

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Friday, 20 May 2022 1:45:45 AM

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

I am a life long resident of the Northern Rivers and a long term resident and disabled resident of Lismore.

I am a previous member of the Lismore SES both prior to and after the construction of the flood levy and have always been interested in taking notice of our local weather.

I was in regular contact through phone

messaging from the Saturday prior to flooding , with my friend who lives in South Lismore. From my own experience and knowledge in conjunctions with data for various weather services I was very concerned that this was going to be a record flood. Though nothing prepared me for just how big this one was. I was very concerned at the lack of urgency to prepare for extreme flooding. There was no way this was going to be a regular major flood. And on Sunday there was not enough urgency given to evacuate residences in the flood basin. Personally I was feeling very frustrated and was sure many more people would die then actually did. It is much to good luck that more didn't. I spent many hours late Sunday and Early hours of the Monday urging my friend to expect the Levy to break between 3 and 4am not 9am as the BOM was saying. Going by the rain that was still falling and the rate of rise of the river it was quite clear the BOM prediction was wrong. It was an extremely stressful night knowing many people would have gone to bed thinking they had much more time then they really had. The last message I had from my friend before she was rescued some 6 or more odd hours later was her saying they were going to die (they being her 56, her mother 82 and her sister who suffers emphysema , as the flood waters had already inundated her two story home second level with a floor level of ADH 14.66m. It reached a peak in her house between 30 and 40cm higher. Once they were rescued and taken to the Evac centre at GSAC we were able to be back in contact and we took them all into our small three bedroom home plus their three dogs. It is only in the last couple of weeks that they have been able to get one room set up as a temporary place to stay in their home in South Lismore. Fortunately they have had a good number of friends and strangers come and help them clean and raise some money to help them try and get their home back to a livable home again. But are still a very long way off from having things back to normal.

Only my friend and her mother have returned to live there. Basically they have no other choice.

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

The cause of the flood is simply nature doing her thing. Extreme wet is guaranteed to happen at some time after extended drought. Flooding like we saw has happened before and I have been fortunate enough to always know this as two local indigenous elders had told me as a child of flooding going over cathedral hill and my father had told me that his grandfather always told him when it flooded that he had seen a flood in Lismore in the Late 1800s where the water covered the hill where the Cathedral is, So approx 150yrs ago. In reality if you look at previous flooding rains both just over the border and just south of Lismore which has happened while the ground was saturated already in Lismore has that rain happen just 50km our direction, there could have been a number of floods that could have been as big or near as big as this one, We really have just been lucky it hasn't happened soon. Therefore it is not unreasonable to expect that this type of flooding could easily happen again,

Lismore is in a unique position as it has an very large and wide catchment area that brings water from many streams and creeks into the two that converge a Lismore. There is no other city in Australia in such a position with the type of rainfall that we can get.

I am of the opinion that something that also may contribute to the flooding issues is the Original Browns Creek being joined up to the flood drains the bring water from parts of Goonellabah and East Lismore right down to the top side of Lismore where it pours out right at the same junction of the two rivers. This water should never have been directed up river of the CBD. It would have been much wiser to have built the

drain down the side of Ballina Road to come out below the Ballina Street bridge.

1.2 Preparation and planning

When I was a member of the Lismore SES before and after the levy was built, the SES tried to educate and get the very serious and important message across to the public and authorities that EVERYONE needed to evacuate well BEFORE the levy topped as it would be all but near impossible to cross the river to rescue people. The levy itself has contributed to much faster and stronger surges of flood water as was predicted by the then Lismore SES Controller . He also explained that the once last to flood street of Molesworth street would become a torrent of forceful water because for the way the levy Spillway area was built.

I do not believe raising the levee at all is an option as it would only make the destruction once topped even worse by increasing the amount and pressure of the water pouring over the levee. it would also increase the complacency around flooding that has crept into our community since the current flood levee was built.

The general public needs to be educated as to why raising the levee isnt an option and that in order to increase even 10cm on the flood height topping the levy means the levy needs to be raised much higher then 10cm. and any raising of the levy just increases the height of flooding in the immediate up river area of Lismore and North and South Lismore.

'Straightening' the river down stream would only increase the speed and height of flooding to Coraki, Woodburn, Wardell and Broadwater and possibly Ballina. Not to mention the environmental impact to the fish and other animals and creatures who rely on the curves of the river for breeding etc . Also it would change the km inland that the salty sea water would travel cause who knows what environmental impacts.

I am yet to be convinced there is any engineering answers that would provide a big enough, safe enough, environmentally safe and value for money option.

The only real solution to to slowly remove residences from flood prone land and encourage and design alternative business places out of the flood zone.

Some still want to live in the flood zone but if so they cant expect the public purse to continue to bail them out. It is just foolishness for humanitarian, Environmental and financial reasons to keep doing the same thing over and over again. The amount of flood damaged debris and pollution from toxins etc that are held in many of the businesses that were flooded is an environmental damaging event in and of itself. We have to live and think smarter. Lismore Heart, CBD or shopping business is not defined by the location it is in but by where the shops an business exist so if they are move the Heart of Lismore moves with it. Despite what some may say. Many in Goonellabah have been hurt by the accusations that it has no heart or soul and is bland.... If it had a shopping district that was given the same attention and money spent on it to make it special and inviting there is no reason it could be a new shopping district.

1.3 Response to floods

No matter how big our SES could have been it would never have been able to rescue all the people who needed to be rescued without the help of the general public. It was a monumental job. The only thing that could have made the situation much better and more manageable is IF the people in North and South Lismore and been educated on how important it is to leave and evacuate to the evacuation center or friends in the hilled areas even if the flood isnt expected to be super major. As soon as there is any indication the levy may top they need to get out. If this had happened then the only people needing rescue would have been the people in east Lismore and Lismore as these areas were not usually effected by flooding that required

rescues.

Somehow ANYONE living in North and South Lismore really needs to understand just how dangerous and difficult it is to get rescue boats to them by the trained and qualified members of the SES. There is much more to flood rescue in raging flood waters then just driving a boat out. It is only good luck that more private boats didn't capsize and the one that did was very fortunate that none drowned as a result and that the people in the boat at least had life jackets on. There is a video of the incident on facebook somewhere. It is my understanding that many people where rescued with out having a life jacket on. While I do not in any way take away from the heroic efforts of the general public, by not providing life jackets the peoples lives where at more risk of drowning then remaining on the rooves till experienced flood rescue could reach them.

A bi annual training day for flood rescue to the general public put on by the SES would be a very good idea or encourage those who did rescue people to join the SES with the specific goal of getting flood rescue training and for the government to cover insurance for those with flood training who need to use their own boats during a flooding event. Have life jackets for all members of a house hold as a prerequisite for living in a home on the flood plain. Have a man hole with drop down stairs in every home and a skylight window roof hatch installed in every home. This would allow a safe, dry environment for people to wait for rescue. Also either an EPERB in stored in the roof cavity with the life jackets to be either mandatory or voluntary.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

Definitely need to make sure ALL services are on the same page and able to respond promptly. This includes voluntary organisations such as Resilience Lismore etc. Also make sure ANY cleaning volunteers have a training session as to how to behave, what they can and cant throw out without asking the owners and proper understanding of any legal issues that they need

to know about.

KEEP DISABLED PEOPLE and AGED as a priority when organising ANYTHING , be it cleaning, meetings or what ever. They have been neglected when portable toilets were organised, when meetings venues have been chosen and in providing emergency accommodation. one of my other friends who had to be evacuated was put into an aged care village which in itself wasn't a bad option however... they charged her NDIS plan \$5000 for the week. No money should have to come out of a person's NDIS plan for a natural disaster causing emergency accommodation or to replace equipment damaged from such an event. It all should be paid for from the State or Federal Natural Disaster Fund. Having to have these costs taken out of their NDIS funds has left some short of funds for important care as such costs definitely were not considered when their plan was created. It is far too much to ask them to go through a review process to get their plans increased to cover the cost, Reviews take time and are quite stressful at the best of times.

1.5 Recovery from floods

When you look at the fact that 3800 businesses are registered in the Lismore Council area and 3100 of them were directly impacted by the floods it speaks volumes about the lack of good planning especially as very important services such as Ambulance, SES, Fire Brigade, All our banks, NSW Services and Centrelink are all in flood area and when flooding occurs our police station is isolated from the rest of the community. Even many of our Drs Surgeries were impacted by flooding. Better planning and urgent relocation of these very important Services needs to happen.

1.6 Any other matters

The BOM needs to be independently investigated as to explain why they are the last to predict the flooding and storm events and why they don't update the data at least half hourly. Every 15min really is needed once flooding warning is called as too much can change in half an hour

but currently many flood data stations where up dated 2 hours or more. Especially during overnight hours. Floods and rain dont go to sleep.

We need to go back to local flood management control urgently. WE need to have both local visual river readings like we used to as well as the electronic data as quite a number of stations stopped working which was a very dangerous situation. A sudden heavy down pour in one of the creeks can change what will happen down stream quite dramatically.

All agencies need to understand , as does the general public, that early warnings are not scare mongering but needed and part of good preparation for flooding events and preservation of life.

Supporting documents or images
