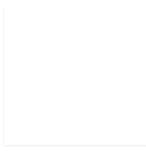


From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Friday, 27 May 2022 10:15:59 AM
Attachments: [Flood Inquiry Submission.docx](#)



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 See below word document.

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 See below word document.

1.2 Preparation and planning See below word document.

1.3 Response to floods See below word document.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery See below word document.

1.5 Recovery from floods See below word document.

1.6 Any other matters See below word document.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files • [Flood Inquiry Submission.docx](#)

Flood Inquiry Submission

February – March Floods 2022

Publish as anonymous.

My wife, _____, and I live at _____ situated between Woodburn and Broadwater on the Richmond River. While we are lucky to have not had water through our house, we felt it necessary to share what we witnessed, and our recommendations based on our lived experiences.

Short Term Flood Preparation

Flood warnings and predicted flood heights

Our lived experience:

A review of the flood heights predicted for the Richmond River at Woodburn in the lead up to the flood will show that it progressively increased over a period of time. The first warning was for a minor flood. The last flood warning I read was at 4pm on Monday 28th February forecasting 5.3m at Woodburn, it ended up 7.3m by daylight.

Our recommendation:

Forecast unknowns into the flood height. EG start the flood height high (giving people enough warning to make preparations) and then reduce the flood height as data confirms otherwise. An accurate flood height prediction was never reached until water hit the roofs.

Flood warnings not based on predicted rainfall but waiting for actual rainfall

Our lived experience:

The flood warnings of minor at Woodburn continued through until midday Monday, when the rain actually hit the ground. It was obvious given the forecasted rainfall and the situation in Lismore that this was inaccurate.

Our recommendation:

Estimate flood heights based on forecasted rainfall and then reduce flood height as data confirms otherwise. Refer to NSW Supreme Court vs SEQ Water ruling regarding the 2011 floods in Qld. "relied too closely on rain on the ground and did not appropriately use rainfall forecasts to manage.."

Broadwater excluded from flood warnings issued by BOM.

Our lived experience:

All flood warnings for the Richmond River only went as far downstream as Woodburn. Broadwater is never mentioned in any BOM flood warnings. This causes great confusion, stress and uncertainty to Broadwater the downstream communities.

Our recommendation:

I have learnt post flood that the BOM is only contracted to provide flood warnings as far as Woodburn on the Richmond River. There is no clear agency responsible past this point. Contract BOM to provide flood warning for the entire catchment. It seems ridiculous that flood warnings do not cover the entire catchment and no one at the time knew why BOM was not issuing warnings for further downstream.

Formal evacuation warning – timing and reference to Wardell river gauge

Our lived experience:

The text messaged flood evacuation order for Broadwater issued on 28th Feb at 3.11pm to evacuate immediately given forecasted rain and the Lismore situation could have been issued earlier. The text message also referenced when the Wardell flood gauge hit 3.2m key roads in the area will be cut.

Our recommendation:

Issue flood evacuation order earlier based on actual water upstream. Consider time of day order is issued allowing enough time prior to dark. There is no Wardell automatic flood gauge available online, therefore reference to this gauge is useless.

Install flood cameras, streamed online, in flood prone areas. Consider flying drones during significant events, and stream these images online. A picture can tell a thousand words to downstream communities.

No formal flood evacuation centre available at time of evacuation notice issue. No reference to one being set up.

Our lived experience:

We considered leaving based on the text message however there was nowhere to go. At the time (and for a significant time after) the evacuation order was issued there was no formal evacuation centre. This does not encourage people to leave.

Our recommendation:

Set up evacuation centre prior (or close to) evacuation order being sent. Refer to evacuation centre locations in evacuation order. I only received one evacuation text message. Send multiple messages to those that still remain in the area.

Broadwater river gauge manual and not high enough

Our lived experience:

Understanding the river height in Broadwater was difficult/ impossible as there is not automatic river gauge. In addition the manual river gauge finishes at ~5.3m. Residents were reliant on Facebook Messenger pictures from locals of the manual river gauge (which was over topped).

Our recommendation:

Install an automatic river gauge at Broadwater as priority. Install additional height to manual river gauge. I understand the additional height for the river gauge is available within the SES depot however has never been installed.

Provide cameras, streamed online, of manual gauges.

Install flood cameras, streamed online, in flood prone areas. Consider flying drones during significant events, and stream these images online. A picture can tell a thousand words to downstream communities.

No local SES provision of local flood information. EG at this height this occurs.

Our lived experience:

The river height at Woodburn did not assist as there was no available knowledge of what happens at certain heights in Broadwater. Not even the old timers. At what height does access to the highway generally get cut off?

Our recommendation:

SES to provide general guidance, via warnings / Facebook, about what to expect at different heights. EG at 4m on the Broadwater gauge expect access to the highway from Rileys Hill Road to be cut. This would likely inform evacuation decisions.

Flood Emergency and Immediate Response

Delayed response for SES Broadwater boat to hit water.

Our lived experience:

At daylight on Tuesday 1 March the water was very high and rising. The SES commanders house was going under and he was busy hauling out caravan and furniture out of his inundated house. I was receiving messages of friends and families on Rileys Hill Road on roof tops. Other friends with boats on Rileys Hill Road launched their boat and rescued many people off roofs. Going back and forth from Rileys Hill to Broadwater picking up people on roofs and calling out for help. The first evacuees to be rescued from their roofs arrived at Rileys Hill 9.10am. Other boats from Evans Head and even Lennox arrived to assist with the civilian rescue.

Once the SES had set up his personal caravan the SES boat was attempted to be launched. This was hampered by the keys to the boat being locked in the lock box of the caravan (the key to the lock box was lost). A locksmith from Rileys Hill was called upon to unlock the box.

Further more the boat could not be launched as there was insufficient trained SES personnel available to launch the boat. The SES was not sufficiently trained to launch the boat on their own. Once another member of the SES arrived the boat was again attempted to be launched however there was insufficient fuel in the boat. Fuel was then delivered, apparently by the Woodburn police, via boat. The Broadwater SES boat finally hit the flood waters at 10.50am. I acknowledge the Broadwater SES carried out rescues later that day to people further afield.

Our recommendation:

Where to start. SES to be prepared with fuel, available personnel and equipment (including keys) available.

I suggest a checklist is physically verified by a supervisor/regional authority prior to events to ensure SES preparedness.

Locals carry out rescues in own boats

Our lived experience:

As noted above locals carried out the vast majority of rescues in the Riley's Hill / Broadwater area before the Broadwater SES boat had even hit the water. More rescues were required than official boats available.

Our recommendation:

More SES preparedness as detailed above. More boats, personnel and equipment strategically located prior to the onset of weather event so they can be quickly put into action. Consider recruiting and equipping paid professional on the ground support, that is deployed prior to events.

No coordination or communication with where evacuated people are to be taken

Our lived experience:

When evacuation order sent there was no formal evacuation centre available in mid Richmond area. During rescues there was no clear direction on where the formal evacuation centre was going to be set up.

Our recommendation:

Set up and communicate evacuation centre locations early.

Rileys Hill Community Hall acts as impromptu flood evacuation centre.

Our lived experience:

As there was no formal evacuation centre set up at the time of evacuation orders or any communication that one was going to be set up in the mid Richmond. In light of this and along with the fact the Rileys Hill hall is high on a hill, the Community Hall was set up as an impromptu evacuation centre. Community members provided bedding, cooked food and provided comfort for the 30 or so people that went through the centre. Night of 1st March eight people slept in the hall. Others were allocated to housing within the community or stayed with friends on the hill.

Our recommendation:

Hall is on high ground and should be equipped to be utilised as temporary emergency base. Hall should be equipped as a Community led evacuation centre.

Our recommendation:

Hall to be equipped for use as emergency support hub (community led evacuation hub). Upgrades should include water tank, solar and battery (to run community fridge), generator, upgraded toilets, provision of showers, provision of emergency bedding and communication equipment. See Kyogle Council 'Community Led evacuation Centres' developed after the 2017 floods.

Supply of food to isolated Rileys Hill residents and evacuees.

Our lived experience:

Food was supplied to Rileys Hill from private individual's and community groups. This included food flown via helicopter from private donations. Food was also transported via private boat from Broadwater hill to Rileys Hill

Our recommendation:

Ensure donated food is long life and does not require refrigeration. Better public education of when roads and access to food services will be cut.

Evacuation of residents and evacuees from Rileys Hill.

Our lived experience:

There was not any clear communication between the SES and Rileys Hill community on the evacuation of residents – when it would occur, etc.

Our recommendation:

Train SES members on improved communication. Consider provision of loud speaker to SES.

No mobile phone or internet communications for 10+ days.

Our lived experience:

This was the single greatest issue that compounded all other issues. Mobile phone coverage dropped off early without warning. Mobile phone coverage at Rileys Hill still has not returned to pre-flood levels.

Our recommendation:

Disaster proof mobile phone and internet infrastructure. Actively follow up telcos to ensure mobile coverage is returned to pre-flood levels.

Flood Recovery to date

No Government Plan for safe return to homes, clean up and rebuild from day 1

Our lived experience:

There was ten days between the flood peak and when the flood waters receded enough for people to return. At that time there was no formal government plan on how to safely return to homes and how to commence the clean up. Instead a group of locals organised and set up a centralised system to harness the volunteers, give direction and support to the flood affected.

Our recommendation:

The government organisation responsible for coordinating flood recovery should be on the ground in impacted communities from day 1. This can be as simple as appointing a Flood Recovery Officer to each town. They must be on the ground directing resources and communicating back to departments what is required from Day 1.

Community led planning, coordination and doing the flood clean up. Slow response from Government in assisting/ providing resources and coordination in flood recovery

Our lived experience:

An unfair burden was put on flood affected communities to lead, plan and resource the flood clean up in their local area. For at least 14 days after the flood waters receded it was purely community volunteers leading and resourcing the recovery.

Our recommendation:

As per above Flood Recovery Officers should be in place, on the ground, in communities from day one to harness the huge volunteer support and free resources available immediately after a flood event. Government should develop and communicate a staged plan to clean up and rebuilding prior to and immediately after a flood event.

Long Term Flood Resilience

Lack of Federal Government action on climate change

Our lived experience:

This was a climate change driven flood. Stronger action is required now to address the underlying driver of this disaster - Climate change.

Lack of Government preparation for at risk communities due climate change. Lack of government education for at risk communities due to increased risk of flooding due to climate change.

Our recommendation:

Government to actively prepare communities for further extreme weather events especially those in known high risk areas. Communities living in a known risk area must be told this and immediate funding provided to mitigate the damage of future floods. EG house buy back, raising home, flood resilient design.... People are rebuilding back now without taking into account future extreme events. We know this is going to occur so we should already have a plan in place to build back in a more climate resilient way.