

WELLBEING THROUGH THE FLOODS

Matthew, McNamara, *Central Regional Maintenance Coordinator*, Seqwater
(Co-Writer) Kimberlee, Pithers, *Principal - HSW*, Seqwater

ABSTRACT

The 2022 floods in South East Queensland posed significant challenges for Seqwater, the regions bulk water authority, which lead to a comprehensive response to ensure the welfare of their workers when responding to an emergency event. This paper explores Seqwater's post-flood debrief and investigations, focusing on their efforts to provide adequate accommodation for workers during an emergency event. The project encompassed understanding of the operational risks for critical assets, developing minimum accommodation standards, conducting risk assessments, and exploring installation options within existing assets. The paper presents a discussion of the investigation methodology, key results, potential learnings for the water industry, and welfare during emergency events, and serves as an important model for other businesses in the water industry.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 2022 floods in South East Queensland presented significant challenges to both the regions infrastructure and in turn the welfare of workers involved in critical operations during the event and subsequent response.

Seqwater's Safe for Life Promise reflects our commitment to keeping ourselves, each other and our communities health, safe and well at work and at home. To achieve this promise, Seqwater leaders recognise the importance of worker welfare during times of emergency, Seqwater embarked on a project that encompassed a multifaceted approach. Their objectives included understanding the operational risks, establishing minimum accommodation standards, conducting thorough risk assessments, and exploring the installation of accommodation facilities within existing sites. This paper explores the strategies employed by Seqwater in their endeavour to mitigate the impact of the floods on their workforce and provides insights into the investigation methodology, key findings, implications for the water industry, and reflections on issue resolution.

The investigation methodology employed by Seqwater was guided by Seqwater's values of Integrity, Respect, Care and Courage. It involved a comprehensive post-flood debrief process and assessment of the challenges faced during the floods. By identifying key focus areas, Seqwater was able to gather valuable data and insights to guide their subsequent actions.

Understanding the risks at critical sites was a crucial step in ensuring worker health, safety, and wellbeing, and risk assessments were conducted that could impact these sites faced during the floods.

To address the accommodation needs of their workers, Seqwater recognised the importance of developing minimum accommodation standards. Through a comprehensive review of existing guidelines and best practices, a set of standards was formulated that served as a benchmark for ensuring suitable accommodation facilities. These standards aimed to provide not only physical comfort but also psychological support for the

workers, recognising the importance of their welfare when potentially faced with long periods on-site.

Furthermore, risk assessments were undertaken for priority sites to identify specific measures and recommendations for mitigating risks. By evaluating data collected through detailed data collection and analysis processes, Seqwater was able to identify potential vulnerabilities and propose suitable mitigation strategies to enhance worker safety.

An integral part of Seqwater's approach was exploring fit for purpose accommodation options within existing sites. By leveraging a risk-based approach, Seqwater sought to optimise resources, minimise costs, and implement a phased approach suitable for existing asset capacity. This approach required careful consideration of site adaptation and upgrades to meet the minimum accommodation standards.

The discussion in this paper will highlight the investigation methodology employed by Seqwater and present key results and findings. Seqwater's commitment to living our values to guide our approach to worker welfare during the floods serves as an important model for other organisations operating in the water industry, emphasising the critical role of preparedness, risk management, and proactive accommodation solutions in an emergency. The paper will conclude with reflections on issue resolution and recommendations for future preparedness, emphasising the importance of worker welfare as an integral component of effective emergency management strategies.

2.0 DISCUSSION

2.1 Plan

Seqwater's approach consisted of two key focus areas which aimed to

1. Develop a risk profile for all sites that require accommodation during an emergency event, specifically identifying;
 - a. Low, Medium, High risk exposure sites
 - b. The ability to store emergency/accommodation equipment within the site's current capacity
 - c. The requirement for workers to be on site during an emergency
2. Develop minimum accommodation standards including;
 - a. Sleeping arrangements (e.g. hotels, motels, sleeping on site)
 - b. Food/cooking requirements
 - c. Personal items e.g., PPE, medications, clothing packs

2.2 Risk Assessment Methodology and Data Collection

Seqwater utilised the existing risk enterprise framework which allowed the project team to develop an assurance tool with a specific criterion. The criteria were designed to gain consistent site-based risk profiles to assist the project team.

The key questions were:

- I. Does the site require workers during an emergency event to remain operational?
- II. What is the likelihood of the site being affected by another emergency event?

III. What was the consequence of the last emergency event that affected your site?

Once this data was collected, analysis was completed to understand the critical sites which required immediate risk management strategies. There were 24 sites with a risk profile of medium risk or above.

2.3 Development of minimum accommodation standard

Seqwater sought to review existing accommodation standards or baseline models from within the water industry, with little success. The review then consisted of regulatory and legislation requirements which were applicable to other industries and specifically looked to call out basic levels of accommodation that would be expected as part of meeting general WHS obligations, while also considering the wellbeing of staff responding to an event.

This allowed Seqwater to identify key areas and criteria that were needing to be addressed in the minimum accommodation standard. The minimum accommodation includes criteria relating to infrastructure, cleanliness, safety, amenities, sustainability, and compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

Below is a snippet from the Minimum Emergency Accommodation Standard

1 Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to detail Seqwater's approach to the minimum acceptable standards for accommodation when responding to an emergency event.

2 Scope

This guideline applies to all Seqwater assets which are required to accommodate workers during an emergency event to ensure all workers are provided with consistent and acceptable facilities and supplies to manage their health, safety and wellbeing during the emergency response.

3 Facilities and Supplies

The hierarchy of controls should be applied when determining the facilities and supplies for each site. It is Seqwater's preference that where possible Workers are accommodated off site at nearby motels / hotels or rented accommodation.

Where facilities and supplies are required on sites, they will include: toilets, drinking water, washing and eating facilities. To be acceptable, these facilities must be in good working order, clean, safe and accessible.

When considering how to provide and maintain facilities that are adequate and accessible, you must consider all relevant matters, including:

- the nature of the work being carried out at the workplace
- the nature of the hazards at the workplace
- the size, location and nature of the workplace
- the number and composition of the Workers at the workplace
- the ability to meet the minimum standards during a power outage (including lighting)
- ability to provide working communication through WIFI or mobile service

2.4 Business buy-in

Seqwater recognised that to achieve success, the project needed to be led by leaders in the business that work directly with frontline workers. Leadership commitment, our current work driving cultural transformational and aligning the work to our Safe for Life Promise and our values, helped secure a strong acceptance that Seqwater needed to improve

facilities for worker welfare. Through utilising a grass roots approach leaders were able to reinforce commitment through providing capacity of resources, both workers and financial, for successful roll out and implementation.

2.5 Gap Analysis between new standard and identified sites.

Post leadership commitment the project team completed a gap analysis between the developed standard and what was already available on the identified critical sites. This critical part of the project identified what could be repurposed in an event (Meeting rooms etc) what wasn't possible and what sites were quick wins to provide off site arrangements. This enabled the team to understand what the capacity was at sites and what processes/facilities required further investigation.

The wet season was fast approaching, and it was recognised that a phased implementation be developed to ensure the most effective delivery that would enable immediate improvements to the accommodation standards and importantly improve the wellbeing for site based employees as quickly as possible in the occurrence of an emergency event. The phased approach covered the following:

Phase One

This enabled the workers to receive standing arrangements for external accommodation where identified, temporary accommodation at sites where nothing else was possible. All identified sites were allocated, beds and bedding, improved PPE availability and storage. It was evident that as part of the project a logistics function would be required for responding to future emergencies, this function would allow operational workers to focus on core duties in responding to the event.

Phase Two

Prior to implementing additional supplies and facilities to enable compliance to the minimum accommodation guidelines, an assurance activity was required to be conducted to understand the individual sites status and limitations.

Where possible Seqwater will locate external accommodations for workers to be housed off site, to promote cognitive and physical boundaries between work duties and rest to minimise the physiological risk of the emergency event. It is anticipated that some critical sites will require capital investment to provide ongoing facilities and supplies during an emergency event.

2.6 Positive Impacts on Operational Efficiency

Implementing the accommodation standard has supported leaders demonstrate their commitment to our Safe for Life Promise and care for their workers. It has also encouraged a culture of continuous improvement within operational teams. The implementation of regular monitoring, self-assessments, and assurance activities to meet the standard requirements created and continues to create opportunities for feedback and identification of areas for improvement. This has fostered a mindset of innovation, problem-solving, and ongoing refinement of operational processes.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Seqwater's response to the 2022 floods in South East Queensland demonstrates the application of their Safe for Life Promise through its commitment to the welfare of their

workers. Through living our values, Seqwater was able to proactively address the challenges posed by future floods, given the improvements we have identified and implemented after the event. The investigation methodology, encompassing post-flood debriefs, risk assessments, and accommodation guidelines, provided a solid foundation for Seqwater's actions. The implications of their efforts resonate throughout the business, supporting our work to drive cultural transformation, emphasising the critical role of effective emergency management and accommodation solutions in protecting workers during times of emergency. Seqwater is committed to health, safety and wellbeing our workers and will continue to prioritise employee wellbeing, particularly in the face of adversity.

4.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Seqwater would like to give thanks to the Project team: Katie Jones, Michelle Booth, Cheryne White, Leigh O'Neil.

5.0 REFERENCES

Workers Accommodation Act 1952
Pastoral Workers Accommodation Action 1980
WHS Regulation QLD 2011
Managing the work environment and facilities COP 2021