

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

“Around our house looks like World War Three, trees down and twisted off, branches everywhere, leaves, leaves, leaves, smashed, fragmented, stuck in crevices, on to windows like sticky tape, stuffing up the gutters, plastered all over the car which was under the carport supposedly in the dry.”¹

Between 6.20 am and 7.20 am on Monday 20 March 2006 Severe Tropical Cyclone Larry crossed the North Queensland coast. As predicted, its main fury was directed at the town of Innisfail. ABC radio was on air talking to Les Scheu when its listeners around Australia heard the “almighty roar” that snatched off the roof of his house in one piece, rafters and all.² During the 40 minutes of calm in the eye of the storm, Innisfail police took a quick look around and reported to the State Disaster Coordination Centre in Brisbane their estimate that 50 to 60 percent of houses were damaged.

With winds up to 290 kph, it was Queensland's worst storm in 80 years; fortunately for those waiting it out in fortified parts of their homes, it moved through fast. By 10 am, still rated as a severe cyclone, and still destroying crops and houses, Larry was inland, over the agricultural areas of Ravenshoe and Herberton (*Exhibit 1*). Its strength had diminished by mid-afternoon, and it was petering out to become a rain depression when it reached Croydon, 450 km inland, at 10 pm on 20 March.

But it left a swathe of damage up to 150 km wide across the countryside, its most destructive impact on townships, infrastructure and crops between Babinda and Tully. Effects were felt as far north as Cairns, south to Cardwell, and west to the Atherton Tablelands,³ an area totalling 17,000 square kilometres. In less than four hours, most of the

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¹ Cyclone Larry, by Grahame West, Tablelands, Taken by Storm, p 79

² Our Story, by Les and Rae Scheu, Taken by Storm, p 53

³ http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/qld/cyclone/tc_larry/ downloaded 22-07-2008



region's revenue sources had been destroyed. Rainforest and other trees, including crops like macadamia nuts, avocados and lychees had been stripped of their leaves.

Banana plants that had been ready for harvest were splintered and flattened; bunches of fruit lay on the ground. Sugar canes were smashed. Fallen trees blocked roads and pinned down farm fences; wallabies and feral pigs mingled with horses and cows.

After the wind died down, the rain continued, causing some flooding that disrupted roads including the main Bruce Highway, and the railway line. However, the heaviest rain fell to the west of the wind damage area.

Within an hour of the cyclone crossing the coast, the first police and emergency services were venturing out to see if anyone needed rescue, determine the extent of flooding, and check the usability of the airport.⁴ Everywhere, they saw shredded vegetation. The coastal tourist drive, the Great Green Way was now a barren avenue of broken trunks and branches.

Few injuries, much damage

In Innisfail, many buildings were roofless, while some had acquired an extra roof. Damage, especially to older and poorly maintained houses, was widespread. Hundreds might be homeless, but almost everyone was unhurt. Nan Monti recalled:

“After ten o'clock all our neighbours gathered...to assess the damage. We realised and were grateful that no-one was injured, but the damage was severe. We had to walk carefully around roofing iron, fallen trees, broken power poles and fallen power lines that were all over the roads, yard and fields. We had lost our roof trusses and iron, our contents, our tractor shed had collapsed onto our tractor, and land cruiser wagon and our family car was damaged too.”⁵

Pausing only to put a tarpaulin over his daughter's precious university notes in her now roofless bedroom, Sam Monti and helpers began to clear the road so he could check on residents at nearby Mena Creek, where he was the State Emergency Service (SES) Group Leader. There too he found significant damage, but again, no sign of serious or fatal injury.

The Montis were typical of many local residents who left behind destroyed homes and went to the aid of others. Staff at most government agencies had suffered some impact of the cyclone: the family of one worker at the Department of Natural Resources and Water had to dig themselves out after being buried in the rubble of their house, fortunately with only minor injuries.⁶ Most departmental disaster plans put a priority on ensuring the wellbeing of staff and their families before asking anyone to return to work; typically, people turned up to work as soon as they could once the cyclone had passed through, despite the debris and damage.

Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ's) Executive Director Frank Pagano was monitoring the severity of the situation from the State Disaster Coordination Centre in Brisbane. With suggestions of a billion dollars' worth of damage already in the air, based on the emerging evidence of house and property devastation, he decided to move the majority of the State Disaster Co-ordination Group, and the State Disaster

⁴ Final Report, p 40

⁵ Our story, by Sam and Nan Monti: Taken by Storm, p.41

⁶ Final Report p 84

Co-ordination Centre, from Brisbane to Cairns. He despatched the Fire and Rescue Service's State Incident Management Team as a forward party, and within two days arrived there himself.

"I wanted to ensure that the whole-of-government focus was maintained, that all efforts were co-ordinated and there was no duplication. It hadn't ever happened before, and I knew that it might fail. I was very conscious, having worked in North Queensland, that disaster response and recovery had to be centred in North Queensland, not done by remote control. It's a very very big state...I made a deliberate decision to co-ordinate as much as possible of this locally."⁷

Cairns airport had only been closed during the height of the storm. By mid-morning helicopters had brought Australian Defence Force troops – deployed by the Commonwealth government through Emergency Management Australia (EMA) at Pagano's request - from the army base at Townsville for Operation Larry Assist. They brought with them water, food, cooking facilities, medical supplies, maps, and the first of thousands of tarpaulins that would be needed.⁸

Politicians on the spot

As soon as weather permitted, Premier Peter Beattie arrived by air from Mackay, an hour away, where the Queensland Cabinet had been meeting. The state's key decision-makers had watched the cyclone's progress on TV and made their first response decisions over breakfast.

Arriving in Innisfail, the Premier announced the opening of the Tropical Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal, kick-starting it with a State government donation of \$100,000. Travelling with Beattie were the Director-General of the Premier's Department, Ross Rolfe, the police commissioner, and a number of other departmental heads who had been at Mackay. When Prime Minister John Howard arrived from Canberra, he and the Premier walked around the town together. Cloud and rain had prevented the politicians from seeing the vast extent of damage from the air, but on the ground it was immediately apparent that a major response and recovery effort would be needed: Operation Recovery.

The Operation Recovery Management Group was created that day to facilitate discussion and ensure effective reporting throughout government on major issues relating to the recovery. Senior representatives of all three levels of government made up the group.

High-level interest and presence in Innisfail would continue during the week, with the Governor-General and Leader of the Opposition also visiting, as well as more state and commonwealth government ministers and officials.

⁷ At 1.7 million square km, Queensland is larger than Iran and a bit smaller than Mexico in area. As a former fire service chief, Pagano was acutely aware of problems that could arise when communicating across distances, highlighted in several coronial reports on bush fire deaths.

⁸ EMA co-ordinated the delivery of 15 tonnes of tarpaulins and ropes from the Australian Government Disaster Store, while all 14,000 of Queensland's SES tarpaulins were used (www.ema.gov.au/ema/emadisasters)

Power out

The cyclone had doubled over the steel chimney at the Mourilyan sugar mill and taken out other tall structures like radio aerials, mobile phone towers and power lines. In what transmission company Powerlink Queensland described as “the worst damage ever sustained”,⁹ seven major supply lines and five bulk supply substations were out of service, and a number of transmission towers knocked over or askew. As a result, more than 140,000 people¹⁰ – 70 percent of people living in the affected area - were without power.

Power cuts didn’t only mean cold showers, no air conditioning or internet access. Many people whose houses had been damaged were keen to leave the town but couldn’t get petrol as automatic teller machines wouldn’t work.

By the end of the first day much had been done in Innisfail to meet the immediate needs of “health, housing and hunger.” A hundred thousand litres of bottled water, and 6000 Qantas in-flight meals were among the first items to arrive in town. The Johnstone Shire Council had organised trucks to distribute water. The SES and the Salvation Army brought big barbecue trailers and started cooking the sausages that for many people would be breakfast, lunch and tea. By good fortune, two large, empty refrigerated rail containers were already stopped at Innisfail and could serve as walk-in freezers for any fresh food delivered. Enterprising locals Len and Anita Oliveri exhausted themselves and their generator cooking for 6000 people over six days, using 120 kg of donated bacon and 40 dozen eggs a day.¹¹

Queensland Health sent in additional nurses, and evacuated patients from the damaged hospital at Innisfail. The Department of Public Works’ main role was to assess building damage, but it also helped with food and water. The Red Cross began preparing the Innisfail TAFE as temporary accommodation for those who had moved out of their homes. In Babinda, the Cairns City Council kick-started community efforts by broadcasting that it would pay a daily rate to anyone with a truck prepared to work on the clean-up. The Mena Creek pub became a community gathering point.

At 8.30 pm the EMA convened a meeting of the multi-agency Australian Government Counter Disaster Task Force in Canberra to consider its policy response and to liaise with State Disaster Management Group. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet Director-General Peter Shergold would work closely with his Queensland equivalent, Ross Rolfe throughout the response, with at least one Commonwealth representative at each State Disaster Management Group meeting.

Disaster relief funding normally comes first from the state through its Disaster Relief Arrangements (SDRA). Commonwealth funding comes in once state spending goes above \$240,000. In recognition of the scale and severity of the Cyclone Larry disaster, the Attorney-General approved an immediate \$40 million advance to Queensland under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA).¹² It could be used, among other things, for generators and relief payments to those eligible.

⁹ Final Report, p 77

¹⁰ Final Report p 78

¹¹ Fear and Devastation, by Len and Anita Oliveri, Taken by Storm, p 47

¹² Final Report, p 153

Timely information, appropriate assistance

The Department of Emergency Services had pre-deployed two communications staff to Cairns and more of its and other departmental media people joined them in Innisfail on 20 March, just ahead of national and international reporting crews. By providing the Johnstone Shire mayor with a person to field enquiries and update information for the media, the state could take pressure off the local authority, Frank Pagano said. He knew that, in the absence of interesting hard news, media crews would work whatever angles they could find – which might not always be the most uplifting, or most helpful to the response and recovery effort. “Media management is a huge issue. If you don’t spend enough attention on it, the media get very cranky and become problematic.”

He also knew that, for residents in a disaster area, timely information about what’s going on can be at least as important as welfare services. While the electronic media were beaming out the story to an avidly interested Australia and the world, in Innisfail it was back to communication basics; face to face conversations, “the grapevine” and notices, sometimes hand-written. Radio stations broadcast warnings about live power lines and other information for those able to receive it; a proliferation of free-call numbers and hotlines were publicised.

Offers of assistance came from every state in Australia. Some people just jumped on a plane or a train, heading for the disaster zone. Few of the government agency volunteers who came to Innisfail had experience in disaster response, but all brought a willingness to work long hours in cramped and clammy makeshift offices and turn their hand to whatever was needed. Within a week, more than 3800 people had been involved in the response,¹³ creating a significant accommodation challenge. Fortunately, people could be based in Cairns, to and from which the daily convoy included a number of free buses funded by NDRRA.

A major communications issue was letting a sympathetic Australia know what kind of assistance would be most helpful, and what would not be, to the immediate response. Most needed, in the first days, was cash to restart the local economy, and entrepreneurial and energetic people prepared to turn their hand to anything.

“Sometimes you have to break down the traditional, and make it up as you go along,” Frank Pagano reflected. “Disaster managers in my opinion have to be flexible and fast on their feet...the first couple of weeks are about clean-ups, as you don’t know the extent of the problem.” A week after the cyclone hit, Qantas and Channel 7’s Sunrise Show organised a jumbo jet full of tradespeople to come up to Innisfail. They were fantastic workers, Pagano said, but without systems or supplies for their building, plumbing and carpentry skills, they mainly worked as clean-up hands.

Continuing a tradition of community service that dated back to the 1990 Charleville floods, one very effective clean-up crew consisted of low-risk prisoners from Queensland Corrective Services.¹⁴

¹³ Tropical Cyclone Larry, downloaded from <http://www.ema.gov.au/emadisasters> on 22 July 2008.

¹⁴ Final report p 131

Turning on the lights

Liaison officers from the National Emergency Co-ordination Centre worked 24-hour days to process supplies and equipment funded by NDRRA.¹⁵ A day after cyclone landfall, Queensland Transport had cleared the airport at Innisfail, and the Department of Public Works had hired 120 generators of varying size from around Queensland. More generators were airlifted in the following day, along with urgently needed chainsaws, and roofing materials. Meanwhile, Powerlink and Ergon Energy, working out of Cairns and using staff from around the country, were rapidly restoring electricity infrastructure.

While water, sewerage and other utilities took priority for available power, the whole community got a morale boost when the Innisfail street lights were turned on again, and power was restored to supermarkets and banks, so cash could flow again.

Centrelink's Chief Executive Jeff Whalan had realised the absence of cash was building to a major problem, especially for people wanting to travel.

“We toyed with the idea of taking cash into Innisfail ourselves, but much preferred the banks to do this. I rang the CEOs of most of the major banks and asked them to open as a matter of urgency. The response was great – some of the banks opened while water was still ankle-deep in their building. They rushed emergency cash supplies to Innisfail and undertook to help wherever they could.”

With Peter Searston, Area Manager, Central and North Queensland, working with local bank managers, they negotiated a ground-breaking agreement that payments could be made on the basis of Centrelink identifications, confirmed by an agency representative based at each branch.¹⁶ In the first days, Centrelink and the Department of Communities operated Community Recovery from the old Innisfail Courthouse, one of the few buildings declared safe, although without power and water.

From Friday 24 March, people could get cash in hand from their bank, with 196 ex-gratia payments to the value of \$230,000 made that day and \$1,271,400 paid out in two weeks. Centrelink, normally with 12 staff at Innisfail, by Wednesday had nearly 40 people on-site, with another 300 around Australia taking and processing payment claims by phone. With mobile laptops and extensive records, staff could verify people's identity and entitlements more easily than its state partner in community recovery, the Department of Communities, which used paper records.

One downside of the early availability of money was that some people, unable to work, promptly spent it in on alcohol, which then fuelled frustration at the pace of recovery efforts. However, everyone from the state Premier through to local mayors were determined that as much money as possible would flow back into the local economy. As Frank Pagano said:

¹⁵ Final Report, p 50

¹⁶ “Touching Lives: Centrelink's response to Cyclone Larry and the Katherine floods”, Australian Government video.

“We would have companies ringing up and saying we can give you hundreds of air conditioners, fridges, television sets... [but that] would kill local employment and trade immediately. Very quickly what the government said was, we need promises in relation to rebuilding, or we need dollars to distribute to the uninsured. It was a deliberate decision not to accept 500 new fridges, otherwise the business community would struggle to get back on its feet.”

The education community was quickly back on its feet. Most of the 156 schools closed on 20 March had suffered some degree of damage, but 74 of them were open the following day, thanks to extraordinary efforts led by their own teachers and parents, with QBuild and the army, to ensure a safe environment and clean drinking water. The school at Silkwood, an evacuation shelter during the storm, became a drop-off point for army rations and a communication and distribution centre for food, water and clothing.¹⁷

Ruin and resilience

Two days after landfall, on Wednesday 23 March, an Australian Defence Force Chinook helicopter successfully airlifted a 32-metre high, four-ton steel tower over flooded roads and into a waterlogged sugar cane field. The Department of Main Roads used 2000 tons of gravel to create temporary access for a crane to erect the tower to replace one that had been downed by the cyclone. A day later, one of Powerlink’s main transmission lines to Innisfail could be “re-energised”¹⁸.

For Frank Pagano, this was excellent justification for his decision to move most of the State Disaster Co-ordination Group from Brisbane to where it could be seen and contacted in North Queensland:

“Locals came up with the strategy to use the Chinook. Many stories in relation to Cyclone Larry were successes because of the engagement of the local North Queensland community. Solutions were worked out quickly because of local relationships.”

Rain was still falling. Flood damage to roads meant that it was not for some days after the cyclone that outreach teams were able to check on the wellbeing of some rural people, and two weeks before anyone reached East Palmerston and Millaa Millaa. Non-governmental organisations played a significant part in outreach activities. Arriving in Babinda, Australian Red Cross Executive Director Greg Goebel called in 500 more volunteers.¹⁹ He said:

“...We gave an undertaking that we would visit every house in all the 30 towns surrounding Innisfail that had been affected by the cyclone. We would check on their wellbeing, assess need, distribute basic food and water items; distribute information and established links between people in need and appropriate local agencies and services. Very early on, our teams came across an 87-year-old woman who was in her bed, surrounded by candles, unable to move. Another elderly lady had fallen over and broken her hip and was unable to move. Clearly, while some were managing, others were in trouble.”

¹⁷ Taken by Storm, p 83.

¹⁸ Final Report page 79 and Simon Bartlett, Powerlink Queensland, in Transmission and Distribution World http://tdworld.com/overhead_transmission/power_australia_cyclone_larry downloaded 22-07-08

¹⁹ Red Cross Responds, Taken by Storm, page 88; also p51 and 56

At Passionfruit Farm in South Johnstone, Cyclone Larry had stripped about \$15,000 worth of ready-to-pick fruit from the vines, and torn the roof and verandas off the farmhouse. Yet farmer Polly Perkins' first reaction, on seeing the Red Cross drive up, was to look for his wallet to give a donation. An elderly rural couple, cut off for three or four days, were asked what they needed. They were OK for food, they said, having planned supplies to last two weeks. Did they want clean water? "Why should we? It's raining." Alf Zammit's home and business had sustained major damage. But his concern was for his neighbours as he drew mud maps to guide rescuers to more isolated homes and farms.

While the Red Cross took care of human welfare, the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) focussed on farms and livestock, setting up cyclone assistance centres and a helpline. NDRRA funds were used to provide generators to restore aeration pumps on aquaculture farms and milking machines for dairy farms. Hercules aircraft flew in two portable milking machines which DPI&F transported around Tablelands dairy farms on a continuous circuit for five weeks.²⁰ Hundreds of trees were sawed and cleared from rural roads so that milk tankers could get through.

DPI&F representatives started talking to farmers as soon as possible to assess the extent of damage. The picture was discouraging. Vast areas of ready-to-harvest fruit now lay on the ground, there were some distressing animal welfare situations on beef and dairy farms, and an enormous amount of debris to be cleared and fences to be mended before any replanting could take place. While bananas could be reinstated quickly, tree crops like macadamias would take years to recover.

Keeping the community

A constantly-aired concern was that communities could disintegrate if the labour force deserted the district because the work they had come for, like harvesting bananas, could not be paid for. Every link in the chain was affected; housing for temporary workers as well as cool stores and packing sheds were damaged, and a fleet of 300 trucks now stood empty. Counsellors warned of the mental health risk to farmers whose livelihoods had been lost. "People were under enormous stress; they wanted a whole lot of things to happen, more quickly than normal," observed Bruce Turner of DPI&F. The Department negotiated with other states to relax regulations and allow freshly fallen bananas to be sold if in excellent condition.²¹

National Parks and the Great Green Way were among the key tourist sites that had been trashed by the wind, and some of the rare and protected cassowaries had already been killed after venturing onto the road in search of fruit to eat.

By 23 March, an Australian Defence Force aerial survey had provided a good overview of the extent of damage to both town and country. It showed that 99 percent of houses in Silkwood had lost their roof or suffered structural damage. In East Palmerston, 70 percent of homes were damaged. In Innisfail, it was assessed that there

²⁰ Final Report p 95

²¹ Final Report p 96

was 50 percent damage to homes, 35 percent damage to private industry, and 25 percent to government buildings such as schools, and including the hospital.²² Newer houses built to the latest Queensland code generally survived better than the older wooden “Queenslanders”, especially those not well maintained.

With some people toughing it out under tarpaulins, and others temporarily leaving town, it was still hard to assess how many would need alternative housing. Over a thousand (1146) Department of Housing properties were damaged, and 2500 state government assets, including 91 schools, the agency QBuild estimated. The Building Services Authority’s Ian Jennings announced he would do everything possible to speed up the registration of out-of-state tradesmen to work to Queensland building codes.

On 23 March the Premier and the Prime Minister came to Innisfail to announce a jointly funded relief package of more than \$100 million that would provide farmers and small businesses with loans up to \$200,000 and tax-free grants to \$10,000. Each also contributed \$1.1 million to what was now to be known as the Prime Minister’s and Premier’s Cyclone Larry Relief Fund. That afternoon, the Army flew SES, police and government representatives into Mission Beach and Silkwood for the first time.

Community frustration builds

Despite what had been a rapid, comprehensive and largely successful response, the novelty of being “just larried” was starting to wear off. Some things were working well, but in spite of efforts a lot were not, and frustrations were rising as the rain continued relentlessly. Tarpaulins were rationed to those whose roofs were only half-damaged. Food in fridges and freezers had spoiled during the days without power; people had eaten a lot of baked beans and were longing for hot showers. Prices for fruit and vegetables and essentials like long-life milk and batteries had doubled.

Some NGOs and others volunteering their assistance were disappointed to find themselves duplicating others’ activities or hanging around to get instructions. The Environmental Protection Agency was disappointed that Parks and Wildlife Service staff were “left to wait around, sometimes on a daily basis” before being deployed, or were underutilised.”²³ With almost every road sign demolished, as well as flood damage to the roads, people coming from anywhere out of town, including SES volunteers, sometimes struggled to find locations they were directed to.

A local freight distributor co-ordinating the unloading of supplies of water, food and tarpaulin, described his job as a “nightmare...much of it is arriving unmarked and workers have no idea which authority needs it.”²⁴ Well-meant donations of used clothing, school materials and perishable foods, were creating problems of their own. One resident told the *Sydney Morning Herald* it was like “war-torn Somalia”:

“Victims from outlying areas around Innisfail, many of whom remain cut off by floodwaters, also said they were being overlooked by the relief effort. AnnMaree King, 43, who lives eight kilometres outside of Tully, had to travel by boat to reach Innisfail

²² <http://www.ema.gov.au/ema/emadisasters.nsf> downloaded 22/07/08

²³ Final Report p 128

²⁴ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200603/s1600597.htm> downloaded 15/07/08

for basic supplies. ‘The response has been good in one way but they seem to have slackened with people outside the immediate township and I’m really disgusted with that,’ Mrs King said.”²⁵

Premier Beattie, normally one of Australia’s most popular politicians, was “mobbed by angry victims” who had waited in the rain for more than five hours outside the Innisfail courthouse for state financial assistance. He promised more streamlined processes, and began personally handing out bottled water, telling people:²⁶ “We didn’t want the bloody cyclone, either...we’re trying to help you.”²⁷

Major-General Alan Stretton, who had led the response when Darwin was demolished by Cyclone Tracy in 1974,²⁸ told the *Sydney Morning Herald* the Larry aid effort lacked leadership and a high-profile co-ordinator should have already been appointed, “to keep the people (updated) on what is happening and convince them there is light at the end of the tunnel.”²⁹

That evening, Beattie announced that General Peter Cosgrove would take charge of the emergency aid effort in Far North Queensland. He said he had consulted with Prime Minister John Howard over the appointment, and defended the time taken to publicly announce it.³⁰ The full costs of the disaster were still emerging, but it was already clear that the recovery would take at least six months.

The Premier said he appreciated the efforts made so far by other people, but it was now time for someone like Peter Cosgrove to help with the “long, hard road” of recovery that lay ahead. Johnstone Shire Mayor, Neil Clarke, who had worked a “39 hour day” after the cyclone struck, was happy to hand over responsibility:

“I think we’ve handled it very well ‘til now, but the problems are really becoming apparent and growing. The logistics are getting overwhelming, with all of the help that we are being offered right through the nation. People are offering to give us goods and all that sort of thing. We now need to have people and places to store it, [so it can be] distributed...Money is certainly required. If the Premier has made [the decision to appoint Peter Cosgrove] I’m certainly not going to criticise him for that.”³¹

General Cosgrove and the Operation Recovery Task Force

General Peter Cosgrove, voted Australian of the Year in 2001, was the recently retired Chief of the Australian Defence Force. Days before the cyclone struck, he had handed over the first draft of his autobiography to the publisher. His military honours included the Military Cross for service in Vietnam; as a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) he also held Australia’s highest civil honour.

²⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, ‘Cosgrove to head Cyclone Larry effort’, 23 March 2006.’ Find further reference to people in outlying areas who had their first visit four days after the cyclone.

²⁶ Viellaris, R., ‘Hungry and heartbroken’. Courier-Mail, 23 March 2006.

²⁷ ‘In the Wake of Larry,’ The Bulletin, 4-04-2006. downloaded from <http://bulletin.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=140820>.

²⁸ Because of Darwin’s isolated position it took the main response forces, the Australian army and navy 10 days to sail there from Sydney after the cyclone.

²⁹ <http://www.smh.com.au/news/National/PM-defends-cyclone-relief-effort/2006/03/23>

³⁰ ABC Newsonline 24 March 2006, ‘Beattie defends Cyclone Larry Response’

³¹ Millar, L., ABC AM Radio, “Peter Cosgrove to clean up Cyclone Larry mess” <http://www.abc.net.au/am.content/2006/s1599658.htm> downloaded 15/7/2008

General Cosgrove became a national hero and earned Australia international prestige when he led a multinational United Nations intervention in East Timor in 1999 and 2000. Taking Australian troops into a country where bloody rioting had caused innumerable casualties, he slept alongside his troops, promised to “treat each soldier as his own son,” and completed the tour of duty without any loss of life.

As head of the Australian Defence Force, his logistics expertise had been called on in the response to the 2002 Bali Bombings³² and 2004 Asian Tsunami; as a young soldier, he had been a military commander during the clean-up of Darwin after Cyclone Tracy in 1974. All of these experiences shaped his view of the Cyclone Larry response. Common elements he identified in each included quick and decisive interdepartmental collaboration and “having the chequebook on the table.”³³

General Cosgrove had been following the progress of the cyclone on television, mentally rehearsing what would be needed, when the phone rang. It was Premier Beattie asking if Cosgrove would lead a Task Force for the Cyclone Larry recovery. Within 12 hours of his agreeing all but one of the original Operation Recovery Task Force (ORTF) had been named. As *The Bulletin* commented:

“Cosgrove might be the public face of the task force. But those appointed to work alongside him are no less formidable. They include Beattie’s former deputy, the abrasive Terry Mackenroth, former diplomat and chief executive for Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games Sandy Hollway, and [director-general of the Department of Premier and Cabinet] Ross Rolfe. ... ‘you couldn’t get a bunch of tougher bastards... a bigger bunch of grumpy old men. But just watch them rebuild this place.’ Beattie says: ‘They were chosen because they’re practical political hard-heads who guarantee results.’”³⁴

On Friday 24 March, General Cosgrove arrived in Innisfail and moved into the base that had been set up for the Task Force in the Shire Hall. His support team included media advisor Justin Coomber, previously working with Emergency Services Minister Pat Purcell, army Lieutenant Colonel Paul Hobbs as chief of staff, and two senior police officers, for community liaison. Back in Brisbane, their first point of contact was the Cyclone Larry Co-ordination Unit within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, set up to assist with policy and co-ordination support.

Innisfail now became the centre of activities. Frank Pagano and the State Disaster Co-ordination Centre moved from Cairns to the Innisfail TAFE, as did Queensland Health and a number of other agencies. Centrelink was back in its own office, the broken windows boarded over and a generator providing power.

³² Australia’s response was an excellent example of whole-of-government activity, with interdepartmental committees active and effective, a range of departments around the table and “rule books and timelines thrown out the window,” General Cosgrove told the 2007 ANZSOG Conference.

³³ Cosgrove, P, ‘Is collaboration easier in a crisis?’ speech to ANZSOG Conference, June 28, 2007.

³⁴ ‘Cyclone Cosgrove’, *The Bulletin*, 18 April 2006. Downloaded from <http://bulletin.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=140889> on 20-11-2007

Someone in charge

Premier Beattie gave the Task Force a broad mandate to “achieve the most efficient and speedy recovery of affected communities.”³⁵ It was to do this through “the widest possible consultation” with all affected parties and 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.”

With his past experience, his personal style, and his skill set, General Cosgrove needed no specific powers or authority to lead the ORTF. More than any other region, North Queensland respected the army, which had defended it against invasion threats during the Second World War, and which remained an important career choice for many of its young people. Cosgrove himself was greatly trusted, and embodied the leadership people were looking for. Task Force media officer Justin Coomber said:

“Before he came there were four days where every government agency and department was feverishly doing its own work in its own sector and area of expertise. The local council was doing a good job with emergency services. They were all doing great work, but the local people didn’t have a sense that there was one person in charge, one person co-ordinating everything, almost a figurehead they could go to with a problem. There were lots of government ministers, heads of department, all those sorts of people, but nobody really saying I’m here leading the way...even though the Premier was a frequent visitor, but he obviously had other commitments.

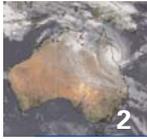
“When General Cosgrove walked in, he was a big commanding person and his presence automatically said to everyone, I am in control, I am going to do my best, we are going to get back on track. The community spirit raised, you could see people thinking, ‘oh there is somebody to listen, somebody in charge’.”

The day he arrived in Innisfail, Cosgrove convened his first meeting. Bruce Turner, of DPI&F was on the road with a colleague inspecting the extensive damage to the department’s infrastructure on the Atherton Tablelands, when General Cosgrove’s office called to invite him to a meeting about strategies for economic recovery. Already there, Turner found, was a wide variety of people, government, non-government and even some citizens shoulder-tapped from the street.

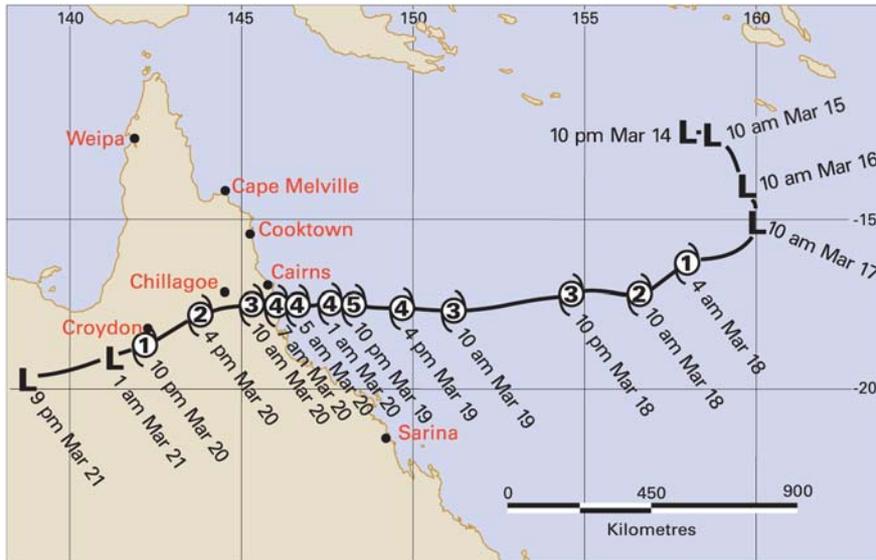
Cyclone Larry had caused the collapse of many of the drivers of the local economy. Their challenge was how to restore the community and its economy to long-term sustainability.

³⁵ Final Report, p 108

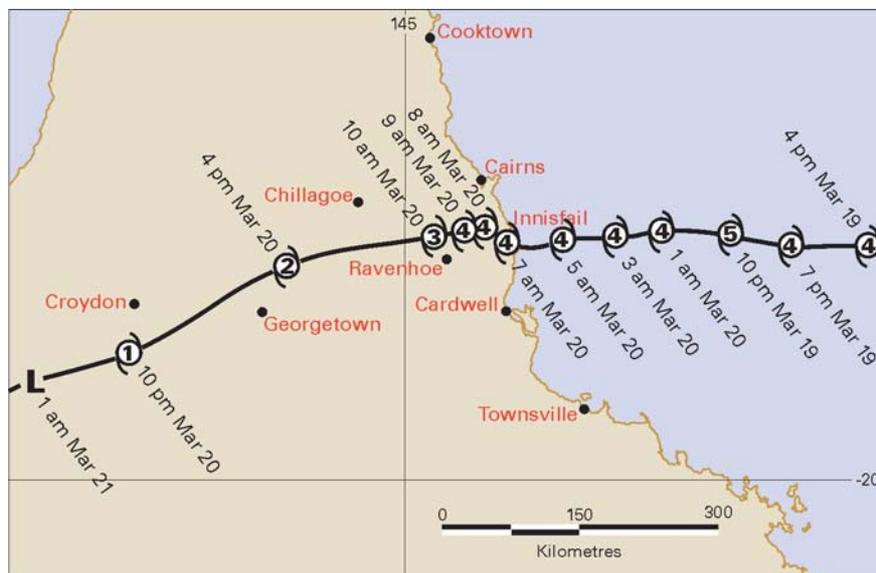
Exhibit 1 Path of the cyclone



2 Tropical cyclone *Larry*



The complete track of severe tropical cyclone *Larry*.



Cyclone *Larry's* track with a more detailed view of the landfall phase.

Exhibit 2: Participants in the whole-of-government co-ordinated response to Cyclone Larry

Federal: The Commonwealth Government of Australia
 State: The Queensland Government
 Local: Cairns City Council and the Shires of Atherton, Carowell, Cook, Croydon, Eacham, Etheridge Shire, Herberton, Johnstone and Mareeba

(A) Standing committees

Commonwealth Government		Role
AGCDTF	Australian Government Counter Disaster Task Force	Multi-agency policy-setting group
AGDRC	Australian Government Disaster Recovery Committee	Co-ordinating social and community recovery assistance across 27 agencies.
State Government		
SDMG	State Disaster Management Group	Peak disaster management body: strategic policy and planning
SDCG	State Disaster Co-ordination Group	Senior official support to State Disaster Management Group
SCRRC	State Community Recovery Committee	Departments and other agencies with a welfare focus

(B) Entities established for Cyclone Larry

BCC	Building Co-ordination Centre	Co-ordinates reconstruction efforts. One-stop shop with independent insurance advice.
ESG	Economic Strategy Group	Head office based: monitors economic impact and develops policy
HTF	Housing Task Force	Head office-based: co-ordinates consideration of all housing related issues
LGCC	Local Government Consultative Committee	Peak body for Mayors and Chief Executive Officers of affected councils to engage with Task Force.
ORIAG	Operation Recovery Industry Action Group	State government and industry recovery plans.
ORTF	Operation Recovery Task Force	Five-person team leading recovery
ORMG	Operation Recovery Management Group	Operational management for recovery. Operational Recovery Co-ordinator (ORC) is also the Executive Officer EMQ and link to SDMG
OSS	One Stop Shop for health and welfare services	On-ground presence for agencies involved in Community Recovery
	Public Officers of Assistance Task Force Steering Cttee	Reviewed and responded to public offers of assistance
SIDF	Strategic Industry Directions Forum	Head office: longer term economic outlook

(C) Roles and Relationships			
Queensland State Government	Member of	Operation Recovery Task Force Road Map roles, whole of government relationships	Member of
The Premier Peter Beattie Department of Premier and Cabinet (Ross Rolfe)	Chaired SDMG ESG lead agency HTF ORF SDMG (Chair)	Immediate response Appeal funds and offers of assistance Immediate response Community support, health and welfare Housing and reconstruction Economic recovery and employment Environment Public communications and involvement Appeal funds and offers of assistance Ongoing liaison between Ross Rolfe and Peter Shergold and later with Gen Cosgrove of ORF Whole of government and state-federal consultation	The Prime Minister John Howard Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Director-General of PMC (Peter Shergold)
Minister for Emergency Services Department of Emergency Services Director-General Emergency Service Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) Executive Director, EMQ - Operational recovery co-ordinator State Emergency Service – trained volunteers	ORMG SDMG (dep chair) Exec off. SDMG ORMG	Immediate response Community support, health and welfare Housing and reconstruction Public communications and involvement Emergency Management Liaison officers (EMLO) based in state and Canberra to assist with resources and skills. Delivery through National Emergency Management Co-ordination Centre (NEMCC) Request/deploys Australian Defence Force for first response: food, water, tarpaulins, logistics, aerial survey. NGO partners: Red Cross for emergency evacuation and accommodation; Salvation Army for emergency food. Also: Australian Broadcasting Corporation (formal agreement for emergency broadcasts)	The Attorney-General The Attorney-General's Department Emergency Management Australia (EMA) Director-General of EMA
		Immediate response Community, support health and welfare Economic recovery and employment Administers funds under NDRRA and distributes to individual departments for payment.	Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS)
Queensland Police Service Commissioner	ORMG ORF suppl SDMG	Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing Specialist response units including Public Safety Response Team Immediate response Community support, health and welfare	AGCDTF AGCDTF AGDRC
			Australian Defence Force

Department of Communities Director-General	HTF ORMG OSS SDMG	Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing DoC's distributes State Disaster Relief funding (SDRA) Centrelink maintains regular support and makes emergency payments from NDRRA (Federal funds) Centrelink and Department of Communities were Community Recovery partners in outreach, One Stop Shop and other services... Outreach, counselling, support partners: Red Cross, Life Line, Church Groups e.g. Centacare (Catholic Diocese of Cairns)	AGCDTF AGDRC ORMG OSS	Department of Human Services Centrelink service delivery agency for regular support payments. Chief executive of Centrelink
Department of Child Safety		Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing		
Department of Education, Training and the Arts Education Queensland Director-General	SDMG	Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing Liaison with army, QBuild		
Department of Employment and Industrial Relations	ORMG	Immediate response Economic recovery and employment		Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
Department of Local Govt, Planning, Sport and Recreation Director-General	BCC HTF LGCC ORMG SDMG	Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing Appeal funds and offers of assistance Partner with affected local governments for outreach and other assistance		
Queensland Health Director-General	ORMG SDMG	Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing	AGCDTF	Department of Health and Ageing
Department of Housing Director-General	HTF (chair) ORMG OSS SDMG	Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing Housing and reconstruction Partner with Tourism North Queensland to provide housing; Residential Tenancies Authority for private rent relief (also on HTF). FaCSIA has funds for special ex gratia payments outside of NDRRA in severe emergency	AGDRC HTF SDMG	Department of Families, Communities, Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) Aboriginal Councils: Hopevale; Lockhart River; Wujal Wujal
Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries Director-General	ESG ORIAG (co-chair) ORMG SIDF key partner SDMG	Immediate response Economic recovery and employment First assessment of economic impact within 7 days Other agencies: Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority (concessional loans for farms and small business through NDRRA) Growcom (horticulture industry Advocate: industry support officers) and Dairy Farmers Task Force (sector support group for clean-up)		Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Department of Public Works QBuild Director-General	HTF ORMG SDMG	Immediate response Housing and reconstruction		

Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation Director-General	ESG ORIAG (co-chair) ORMG SDMG	Immediate response Economic recovery and employment	Australian Taxation Office
Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development	ORIAG SDIF key partner	Economic recovery and employment Environment Public Communications and Involvement Tourism Queensland worked with Department of State Development to promote availability of tourist venues	Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources
Queensland Treasury	ESG HTF ORIAG SDCG	Economic recovery and employment Participant but not member SDMG	AGCDTF Department of Finance
Department of Mines and Energy Powerlink and Ergon Energy	SDCG	Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing	
Dept of Natural Resources and Water	ORMG	Immediate response	
Department of Main Roads		Immediate response	
Environmental Protection Agency Queensland Parks and Wildlife service	ORMG	Immediate response Environment	
Queensland Corrective Services		Immediate response	
Queensland Transport Director-General	ESG ORMG SDMG	Economic recovery and employment Immediate response Community support, health and wellbeing Economic recovery and employment	
Department of Justice and the Attorney-General	OSS	Immediate response Community support, health and welfare Free legal aid with Legal Aid Queensland	
Other agencies			
Queensland Building Services Authority	HTF BCC	Housing and reconstruction BCC partners include Insurance Council of Australia, Master Builders of Australia, State Insurance Commission; Housing Industry Association; Building Designers Association of Queensland . Also two independent insurance assessors appointed by Queensland Treasury.	
Far North Queensland Natural Resource Management Ltd	ORIAG	Immediate response Economic recovery and employment	Geoscience Australia
Insurance Commissioner	HTF	Housing and reconstruction	
James Cook University	ORIAG	Housing and reconstruction Immediate response	AGCDTF AGCDTF AGCDTF AGCDTF Bureau of Meteorology Coastwatch Australian Maritime Safety Authority AusAID

Committee membership

(D) Standing committees (Commonwealth agencies)		Standing Committees (state agencies)	
Australian Government Counter Disaster Task Force (AGCDTF)	Australian Government Disaster Recovery Committee (AGDRC)	State Disaster Management Group (SDMG) (chief executives)	State Disaster Co-ordination Group (SDCG) (senior officials as operational support)
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (chair)		Department of the Premier and Cabinet (chair)	
Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA)	Emergency Management Australia Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) (chair)	Department of Emergency Services Department of Housing	State Community Recovery Committee
Centrelink (Department of Human Services)	Centrelink (Department of Human Services)	Department of Communities	Department of Communities (chair)
Department of health and Ageing		Queensland Health	Centrelink (Regional office)
AusAID		Queensland Police Service	Australian Red Cross
Department of Transport and Regional Affairs (DOTARS)	14 other agencies	Department of Education, Training and the Arts	Other religious and voluntary agencies.
Department of Finance		Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation	
Australian Defence Force		Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries	
Bureau of Meteorology		Department of Public Works	
Coastwatch		Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation	
Australian Maritime Safety Authority		Department of Natural Resources and Water	
		Environmental Protection Agency	
		Queensland Transport	

(E) Cyclone Larry special committees

Operation Recovery Task Force	Operation Recovery Management Group (senior representation)	Operation Recovery Industry Action Group	Housing Task Force
General Peter Cosgrove (chair)	Department of Emergency Services, Emergency Management Queensland, through Frank Pagano (State)		Department of Housing (chair)
Ross Rolfe (Department of the Premier and Cabinet)	Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (state)	Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (co-chair)	Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Sandy Hollway (public involvement)	Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation (state)	Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation (co-chair)	Department of Communities
Terry Mackenroth (appeal)	Department of Communities (State)	Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development	Department of Planning, Local Government, Sport and Recreation
John Mulcahy (insurance industry)	Centrelink (Commonwealth)	Queensland Treasury	Department of Public Works
With support from Department of Emergency Services, Australian Defence Force, Queensland Police.	Queensland Police Service	Far North Queensland Natural Resource Management Ltd (NGO)	Queensland Treasury
Local Government Consultation Committee			
Atherton Shire	Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (state)	James Cook University (Old)	Queensland Building Services Authority
Cairns City Council	Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation (state)	Geoscience Australia	Insurance Commissioner (state)
Cardwell Shire	Queensland Health	Economic Strategy Group	Building Co-ordination Centre
Cook Shire	Department of Housing (state)	Department of the Premier and Cabinet (lead)	Insurance Council of Australia
Croydon Shire	Department of Public Works (OBuild) (state)	Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries	Independent Insurance Adviser
Eacham Shire		Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation	Department of Planning, Local Government, Sport and Recreation
Etheridge Shire	Department of Natural Resources and Water (state)	Queensland Treasury	Queensland Building Services Authority
Herberton Shire	Environmental Protection Agency (state)	Queensland Transport (as needed)	One Stop Shop
Johnstone Shire	Queensland Transport		Centrelink (Commonwealth)
Mareeba Shire	Department of Mines and Energy		Department of Communities (State)
			Department of Housing (state)
			Department of Justice and the Attorney General (state)