

South Gundurimba

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing this email in response to Janelle Saffin – Member for Lismore’s post on Facebook regarding the 2022 NSW flood inquiry.

I live at _____ South Gundurimba with my 2 sons
and _____ and _____ girlfriend _____.

I have lived at this property since 1997 and the property is owned by my mother-in-law. My family run beef cattle on three separate farms at South Gundurimba. My mother-in-law lives _____ on Coraki Road and there is another farm which is on the flats at Coraki Road with no house that has cattle on it. I am at the end of _____ which also runs cattle.

We have all experienced floods in the past so are well routined in how to prepare and what cattle to move when the river has certain height predictions in Lismore.

The flood on the 28th February was something that none of us had ever experienced in our community.

Our area had experienced heavy rain leading up to this flood event. We had 40 weaner heifers we moved from _____ to the hill farm at Coraki Road as our flats were so wet on the 27th February.

We moved cattle from our lowest farm up to a small holding paddock near Coraki road in the morning which is our procedure in flood time.

As the rain continued we checked in on BOM which predicted we were going to get a flood maybe similar to 2017. My eldest son, _____ took hay to the hill and decided to stay with my mother-in-law on the hill and tend to the cattle on both farms.

At the _____ property we had 60 cows and calves and 2 horses but from the prediction of a 2017 flood these cattle would stand in a

small area that is the highest point on the property. The 2017 flood came to the side of the house fence and we were left with an area of grass out.

I said to my son “we will be ok as 2017 flood was just at the side fence” I was always told the 1974 flood just came to the bottom step of the house and there are 3 steps and Lismore would be a mess even to come to the next step as the water spans out into open plains after it funnels through Lismore.

I stayed at the house with _____ and _____. We had planned for a flood, moved cattle, extra food and fuel for the generator for a power outage.

We continued to check on BOM and went to bed at 11pm with the prediction of 11.5 mtrs similar to 2017 maybe even 12mtrs like 1974. As it was still raining I said lets set the alarm for 4am and see what is happening then. We checked BOM and it said it was going to be 14mtrs. We went outside to start moving the chickens to higher area and move the tools and other items up in the old dairy and sheds. The water was rushing around the old pig pens and over the driveway and as we walked back it was starting to run under the house.

I talked to my neighbour on the next farm at 5am. I went over the flood heights and said “if the flood is 14 mtrs in Lismore it will span out when it comes here?” He agreed it shouldn’t come in the house.

We just kept moving items up and then went to the house and moved household items on top of cupboards, put mattresses up on the kitchen tables and anything we could move went higher. As the water was raging across the paddocks it was like rapids. We had tried multiple times ringing the SES with a message saying they were busy with multiple rescues. _____ had made multiple calls to 000 and was told to get onto the roof so you can be seen.

As the water entered the house, _____ and _____ had decided to go on the garage roof. I stayed inside the house and continued moving things up. The water rose very quickly and it was like waves hitting the side of the house with also flood debris and other people’s property floating and taking out fence lines.

At this stage our cows were standing in very high water in the side paddock and another 10 heifers and 2 horses were standing in front of the garage also in high water.

The water was gushing in the house very quickly and I went to the shed roof also and waited hoping there would be a helicopter or boat to rescue us.

I had talked to both neighbouring farms during the morning and told them had phoned 000 so they knew we were there. One of my neighbours said they couldn't get through to SES and wanted to get out also and my other neighbours are elderly with no phone contact as the power had gone out early. I had talked to their daughter and said we had phoned SES and 000 and would take them out also.

As we sat on the shed multiple helicopters went across, we waved but obviously wasn't for us. My brother-in-law also tried to come across from Wyrallah with someone who had a boat and was experienced in fast flowing water but it was just too fast and they turned back. We had multiple calls from family and friends checking we were ok while we were on the roof and I was told of a man who was missing from a farm a few properties towards Lismore. His family had lost contact and it put a new fear of what we were experiencing.

We waited on the roof and could no longer see our cows on the high point and the heifers in front of the shed started to head off into the raging water. We watched as they just followed one another hitting the fig tree and then rolling over the fences, no longer visible. The two horses stood together in the corner, we knew they didn't have much of a chance. One of our water tanks just lifted and rolled away. At this stage I thought that if something big hits the shed we would have no chance.

After a few hours on the roof we spotted a boat coming our way. As it got closer we could see the man standing up was the man who had been missing and another man driving the boat. He said he would get my elderly neighbours first and asked if we were ok? He then continued on to get my elderly neighbours and took them to a nearby property out of flood.

He came back for us and then continued to rescue others along the river. In total they had rescued 9 people in our area. The boat driver had come to look for the missing man and had found him on a shed roof and then with his local knowledge of the area the man from a few farms up was able to take us all to higher ground. We stayed with my mother-in-law on the hill along with our neighbours.

We were all very fortunate to be safe as the water was continuing to rise and we were not sure what we would be going back to. We continued to watch BOM and see the peak and what that would mean to us on the flats south of Lismore.

On the 29th February at 4pm, I received a call from the Police, a Constable, asking if we had been rescued after her 000 calls from the previous morning. This was over 24 hours after the calls were made! I understand they were just accounting for all people that made calls but that is a long time to check in to make sure we were safe!

It took 5 days for us to be able to gain access by walking in when the water had receded enough. My elderly neighbour's daughter and husband had walked around the banks to gain access to their property so they came to have a look at ours as well. It's a mess!

The water had gone over the kitchen benches inside so what we did put up wasn't high enough and some cupboards had fallen over.

We had three vehicles, a caravan and farm equipment that had gone under. The livestock were all gone. Cows, horses and chooks all gone. The fences were a mess and we had lots of other people's property and debris scattered all over the two riverbank farms.

This flood was 2 mtrs higher than 1974 in Lismore yet we had 2 metres higher on the property? I'm not sure how that can happen when it spans out on the plains after funnelling through Lismore. We rely on the information that we get on rainfall and river heights in Lismore so we know when to move cattle and prepare. This flood has put a lot of questions out there and hopefully we can get some answers!

So the clean -up began. My son had been looking for the missing cows that had been washed down stream through Misplaced Stock Facebook sites and visiting farms along the river. In total he found 17 cows of the 60 missing. The 2 horses were found downstream and had wonderful care from local vets and community but the older mare sustained too many injuries and died. The house was cleaned out and gutted, fences put back and cleaned off if not too much damage. Other fences were just pulled out as not repairable. We cleaned out the sheds and have been sorting through the massive amount of damaged and salvageable items.

Then on the 27th March I had a message with a link of a weather event for another moderate to major flooding! This sent everyone into a spin!

How could this be happening again? We were unable to live in the house and no stock on the property but what we had left was drying out to see if it would be ok. We went back and placed everything that maybe ok in the sheds and shut the doors hoping it would be safe. We still had our massive rubbish heap outside and the thought was I hope that if the flood comes through again the rubbish could be taken all over the paddocks.

It was unknown. The ground was sodden from the previous flood, how is it going to survive this time? Are the banks going to give way? Are the house and sheds going to stand up to another flood? What will happen next??

The flood level on BOM on 29th March at night said it was 8.8mtrs in Lismore but at our place it was more like 10 mtrs our neighbour said. I'm not sure how it can be higher south of Lismore than actually in Lismore! Is the water running a different way around Lismore for us to be higher than Lismore.

With every other flood water comes down the river banks out onto the flood plains. The latest flood, the plains were filled and Lismore had not reached their peak. Roads were cut and the flat country covered in water much longer than previous floods.

Watching Facebook and BOM we had no idea what was happening. They said gauges were down and they were going blind with this flood! People were messaging and asking people in the catchment areas to message their rainfall readings so individuals could have some sort of idea what water would be coming!

This flood was still major at 11.4 mtrs in Lismore and for us it was like the 2017 flood! We were lucky some of the catchment areas didn't get the extreme rainfall as other areas otherwise it could have been headed for what we experienced on 28th February.

The water was very slow going down and the water from Coraki came back up the Ruthven straight holding the levels up.

We are now left with fences to be cleaned again. Both the riverbank farms have fencing to be done and are now too wet, the grass content is not good and we will be going into a hard few months. We have cows on agistment to other properties that have not been affected by flood, for the next few months. It will take time for the farms to recover and give us time to get the fences sorted.

I know there are lots of people in the same position and we are fortunate to be safe and have a roof over our heads as we are now staying with family as our house is gutted and we have been faced with a massive clean -up job on both farms.

We do feel like a lot of attention is on Lismore town and feel as if we have been forgotten as there are a lot of people downstream that are also not able to live in their houses and have to deal with the flood clean up on their farms and properties. We arranged for the Army to come and take white goods and large items but have had no assistance from our local Council to remove flood destroyed goods as town areas did.

We rely on BOM predictions and information on the internet so we can plan. We need accurate information so we can make informed decisions! Lots of people use this information for their own safety and the safety of their businesses in Lismore and surrounds including farms.

I would like to know is the water being diverted through South Lismore for us to have a higher water height than Lismore??

If the water is being diverted it is a total new flood model for the south of Lismore!

Lots of families and communities are affected and need answers on how it will be improved and correct information given in the future.

Future flood mitigation planning must include the outcomes for communities both upstream and downstream of Lismore City.