

# Brisbane staff rise to flood challenge

With major suppliers of power and communications services in Brisbane affected by the recent floods, the ACMA has recognised the importance of improving its planning for natural disasters.

The ACMA's reliance on computing and communications infrastructure, including the use of terrestrial mobile networks for emergency communications, has prompted it to investigate dual mode satellite/terrestrial mobile phones. This should ensure continuity of communications for future emergency situations.

As the flood crisis unravelled in mid January, the Brisbane team, whose office overlooks the Brisbane River, had an incredible view of the rising floodwaters. The team observed many unmanned boats, pontoons and other objects careering down the rapids. Some boats passed miraculously under bridges; others worth thousands of dollars were smashed like toothpicks and sunk in seconds.

In consultation with Robert Johnston, Acting Executive Manager of Operations Branch, senior members of the Field Operations team planned a strategy to ensure the safety of staff and continuity of services provided by the ACMA Brisbane Office.

Staff contacted local emergency organisations (Police, Fire and State Emergency Service) to advise that the ACMA would maintain its capability to assist with radiocommunications interference, frequency coordination and congestion affecting emergency operations, and to ensure they had the correct national operations contact point and details.

By midday on 12 January, the Brisbane office had lost its VoIP phone system and emails could no longer be accessed, either through laptops or desktop computers in the office. Shortly after, power was cut to the Brisbane CBD, with a generator providing back-up power to the ACMA office.

In anticipation of these events, Field Operations staff had outfitted several vehicles with all the necessary equipment to support emergency services in the case of interference to their networks. It appeared the flood was going to cut the city in half, so the vehicles were home garaged to the north and south of the city to allow access for possible future emergencies.

Due to the road closures, congestion and damage from the floods, the office was closed, with staff only accessing the building to check IT systems and ensure security.

The remainder of the Brisbane team worked from home using remote access software and, where available, their own IT provider to communicate with other offices. Blackberries proved to be an important tool in the emergency, ensuring that communications and emails could continue to be used throughout the duration of the floods.

In the aftermath of the floods, many of the Brisbane team offered their services to help in the general city-wide clean-up. These staff worked in very hot, muddy and trying conditions, demonstrating the spirit of Brisbane and the ACMA team.

The Brisbane office was reopened on Monday 17 January, although mains power, IT communications and air conditioning remained unavailable for a further period. ☎

By the afternoon of 12 January, the flood waters were beginning to cut access to the Brisbane ACMA office.

