

# Media Release

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## Unsung Flood Heroes Map Out Innovative Crisis Response

2 June 2011

Not all of the heroes who emerged from the Brisbane flood disaster used tugboats, helicopters or even shovels – some, like location intelligence expert Dominique Berger, were armed simply with a laptop and an internet connection.

Ms Berger was one of a brigade of volunteers from leading Australian Geographic Information System (GIS) and data mapping specialist Esri Australia, who worked with Brisbane City Council around the clock for five days during the crisis to develop and maintain an interactive, online flood mapping system.

Known as the Brisbane City Council (BCC) Flood Map, the system compiled flood data from across disaster-struck Brisbane – such as flood peaks, road closures and evacuation centres – onto a map to provide a comprehensive, real-time picture of the flood.

FloodMap was a key information source for emergency response teams and the Brisbane City Council, guiding recovery operations and supporting critical decisions.

More than three million members of the public also accessed the map at the height of the crisis, to view the scope of damage and access important updates.

The importance of the BCC Flood Map was acknowledged when the project was selected from an international pool of 100,000 nominees to receive a 2011 Special Achievement in GIS Award, presented annually by Esri Inc. to recognise excellence in the application of their GIS technology.

Although the team's efforts were crucial to one of Australia's largest disaster response operations, and lead to a landmark change in the way Australia responds to large-scale crises, Ms Berger said she and her colleagues didn't feel heroic.

"We all live in Brisbane and had family, friends and clients affected by the floods, so it became very personal for us," Ms Berger said.

"We all knew what the technology was capable of and how useful the Flood Map could be

to the response efforts - we didn't think twice about helping out.

“Like everyone else, we wanted to do our part. We wanted to make a difference.”

An important aspect of the BCC Flood Map was a function which allowed users to turn on and off information layers as needed, such as property damage and evacuation centre locations, on the one map.

Throughout the floods, Esri Australia’s team of five volunteers continuously updated the BCC Flood Map with information fed through from local and state government officials and emergency crews on the ground.

Ms Berger, who was working from home at the time, said the data trickled in slowly at first but, as the flood-waters rose and more and more suburbs were inundated, the scale of the disaster began to reveal itself.

“The data came in faster and faster and the list of information feeds tripled in size in about an hour,” she said.

“I could see how many roads were being shut off and how fast the water was rising – that's when I knew it was a terrible flood – significantly worse than what we first thought.

“It really spurred me on to work harder and get new information on the map as quickly as possible – to pitch in and do what I could.”

A second flood map developed using Esri technology, was also the first in Australia to make extensive use of a social media viewer during a time of disaster – a technology that crowd sourced tweets, Flickr photos and YouTube videos and linked them to their relevant location on the map.

“This was a monumental moment in our history because it provided every Australian with a direct connection to how communities themselves were responding to the floods,” Ms Berger said.

“It was the first time during a crisis situation in this country that such a massive collection of community-generated material and official information had been combined on the one interface.

“It made me feel that what I was doing was part of something extremely valuable and I'm so proud to have been able to help.”

Since the Brisbane Floods, Esri Australia’s data mapping solutions have also been used to assist with emergency response during Tropical Cyclone Yasi in North Queensland.

Ms Berger said the technology has also been extensively used following the Japan earthquakes and tsunami.

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**About Esri Australia**

Esri Australia has a 33 year history of providing location intelligence and data mapping solutions that help organisations make smart business decisions. The combination of local expertise and world-leading Esri GIS technology has helped thousands of government departments and commercial organisations to turn their data, information and knowledge into collective insight to reveal opportunity.

**About GIS**

Geographic Information Systems are a key piece of technology used in thousands of organisations Australia-wide from the military and government, to the insurance and mining sector. Australia's GIS industry currently stands at over \$2.1 billion and more than 300,000 organisations across the world use Esri GIS.