

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Saturday, 21 May 2022 12:00:54 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 live in Lismore and, while the damage to my own property as comparatively minor, I have been heavily involved in the response and recovery, volunteering full time since the big flood. This has been a catastrophic event, devastating the city and its residents, leaving thousands traumatised and homeless. The warnings, response and the beginning of the

recovery to the flood has been appalling. This city, the wider region and its residents have been utterly abandoned by state and federal governments, compounding the trauma and challenges we now face. Just this evening I organised assistance for a man and his daughter camping in tents in their flood ravaged home, too traumatised to even collect essential supplies and food. I arranged essential supplies for displaced residents put in a hotel 3 hours from their home who have received no other support and can't access the generous community donations due to being moved from their home. Yesterday I spent the day fundraising to buy gravel and excavator fuel so people who have been stranded on their properties in Bungawalbin for three months can access society; so tradespeople can restore their power and they can have a hot shower in winter. The community has done everything, and the relief announced by the government has been slow, inadequate, and virtually impossible for most people to access due to the excessive red tape and total lack of compassion and accommodation for people's present circumstances. We rescued each other, we fed each other, we comforted each other, we saved each other – and we still are. All day, every day, three months later. I worked closely with privately funded helicopter crews that crowdsourced fuel to save people's lives, while the helicopters contracted to the government sat at Ballina Airport and did nothing. I worked with civilians that formed a grassroots SES to reach cut off communities and ensure they were safe, restore access and deliver supplies because no one else came. They fixed bridges with bamboo and set up flying foxes so people could escape when more landslide inevitably happened. They did this for a week before seeing a single ADF helicopter. The ADF stood around and did nothing for 10 days. My partner worked ten hour days in the mud army for six days straight and didn't see a single ADF member helping in

Lismore. They took valuable resources and offered no help until the media caught on. And then they went home after a few weeks of cleaning, when there is still so much to do. Still, we feed each other out of our own pockets, donate supplies, fundraise, beg for help; but none comes. We do this not because we're resilient or because we want to. We are exhausted and broken and bubbling with rage at being abandoned; we are simply surviving. We still need so much help and still none is coming. The government has all of the resources to help the people it is tasked with helping, the constituents it represents; but none of the will to actually do it. Lives have been lost; in the flood, and in the aftermath. Many more will follow without swift action to provide a solution to the pre-existing but greatly exacerbated crises of housing and mental health.

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## **Terms of Reference (optional)**

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

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### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

The climate is changing and disasters are getting worse, leaving a city of climate refugees, yet no meaningful action on climate change is forthcoming. No major flood mitigation or disaster management funding since the last big flood in 2017. No local knowledge utilised to properly prepare and warn people. No upkeep of drains. No consultation with Indigenous Australians about how to manage the land in a way that means we can coexist with it. We will not win a fight with mother nature.

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### **1.2 Preparation and planning**

As above. The local SES were massively under resourced and no amount of preparation could have readied the Lismore branch for what was coming. Had proper warnings been sent out and people given a chance to evacuate, perhaps. There needs to a massive overhaul of how this organisation operates, starting with PAYING YOUR STAFF.

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### **1.3 Response to floods**

I have owned a house in Lismore since 2020. I pay rates and every government service I have is registered to my home address in Lismore, and the only phone number I have ever had in 22 years of owning a mobile phone. I did not receive a single warning text message from the SES or LCC regarding the February 28 flood. Neither did my partner. On Thursday 3 March I received a text from the SES telling me power had been restored to the Ballina hospital. I have never lived in Ballina. The texts that were sent (which I have seen from friends) were horrific. People were explicitly told at 5pm that they did not need to evacuate until Monday. At 1am a terrifying all caps text basically telling people they might die was sent, when most people were trying to get some sleep to prepare for a potentially busy day of evacuating on Monday. They literally woke up in water, and when they called for help they were told none was coming. It was too dangerous. Why were they told to stay? An entire business day passed between the reassurance that it was ok, to there being an imminent risk to life, and yet no communication at all. And then we saved each other. Hundreds of people could have died if the civilian tinny army didn't spend days rescuing people. The SES told people not to bring boats, but luckily they didn't listen. Scott Morrison went on TV and lied that the Army was winching people off roofs in hours, when actually people saved each other.

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### **1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery**

There was no transition, because there was no proper response. Some people are still in the rescue phase 3 months later having never regained access off their properties! The community has worked out how to do this on our own. We set up hubs of donations, coordinated by willing volunteers who secured venues and corporate partnerships and built websites and the FINALLY the government services turned up and decided to contribute a minuscule role. A couple of reps a few times a week to help people navigate the absolute disaster of conflicting and

confusing grants. And over 90% of this money still hasn't been given out! I met a man who is camping in his shell of a house in Woodburn and whose grant was refused because the electricity bill he provided said , not . People who live in evacuation centres receiving emails requesting government issued documents to access temporary accomodation rent support, when they have no internet, no documents, and clearly no home. You ARE the government, you already have these documents. Instead of relentlessly hassling people to provide the same information over and over, to prove where they once lived; as them where they live now. Because most of them don't live anywhere. This is set up to fail; to wear people down until they simply give up. On Saturday 14 of MAY Service NSW started handing out food boxes door to door, and announced it as if it were something to be proud of and not deeply, deeply ashamed that it took 3 months. What do you think people have been eating?

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**1.5 Recovery from floods**    What recovery?

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**1.6 Any other matters**    This region has had a housing crisis of monumental proportions for years, with no solutions provided or even proposed prior to the disaster. This is now incomprehensible, and yet we currently still only have a handful of motorhomes in the way of temporary accommodation. We need mental health support. People are already committing suicide because they are living in tents in the mud, in cars, in mouldy and sewerage infested houses. People have no hope, because they have been given no reason to have any. You sent chaplains when we needed trauma counsellors. People are now stuck in a cycle of poverty and helplessness, more unable than ever to leave the flood zone, but terrified that it will rain. This is no way to live. We need help.

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**Supporting documents or images**