

**From:**  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** submission to flood inquiry  
**Date:** Thursday, 19 May 2022 2:31:54 PM

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To Whom it May Concern,

Please find below a summary of our family's experience of the February 2022 Flood in Northern NSW. We live on my mother-in-laws farm at Marom Creek, and we own a house in East Lismore that my mother lived in. The house in town is the only property we own.

These floods have been life changing for many people in this region and I believe this should be the catalyst for changes in our legal, ethical and behavioural practices to take serious, effective action on human -caused global warming. Climate change is at our doorstep and it's not knocking politely.

#### FLOOD WEEK

In the week preceding the Feb 28 event, there was another smaller flood which flooded the riverside parks in Lismore but did not breach the levee, nor am I aware of it reaching any residences. As this event finished up, I was keeping a very close eye on the weather, because 3 causeways on our road go under and become impassable. So we got stuck out this time, and stayed with friends for a few days. The storm that caused the overtopping of our causeway was very hard and fast and not the normal 3 days of heavy steady rain that would normally block us off. I had also seen that Maryborough and Gympie and other parts of SE Qld had in some cases had record breaking flooding, and was reading every facebook post published by Higgins Storm Chasing. I learnt that the storms that were occurring were somewhat stationary, and that is not good because it can cause extreme rainfall amounts. All this combined made me feel fairly certain that this was weather to keep an eye on and not just "she'll be right" this one. We managed to get back in to our home on Friday 25th Feb.

By Saturday afternoon, I was concerned enough about the weather to ask my mother in town to evacuate early, which she refused to do. I asked my brother to ask her too but he had no success. This is because there were still no indications of a very serious event from any official agency. The reason for wanting her to evacuate early was for 2 reasons- East Lismore low areas around Cottee St get cut off by localised flooding before the levee overtops in some floods if there is local very heavy rain as well as catchment wide rain. This can prevent evacuation on foot before evacuation orders are given. Secondly, in the 2017 flood, the water rose slowly over the course of a day to a few steps below the floor height and SES were unable to evacuate my mother and she had to sit it out until the water went down. The 2017 flood was what made me think that the floor being above the 12.4m highest recorded flood may not be high enough after all. Subsequently, I had decided that any time a flood warning changed from moderate to major category that it would be best if my mother packed her bags and left early so as not to get cut off. As my mother did not agree to this, I just had to wait. She was well aware of the flooding potential and was listening to local ABC radio. However, none of the official info from any source indicated this would be close to or over record flooding until far too late.

In the early hours of Monday morning my mother heard the ABC radio announcer inform Lismore City Council's General Manager that the predicted height was not going to be 11.something but over 13m, and the GM seemed taken aback by this news. My mother knew her floor height is 12.55m so she knew for sure she was going to be in trouble. She rang SES for help at 2.30am as the water in the yard was too deep to wade out. They told her they would not be coming to get her, and she should get onto her kitchen bench. My mother can't swim and it was at that point she realised she might die in there.

I could see from very simple extrapolating of the curve on the river height graphs that the predicted height and timing was unlikely to be accurate, as river heights rarely fall off a cliff which it would have to do to meet the prediction, and it was likely to be worse than the BOM flood warnings were saying. I could not understand why they hadn't had sirens and trucks getting everyone out of the low lying areas.

At 7am my mother sent me a photo of her fridge floating around in her kitchen. By that stage, she had packed some things up and stored things like licence and phone in zip lock bags inside her handbag. She had a stool set up on the kitchen bench which she moved onto once the water breached the kitchen bench. When my mum was eventually rescued the water was around her waist when standing on the bench. It's final height inside the house from the grass and marks on the wall was 2m. My mother was conveyed to Girards Hill, where friends of mine looked after her for 3 days while they were isolated by flood waters and without power there.

While the water was rising in Lismore, my brother and I tried repeatedly to call SES for her to be rescued but did not get through. I decided yes, it actually is life-threatening, so I called 000 and was at least able to lodge a request for rescue, and explain which room in the house she was in, etc. But that rescue did not occur. In fact I got a call from the SES SEVEN days later, I laughed like the hysterical person I now am. I also placed a request for her to be rescued on a facebook group where people were doing that so I thought I would try anything at this stage. We also rang everyone we knew in town and asked them if they saw emergency services or a boat to tell them where she was and that she desperately needed help. A work colleague of my partner had only just rescued himself and his flatmate from Molesworth St in a canoe with a small electric motor and had gone up Girards Hill to dry out. After hearing my mum was trapped in her house still, they walked back down to the waters edge and tried to hail a boat with a motor. The guys in the boat ignored them at first, presumably because they were on dry land. But they got in the water and got their attention. They convinced them that there was someone just round the corner. The guys in the boat had actually already been down to the house but couldn't see or hear any signs of her. We know she was screaming for her life at that stage because my brother was on the phone to her and heard her, and also heard her say, " they're going away." When they returned, she grabbed a small long handled dustpan broom and was rapping on the window with it. The rescuers were unable to open the windows because water was already over the sill height, they tried the back door but it also had too much water to open. They returned to the kitchen window and smashed the glass, then used the edge to break the actual timber window frame out. The guys very calmly and carefully talked mum through leaping over to the window so she could be pulled through and out into the boat. She thinks one of the first coherent things she said was " has my friend down the road been rescued, she's 91 with a wheely walker. " We later heard from a relative that she had been rescued, sitting on the verandah in her wheelie walker with the water covering most of her body. Her niece had gone there and convinced her to go out on the verandah, otherwise she would have drowned inside the house. Her niece had had to save herself on a surfboard as the boat did not return for her. Likewise, for my mother, if us, our friends and the people in the boat had not aligned in our efforts, I have no doubt my mother would have perished in the house.

My mother has had flashbacks and bad dreams, however, she maintains she is just glad to be alive and is doing fine. As my mother does not drive, living out of town with us is not a long term solution. As there was no housing available and absolutely no help from the Dept of Housing, my mother has relocated to a city. As the town of Lismore no longer exists, it is a much better place for her to be for now.

## GRANTS

Not long after the floods, I took my mother to the recovery hub setup at SCU. We went through a lengthy interview process, including signing forms to allow different government departments to share our information. We were given forms to fill out on paper to apply for the NSW Disaster relief grants for house internal repairs and living essentials, both of which are all badly damaged and gone. We still have not received any notification about success or rejection with this grant, despite submitting in mid March 2022. Since we were recommended for this grant via the interview, various things have changed with this grant. We have heard rumours that this is means tested, that people's work cars are being counted as assets they could sell and use to fund repairs, and that the amount paid can vary. This is all rumour as there has been no specific communication to us about or success or failure in this grant application. We applied for this grant before the Back To Home grant was announced and then later opened.

After not hearing for 7 weeks about the grant, and being conscious that people desperately need housing, I went to the hub to ask where we were at with our grant. As our first experience at the hub with Services Australia and Service NSW was very positive and successful, I was surprised at the lacklustre efforts of Resilience NSW. They didn't even have laptops to access our files or add supporting info for us. In fact a staff member informed me they don't have staff to assess the grants and unofficially it may be 10 to 18 months before we had any news. How is this an acceptable level of public service? I was concerned that the rumours we were hearing meant that criteria for the grant had been changed since we applied for it. And there is uncertainty if people get the grant if works are carried out before approval. The staff member advised me to take a gamble and try to withdraw from this grant and apply for Back to Home. I should not be having to gamble with grants at this stage, I have enough hard decisions with unknown consequences to make as it is. I am appalled at Resilience NSW. Is it even a real department? The help received from Services NSW has been professional, and appropriate. My mother has been successful in getting the NSW rental assistance grant. However, we are not sure what will happen with her once her 6 month lease is up. This is so upsetting that she is still not "safe". I feel that us and many in the region are actually still in the impact stage, not recovery or rebuild stage, without safe housing.

## FUTURE OF LISMORE

Aside from our personal loss and trauma, we need to cast our eye to the bigger picture. I at times try to think about ways forward for our suburb, our town, our region but often find it overwhelming.

So, going back to the personal, we do not want my mother, or a future tenant , or a future purchaser to be living in a house that once was thought safe but has now experienced life-threatening flooding. As for government funded house raising, we would do it if available, but how high is high enough? As for government funded land swaps, we would do it but is it affordable? At the moment we are counting on nothing and are considering adding an attic ladder and roof hatch so at the very least if it happened again, risk to life would be greatly reduced to whomever was living there. Meanwhile whilst we wait for government action, our house sits stripped and empty, with leaning and sunken foundations whilst I see posts on social media of mothers with small children begging for accommodation. I find this almost as intolerable as nearly losing my mother. To add insult to injury, we have seen Queensland announce land swaps, house retrofitting and house raising weeks ago.

The Lismore levee has always been a lemon and to consider making it bigger seems the height of madness. I hope some hydrologists can inform the local federal member of this truth.

Thank you for reading my submission,  
Sincerely,