

Restoring order from chaos

About 60 percent of Queensland's land mass was disaster declared just two months ago as the aftermath of Cyclone Ellie continued to wreak havoc in North Queensland towns.

Record floodwaters, king tides and weeks of endless rain isolated communities, with Ingham proving to be one of the worst hit coastal centres.

Hundreds of homes were affected as the town was battered by 400mm of rain within 24 hours in February and almost the same again a few days later.

Weeks of endless downpour marooned the town causing residents to be evacuated from their homes.

The Herbert River peaked and the Bruce

Highway was cut from the north and south, stranding the town which was accessible only by boat or helicopter.

A whole-of-government approach in reaction to this natural disaster resulted in the formation of the District Disaster Management Group (DDMG).

As the group's lead agency, Queensland Police Service (QPS) worked with Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ), Department of Communities, Australian Defence Force, and

Hinchinbrook Shire Council to assist the stranded communities surrounding Townsville.

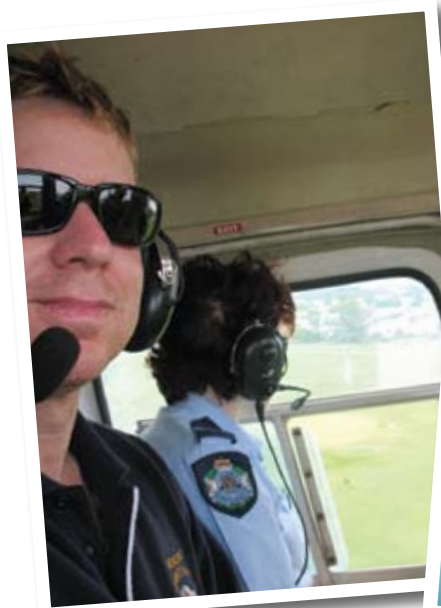
This group's responsibilities included assessing the flooded areas, facilitating food drops, finding emergency accommodation for homeless flood victims and ensuring homes affected by the stagnant flood waters were disinfected to help with sanitation.

Perched at the highest point in town, the Ingham Police Station became an island surrounded by water. This in itself

created a further challenge for Superintendent Noel Powers who, from the relative dryness of Townsville, ensured the isolated Ingham officers were well supported by the DDMG.

Acting Senior Sergeant Geoff Bormann, Officer-in-Charge of Ingham Police Station, and Senior Sergeant Glen Morris from Townsville remained in the station for nine days, developing emergency aid strategies while waiting for floodwaters to recede.

While the officers were prevented from doing even the simplest thing like jumping into their police



Left to right: The District Disaster Management Group sourced seven helicopters, enabling police to attend to calls for service and make assessments of flooded areas; up to 18 people lived and worked in the flood-isolated Ingham Police Station, with makeshift beds tucked into any available corner; Detective Senior Constable Shane Stibbard, Ingham CIB, used his cooking skills to keep the stranded officers well fed.

car to patrol the majority of the town's streets, Acting Senior Sergeant Bormann said due to the level of support received from Townsville there was never any cause for concern that police would be unable to respond to an emergency.

"Superintendent Powers had just arrived from Brisbane but any resource we required was sourced by him and the DDMG. We had access to boats and helicopters if need be," Acting Senior Sergeant Bormann said.

"We had a police presence on both sides of the railway bridge and up to seven helicopters on standby in case of any emergency. Six tactical officers from Brisbane had also been deployed to the Ingham station."

During their nine days confined to the Ingham Police Station, Acting Senior Sergeant Bormann and Senior Sergeant Morris continued to operate a 24-hour shift rotation with the help of officers sent from Townsville and Brisbane in a bid to manage staff fatigue.

"We used a Water Police boat from Townsville to ferry two additional Ingham staff to work when they could get to an area where we could reach them," Senior Sergeant Morris said.



Acting Senior Sergeant Geoff Bormann, Ingham's Officer-in-Charge (left), and Senior Sergeant Glen Morris from Townsville endured the confines of the station for nine days straight during the height of the floods.

"The Water Police boat was also used for proactive patrolling and to assist the Ambos and Furies where needed."

"Local produce was also an issue, so we had meat flown in by plane. Up to seven helicopters in Ingham had also been sourced by the DDMG that we had access to. We used them to attend to calls for service and make assessments of the area."

One particular Saturday night, 18 people were living and working at the Ingham Police Station with makeshift beds tucked into corners. A number of the Ingham staff had travelled to the station to work before the floods, knowing they could become stranded.

Luckily for the group, Detective

Senior Constable Shane Stibbard was one of the stranded officers. An ex-chef, he proved to be a creative cook and more than capable with the barbecue located in the staff's outdoor area.

Senior Sergeant Glen Morris said the positive attitudes of all the members involved in such difficult circumstances had proved inspiring.

"The teamwork was outstanding," Senior Sergeant Morris said.

"This is especially so considering a number of staff had suffered water damage to their private residences."

On Tuesday February 10, Acting District Officer Inspector Cheryl

Scanlon sent word that the Bruce Highway had reopened to all traffic to the north and south of Ingham, finally allowing trucks to cross the Seymour River Bridge and continue up to Cairns.

"The day the Bruce Highway re-opened there were 200 trucks waiting on the south end and 55 trucks waiting to the north," Acting Senior Sergeant Bormann said.

"But we're back to a response mode—that is, normal policing—now. It's all about getting the township functioning normally, just as soon as possible."

*By Chrissie McLeod,
Media and Public Affairs Branch*

