

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Tuesday, 12 April 2022 6:17:02 PM

Your details

Title

First name

Last name

Email

Postcode

Submission details

I am making this submission as A resident in a flood-affected area

Submission type I am making a personal submission

Consent to make submission public I would like this submission to remain anonymous

Share your experience or tell your story

Your story I have observed the function of Lismore City Council from both inside and outside the organisation. They have played a contributing role to this disaster in a number of ways which are outlined in section 1.1. I have my own personal story from this flood that is detailed following. On Wednesday the 23rd February the land surrounding my home began to flood very

quickly. I am on a hill approx 800 metres above Lismore. My home is 1metre off the ground. At 6.34 pm on Wednesday the 23rd of February I placed a call to the SES to get help as my carport was flooding quickly and my car looked as if it would float. My husband and I lifted our air-conditioning motor onto a ladder and moved cars and anything else that we could physically manage to move. At 7.39 I received a text from the SES with a little smiley face asking to discuss my flooded carport. I called the SES back and explained what we had done and suggested that based on previous experience that they should take a good look at Lismore. I cannot fully recall the exact wording but it was something along the lines that they were watching the BOM

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#)

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

There are many contributing factors that when considered together demonstrate a complete systemic failure. Post the 2017 flood there was much discussion about the role of the SES, broken lines of communication, lack of coordination and lack of understanding of the roles of each party, in particular local farmers that watch rainfall incessantly. There has been no lessons learned from the 2017 flood and absolutely no implementation of any changes. The Lismore City Council has been running a flood plain management committee for nearly 12 years. The very title implies that they have a role in managing or a contribution to governance of the flood plain. Nothing could be further from the truth. Despite the council losing 10's of millions of dollars from the 2017 floods, the community and businesses of Lismore losing everything, the Flood Plain management committee has done nothing material at all. There has been no lobbying of Government for funds to undertake preparation works, there has been no work done

to change the planning scheme so that missiles such as containers, trailers etc were not part of permitted conditions of DA's on the flood plain and there has been no work undertaken to develop a land buy back scheme. The lack of focus and outcomes of this committee must be a contributing factor as by its very existence it misled the people of Lismore to believe that something was being done. The other contributing factor to failure within the Lismore City Council was the merry go round of General Managers. There had been 5 GM's within as many years and the quality of their work seemed irrelevant. Councillors would do deals with each other to replace them at their whim. This resulted in a lack of corporate knowledge, a lack of willingness to take the necessary steps to act when rain had been incessant and in this particular case a lack of attendance in the local area. The LCC website states that post the 2017 floods they put the following in place. In March 2017, the Lismore flood levee was overtopped for the first time, causing one of the most damaging floods in living memory in terms of material and community destruction. Following the flood, Lismore City Council launched its Flood Ready project to develop a comprehensive, community-wide action plan for natural disasters. Working with emergency services, local agencies and community groups, the Lismore Flood Ready plan provides a clear framework on how to be prepared and resilient before, during and after a natural disaster. None of this happened at all.

On Thursday the 24th February the Governance officer of council was advised to recommend to the GM that he step in and make a call to the SES about evacuation. The GM had only been in his job for a couple of weeks and had chosen to not come to the office due to the rain. The other contribution factor is the SES's refusal to listen to what they refer to as 'anecdotal evidence' . Myself and many others had contacted them expressing concern that the situation was going

to be dire. All comments were dismissed as anecdotal.

1.2 Preparation and planning

There was no preparation. In 2017 the Brisbane highest rainfall was 491.4mm for March. On the 30th March 2017 the Lismore CBD levy overtopped for the first time. In February of 2022 the Brisbane rainfall was 677mm. There is never a linear path from one place to the other, one rain event to the other however there was enough data to show that something dreadful was about to happen further downstream in the catchment. The SES and BOM continued to look at the weather forecasts, not the weather that was already on the ground.

Again I reiterate that there was no plan.

I have a building that I am involved in in the Lismore CBD. On Friday the 25th February we had become very concerned that there would be a very bad flood. the SES and the BOM had made predictions about the flood level and we were not confident with them. At one point in that week we had received 330ml of rain in our gauge in one day. The rain had been persistent at this level for nearly 9 days. On Saturday the 26th February we contacted the SES and were told that they flood level would not be as bad as 2017. We decided to empty our building of smaller items, remove all electrical items and place them up high and remove any formal records. We contacted the council to see what sort of plans they were putting in place and there was nobody to speak to, they had gone home. There was no coordinator, no single point of contact for information and absolutely no leadership. Put this together with the false sense of security that was provided by agencies such as the SES and BOM telling us that the levy would not overtop and/or the flood would not be major and we have the reason as to why people died. On Sunday morning the 27th February I had begun speaking to neighbours that had boats and kayaks as I knew they would be needed. My own kayak was in need of repair so all I could do was alert them. One of my

neighbours undertook rescues on her kayak in the early hours of Monday the 28th February. The SES did not have adequate equipment to hand which is again reflective of a lack of planning. Evacuation centres were turned on as the event unfolded early on Monday morning. No planning had been done and nothing was prepared prior to the rescues commencing. Given the 2017 floods, the amount of rain in QLD and the previous months rain there should have been an evacuation centre stood up at least 48 hrs prior to this catastrophe.

1.3 Response to floods

What can anyone say. The community groups have sprung up everywhere delivering much needed services but also creating complete confusion for those that were impacted. There are organisations that are led by local politicians such as Resilient Lismore who have collected a lot of money, there is an ex Councillor that has established a gofundme with the money going directly into her personal bank account, there are lots of gofundme's such as this with no governance and no accountability. The council has raised \$1m and nobody is sure how it will be governed.

Volunteers have done 80% of the heavy lifting in terms of feeding people, clothing people and trying to house people. It took some days for all services to be made available to people and these are still not coordinated 5 weeks on. I have been going with people to the University to assist them to complete applications for grants, apply for lost birth certificates, deal with insurers etc. The grants are greatly appreciated but the city needs one single body to deal with, that manages all of the people who are honestly, completely lost. It needs one single body to deal with rebuilding, redesign, city movement, land swaps etc. The response has been piecemeal, slow and disorganised. It if wasn't for the army then I do not know what would have happened to this city. We have become a politicians door stop photo opportunity with no reliable outcome. I am just about to take my second flood refugee family

in. They lost everything, they are traumatised from sitting on a roof waiting to be rescued and the only response they have had to date is 3 lots of \$1000, together with lots and lots of confusing and complicated forms. I and my friends spent day after day with pressure washers and cleaning kits spraying out houses that were full of sewerage infested mud. We put our own health and safety at risk because there was just not enough Government assistance.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

What was the transition? Incident response is still continuing 5 weeks on. There has been no plan for recovery, there has been no community consultation and no integration from politicians. Instead of them all coming together in a non partisan way to help the people of Lismore it has become more like a contest to see who can claim putting out another grant. There has been a petition commenced that as of today has 18,500 signatures calling for a single coordinated response in the form of a reconstruction commission or authority. This has been completely ignored by the Lismore City Council and by the Federal Member Kevin Hogan. The community needs leadership, it needs hope and it needs a genuine response from Government. The lessons of the Black Saturday bushfires and the Canterbury Earthquakes should be taken into account but they are being ignored. There is no managed transition at all

1.5 Recovery from floods

The Federal Treasurer on Friday the 1st April told Senate Estimates that the cost to the economy of these floods would be \$10bn. He also said that these losses could be made up by reconstruction activity. Recovery requires a single co-ordinated response, an entity that is an arm of government and has strong leadership. Lismore is a Regional City, it is not a country town and it is too big to be rebuilt by volunteers in the community. Lismore prides itself on being resilient but why do people here need to be more resilient than people in other communities? As the Regional centre of the Northern Rivers, it

must be rebuilt, reshaped or re envisioned as quickly as possible, under the guidance of one single entity. I personally am housing three single parent families that simply have nowhere to go. Their lives are chaos and we are now struggling with vicarious trauma that derives from being exposed to their stories, their worries and their complete lack of hope.

Lismore City Council is a historically split council that delivers very little to its community other than infighting. This means that every step forward takes three times longer than it should. The North Lismore Plateau land development is a useful case in point. It was intentioned, when first envisioned to provide affordable housing to people from South and North Lismore that wanted to move off the flood plain. 20 years of holding costs, report costs, developer costs, court costs etc means that this land will now be unaffordable to most. The Altitude 2480 development in Goonellabah is another case in point. 12 years of arguing, debating and fighting. Despite having sold many houses off the plan the development is still stalled in council. These are affordable houses. The Northcott Drive Goonellabah subdivision, nearly 10 years in council and is still being blocked, the Possum Plateau development in Goonellabah, offering truly affordable housing - blocked by Mayor Ekins in 2021. Council is now espousing that it needs an affordable housing strategy while having actively held up, obfuscated and blocked affordable housing for the past 16 years. The planning function of Lismore City Council has been under resourced and over worked for the past 10 years, largely because of the councils historical financial position. Councillor after councillor has failed to address this poor financial performance, despite grave warnings from TCorp meaning that the city has no buffer to be able to step up and do this, yet again. This city and the towns that surround it cannot be rebuilt without a single coordinated entity that is properly funded by the Federal Government. An

entity that works with the community to determine what our future will be, an entity with the experience, an entity with the expertise and resources. This needs to happen immediately. Without this the region and the city of Lismore will become a shell of its former self, begging and competing for grant after grant in the hope that it can rebuild its future. Land swaps must be made available to people living on the flood plain. This could happen over a 5-10 year period with an allocated budget each year. The average price of a home in North and South Lismore prior to the flood was \$400,000. The Government could set a cap as to how many houses they were prepared to move each year and provide the funding to home owners. This should commence with those that have been decimated and are uninhabitable.

New planning laws should be implemented immediately to remove missiles from the flood plain. Examples of these missiles include telecommunications and electrical power poles being stored at 14 jubilee street. As these floated they did immense damage. Prefabricated container homes being built on the old Hurford Site, these floated and wiped out entire houses. Timber logs ready for saw milling that were stored at Bigscrub salvage and Lismore Timber and Plywood. These became missiles and took out entire houses. 210 kg gas bottles held in place by a 10mm chain. These became missiles and smashed through windows and walls of houses. If residential houses are to remain in the flood plan then planning laws must account for floods and ensure that damage is mitigated by removing these potential missile industries from the flood plain.

1.6 Any other matters

I have attached the StateWide lessons learned link from the 2017 floods. My friend and her children were killed in this flood event and most of the lessons learned have been implemented. None of the lessons learned in the same event in Lismore have been implemented. Not due to any deliberate intention but largely down to the fact

the council is completely divided and is in a precarious financial position.
<https://www.statewidemutual.com.au/when-tragedy-strikes-lessons-learned-after-record-flood/> . I have also included a submission from the last enquiry into the 2017 floods which highlights many recommendations, none of which have been implemented

Supporting documents or images
