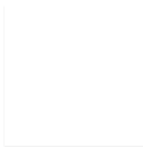


**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Tuesday, 14 June 2022 10:07:06 AM  
**Attachments:** [FloodInquiryCA.docx](#)



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## Your details

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**Title**

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**First name**

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**Last name**

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**Email**

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**Postcode**

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as** A resident in a flood-affected area

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**Submission type** I am making a personal submission

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**Consent to make submission public** I would like this submission to remain anonymous

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story** I am a fulltime carer of my mother who is 89 years old. She has dementia and is unable to walk or communicate effectively. I have arthritis in both my feet and have difficulty walking. We live in rented accommodation in Maclean, one street back from the river and levy wall. This wall was not only in danger of being topped, but also

of bursting at the base. hat would have caused a Tsunami like effect and without doubt we would have flooded at the very least. As it was the water flooded through a garden shed and to the base of our back steps. I have submitted further details. (See attached)

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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**

Potential flood inundation due to faulty pumps, levy bank and rising river.

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#### **1.2 Preparation and planning**

Lack of preparation or planning for elderly or disabled access, transport, facilities, equipment, medical services and medication requirements.

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#### **1.3 Response to floods**

Bombardment of evacuation order notifications with no solutions on how to do it.

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### **Supporting documents or images**

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#### **Attach files**

- [FloodInquiryCA.docx](#)
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## **Evacuation Issues for vulnerable residents**

During the February floods in the Northern Rivers there were many brave rescues and sterling work by all branches of the emergency services as well as the broader community. However, attention now needs to be paid to any shortcomings in the regional and state response to such disasters that have emerged from this catastrophe.

On two separate occasions Maclean residents were told to evacuate. We were one vulnerable household among many in our area and in acute distress, as we struggled to physically escape the possible imminent inundation of our home. My mother is 89 years old, with dementia and wheelchair bound and I, her carer, have my own mobility issues. While bombarded by many texted evacuation warnings and even doorknocks, there are apparently no protocols in place to evacuate vulnerable residents such as us.

I first contacted Maclean hospital, a block away, thinking that it was a safe and suitable place for my mother and one that I could reach by wheeling her to the door. After some discussion, where I was first told no, I was advised that I could leave my mother in a waiting room. My mother cannot communicate, is easily confused, and is unable to get out of bed or her chair, walk, toilet, feed or medicate herself. I then contacted Mareeba, the nearby Nursing Home, and was informed they had insufficient staff to accommodate my mother.

Emergency Services continued to warn us to evacuate but were unable to physically help us to do this. An attempt was made to bundle my mother into an SES truck, but this proved physically impossible and caused extreme distress to both of us. After ringing for an ambulance and going through what seemed inappropriate screening questions, we were advised to use Tupperware as flotation devices, and not to climb into the roof cavity. I was trying to evacuate my mother *before* those measures would be needed, so these suggestions were neither helpful nor appropriate, and in fact created more stress.

So, I sat up for those few terrifying nights praying that the levy would hold and that we would not be inundated. The next day a volunteer SES member managed to find private wheelchair friendly transport and we were both transported to the Maclean evacuation centre. It was immediately obvious to all concerned that this was not a suitable environment for an 89yo woman in a wheelchair with advanced dementia, who required a hoist, a shower chair, a hospital bed to sleep in, one that we could raise up to manoeuvre her in or out, and at least some privacy to use the toilet. Despite their best efforts, the Emergency Evacuation Centre could elicit no assistance from the hospital or Mareeba either. It was abundantly clear that no-one had a plan to deal with vulnerable/disabled residents in an emergency such as this.

One of my friends, who had delayed travelling due to the poor weather, called and offered accommodation. She had a house that was wheelchair friendly. The Evacuation Centre then

started to look for transport. They tried a community organisation called ConnectU2, who have a suitable vehicle, however they were not driving due to the floods.

Eventually they sent out a request on a carers' network and managed to find a private vehicle that was wheelchair friendly and a support worker, to transport us. Unfortunately, we still needed the hoist and other medical equipment that had been left behind. This did not become available until our care provider, Wesley Mission, eventually revealed they had a bus that could transport the equipment. They subsequently managed the transfer back home for us and all the equipment, once the emergency was over.

Undoubtedly, there are many other vulnerable households throughout the Northern Rivers region similarly affected by the lack of coherent planning for such disasters, but not all would have the resources or wherewithal to alert the authorities to this situation. After the event I went to the Recovery Centre and outlined my concerns and genuine distress. It is not known if this report has been forwarded or in any way acted upon. I was not aware of the Independent Flood Inquiry until a friend mentioned it. It is known that an SES debrief after the Maclean emergency could offer no solutions for vulnerable/immobile residents. Furthermore I am aware of other residents that were unable to be evacuated because of their physical condition. I am horrified to know that the most vulnerable in our community have been abandoned and that if I had not had a sister in the SES it is likely we too would have been abandoned. I am currently being counselled and am constantly in fear of rain and rising water levels.

Based on all too real experience, the following suggestions are put forward to this Inquiry:

- That all vulnerable residents be registered for the purposes of safe evacuation in the event of flood, fire, or other disaster. Wagga Wagga council has already done this by doorknocking all their residents, with police assistance.
- That any care plan developed with My Aged Care or NDIS include an evacuation plan component.
- That evacuation of registered vulnerable residents be triaged by the local council, hospital, or similar authority.
- That the evacuation process be achieved through the collaboration of: local council, emergency services, My Aged Care, NDIS, local care providers and community transport organisations; and that all parties be informed and trained in appropriate protocols.
- That the current warning system be modified to prioritise or target vulnerable residents in a more effective and stress 'reducing' rather than 'inducing' approach.