



Disaster planning in East Timor

THE AUSTRALIAN-LED INTERNATIONAL STABILISATION FORCE (ISF) UNDERTOOK EMERGENCY REPAIRS TO SEVERAL ROADS, CULVERTS, DRAINS AND A SCHOOL IN DILI



The year 2011 may very well go down in history as a year of great natural disasters, and East Timor was among the many nations in the Pacific Region hit by Mother Nature – specifically with flooding rains in early February.

The Australian-led International Stabilisation Force (ISF) undertook emergency repairs to several roads, culverts, drains and a school in Dili, after receiving a late-night request from East Timor's President Jose Ramos-Horta.

Heavy rain over several days caused minor flooding and landslides in the Dili area, putting a number of roads, schools and buildings at risk of serious damage.

ISF Commander Colonel Mick Reilly received the call on Sunday 6 February and realised the situation demanded immediate action.

"Dili is closely surrounded by mountains, so during the wet season, they act like funnels, channelling water down onto the city below. After heavy rain, such as what happened over the past few days, it was inevitable roads and homes would be at risk," Colonel Reilly said.

After attending a briefing at the Presidential Palace, Colonel Reilly and an ISF engineering team immediately agreed to evaluate the areas most in need of assistance.

By 2.30am, having made an on-site evaluation with Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, Colonel Reilly advised the Prime Minister that ISF would begin work within hours.

At 8am more than 30 ANZAC team members and the Dili Fire Brigade – using a combination of 'elbow grease' and earth-moving equipment – had commenced work.

Their tasks primarily consisted of removing silt and debris that had completely blocked drains, covered a major section of road and threatened to flood a school.

Combat engineer Lieutenant Gary Breen said the buildup of silt and debris had reached a critical point.

"The drains and culverts were completely blocked around the road intersection and were starting to dissolve the roads' foundations. Another day or two of heavy rain and it would have been beyond repair," Lt Breen said.

By 6.30pm, work was completed and both sites had been spared from major damage.

While visiting the work sites, the Prime Minister thanked ISF for their assistance and commented that the seasonal floods and landslides in Dili were quite small when compared to the experiences of Queensland residents.

