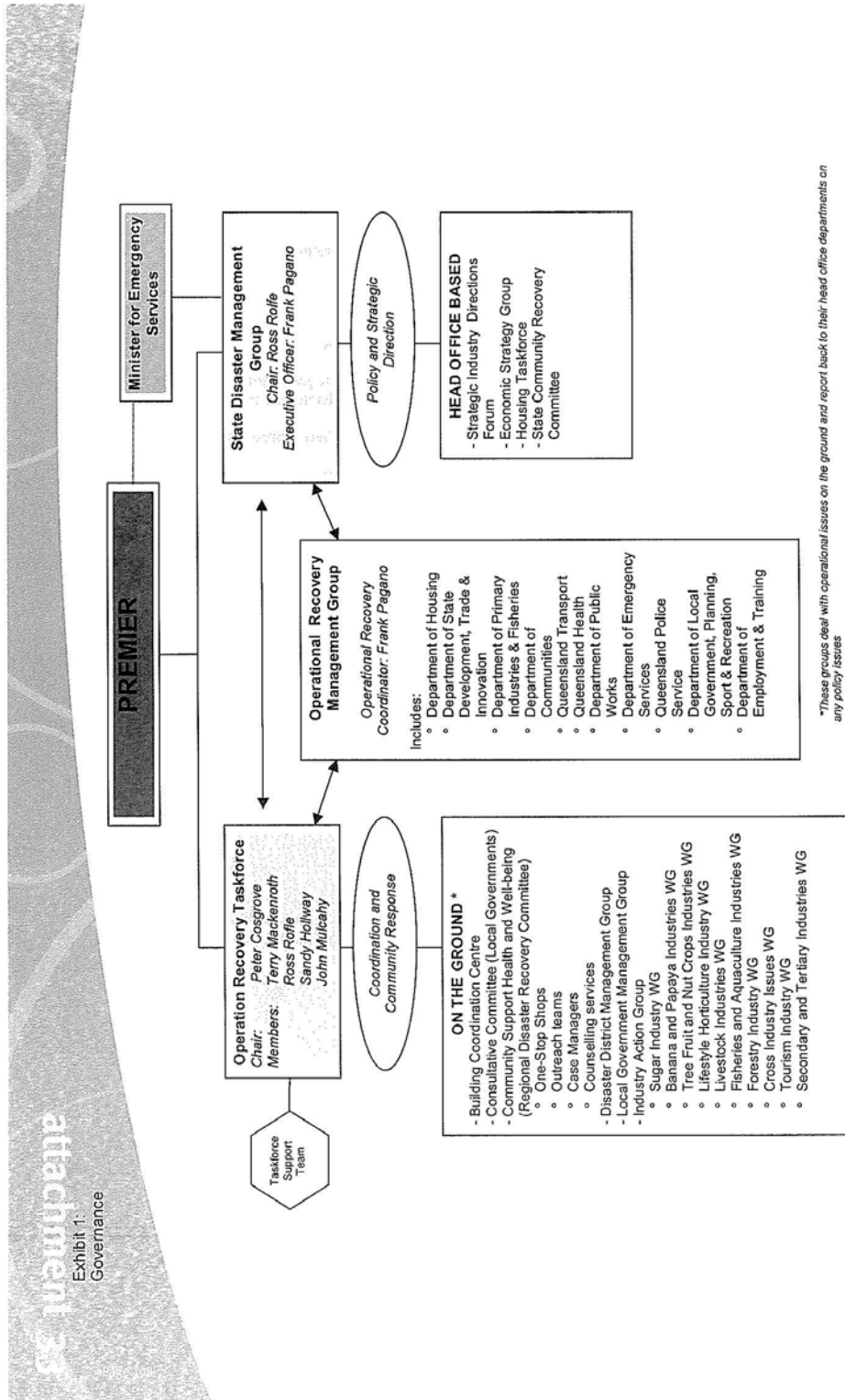
³⁰ Andersen, J, ‘Errors lead shire to a model plan’, *Townsville Bulletin*, 12/12/2007

³¹ Gurtner, Y, A Cottrell and D King PRE and RAPID: Community Hazard Recovery Needs and Capacity Assessment, Centre of Disaster Studies, and Queensland Department of Communities.

³² Taken By Storm; Cyclone Larry: Tales of Survival from the Children of North Queensland.

³³ Butson, T, ‘Cosgrove visit marks Larry anniversary; Chief signs off on town revival’ *The Cairns Post*, 22 March 2008, edition 1, p 11.

Exhibit 1



*These groups deal with operational issues on the ground and report back to their head office departments on any policy issues

GOVERNANCE - TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

<p>Situation Now (May – October 2006)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per the organisational chart • No further bodies/committees created if existing can be used or adapted 	<p>Task Force dissolves – Commence Transition (31 October 2006)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Disaster Management Group (SDMG) becomes the single oversight peak body • Task Force machinery rolled under SDMG • Operational Recovery Management Group potentially contracts but remains on ground reporting to SDMG 	<p>Mainstream follow through (October 2007 onwards)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ORMG wound up (if not sooner) • Lead departments to drive and coordinate delivery of support
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Source: Final Report, attachments 31-35

attachment 33

OPERATION RECOVERY TASK FORCE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND MILESTONES

The Operation Recovery Task Force Strategic Road Map outlines, in broad terms, how the Task Force intends to progress the recovery effort through the various phases of the Operation. The road map identifies a non specific target time line for the achievement of certain activities, which will trigger changes in the Task Force structure and its modus operandi. This list of significant events and milestones is designed to complement the strategic road map by providing more detail of the sequence of events in each phase of the operation. It is not designed to be an exhaustive list and there are many more events that have or will be achieved by the Task Force and other entities involved in the Recovery efforts.

Activities completed to date

- Restoration of water supply
- Restoration of sewerage services
- Provision of food and water
- Provision of emergency power supply
- Provision of emergency housing
- Tarping of buildings to limit additional water damage
- Distribution of Phase One (Emergency Relief) payments
- Clear roads and access to properties
- Commence transition from Emergency Response to Recovery Operations
- Commence clean-up
- Establish One Stop Shops
- Commence Community Outreach programs including provision of counselling services
- Establishment of the Operation Recovery Management Group
- Establishment of an Industry Action Group
- Completion of Industry Impact Assessments
- Establishment of Building Coordination Centre
- Appointment of Independent Insurance Advisers
- Develop a Strategic Communications Plan
- Establishment of Strategic Industry Directions Forum to consider long term development
- Establishment of an Offer Coordination Cell
- Establish a single entry point for Business Assistance
- Commence hand-over of phase one appeal funds
- Announcement of further assistance from the Appeal Funds for structural damage

Activities still to be completed while Task Force leadership on ground

- Develop a Community Support, Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Distribution of Phase Two (Home Contents) grants
- Premier to issue comprehensive Housing statement
- Premier's endorsement of Task Force Strategic Planning documents
- Establishment of temporary housing in various locations
- Commencement of Operation Farm Clear
- Commencement of community jobs program
- Commence Demolitions Program
- Commence assistance to uninsured households through the Phase Three (Structural Assistance) grants
- Commence second round Appeal Fund distributions

- Establishment of Temporary Library in Innisfail
- Assessment of all Offers of Assistance and development of a plan, endorsed by Local Government to match these offers with identified community needs, including selected community projects
- Presentation of donated goods
- Announcements of significant offers and how they will be utilised
- Tabling of Industry Recovery Plans
- Announcement of significant community based projects
- Official Opening of Tourist attractions
- Initial National Park Openings
- Completion of power restoration of all areas with mains power
- Conclusion of kerb side rubbish removal
- Task Force leadership departs disaster area, but continues to monitor progress through regular visits, with ORMG remaining on the ground to coordinate day to day activities

Activities to be completed through Operation Recovery with Task Force leadership visitation

- Commencement of Community based programs and projects
- Construction of first new home
- Continue remediation of National Parks and progressive openings of Parks
- Opening of facilities constructed from donated materials and labour
- Completion of repairs to Schools
- Opening of Community Recovery Projects
- Harvest of first Sugar Crop
- Develop plans to transition oversight of Task Force initiatives on the ground to the Operation Recovery Management Group under the State Disaster Management Group
- Repairs to the majority of homes complete, with the target of all habitable homes under the purview of the Task Force weather proof before the next wet season (wherever possible)
- Disbandment of Operation Recovery Task Force, with ORMG remaining on the ground, but potentially down sizing, and reporting to SDMG

Activities to be completed with SDMG oversight after Task Force has been disbanded

- Host a Whole of Government lessons learnt forum, where the Task Force and other lead agencies would present to a wide audience including; Federal and other State Governments, and other interested bodies and agencies
- Opening of new or rebuilt community facilities
- Opening of library
- All National Parks Opened
- Opening of new tourism ventures
- Continue distribution of remaining Appeal Funds
- Convene a 'Regional Economic Development Conference' to present long term regional economic development strategies developed by the Strategic Industry Directions Forum
- All damaged homes weather-proof before next wet season
- Cessation of employment programs
- Harvest of first Banana and other crops

Activities to be continued with departmental oversight

- Monitoring of concessional loans
- First harvest of long lead time crops
- Implementation and monitoring of Regional Development Plan

Exhibit 2: The immediate response by numbers

All information from the Final Report unless indicated

280,000	People living in area crossed by cyclone*	20 March
140,000	People without power	20 March
30,000	People whose homes or livelihood were affected by Cyclone Larry	20 March
19,000	Homes damaged by cyclone	20 March
15,000	Tropical fruit trees destroyed+	20 March
12,500	Square km of primary industry affected by cyclone	20 March
6000	Ready-meals provided by Qantas	20 March
5100	Jobs affected by cyclone #	20 March
600	Homes completely destroyed and requiring *demolition	20 March
294	Kph highest wind gust recorded at Bellenden Ker	20 March
187	Kph wind gust recorded at Ravenshoe	20 March
156	Schools closed	20 March
91	Schools damaged	20 March
30	Number of injuries in Innisfail +	20 March
1400	Insurance claims lodged	23 March
2440	DPI&F estimate of jobs lost in primary industry sector	27 March
14,500	Homes without power ^	28 March
400	Australian Defence Force troops on Operation Larry Assist	As at 28 March
7304	Out of 10,000 school pupils back in the classroom	29 March
3800	People involved in the TC Cyclone response as at +	29 March
500,000	Litres of bottled water distributed	To 3 april
40,000	Flu vaccinations administered by Queensland Health	To 3 April
14,000	SES tarpaulins used	To 3 April
6000	Cyclone-related tasks co-ordinated by EMQ.	To 3 April
3000	People transported between Cairns and Innisfail	To 3 April
1950	Emergency services staff deployed, including 1055 SES volunteers;	To 3 April
900	People or 265 households assisted into emergency accommodation	By 3 April
500	Red Cross Volunteers	To 3 april
200	Centrelink staff on ground at any one time (1000 in total)	To 3 april
1000	Staff and contractors restoring electricity	To mid-april
250	Department of Communities staff assisting with one stop shops	To mid-april
\$40,000,000	First NDRRA grant approved	20 March
\$100,000,000	Cyclone Larry relief package announced	23 March
\$18,560,000	Cyclone Larry Employment Assistance Package	23 March
\$473,000,000	DPI&F assessment of impact on gross value of agricultural production	27 March
\$439,000,000	DPI&F assessment of impact on local economy	27 march
\$217,000,000	DPI&F assessment of loss of value added in primary industries	27 March
\$8,000,000	Appeal Fund total as at	27 March
\$1,290,000	Cash payments by Centrelink	24 March to 6 April

Sources:

#DPI&F report: Initial estimates of the indirect impacts of Cyclone Larry on primary industries in the severely impacted areas of the Wet Tropics and the Atherton Tablelands

* Paul Hobbs presentation

^Queensland Government State Disaster Management Group media release: TC Larry Report – 28 March 2006. downloaded from <http://www.disaster.qld.govt.au/news/view.asp?id=1323>

+ www.ema.gov.au/ema/emadisasters downloaded 22 July 2008

Exhibit 3: Government assistance



In response to the devastation caused by Tropical Cyclone Larry, the Prime Minister has announced a package of Australian Government contributions to the relief effort that are expected to total more than \$250 million. The purpose of this package is to provide assistance for those affected by the cyclone to rebuild their homes, businesses and lives.

Summary of assistance available

Australian Government

- **Ex-gratia payments to those who have lost their principle place of residence, or had them rendered uninhabitable:** \$1000 for each eligible adult and \$400 for each eligible child aged under 16 at the time of the cyclone.
- **Free Travel between Cairns and Innisfail for displaced residents:** Free daily travel on bus services from Cairns to Innisfail and the surrounding areas for displaced residents for three months.
- **Income support for farmers and small businesses:** a one-off income support programme equivalent to the Newstart Allowance for six months.
- **Business Assistance Fund:** businesses adversely affected by the cyclone may be eligible for a one-off, tax-free grant of either \$10 000 or \$25 000, depending on the extent of costs or loss. Where a grant of \$10 000 has already been made and exceptional costs or losses can be demonstrated, an additional grant of \$15 000 is available.
- **Wage Assistance for employers, including farmers:** a wage subsidy of \$400 a fortnight per full time equivalent position will be provided to employers for 13 weeks to help retain their workers and get back to business quickly.
- **Fuel excise relief:** assistance with excise paid on diesel or petrol fuel used by businesses, farmers and households to generate their own electricity, until normal services are restored.
- **Generator Hire:** assistance to dairy farms and aquaculture businesses that have a critical need for power to maintain the health of their livestock. This is in addition to the fuel excise relief.
- **Concessional Interest rate loans/grants for farmers and businesses:** special concessional loans of up to \$500,000, with a grant component of up to \$50,000, will be available to help farmers and business people rebuild.
- **Taxation assistance:** a range of assistance such as fast tracking of refunds, extending debt payment and lodgement obligation time frames, and help in reconstruction of lost/destroyed tax records.
- **Assistance for companies:** extensions of time may be granted and late fees waived where companies and office holders are experiencing difficulties with such activities as lodgements, notifications and payment of fees.
- **Small Business Field Officers:** will provide advice and referrals to assist small businesses affected by Cyclone Larry.
- **The National Harvest Labour Information Service:** The National Harvest Labour Information Service (NHLIS) will provide a central coordinating point for sourcing labour in the affected area.

Exhibit 4: Recovery Task Force meeting



Premier Peter Beattie (centre) chairs a recovery task force meeting. General Cosgrove is at his right

Exhibit 5: Operation Recovery Updates

OPERATION RECOVERY UPDATE

Issue **7**

27 May – 2 June 2006



General Cosgrove, referee Bill Mitchell and Mayor Neil Clarke celebrate the return of rugby league to Innisfail after Cyclone Larry.

MESSAGE FROM PETER COSGROVE

It was great to see such a large crowd turn out for the first home game for the Innisfail Leprechauns since Cyclone Larry. Being from New South Wales, I was "railroaded" into wearing a Queensland State of Origin jersey on the night, but it was all in good fun.

Innisfail downed Southern Suburbs 62 to 18 and put in a really solid performance. It was a top night and I'm sure the Leprechauns will give many people something to smile about come finals time.

General Peter Cosgrove AC MC (Retd)
Head of the Operation Recovery Task Force

Banana plastics pickup



Operation Farm Clear in conjunction with Subloo's Recycling has agreed to pick up used banana bags and damaged irrigation pipe at no cost to the grower. Phone DPI&F on 13 25 23 to log a request for pick up. Plastics should be free of mud chunks as this interferes with the recycling process. NO banana twine and strapping. NO trickle tape. This service is also available for any growers with damaged irrigation pipe.

Prisoners praised



The communities affected by Cyclone Larry have praised the work of prisoners from Lotus Glen, Townsville, Capricornia and Darling Downs correctional centres who took part in the Department of Corrective Services' Work Outreach Camp (WORC) program. More than 5,300 hours of community service work was completed by the prisoners who undertook a variety of clean-up tasks. Community corrections offenders also performed their community service in the Cyclone region.



The Dairy Recovery Program Team. L to r: Joe Nechwatal, Howard Smith, Lex Peters, Lyn O'Connor (Manager), Ross Walker, Judy Stewart & Ian Stewart. Absent: Rhonda Sorensen, Jude Nechwatal & Ruth Rasmussen.

Dairy assistance

The Dairy Recovery Program team based in Malanda continues to offer a range of help to dairy farmers impacted by Cyclone Larry. They can assist with milking machine testing, mastitis investigation, social counselling and with accessing Cyclone Recovery financial packages. Phone 4096 7213

POST
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Help for tenants affected by Cyclone Larry Wednesday 31 May 10.30am-4pm
Dept of Communities Recovery Centre opp Supa IGA, Innisfail Central Arcade
Enquiries: Tenants' Union 4031 3194 or Tenant Advice/Advocacy Service 4031 6733

OPERATION RECOVERY UPDATE

Issue 40

MARCH 2007



MESSAGE FROM PETER COSGROVE

The anniversary of Larry on March 20 is now rapidly approaching and it is also the date that marks the end of the Operation Recovery Task Force.



This only means that the Operation Recovery Task Force finishes up, but please don't for one second think that the recovery effort will finish on March 20 as well.

This announcement only means that the Task Force will cease its role as the co-ordination unit within the wider recovery effort.

This is positive news, because it means that the recovery has progressed so well that the Task Force is no longer needed.

It also means that the recovery work will continue full steam ahead through the various organisations set up by the State Government and the Task Force.

These organisations include the Operation Recovery Management Group, which brings together the representatives from all Government departments and agencies, the Community Recovery One Stop Shops which are run by the Department of Communities, and the Building Coordination Centre.

These three important groups will all continue their operational and support capacity well into 2007, and possibly even beyond that if need be.

General Peter Cosgrove AC MC (Retd)
Head of the Operation Recovery Task Force

OPEN FAITH CHURCH SERVICE INNISFAIL

The Combined Church Clergy of Innisfail invite all members of the community to a church service on March 20 at the Johnstone Shire Hall, Rankin Street Innisfail.

The service will give thanks for survival during the cyclone and for the community's recovery to date, post Cyclone Larry.

The service commences at 7.30am, (so please be there early) until 8.30am.

For more information, contact Reverend Glenn Louttit on 40611180.

RAIN NO DAMPENERS

Around 100 residents and community services from Babinda and surrounds braved the wind and rain to attend a Heritage Blessing at Babinda Boulders recently.

The event was held to facilitate a blessing of this sacred area for its protection and as a sign of respect and to thank those who had helped clean up the area after Cyclone Larry.

Initiated by the Babinda community, the day was supported by Dept of Communities and many other local organisations.

Events on the day included the indigenous storytelling of the Boulders by local Elder of the Yidinji people Ann Wonga, the blessing by Bishop Arthur Malcolm of Yarrabah, and demonstrations of indigenous dance and musical instruments.

A tree planting followed these events, the afternoon rounded out by a beautifully decorated spread of food that people had brought to share.

There was a strong sense of community spirit on the day. This was reflected in entries left in the Comments Book which included: 'I sit here just to see everyone's part in the wonderful venture, I shall call, I say thank you one and all.'



Community Recovery's Kezia Vonarx plants a tree at the Babinda Boulders Heritage Blessing.

A-Z Directory of Cyclone Recovery Assistance

Asbestos:

Advice on safe removal of asbestos 1800 177 717

Building Coordination Centre:

1/56 Rankin Street, Innisfail..... 1300 727 795

Business assistance:

Department of State Development..... 1300 36 37 11

Carer Respite:

Carelink Centre1800 059 059

Centrelink:

Cyclone Larry Hotline180 2002

Clothing/Household items:

St Vincent de Paul..... 4032 3139

Red Cross..... 4047 6154

ADRA..... 4061 2911

Councils:

Johnstone..... 4030 2222

Cardwell..... 4043 9100

Hinchinbrook..... 4776 4600

Eacham.....4096 5311

Herberton.....4096 2244

Atherton.....4091 0700

Mareeba.....4030 3900

Cairns.....4044 3044

Douglas.....4099 9444

Etheridge.....4062 1233

Croydon.....4745 6185

Counselling:

Lifeline.....13 11 14

Department of Communities.....1800 440 074

Mamu Family Support Centre 4061 9988

Innisfail Community Support..... 4061 6000

Atherton Neighbourhood Centre..... 4091 3850

Atherton Family Support House 4091 3850

Centacare..... 4044 0130

Eacham Community Help Organization..... 4096 6950

Ravenshoe Community Centre..... 4097 6726

Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal:

Enquiries.....1800 265 051

Domestic violence:

Innisfail..... 4061 9869

Womensline..... 1800 811 811

Mensline.....1800 600 636

Electricity:

Ergon Energy.....13 22 96

Employment Assistance Hotline:

For jobs and training opportunities1800 031 921

Fair Trading:

To report alleged profiteering or other related issues13 13 04

Farming issues

Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries including
Operation Farm Clear and Business Information Centre
.....13 25 23

Financial help:

Information and referral.....1800 440 074

Fire permits:

For information and enquiries, contact

Rural Fire Service.....4061 0650

Forestry Salvage:

For all forestry salvage matters, contact

Private Forestry North Qld (Wendy)... ..4091 9433

Health:

Flu vaccinations, Communicable Diseases,

Environmental Health, Dengue Fever ...4050 3600

Mamu Health Service.....4061 4477

General.....13 4325

Mental Health:

Cairns 4050 3100

Innisfail.....4061 5327

Tablelands..... 4091 0213

Housing:

To offer properties for rent or seeking medium to

long-term housing 1800 623 208

Insurance:

Operation Recovery Independent Insurance Advisor

.....1300 727 795

Insurance Ombudsman for help with resolving

insurance disputes1300 780 808

Legal advice:

Free priority advice for people in cyclone affected

areas..... 1300 651 188

One Stop Shops: (Open Mon-Fri 10am – 4pm)

Innisfail Central Arcade (opp IGA)4061 9908

Malanda 38 James Street..... 4095 1446

Info on financial & other assistance... 1800 440 074

QRAA: Qld Rural Adjustment Authority

For interview with industry expert ... 1800 623 946

SES:

Atherton..... 4091 0700

Cairns 4044 3377

Cardwell..... 4068 2600

Douglas.....4099 9444

Eacham.....4096 6638

Herberton..... 4096 2244

Innisfail.....4061 2065

Mareeba.....4030 3900

Townsville.....4727 9000

Telephones:

Telstra Cyclone Assistance Hotline ... 1300 134 239

Tenants:

Union1800 177 761

Tenant Advice & Advocacy Service.....4031 6733

www.operationrecovery.qld.gov.au

Exhibit 6: Recovery by numbers:

All information from the Final Report unless indicated

577	Businesses helped by DPI&F to apply for financial assistance	By 30 June 2006
50,000	Client contacts to One Stop Shops	To November 2006
24	Houses still under tarpaulin	To December 2006
12,000	Certificates of recognition, 450 certificates of commendation from DPMC for role in response and recovery.	February 2007
60,000	Claims for emergency assistance through Centrelink	To 1 March 2007
48,000	Calls to Centrelink hotline	To 1 March 2007
27,000	Domestic insurance claims (19,000 for buildings)	To 1 March 2007
12,000	Hours of community service from Queensland Corrective Services	To 1 March 2007
8062	Businesses assisted through Business Assistance Fund	To 1 March 2007
2500	Farmers assisted by Queensland Farmers Federation Industry Recovery Project	To 1 March 2007
1000	Farms assisted by Operation Farm Clear	To 1 March 2007
949	Assisted through Cyclone Larry Employment Assistance Programme (733 on Community Jobs Programme)	To 1 March 2007
450	Clients assisted by Building Coordination Centre	To 1 March 2007
228	Enterprises received financial counselling	To 1 March 2007
200	Employed on Operation Farm Clear	To 1 March 2007
184	Organisations funded to restore sport and recreation.	To 1 March 2007
60	Building Services Authority staff at Building Co-ordination Centre	To 1 March 2007
19	Operation Recovery Task Force Meetings	To March 2007
\$1,500,000,000	Final cost estimate	As at 1 March 2007
\$369,000,000	Domestic insurance claims (19,000 for buildings)	To 1 March 2007
\$216,000,000	Federal Government contribution through NDRRA	To 1 March 2007
\$200,000,000	State government contribution	To 1 March 2007
\$189,000,000	Paid out in assistance by Centrelink	To 1 March 2007
\$145,000,000	Business Assistance Fund	To 1 March 2007
\$62,000,000	Federal Government Contribution, other	To 1 March 2007
\$51,920,000	NDRRA payments through Department of Local Govt, planning and sport to restore damaged public assets	To 1 March 2007
\$22,000,000	Raised through Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal, \$18 million distributed	To 1 March 2007
\$9,000,000	Payments and loans to Johnstone shire, worst affected local government areas (\$5m from state)	To