

From:
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Date: Monday, 2 May 2022 6:00:36 PM

To Whom it May Concern,

I am a local _____, running a practice in Goonellabah for the past 10 years. I grew up in the Northern River attending Trinity Catholic College and I run a charity (_____) working closely with many local schools. I have deep roots in the Lismore community.

In the week following the floods I saw patients at GSAC evacuation centres. Since then I have seen thousands of patients in my own practice and heard their honest and raw accounts of their experiences.

I feel that I'm in a good position to offer some specific input about could have been done to make this period less painful, and what we can work on to get a better future outcome. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but a list of some important factors that may be overlooked.

More essential services out of the flood zone:

In the weeks following the February flood the supermarkets in Goonellabah were life sustaining. If we didn't have supermarkets in Goonellabah we would have been dealing with an even worse situation.

Since then the lack of Allied Health and General Practitioner services has added an extra layer of suffering for many.

There are a number of essential services that I feel need to be located out of the flood zone in order to improve the resilience of our community:

- at least one department store selling shoes, clothes and some basic kitchen supplies.
- a larger percentage of general practitioners and allied health services including an optometrist.
- Banks (although they have seemed to be the fastest acting of any sector in sourcing a new home and/or shipping in temporary pop up facilities)

Bruxner Highway:

Since our last major flood in 2017 there has been significant work to the pacific highway as well as the construction of a large service station at the junction of the bruxner highway and pacific highway. The impact of one or both of these constructions on water drainage needs to be better understood. We cannot have the main route between Ballina and Lismore being cut every time we experience heavy rainfall. This road closure during both floods lead to the unnecessary closure of schools and businesses due to staff shortages. This section of the Bruxner Highway never used to flood and needs to be corrected as a matter of urgency.

Temporary Housing:

As temporary/medium term housing was slow to be supplied, it's my opinion that it is now a better use of money (and possibly a similar timeframe) to repair peoples houses and get them back into their own home.

Some people will not wish to return to their houses, but for the majority of traumatised residents, the safest and most comforting place for them is back within their own community surrounded by neighbours and friends.

Any long term plans for relocation are years away and in the meantime people can be living back in their own community. Many houses in Lismore are relocatable so it isn't a waste of money to repair these houses.

Making temporary container villagers will only serve to create long term slums. The needs of some of the survivors in need of long term accomodation are complex. Housing families alongside those with severe mental illness and drug addiction only serves to compound their trauma.

Government could assist by helping to source building materials and skilled labour to speed up the repair process. With no external input, the rebuilding process will be slow and painful, again compounding the trauma of so many.

I feel strongly that we should not employ short term solutions that will prevent us from having good long term solutions. For example: using prime land for temporary housing that may be needed for long term accomodation/commercial relocation etc.

Local knowledge and representation:

In the weeks following the February flood Professor Mary O’Kane was quoted in a major newspaper suggesting that the solution to lismores flooding problem would be to build houses on stilts “just like in Queensland”. This made it obvious that she had no local knowledge and had possibly never set foot in Lismore. Most local would have retorted “do you mean just like the ones that flooded over the roof” or “ like the ones that we were rescued from”. These types of comments further cement the idea that our solutions will come from people in cities in suits who have no idea of the local environment and it makes people feel that there is little chance of getting real workable solutions to our problems. Please do not be offensive to local people by employing people with no knowledge of our local area to come up with solutions. There are brilliant local people who on the northern rivers. They came up with solutions to save lives, to keep each other fed and clothed and to maintain this community. Let them chart the course of our future.

And lastly, Lismore is the canary in the coal mine, we are just an example of what happens with severe weather events. See this as an opportunity to come up with workable solutions that we can use elsewhere.....and maybe even sell elsewhere.

Please allow big thinking, don’t just hand out grants and leave people with no solution other than to rebuild. See this as an opportunity.

Yours in Health