

From:
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Fwd: Submission to Lismore flood inquiry: re flood advice by the Weather Bureau
Date: Wednesday, 4 May 2022 10:58:11 AM

To the NSW Lismore Flood Inquiry

I have been a resident of Lismore for 40 years, and have had floods in my property in East Lismore twice in 1987, and my property in South Lismore, in 1989 and 2017. I currently live elsewhere in Lismore so was spared the 28 February flood.

I wish to comment on flood predictions and advice given by the SES and Bureau of Meteorology (BOM).

1. Short term advice:

In the two 1987 floods the local SES was providing accurate 1/2 hourly bulletins broadcast by the ABC. They boasted they were using a new computer with data from phone-ins by outlying farmers in the catchment.

This allowed Lismore residents to plan whether to evacuate (depending on when roads were likely to close) or to spend 2 hours moving stock and equipment to safety. 2 -6 hours accurate notice from the flood bulletins are required to do this effectively.

In 1989, possibly because the BOM demanded SES use their predictions and not make up their own, Lismore was unprepared. On leaving work at 3am I heard the midnight BOM report. Around 3:30am my neighbour, who was working at SES reported to them the Wilson River was flowing backwards, the first indication that a storm had hit a valley to the west, going down Leycester Creek into Lismore. By 4am the SES and police used sirens to wake South Lismore that the South Lismore levee had been breached at Caniaba Street giving residents time to move vehicles and move ground floor equipment eg washing machines and mowers higher.

As a result of the inquiry BOM installed remote stations on several creeks upstream from Lismore.

In 2017, many of those stations appeared to be non operational, leading to BOM being unable to advise any useful flood height information, so residents were unprepared.

I was able to use my own rule of thumb, that 150mm of rain anywhere in the catchment will result in a major flood in Lismore 6-12 hours later depending on which valley the rain falls, to reduce some losses. The only useful advice Lismore residents were given that I heard, was a mandatory evacuation notice, no flood height or time advice to allow residents to prepare. This led to massive losses by those unused to Lismore floods.

Likewise on 28 February this year, the only useful notices available was firstly, a moderate flood prediction that allowed residents to move vehicles and gear and (too late for many residents) an evacuation order late on Sunday night.

My conclusion is that local rainfall data and detailed local planning advice is needed, not inaccurate 3-6 hourly modelling flood predictions and reliance on panic evacuation orders that don't allow people to make informed decisions about moving their property to higher ground.

2. Long term predictions:

For people in the Lismore flood zone there are two tools available. Lismore council publishes detailed historic flood height data for every property in the flood plain. There are also signs on telegraph poles for the 1974 flood height said to be a 1 in 75 year event, coinciding with the two other floods of 1880 and 1954. Some homeowners who don't want their property values reduced, are said to remove signs, and anecdotally, real estate agents denigrate the signs as possibly inaccurate, not divulging that the inaccuracy in specific streets is likely to be a few centimetres only.

There is data for around one flood every three years for 150 years, that is around 50 floods. 50 data points seems to me totally inaccurate for any predictive ability, particularly for the regularly quoted figure that the 1974 flood is a 1 in 75 year event. I suggest the talk of a 1 in 500 year or 1 in 1,000 year event in February is also hot air.

If Lismore is to survive as a city in a flood zone, in my opinion we need a proper actuarial study using not flood heights but rainfall patterns on the east coast, including whether a 700mm rain event is rare, and how likely would that event coincide with a river already in flood.

Thanking you

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