

This was a longer presentation I wanted to make but I will also make submissions.

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for providing the opportunity for me to share my experience with the flood and to speak a little about what I believe to be the causes and the response to the flooding. I'll also talk a little about how I'd like to prepare and how our community is helping in this process. I acknowledge that I'm speaking on unceded Bundjalung country. I pay my respects to the traditional owners, past, present and emerging.

I live in a very small community called Chowan Creek. According to 2016 census figures I found; the number of residents is apparently 37 but I believe this is an underestimation of the true number of residents as there are many multi-residential units on properties. Our closest village is Uki where we can access our local post office and have a small country supermarket. Our closest major town is Murwillumbah.

While the major rainfall which led to the flood event, took place on February 28, rain had started way before then and by February 24, we, my brother and I were already stranded on our property due to flooding of our causeway. We were prepared or so we thought. We had food, medicine and basic needs. On Feb. 28, I woke up around 3 a.m. and recorded the following which I'd like to play for you. It's short. (1.26 minute video). I woke up again at 4:17 and recorded another short segment which just speaks to how difficult it was to sleep through the noise and worry.

When it was daylight, I recorded another short video I'd like to play. (46 seconds).

March 2, we were finally able to leave the property with help from Uki SES who cleared a tree that had fallen over our causeway and blocked the way. We still had no electricity.

March 3, the rain started falling again. And I have another short clip I'll play for you. (2.57)

I recorded these clips to share with family and I'm sharing it with you now so that you can hear how I felt living through this frightening event. In total, my brother and I were isolated on our property for 2 weeks and without electricity for about a week. Our family overseas had no way of knowing if we were alive or not as they watched the news about the flooding on their televisions half way around the world. They were so worried, my relatives in Canada called the SES in NSW. To date, they still haven't received a response from the report they made to the SES about our whereabouts. Luckily, our neighbours who live next door had solar power and satellite link and I was able to connect through their internet provider to let family know I was safe.

I've lived here since 2006. Since that time, I've lived through at least 3 of the so-called "once in a" fill in the blank flood event. 25 years. 50 years. 100 years, 1000 years. Before recorded history or at least colonial history. You name it, I've experienced it. Prior to 2022, you may have heard about the 2017 flood which also had a devastating impact on the Northern Rivers and little more than five years later, an even more devastating flood and weather event. In between, we had a drought and a fire emergency in 2019 which led to evacuations in our area. This leads me to address item 1.1 of the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry, causes and contributing factors.

I'm no scientist but I believe I am, we are living with climate change. Frankly, I don't care if climate change is something that's cyclical and has impacted earth in previous centuries, the

reality is that we are living it now and with the pace of human development, it can only impact us worse if nothing is done to address it. What quality of life will we have if we don't have clean water, fresh air and are always living in fear of flood or fire?

Moving on to preparation and planning. Many of us have lived through past weather events and know to prepare for storm and rainy seasons. How do you prepare for rain bombs? How do you prepare without accurate information? How do you prepare when regulations around clearing waterways on your own property are confusing and unclear? How do you prepare when funding reductions to the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO climate scientists are cut impacting on their ability to more accurately predict severe weather events? How do you prepare when communications infrastructure is poor? We have no mobile reception where I live and when the landline goes and we have no power, there goes the rest of our ability to communicate with the outside world. Telstra infrastructure is so poor and unlike our energy supplier who proactively, on an annual basis check and clear trees that might interfere with electrical lines, Telstra does no such thing. There are some residents in Uki who still have no phone or internet service and haven't since Feb 25. It took me days of constant contact with Telstra to get them to address a tree that had fallen over its lines over a creek. Had they not attended to it before the following smaller flood event in March, our whole community would not have had communications again.

In order to prepare and plan, all three levels of government need to work cooperatively to address the impact of climate change. The buck passing I've heard in the aftermath of the flooding as we moved towards response to recovery was maddening. Government also needs to get out of the way when business and citizens are prepared to help. Within 24 hours of landslips occurring which blocked our access into Uki, and from Uki to Murwillumbah, local farmers and business with tractors were clearing paths. They were told to stop. Had we waited for Council to act, it would have been weeks later before we could get to Uki especially in our small community where our concerns about road conditions are always last on the list it appears. In fact, there's still a small group of families with children completely cut off and access is by foot. It's also frustrating when local knowledge is dismissed. After the flood of 2017, I pointed out a section of road to Council that I'd noticed over the years had been scoured out due to previous flooding. That section is now reduced to less than a lane. Next flood event, we will have no road.

Recovery is going to take a long time. We were just recovering from the 2017 flood when the 2022 flood happened. And then the minor flood that followed the major flood of 2022 really took a toll. I still wake up anxious when I hear rain fall at night. When the power goes out which it has since the flood, all those memories of the flood come back. It's still hard to get a reasonable response time from Telstra to fault reports. Even those of us with medical conditions can't get the response time from Telstra we need and they commit to providing. Response times and lack of communications is frustrating and contributing to stress.

I'm grateful however to neighbours who checked in on me and allowed me to use their internet for communications. I'm grateful to the ADF who came to help out with debris removal. I was very relieved to get the services that I could by going to the recovery centre in Murwillumbah and I've heard that there will be recovery services available at the Uki Hall on a regular basis once a week. I'm grateful for the funding and help through the Red Cross, Salvation Army and government agencies. I do have to say that the way the funding was allocated by the federal government was disappointing. Greater funding to other regions

even though our region was equally impacted by flooding was unhelpful and I can't even begin to describe how that made me and others I talked to feel.

Most of all, I'm grateful to the members of my community who came together as the severity of the situation became known. Opening the Hall as an emergency shelter even though it wasn't designated as such. People volunteering to staff our emergency supply hub, cook meals and otherwise providing necessary services to those made homeless or who needed help. This wasn't government. It was us. An ad hoc group of people who have banded together and are now Resilient Uki. Government came later. Resilient Uki is already forming emergency preparedness plans. Geographical areas have been drawn up each with their own hub coordinator. I know who mine is and I've been provided with a loan walkie talkie in case of communications failure and I feel safer already.

Systemic remedies to communications problems, road repair, housing the homeless, getting people back to safe and healthy residences will take time and it won't be fast enough for those who have no where to live.

Commissioners, you have a tough job ahead and I'm and hopeful that you will come forward with a report and recommendations that all levels of government and we can support.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.