

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
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Attachments: [2022 Writing Flood in Lismore 23.3.22.0.docx](#)



Your details

Title

First name

Last name

Email

Postcode

Submission details

I am making this submission as ☐ Other

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

My sister in law in Lismore rang at 7am on 28th Feb saying she was up to her waist in water in her second storey in her home in South Lismore, her dog on a surfboard with only her wallet and phone and unable to get through to SES or 000. Fortunately I was able to contact the police on the Central Coast. They were very helpful and

rang back 3 times to ensure she'd been rescued. She and her flat mate were eventually rescued out their window at 4pm by a local in a tinnie. SES had come around on the Sunday night at 11pm telling them to get their things up high...and that the levee was expected to hold. She was taken in by friends for a week then returned to her home. She pulled off all her internal walls and ghernied the house. Fortunately a power point was restored and she has camped in her home since. On a mattress. With a little camp gas stove. We visited 3 weeks after the first flood, taking a small frig and supplies. We have just returned from assisting her to rebuild her internal walls using fibrous cement sheeting. She was uninsured. Her house is her only asset. She has a strong local community supporting her. She volunteers at Koori mail. The people taking around food and supplies were a godsend. The devastation in Lismore is sobering. On our second visit last week I noted about 1 in 10 businesses seemed to be returning or being cleaned. Caravans and tents out the front of peoples' houses. And still the rubbish needing collection. The potholes...an elderly lady circling them with bright pink spray paint to alert motorists. Mud and more rain predicted. The pop up Coles and Service NSW marquee. Good idea! The difficulty in accessing help due to red tape. The Living School..inspirational headmaster hoping to rebuild. The churches...surrounded by Cyclone fencing. The multiple Motor Homes in the caravan park. Petrol stations all boarded up. Messages of hope and encouragement and love hearts in peoples' windows. The brown river and mud half way up those huge Moreton Bay figs...still! The defence people doing a great job. The rubbish and peoples' lives by the roadside. Washed away bridges and the grass covering fences where the water swept through taking huge trees and community halls in its path. Yes an unprecedented event and who could

have predicted that. And the timing on a Sunday night possibly a factor?

Lots of lessons to be learned. But some more streamlined processes required for future similar events. Perhaps defence personnel in the future could be trained in fire fighting, flood rescue etc etc. or else have another band of emergency paid yes paid workers ready and trained for any disaster who can be mobilised quickly. Also NBN needs improvement. The reception in the surrounding areas is very intermittent.

Maybe a climate change levy...I think we would all happily contribute.

Good luck with the enquiry.

I wrote a de-identified piece after our first visit...see attached.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [2022 Writing Flood in Lismore 23 3 22_0.docx](#)
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Flood

23.3.22

A strange shape hung on the tree branch of the hibiscus bush. picked it up to throw onto the rubbish pile. It's form slowly emerged from its muddy coat: it was a bra. We laughed.

"Whose is that and how did it get there?"

Next door in the back yard of the now condemned house was Nanna's old pot plant stand. It had somehow been carried next door in the floodwaters from the lounge room of house. It must have negotiated a passage through the one broken window on the veranda on the second floor: the window they had to break in order to escape into a neighbour's tinny. said she remembers the noise of rushing water and the screams for help.

I'd texted on that Monday morning, 28th February at around 7am when I read news of Lismore flooding. She'd immediately rung, the anxiety in her voice perceptible.

"We're up to our waists in water on our second floor and no one's coming. is on a surf board. I only have my phone. Everything else has gone under. I'm wearing my bra and shorts, no shoes".

With the voicemail on the SES site saying "call 000 in an emergency" I rang the police. They took the details: 52 year old and 70 year old. Names given.

The receptive policewoman explained that the situation was dire with overwhelming numbers of requests for help.

We turned on the TV and saw the horrific footage of people, along with chickens and dogs, crouched on their roofs awaiting rescue. An elderly woman clung to the back of a single kayak as its owner paddled gallantly to safety. Chickens and goats were seen being transported on surf boards. Precious dogs and other pets were cradled in their owners' arms, frail elderly were carried on Fijians backs and in make sift sheet carriers. Two people were cast into the swirling flood waters when their boat capsized. They clung to the electricity cables. Luckily the power to the city had been turned off. And old Bert, interviewed on Channel Nine, his wrinkled, weathered face splattered with mud, said: "There are lots worse off than us. We're ok".

texted his siblings requesting prayers for sister .

6 hours later texted to say that she was now at . I rang through the new address to the police. Forty people, including babies and two llamas were on the balcony of the higher house.

Details emerged later. As the water lapped "at their tits" and her flat mate had climbed out a window into the boat that transported them to the balcony of the house. They'd taken the two teenage boys across the road with them. The rescuers had tied their mother to the balustrade of their veranda till they were able to return to collect her.

Finally a welcome text from . 4.30pm. "On safe, dry ground".

The local SES had eventually been allowed to go in and had taken them to the bridge across the Wilson River. They waded across the flooded bridge. The levee bank had definitely been breached. Another boat dropped them near an evacuation centre. Another friend arrived in her kayak and took them to her home on high ground at Dunoon. Safe. Alive.

Over the next two weeks the story unfolded. Unprecedented record-breaking rainfall. More than 700mls of rain fell in just 30 hours in the area. Climate change. La Niña. One in five hundred year flood. "We'd been told the levee bank would hold". An SES worker had knocked on their door at 11pm on the Sunday night telling them to get their possessions off the floor. They'd then tied a plastic SES label to the front fence to show they'd attended.

The swirling brown water covered many miles of the northern rivers area. Sugar cane fields were inundated, hospitals were evacuated, deceased people were found in drains and in their roof attics. Brave paramedics had winched people into helicopters, on one occasion getting entangled in the submerged house's TV aerial. All the CBD had been a sea of water and even the elevated Catholic Cathedral had water lapping at its pews.

Thousands of people were homeless, without food, many recovering from the cold and wet, let alone the trauma. A cow was found 150km downstream from its farm. Countless beasts had drowned. A group of great white sharks enjoyed an eating frenzy at the mouth of the Richmond River.

The house was built in 1921 "the same year Nanna was born".

went back in about three days after that Monday. Slush. Stench. Mud a foot deep throughout. The brown band was evident on the mesh on her upper storey deck. A river about 5 metres deep had rushed through her precious home and the homes of many others. The house next door was not salvageable.

Then people began to arrive. People with food, with ghernies (petrol driven... handy when there's no power!) Her house was hosed down; she started to rip off the plasterboard and gyprock in the internal walls. An electrician arrived and installed a "flood approved power point" and issued with a certificate of compliance. She could now boil a jug. The sewer was still connected and eventually clean water started to come through the taps.

She moved back in, lying on a borrowed mattress on the floor. It was two weeks since the flood.

Her car was found on its side, full of mud, near where she'd driven it to the cemetery on the Sunday, the day before the flood. Usually it was safe there. But not this time. It needed to be towed away. Written off.

had been through the 2017 flood and the water had flooded part of the under storey. This 2022 flood was beyond all expectations.

We'd kept in touch and on Saturday 19th March and I drove to Lismore. Sobering is an understatement. Streets lined with piles of rubbish. The CBD looked like a war zone. Mud still halfway up huge Morton Bay figs. Slippery silvery brown slush covering footpaths. Grass hanging off fence wire. Mattresses in tree tops. Dirt bulldozed into high piles. The foundations all that was left of the Corndale Community Hall, washed downstream to who knows where.

Army personnel were clearing away rubbish. The streets were full of potholes. Someone had circled some of them with white paint to make them more obvious. Landslips and eroded gutters necessitated single lane roads, requiring temporary traffic stop go lights. Cyclops fencing surrounded the TAFE, the Uniting Church, the Living School and many more businesses. Shops were boarded up.

South Lismore looked worse, if that was possible. A motor home lay upturned by a creek. The railway station was unrecognisable with matted paper, white plastic chairs and palm fronds high against the fence. "Stay Positive" said the sign on our right. Everything still wore a brown coat. Rubbish piled high. Peoples' lives on the footpaths.

The smell had improved apparently. Just a damp, dank smell now, not the smell of raw sewerage mixed with decaying animal corpses.

 was out the front of the house as we arrived. Hugs and a few tears were shared. , her sweet little Maltese cross, greeted us with a bark but was soon warming to us with some pats and stroking.

We handed over the keys of Bess, the trustworthy old Corolla, gifted by to . I photographed the event. The house stood proudly behind Bess.

 living area was now the back deck and we deposited our donations for her to sort through in due course.

 had seen a few floods, we decided, as we noticed 2 cm man-made circular holes in the corners of each room on the upper storey. Some old dried mud lay below new mud in the wall cavities. Mud from the 1954 flood? The rooms now were open and airy. One could only be impressed by the beautiful plaster patterned ceilings in each room, the solid timber floor, the blue and white clawed bath standing quite stately alongside one wall. The top kitchen cupboards had survived but not so the gas stove. The gas connecting pipe jutted up in the middle of the kitchen and was covered with an orange warning rag. A tripping hazard for sure.

Some salvaged crockery and glassware filled the top cupboards and a trestle table held a jug and some tinned food. Part of the kitchen bench remained but lay at an angle. propped it up with the little bar frig we'd brought up in the ute from the garage in Ryde.

 showed us the escape window. The lounge room was bare apart from a borrowed TV. The only other furniture was the mattress on the floor in the front room with Benson's dog bed alongside. The colourful checked knitted cover expressed some joy and love in this emptiness.

We shared Anzac biscuits and some green cordial. We listened to and we listened a bit more. Real trauma. We measured the walls. How much Gyprock would be needed?

Supplies and tradesmen are in short supply. We talked about the next few weeks. A friend is an electrician and may be able to rewire the house.

And then, maybe once the house has dried out and the area has power, we can return with hammer and nails to rebuild the internal walls.

 is remarkable. Her resilience and positivity are impressive. She clearly loves this old house and her community. We can understand why she wants to stay.