

*MRA is an active community organisation for and by the residents of Mullumbimby. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the 2022 NSW Flood Inquiry.*



### **1. Statistics**

After the floods in 2017 there were no statistics gathered to capture the true extent of the damage. Statistics need to be gathered on the 2022 flood event:

- a) The number of houses flooded.
- b) The number of vehicles lost.

### **2. North Byron Floodplain Risk Management Study and Plan.**

Many issues with flooding in the Mullumbimby township have been recognised in the adopted 2020 [North Byron Floodplain Risk Management Study](#) (FRMS) and [North Byron Floodplain Risk Management Plan](#) (FRMP), many of the priority actions identified have not been funded or actioned upon.

A review of the FRMS including options that required more investigation and the FRMP priority actions needs to be completed once technical data is analysed. (See the amended table with priorities relevant for Mullumbimby on page 5 of this submission).

### **3. Flood Mitigation Options:**

#### **a) Voluntary House Raising Program.**

The most cost-effective flood mitigation option for Mullumbimby is house raising, the FRMS identified 37 properties in the township that met the criteria in 2020, there will be many more after this latest event. Many in the community have shown interest in this scheme but the current arrangement of 2 houses a year is not acceptable, the scheme needs to be streamlined and funded ASAP. A moderate priority in the FRMP.

#### **b) Flood Proofing of Homes.**

Brisbane City Council has piloted a Flood Resilient Homes Program, residents of Mullumbimby would benefit greatly with funding by the NSW Government for a similar program. A high priority action in the FRMP.

#### **c) Buy Back Scheme.**

Buy back of properties is also one of the most cost-effective management strategies for properties located in the floodway who are frequently flooded and subject to high hazard. Mullumbimby was identified in the 2020 FRMS to have 9 properties that meet the criteria. Funding is required.

#### **d) Further Flood modelling.**

There are flood mitigation options in the FRMS that require more investigation. Funding will be required for the following:

- The railway line bisects the floodway, the impact of this obstruction on the floodway needs more analysis. A combination removal of the railway line and raising/flood proofing of houses in the east of Mullumbimby may have a positive outcome.
- Removing spur walls at the junction of the Brunswick River, Marshalls and Simpsons Creek requires further modelling.
- Saltwater Creek upgrades need further modelling. FRMS section 12.1.4

#### 4. Previous Planning and Development on the Floodplain.

There has been development on the floodplain that has contributed to increased flooding in the township of Mullumbimby. The FRMS has identified Mullumbimby as sensitive to cumulative filling and the most sensitive to future floodplain changes.

(FRMS section 8.1.4.1).

- a) Tallowood Estate has increased runoff.
- b) Towers Industrial Estate has decreased floodplain storage and changed the flow path.
- c) Orchid Place filling of land has decreased floodplain storage and changed the flow path. (DA99/0641 rejected by council but approved by the NSW Government in 2000.)
- d) Secondary dwellings have increased runoff.
- e) The affordable housing project DA 10.2017.474.2 currently under construction at 70-90 Station St, Mullumbimby obstructed water from passing under the railway line.

#### 5. Community Education and Vulnerable Community

- On the 24<sup>th</sup> of Feb 2022 a camper trailer was flooded in Heritage Park, council had been notified by numerous residents up to a month before this date that there were illegal campers in the park.
- Many caravans situated on a private property at 39 Cedar Rd, Wilsons Creek were washed away on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Feb 2022, this left many homeless.
- Section 11.5.6 of the FRMS mentions Community Flood education and a *“priority is ensuring vulnerable population without a permanent residence are included in flood awareness and preparedness and are aware of the risks of flooding, who they can trust and where they can seek shelter during flood events”*.
- Many residents in Mullumbimby are not aware of their floor height with reference to the flood planning level and how to use this in a flood situation, even though it’s available on council’s website.

Why hasn’t the community been educated and the vulnerable notified of flood dangers?

A moderate priority in the FRMP.

#### 6. Evacuation Planning

Mullumbimby has been identified as requiring an Evacuation Assessment. Mullumbimby Residents Association has mentioned this at meetings with council executives twice last year. This issue was highlighted in our recent floods with human chains required to access the evacuation centre at the Ex-Services Club. Many could not get to the evacuation centre. The FRMP identified this a high priority action. (FRMS section 9.3.6).

#### 7. Emergency Warning systems

Many in the community were not aware of the severe weather that was coming, council has an emergency dashboard. Why did the BOM not have a flood warning for the Brunswick River? It appears that Climate Change is making flood predictability much more difficult, a review of the weather models used needs to be completed. Private forecasters on Facebook were more accurate than the BOM! E.g., Higgins Storm Chasers.

Mullumbimby scenario:

- a) The FRMS section 9.3.6 *“Evacuation for Mullumbimby is triggered when Federation Bridge reaches 3.5m AHD”* This level was reached on Sunday 27/02/22 at midnight.
- b) Council posted on [Facebook](#) at 6:11AM on Monday the 28<sup>th</sup> of Feb that the SES had issued an evacuation alert at 6AM. 12 hours late!

- c) At 6:04 AM the Federation bridge gauge was already at 4.93m, too late for many residents to evacuate.
- d) Why was there no SES landline, mobile or siren alert?
- e) On the 2/03/22 at 01:14AM Residents received an SES alert on landlines about the Ballina hospital evacuation, this warning was not relevant.

Many cars were flooded near Sherry's Bridge on Main Arm Road and in the township of Mullumbimby. The FRMP has a high priority action *to identify key roads and implement automatic warning signs and depth indicators*. Funding is required.

## **8. SES Management**

The SES had major internal changes prior to the 2022 flood event, this has resulted in the loss of long term and well-trained community members. The SES should be controlled locally and management decentralised.

## **9. Environmental impact.**

### **a) Rubbish removal and Recycling:**

There were many household items that were disposed of which could have been recycled or refurbished. There needs to be a better approach to sorting of items before disposal.

### **b) Many waterways have been severely polluted with Sewer and flood debris, there has been no announcements regarding clean-up of the rivers and estuaries. The Mullumbimby boat ramp at Heritage Park is still covered in mud, preventing access to the river. Funding for the boat ramp upgrade is required.**

## **10. Telecommunications**

Many of the telecommunication's outages were caused by landslides and water breaking optical fibre and copper cables. The redundancy of optical fibre routes needs to be reviewed by Telstra and Transmission equipment moved from the first floor of the Lismore Telephone Exchange which was inundated with floodwater.

Main Arm Exchange optical paths can be improved by transferring one existing link onto the newer optical cable. (Contact me if you require more information).

The North Coast nbn network was affected by power outages at Woodburn, a permanent backup generator needs to be installed at Woodburn Telephone Exchange.

Satellite backup systems need to be strategically placed for future disasters. Lack of local telecommunications staff and test equipment delayed recovery of the networks.

## **11. Future Strategic Planning for Mullumbimby**

The adopted Residential Strategy Dec 2020 (currently with the NSW Government) proposes extensive development on the floodplain including South Mullumbimby and rezoning of sportsgrounds at Lot 22, 156 Stuart St, Mullumbimby. As a consequence of the recent flooding events, in Mullumbimby, Council and the NSW Government needs to review the Rural, Residential, Business and Industrial Lands strategies.

## **12. Use of NSW Government land for temporary housing**

There is NSW Government land within the Mullumbimby CBD close to infrastructure that could be used for temporary accommodation. Some sites are:

- Gordon St behind the Police Station.
- Railway Land.

### 13. Infrastructure

- a) **Water Security:** The community and council are already aware of Mullumbimby's water security issues and the flood clean-up highlighted the need for a better secure water system for the township. Water restrictions were imposed due to staff not able to reach the water treatment plant just when the community required it. Recycled water from the Vallances Rd Sewage Treatment Plant could have been used for clean-up. Funding is required for a recycled water network.
- b) **Sewer:** The poor state of the sewer network is well known, the flood resulted in raw sewage mixing with floodwater and has resulted in many health issues including hospitalisation of residents. More funds are required to upgrade the sewer network ASAP.
- c) **Stormwater:** Stormwater maintenance is critical in managing smaller flood events. As part of the FRMS community questionnaire in June 2018 one of the top structural options was "Stormwater pipes, gutters and drain upgrades". (FRMS section 5.1). MRA met with council executives twice last year and raised issues regarding stormwater maintenance, the response has always been "*There is no funding*". A whole of catchment drainage model and overland flow path investigation is a high priority action in the FRMP, council has applied for grant funding but has been rejected by the NSW Government, this requires funding ASAP.
- d) **Roads:** The road network has been greatly affected by recent flooding events and extra finances from the NSW Government are required to bring them up to a safe standard.

### 14. Insurance Coverage

MRA is aware that there is inconsistency between insurance companies willing to insure homeowners and businesses in Mullumbimby. We would appreciate the implementation of standard conditions for both property owners and insurance companies.

#### **In conclusion MRA requests:**

That the State Government arrange for funding to be available to communities, in a timely manner, to implement resilient programs as necessary, including:

House Raising; Buy-Back; Rebuilding; Flood Proofing; Community Education, Flood Mitigation Programs according to updated flood mitigation plans and Road Safety maintenance.

*, for* ,

**Email:**

**Mobile:**

1. Extracted and Amended from Table 1 of Byron Shire Councils FRMP, new priorities.

Actions relevant to Mullumbimby flooding	ID	Section	Rank as in 2020
1. Update Flood Planning Levels to the 2022 flood experience	PM04	11.6.4	1
2. Update the Local Flood Plan (BSC and SES) based on the 2022 experience and on the 2020 Floodplain Plan	RM01	11.5.1	11
3. Establish flood free Evacuation Centre or Centres for Mullumbimby	RM07	11.5.7	4
4. Identify access routes to and from Mullumbimby and mark with automatic warning signs and depth indicators	RM05	11.5.5	4
5. Develop a Flood Warning system, with SMS and siren warnings	RM02	11.5.2	2
6. Establish a Flood Resilience Scheme for homes and businesses, with three main elements:			
(a) house raising.	PM01	11.6.1	11
(b) house purchase.	PM02	11.6.2	20
(c) at level protection, e.g., wet-proofing.	PM08	11.6.8	4
7. Flood and floor level info for each property in the floodplain. Education on how to find it.			
8. Assess whether suburban fences raise flood levels.	WFG	11.4.4	20
9. Assess whether Avocado Court drainage modifications would have produced any benefit in the 2022 flood.	AC	12.1.3	15
10. Assess whether Saltwater Creek upgrade would have mitigated outcomes for Mullumbimby for 2022 flood.	SC	12.1.4	11
11. Mandate no-fill on floodplains of the Brunswick River.	PM10	11.6.10	4
12. Build the debris control measures for Federation Bridge (project already funded).	FDC	11.4.6	4
13. Enable Council's floodplain advisory committee (comprising council, state, emergency services and community members) to oversee the implementation of the Scheme and other measures.	IC	12.3.2	11
14. Assess drainage and examine options for the New City Road area.	NCD	11.4.5	25
15. Develop a whole of catchment drainage model and overland flow path. Stormwater assessment. (Grant applied for).	CDM	11.4.6	4