

Appendix D Key Communication Considerations during events

Refer to Figure 1 for reporting lines

Communication options during events

Telstra mobile communications – guesstimate (untried) run time on new generator after power outage is 8 days coverage.

Satellite Internet Terminal - Starlink -for internet or for wifi calling (mobile phones)

Located *where?*

Password:

Activate instruction here (if not all ready activated pre-event)

Using UHF Radio channels in the area:

Handhelds (green radios): At Paluma use SES Channel 303, Near Chicks Rd use SES 306 (Mt Zero) At Hidden Valley use SES 302. Calls to any repeater will be retransmitted by all repeaters.

SES / RFS vehicle – older radios: SES Channel 3 for Paluma, SES 6 for Mt Zero & SES 2 for Hidden Valley.

WhatsApp

Paluma Alerts WhatsApp group for internal messaging to local residents if necessary.

Facebook

The Facebook group - Paluma /Hidden Valley News has useful local updates on going-ons during events and could be used for getting info out to locals.

Helpful information on communication needs and experiences from the Feb 25 event.

One of the keys to effective operation of the local (Paluma/Hidden Valley) coordination centre is good communications. The centre needs good comms. with the local government coordination centres (LGCCs) during events e.g. Townsville City Council, Charters Towers & possibly Hinchinbrook shires. The Paluma / Hidden Valley centre needs some way to be across the needs of all residents, via phone, texts, emails, social media & WhatsApp. It also needs to be able to communicate with volunteer support moving around the local area between Paluma & Hidden Valley. Contact with helicopters attempting to land in the cloud prone area is also desirable.

It is also important that the local community can contact family & friends outside the area.

Telstra. The extreme rain event in Feb 2025 was accompanied by the total loss of mains power to Paluma. The associated failure of the Telstra backup generator meant that all Paluma Telstra services were lost – mobile phones & any remaining landline phones or ADSL. The fortunate loan of Star link equipment proved an effective substitute. However

this dependence on Telstra revealed the Paluma community's vulnerability in the aftermath of such weather.

Since then, Telstra have installed a new backup generator. A technician at the site advised it is supported by a 1000L fuel tank giving a guesstimated 8 days run time. It has been suggested that local TCC staff might be trained to refuel the unit if necessary, however the TCC have shown little enthusiasm to accept any responsibility for Telstra equipment in the past.

The TCC have increased the bandwidth of their Paluma WiFi from 2Mbps to 5Mbps. This might be enough as a backup for the Paluma Coordination centre to maintain contact with LDCCs but is unlikely to satisfy the needs of local community.

The Paluma District Community Association is considering having a Star Link system of their own as a backup.

West of Paluma there is no mobile phone coverage. Most residents use their mobile phones via Wi-Fi calling over their satellite derived Wi-Fi. This means they are only contactable when near their Wi-Fi or visiting Paluma. Be prepared to leave a message requesting a callback.

Some older residents west of Paluma still rely on landline phones. This service is totally independent of the Paluma Telstra site. However, it has failed in both the 2019 & 2025 extreme weather events. This may be their only form of communication so be conscious of the need to have someone check on these older residents.

UHF Repeaters. SES have a network of interconnected UHF repeaters at Paluma, Hidden Valley & Mt Zero (between Paluma & HV). Each of these failed in February 2025 for various reasons. Paluma due mains power outage & TCC generator problems, HV due to flooding of the HV fire shed & Mt Zero apparently due to lightning damage associated with a storm just before the rain began. The police techs are looking at ways to minimise some of these vulnerabilities.

This repeater network should allow the local Coordination Centre to maintain contact with volunteer support moving around the area. SES & RFB members should be able to show others how to use the equipment. Calls via any repeater will be re-transmitted from the others however to make a call the UHF radio will have to be on the channel of the local repeater. This is Channel 3 (303) for Paluma, 6 (306) for Mt Zero & 2 (302) for Hidden Valley. The single digit channel is for the older radios, the three-digit channel is for the newer Motorola radios.

Satellite Phones. RFBs at Paluma & Hidden Valley should be entitled to sat phones which will enable comms with Helicopters.