

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 19 May 2022 10:19:45 PM



Your details

Title

First name

Last name

Email

Postcode

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A member of the general public

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

I grew up in the Lismore area, and remember fondly that exhilarating feeling of a flood coming, the community on alert, the bush telegraph on high watch. We were on a hill, and our creeks were upstream, so floods came and went relatively quickly.
That said, there were always stories of those who were flooded out or in, stories of near

misses, and community spirit. The moment to moment judgement of whether to stay or go, to cross or wait. Whilst there is certainly naivety in my childhood recollection of floods, there is still that sense of walking a tightrope. I also know the in-town experience of floods was different. The shops were always so vulnerable, and the schools. There was more property to be damaged and to recover from.

Lismore, for better or for worse, was built on a floodplain. Its a community that has a long-term relationship with floods, and what it takes to manage and prepare for them. AND what it takes to rebuild and recover from them.

But these floods were different, and if this type of different is going to be the 'new normal', then a whole lot things need to be re-evaluated.

Like many, I left the area after school to get further education & pursue employment opportunities. Like many, I got caught up in the city life, and haven't found my way back. I am now an architect registered in NSW, based in Sydney.

My heart country is, and always will be, the Lismore region, and I am deeply devastated by its suffering.

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

1. I have no idea what the monitoring system is in all those (many) creeks and tributaries that feed into the Wilson river, but obviously this needs to be reviewed and made more effective at sending early warning alerts.
2. Anecdotally, there have been a few people upstream, who've been noticing that since the levee was built, that their creek backs up alot more, and floods at a higher level that what it used to. This suggests that the levee is actually increasing the volume of water upstream, which makes the rush and devastation of the flooding

so much worse if/when the levee is breeched.

**1.2 Preparation
and planning**

As per 1.1.
co-ordinated early warning systems
levee management

**1.3 Response to
floods**

clearly trying to manage evacuation orders to give people sufficient time to leave (& pack), preferably in daylight hours, is more manageable, less stressful, less traumatic, and less dangerous than what happened in the february flood.
Surely a false evacuation order is a better option than risk the situation above (again).

**1.4 Transition
from incident
response to
recovery**

I was not present or nearby to offer valid comments on this.

**1.5 Recovery from
floods**

This has to be a long term commitment, with a wholistic lense. Recovery of people, property, community, business, infrastructure, and all the other tangible and intangible things which make up a town, requires time and money over the long haul.
Who is responsible for shouldering the cost of this recovery? Insurance companies are walking away, governments are offering piecemeal support, so for the most part, its going to be individual home owners, or businesses which will have to bear the cost of recovery. And how are they going to find the funds, or energy for this recovery process, if its only going to happen again within some (relatively) short amount of time.
How many business faced with the cost of replacing their stock / equipment, as well as clean-up and renovations to their premises, are going to choose to stay?
What choices do homeowners have if their houses have now been condemned? With no home (and a mortgage), and a massive re-build cost ahead of them, and minimal chance of selling.

If these people are expected to face the recovery in the same place, then I think they need to be assured that systems of support (e.g insurances), are available to them into the long term.

This is climate change in action. Its happening. Governments have had plenty of opportunities to take preventative action, and to reduce the size and impact of the pendulum swing. Governments have to take some responsibility for this chosen course of (in)action, and cannot walk away from shouldering the costs of this cycle in an ongoing way.

1.6 Any other matters

If Lismore is to consider a new Masterplan for the region, especially one based on a brief that is truly reflective of the diverse needs and interests of its communities, then it is going to have to be a process that takes time. Likely years.

However, given the depth of devastation that so my people and businesses are facing, then now is a better opportunity than ever to really consider some radical options for how the future of Lismore might look like, and evolve.

So whilst it might seem like a non-urgent, non-recovery type statement, I think it is actually vitally important that the work on the vision of the future of Lismore begins asap, as a clear vision can be a tool for hope.

My initial thoughts on this, for what they are worth, are:

- Look to relocate the 'town centre' to higher ground, like Goonellabah, or similar...but in such a way that the heart does come with it, and its not just a soulless, universal, shopping centre type place.
- Create a buy back scheme for the flood affected residential areas, with an option to exchange for a new house & land package on higher ground (preferably near the new location for the town centre)
- Re-zone the flood prone lands for agricultural,

cultural, and recreational uses, so that they may be inhabited in a productive and positive way, that gives new life to old and familiar structures, and enables healing of community, and place through re-grounding and re-growing (rather than re-building per se)

I recognise these are over-simplified first thoughts in a very complex situation, but I am nonetheless feeling compelled to share them.

Supporting documents or images
