

From:
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Submission by to Flood Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 7 April 2022 5:43:50 PM
Attachments: [IS NSWSES Ready for the next major flood season.docx](#)

Attached is my submission to the above Flood Inquiry.

After thirty three years of work in flood management positions in this area it is frustrating to witness the blatant mismanagement of floods by the current NSWSES organization.

I hope your review will provide the necessary recommendations for an improved, essential organization for NSW

Yours sincerely,

7th April 2022

SUBMISSION TO INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO NSW FLOODS 2022

inquiry@floodinginquiry.nsw.gov.au

To: Professor Mary O’Kane AC and Michael Fuller APM

Is NSW SES capable of managing future flood operations ?

The ANSWER IS CLEARLY “NO ”, in its current form/structure

The obvious mismanagement of the last three floods in the Northern Rivers clearly demonstrates the urgent need for a total re-structure of the NSW SES in order that they are ready for the next major flood season.

It seems that State HQ management team have little or no idea of the urgency of how floods occur in this tiny corner of the State and why it is impossible to manage flood operations from a distance.

STRIKE TEAMS as used by the RFS to manage bushfires located hundreds of kilometres away from where the Valleys are in flood will not work.

Why the NSW SES have abandoned a system that worked and served the communities perfectly well for nearly FIFTY YEARS is beyond understanding. Although the centralised EMPIRE in Wollon aregong is probably an obvious answer

The flood management could have been much better for 2017 and 2022. Apparently little has been learned by State HQ

The damages to businesses in the CBD in the three recent floods were far greater than those in 1974

Also the 1974 flood lasted for almost TWO WEEKS! Not just a few days as in 2017. We have been told of critical changes being made to improve NSW SES performance after the 2017 operation, but apart from increasing permanent staff numbers in W’gong and adding another layer of management there appears to be little change.

With my 33 years experience in flood management in the Richmond/Tweed, I have interest in these areas.

Flood Mitigation requires seeking a more permanent solution

Reviewing flood management experiences from major events from 1955 to 1995 or later to clearly demonstrate the current management errors:-

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND RECRUITED VOLUNTEERS to form a FLOOD DIVISION of SES to manage each Valley is urgently needed to solve the poor performance of SES.

Hourly Radio Bulletins and Warnings to both farmers/rural residents as well as urban communities of imminent danger

Why not still use Commercial Radio as well ??

Clarence 2GF - Richmond 2LM ---- Tweed 2MW Brunswick/Byron use 2LM/2MW.

Not everyone listens to the ABC!

NSW SES Volunteers. There has been a tendency since 1989 to focus Volunteer recruitment and training on storm damage, recovery and searches etc

Older SES Members with years of flood knowledge and experience, not interested/capable of climbing on roofs were discouraged from continuing their membership of SES.

This obviously suited the thinking of SES State HQ in Wollongong, who seem dedicated to building an Empire of permanent staff in that location, and they could supply FIFO STRIKE TEAMS with little or no local knowledge. The Incident Commander for 2017 came from DUBBO!

Why not harvest the knowledge of those local experienced persons to improve future performance of SES flood operations? I can hear the chorus from Wollongong saying "we have all the local flood info on "Intelligence Cards" so who needs the old timers"

But if most of them cannot even pronounce the local town/village names correctly then the detailed flood information is wasted or possibly ill-directed.

FLOODS in the TWEED, RICHMOND/WILSONS and CLARENCE systems impact on WHOLE VALLEYS and based on my experience should be managed LOCALLY due to the FAST ONSET AND RAPID CHANGES THAT OCCUR FROM VERY HEAVY RAIN (All three floods in Richmond/Wilsons Valley in Feb/Mar 2022 are prime examples)

These three Valleys have complex catchments and are quite heavily populated in the rural areas, where residents travel daily to work, school etc in the large centres like Murwillumbah, Lismore , Grafton etc

Flood heights/Road information used to be collated and broadcast hourly over the radio with far less “flood rescues” from motorists driving into floodwaters.

LOCAL SES HQs such as LISMORE, MURWILLUMBAH and GRAFTON would be quite capable of managing the flood operations in their respective Valleys with support provided by the current Region HQ in particular for Helicopter co-ordination across the area from Tweed to Clarence as well as other external support as requested by the coordinating LHQ.

From 1955 until 1990 this system of local flood management worked very well and the damages seen in the last three floods particularly in Lismore were unheard of!, due to constant and appropriate warnings over the radio, not to mention the reduced livestock losses.

In this period BoM provided the FORECASTS and NSW SES interpreted the impact of the forecasts on each valley community. This does not happen now and all we hear from NSW SES is confused “EVACUATION ORDERS”

There are experienced and capable Engineers on local Flood Mitigation County Councils as well as Academic Staff (Engineers) at SCU and if recruited would be able to communicate with BoM Forecasters to provide some local input other than just the raw data obtained from automatic gauges, that would assist BoM in refining accuracy and timing of the forecasts. Lismore SES has many gauge readers and others reporting on road conditions that provide this local content.

I have included my Service Record below so you can see that I am speaking from experience. I would be happy to add to these comments either face to face or in writing.

Yours sincerely,

6th April 2022

Service History:-