

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Sunday, 15 May 2022 10:07:18 PM



Your details

Title

First name

Last name

Email

Postcode

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A resident in a flood-affected area

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

Our property boundary includes some 600 meters of the Richmond River approximately three kilometres upstream from Broadwater. We have seen several floods and then had to deal with the resulting debris and influx of another round of weeds (eg Coral Trees) and or different weeds and mud.
The devastating flood of late February- March

2022 resulted in water reaching levels and places not recorded before and as such debris was also in unexpected places. The mud from this event was far greater than in previous floods due to the amount of ground covered by water and volume of water runoff and flow back into the river.

We were isolated for days from our property due to road closures. Power was lost for 11 days and the internet for 15 days. What was done was basically word of mouth between neighbours and action taken to the immediate needs from providing food supplies, enabling some form of power and securing and finding stock, and checking upon neighbours if they were okay.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Settlements along the Richmond/Wilson Rivers primarily relate to the original mode of transport in the 1800-1900s when the river was the main or only means of transport, particularly for larger items. Subsequently settlements on a flood plain can expect to be flooded, and the degree of flooding will depend upon rainfall and changes to natural water flow into the river.

The BoM and qualified scientists can provide the climatic factors that attributed to this flood. I do not attribute it to 'Climate change', however the volcanic eruption in Tonga a few months prior probably had a significant effect upon the higher rainfall than the usual 'East Coast Low' experienced on a regular basis.

Councils, farmers need to ensure that drains are kept free of rubbish and weed buildup.

Councils, and rural landowners should be encouraged to maintain and or restore the riparian zones. Unfortunately too many people have removed the natural vegetation from river banks and /or intrusive trees, weeds and vines have taken over smothering the natural vegetation destroying it. Hence the amount of

soil washed into the river is excessive and undesirable for many factors.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Emergency services train and prepare for their respective roles, but a Capability Unit specially trained for a major flood event would mean these emergency service members have knowledge on what to monitor and prepare for and have systems in place to alert the community as data is received and analysed. The Richmond River downstream from Coraki onwards peaks later than places like Casino with the resultant flooding dependent upon the volume of water coming downstream and also that from the Wilson River in Lismore. When these two rivers meet at Coraki it results in the lower river area coping a huge volume of water and debris from both river catchments systems. For the 2022 event this was massive and the flow rate also much higher than normal. It seems there is no monitoring of river heights between Woodburn to the Burns Point Ferry. Towns like Broadwater regularly have flooding yet there is no monitoring for Broadwater. Speaking to neighbours no one was aware of the volume and rate of flow to know what to expect prior to 28 Feb/ 1 March and hence did not receive evacuation notices. The power was out so many people were cut from communications. Neighbours tried to get out when water came into properties. At night in darkness the flood water caught many people unawares, even those who placed cars, stock, machinery on flood mounds only to find the level of flood was far above any expectation and no warnings were given. This is too late and not acceptable. The SES control centre at Goonellabah should have been able to forecast much better. The rainfall data over an area can be used to forecast the level of water to result as flood. Information dispersion can not be relied upon for electrical power devices (that includes mobiles as they must be recharged). A siren system with emergency generator back up might be needed for each town, perhaps located at each SES shed.

1.3 Response to floods

Most people seem to have seen the need for their own safety or those of neighbours and then fulfilled it in any capacity within their means rather than rely upon or wait for emergency services. Various stories have been reported of people getting rescued in someone's 'tinny'. It seems emergency services were not prepared and subsequently unable to cope with the need to evacuate many people. Was this due to poor notifications to the public or an inability to evaluate the potential magnitude of the flooding?

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

Once community halls were able to be established as a central location for information and available services, including the provision of food/ meals, cleaning products, clothing most folk were busy trying to sort out accommodation and or how to get home to evaluate and start the process of cleaning and contacting insurance companies and other service providers. Service NSW, and the Department of Primary Industries were notable in their presence and ability to respond. Congratulations. DPI organised the disposal of many dead livestock, not a pleasant job but an absolute necessary task and DPI also organised the supply of hay for stock.

Other smaller non government organisations like the RSPCA gave assistance to many people who were displaced with pets.

Orange Sky Laundry should be commended for their service, the duration and work they provided to the community including washing of Defence Force clothing.

Lismore City Council was poor in providing information including regular updates on services across its Local Government Area (LGA), where as Ballina Shire initially provided daily updates presented in a clear and informative manner later doing several updates a week as the necessity decreased. Congratulations to Ballina Shire. Lismore City Council was very disappointing in its communications despite the

LGA experiencing more severe and extensive flooding, the Goonellabah office was not flooded and its community (LGA) does extend beyond the Lismore CBD and city boundary.

Community spirit and generosity of people to pull together was heartwarming across the Northern Rivers from pop up coffee vendors to clothing and furniture donations and strangers coming to lend a hand in the clean up.

Of note was Vets for Compassion comprising 3 vets that came from Wangaratta, Victoria providing free veterinary assistance to livestock in the area.

Web Sites such as Dislocated Livestock provided a needed service for those trying to relocate animals particularly horses. Seeing people who lost beloved animals and the trauma they experienced is probably something to be dealt with when the people get time to evaluate the intensity of this natural disaster. The provision of Mental Health services, financial and accommodation services for those flood effected is reassuring for our community. The provision of items and services by service organisations such as Rotary Clubs is valued as this is direct 'community helping community' and clearly displays that the government is not required for everything as sometimes the people know themselves what is needed and what is workable and best undertaken. Volunteers helping others in need is one of the most admirable traits of the Australian spirit. All that helped should be acknowledged. Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) provided an amazing variety of services and they did an incredible job.

Corporations providing food and cleaning materials were generous.

A group (don't know their name) cleaned up debris, many roles of hay bale plastic, metal drums, whitewoods and various containers from the river banks. This was done as soon as flood water receded and safe for boats to operate.

They did a great and necessary task.

Police from out of area were welcomed

especially after reports of looting in the area.

Thank you Police services.

Hundreds of cattle and many horses were rounded up and later transported to suitable pasture. This alone was a magnificent effort particularly as most doing this work were farmers who had also lost stock.

The Rural Fire Service (RFS) hosing out flooded homes was commendable, the effort by these volunteers should also be appreciated and acknowledged. Again helping fellow Australians in a time of great trauma.

The Defence Force -(Army) was definitely needed in this disaster and the shortly followed flood in April. The magnitude of the flood meant a huge input of personnel was required to perform several necessary tasks. Defence personnel did as instructed but at times it seemed direction (orders) were wanting including on basic travel requirements and instructions. Clearing businesses & houses of flood effected materials was not a desired job, but a necessary job. In retrospect it appears some personal items that were recoverable from flood water were included in the 'clean out' that later the property owners would have liked to save/retrieve. The presence of Defence members gave reassurance and relief to many folk so that was a positive, however several times it seems their duties and coordination could have been more strategically targeted. That probably falls back to communication/ information deficiencies into Defence units from outside organisations.

1.5 Recovery from floods

Communication of what has gone before, and now as to what is happening in paramount in an emergency event if the community is to be treated as a valued part of ensuring we prepare and recover to the best of our resources. It would be most interesting to know what Resilience NSW has done or is doing, and what it did in preparation prior to this flood and what has been prepared for other potential natural disasters. A trained Capability Unit for each region should

be part of the preparedness for future events as whilst ever there is development in a flood plain, a flood can be expected. Local knowledge is also very valuable mitigating the risk with sensible preparedness and planning. A considerable reliance upon social media and broadcast media should not be the predominate mediums of communication. Towns could have boards similar to the Fire Warning indicator boards usually seen on entry to each town as a means of informing the community of the level of flood risk. When power and digital communication is non operative there must be some form of back up and one where the community gets familiar to seeing this indicator board. This would assist those not listed on the mobile notification systems and would also greatly help visitors to the area who would not be listed as residents. Urban areas rely upon councils to provide water and sewerage services and accordingly pay council rates for such services. Rural properties are usually independent from such council services. Resilience NSW, if not already identified, could implement a service so that rural properties could have water tanks checked and emptied if contaminated, cleaned and refilled. ALL properties need power, water and sewerage to live in an acceptable and healthy manner. Rural properties should receive similar considerations to urban properties for basic living conditions.

1.6 Any other matters

Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation (NRRC):- apparently is to be led by Resilience NSW and there were several good indicators for cooperation and forward thinking/ planning in the announcement of the NRRC in mid April. The word 'resilience' is the most appropriate both prior to, during and after a disaster of any kind. Translating that word into tangible positive actions and assets is the challenge. Intentions and goodwill are high at the moment but as time progresses I hope this initiative does not devolve into another report on a shelf or bureaucracy. What did Resilience NSW have in place prior to

this disaster? How is this organisation serving the community and how will it undertake this role with the NRRC? Resilience NSW from what I can find is a well funded bureaucracy but little if anything is seen of this agency. To restore faith and trust in a community it would be good to know of the operations of this agency other than high pay rates for the upper echelon and a few policy documents.

Historic and also more recent urban development needs to be reviewed for the towns on the Richmond and Wilson rivers. Some relocations seem logically necessary.

Data collection is a necessity and very much available these days therefore there should not be a flood forecast that catches communities off guard again.

Flood mitigation measures are limited and should not be seen giving any singular sense of security from flooding. Information and communication remain major elements in preparedness.

Frustration from some neighbours has been mentioned due to the lack of reasonable timed responses from insurance companies. Although this is a private sector issue it does hugely impact upon the mental health of people and surely one that the state government, only in such disaster situations, could monitor to ensure further stress awaiting damage evaluations is not adding to people's anxiety. As one neighbour said after two months "we just want a reply so we can get on with our lives" .

Supporting documents or images
