

**From:**  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Flood Inquiry Submission Part 1 (Our Flood Story)  
**Date:** Tuesday, 17 May 2022 9:44:00 PM

---

Hello

I'm not great at this sort of thing but I hope that my submission will be taken into account in the rebuilding of the region that I have called home for the last 30 years of my life.

Although I now live on the banks of the river in Lismore ( I've spent the majority of the years in the northern rivers on rural properties in Nimbin, Eureka and Rosebank) I'm well aware that the entire Northern NSW area has been deeply affected by the recent catastrophic flood event that wreaked havoc and destruction from the tops of the mountains all the way to the sea. That was a LOT of water that fell out of the sky.

I'll firstly tell my story of the lead up to the flood, the flood event on that dreadful night, the second flood and the subsequent and very uncomfortable position I find myself in due to living on a major flood plain. I'll then move onto my thoughts and ideas of what I think the future could and should look like for the people who form this community.

I knew it was going to flood this year and I knew it was going to be a big one although I didn't know that it was going to be quite that big. I had been preparing my property for a flood event all summer moving along things from my downstairs area which I no longer needed and did not wish to see become landfill. I had a flood plan which was based on 1974 flood levels which my upper story floor level is above. I will note here now that my flood plan NEVER involved myself and daughter and dog to stay at the property during a flood event. Part of my plan was always to prepare the property (which includes my ceramics business located in the lower levels of my house) and leave the property to safe haven on higher ground at a friends house in Goonellabah, a prearranged situation, where we would sit the flood event out. This decision was made as I had heard stories from indigenous knowledge of floods being much higher than any in recorded history.

I'll note here that I have built my ceramics business up from scratch over the last 20 years starting out on the kitchen table (working often in the early years, until 2am after I had tucked my little ones into bed) while I brought my two children up as a single parent. My ceramics business is successful and has sustained us through my parenting years and I very proud and grateful to the community in which I live for this to be a possibility for an Arts based business to be able to prosper with the full support of the surrounding area and community.

So the rain began on the Saturday night of the 26th February. My flood plan was enacted that night by firstly moving my market trailer in which I keep stock and market equipment, to safety in Goonellabah. I had driven through South Lismore earlier in the evening and noted lights on at many of the businesses knowing that they too were preparing for the flood event. I then came home and got a good nights sleep as I knew the day ahead would be a big one.

Sunday morning I awoke at 7:30 am and was downstairs moving personal belongings and business equipment to the top level of my property by 8am. I had pre decided what was to be left downstairs and what would be evacuated to the top levels so it was a simple job of moving the items I did not wish to get wet.

I'll note here that during the morning while I was downstairs moving and securing items a news reporter came to the front of my house (my house is directly on the river close to the CBD so this often happens during flood events) asking if she could interview me about the event. I declined as I was busy, very busy preparing for the event. I was already panicking.

It took me 12 hours straight to move all things to safety on the top level of my home. This was with the help of my good friend who rang during the morning with an offer to help me move my stuff. She arrived at 12 midday and it took us 8 more hours to move everything. This move included moving my kilns to a pre arranged safe spot at the top of my street which is known not to flood even in major flood events. My two neighbours from 2 doors down helped us move the kilns which had been pre fitted with castor wheels for this very purpose.

By 8 pm when all preparations were finished exhausted, my friend and I had a discussion about my intention to leave the property. My daughter at this stage wished to evacuate to a friends house on the upper side of Diadem

(she was becoming quite uncomfortable with the unfolding situation) as I at this stage could not convince my friend of my concern that I thought we should now evacuate. She wished to stay at my house for the flood event. We then all packed grab bags which was a part of a flood plan that I hadn't thought out enough unfortunately. I attempted to then drive my daughter to her friends house where I found that I could not drive through the Trinity round about as it was already quite flooded with run off water and my car would not have gotten through it.

At this stage my panic started rising at the situation, I was beginning to feel trapped by flood water. We drove back home, ate dinner nervously, tried to relax.

I'm not sure why I allowed my friend to change my evacuation plan and am angry at myself for listening to her when I knew the gravity of the situation and had prethought my plan out so well. I am prone to anxiety suffering for the last 30 years from panic attacks. My panic was rising and perhaps that clouded my self confidence and judgement. Anyway at 11pm we tried to go to bed. For 1 hour I attempted to relax but at this stage my panic was so great while the rain poured down filling the town, that I was making audible noises as I could not contain my panic.

At 12 pm myself and friend met in the front hallway of my house and we decided on the spot to leave. We all grabbed our grab bags, dog on lead and off we went out the front door. As we fled I turned to look at the river, it was just creeping around the gutter onto my road out front of the house. My road level is 9 meters.

We ran through the rain, through water on my street to the top of my street (about 50 meters) to where I had prethought, prepacked, prepared my car for a flood event. Drenched we're got in the car and called SES to find out how and where to drive away from the rising flood waters. They had been issuing evacuation orders from 11pm for North and South Lismore.

The young woman who received our call told us, when asked the best way to drive to safety, that she did not know and that we should download the Live Traffic app to find out which roads were open still to drive to safety.

We then downloaded the app which gave a route down Molesworth Street. This route I knew would already be well and truly flooded.

I will note now right here that at no time were ANY sirens alarmed to alert anyone in the flood basin that they were in grave danger. I know that sirens went off in this town in the 2017 flood event. I still do not understand nor know why no sirens were set off during the 2022 catastrophic flood event. I would like to know who is responsible and why no sirens? I would also like to know why if dinky little Renee can work out that a major flood was on its way and to get the hell out of its way, (I knew when we fled for our lives at 12pm that the flood waters would inundate the top level of my house above any recorded historical flood event heights) just by using my eyes looking at the river and looking at the bom website, why did the people at the very top of SES not know and warn people in time to seek safety. They had seen that particular rain event nail one town after another on its way down the Australian coastline and little or too late warning was what was issued. Not good enough. I would like to see those who are responsible for such a massive failing for the communities in harms way, held partially accountable for so much avoidable trauma had people been properly warned and forced to move out of harms way.

So after deducing that no help was going to be sourced from either SES or live traffic dot com I decided to just start driving and find a way out of the flood plain to seek safety for myself and careful of companions, wet, scared dog included. I drove us down past the cinema onto keen street, I turned at Conway Street and headed towards the Ballina Road round about. The coast was clear so far!! I turned towards Goonellabah onto Ballina Road and headed towards the traffic lights (you must imagine that it was raining very heavily at this time so visibility was not great). As I approached the traffic lights I could see that the road at the lights was flooded by an overflowing drain covering the road at the traffic lights making it impassable for my Suzuki SX4. I then had to do a u-turn and drive wrong way down the two lane road as I could not go onto the correct side of the road due to there being a traffic barrier between the four lanes of road on that section of Ballina Road. This was terrifying, I had my hazard lights on as others driving up Ballina Road trying to escape were driving straight towards me I thought great now we're going to have a head on collision in this chaos!! Fortunately my hazard lights worked well and alerted other drivers that I was too on the road trying to escape. When we reached the Ballina Road/Whyrallah Road intersection I turned up Whyrallah Road in my attempt to escape the flood. Whyrallah Road was becoming heavily flooded at this stage by run off from the golf course hill. The road was barely visible because of the flooding but I just wanted to get away to safety up the hill so this time I just drove

through the water and all my companions in the car collectively coached me through the drive to finally reach safety at the Daley street round about intersection. We had driven through approximately 100 meters of flood rain run off to get there but my car didn't stall thankfully and I knew then that we had finally reached safety on high ground. I then drove us the rest of the way to my friends house on Ross Street where we arrived unannounced and we're warmly welcomed at around 12:30am and spent the next three weeks as the catastrophe in this town and entire region unfolded.

The days that followed are clouded with little sleep, mourning those perished in the event, mourning what was left behind of our lives to be destroyed by the flood, searching frantically for loved neighbours and friends to gather all our people back to safety. Watching and knowing as the flood waters made their way to the sea taking out town after town on its way. Checking on friends in that wider community to find they too were stranded on their rooftops all the way to the sea where my good friend who had helped me evacuate then spent three days on her boat in the Evans River securing it and making sure it didn't float away.

I'll finish this part of our flood story there even though there's more details I'd like to add, as that's about enough thinking about that dreadful night as I can manage in one sitting.

Kind regards