

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Tuesday, 3 May 2022 12:55:38 PM

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## Your details

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**Title** Mrs

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**First name** Anna

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**Last name** Nicholls

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**Email**

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**Postcode** 2490

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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 give my consent for this submission to be made public

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story** We are a family of 3 with a dog and cat who live in the beautiful village of Tumbulgum. The Feb/March 2022 flood hit the village very hard with many residents losing everything. We were in our property throughout the whole flood until the water began to recede enough to wade out to a boat on the Wednesday morning. I am sure many people will say the same thing,

but the waters rose quickly. We felt we were prepared with boxes on high shelves in the garage, items raised etc. Unfortunately as many others we may of been quite naïve in the belief that the water would not rise as far as it did and we lost everything downstairs in our home. Belongings, memories, furniture, white goods etc.

We tried to leave on the Monday afternoon. Whilst we still had charge in one of our phones and minimal phone reception, my husband called 000 and requested a pick up for us all, they never came. We had no choice at this point but to stay put.

Unlike many of the locals in the village, we do not have a large number of family members to help, friends and a like with boats. One neighbour did offer but as we believed we were being collected we told him to help others instead. As I say, we were never collected. We also had very little if any charge in our mobile phones to be able to call for assistance. The only reason we did manage to escape (and it was an escape at this point) was due to my talking to an amazing gentleman and his friends that were transporting goods into the village for people that needed them and had been able to call to request such things. He said he could take us to Chinderah, we took his offer straight away, gathered our belongings and waded around to the front of the Tumbulgum tavern where their boat was waiting. We loaded in and were dropped at the jetty in Chinderah. This was a mixed feeling to be leaving and not knowing when we would get back as we also lost all our vehicles. The boat went and we were alone, not really knowing where to go or how to get there. I walked out into the road and saw lots of cars going by through the water, rubber necking at damage etc. Nobody stopped, nobody seemed to care. I managed to waive a car down with a beautiful family and asked them to take us to Kingscliff TAFE for the evacuation centre. The only reason I knew this was there was because

my office co-ordinates these in disasters and I presumed it would be open. They loaded us into the rear tray of their ute and very carefully transported us to Kingscliff. We were dirty, smelly, feeling very lost, traumatised and emotional by this point.

Our mobiles had no charge, there was no signal throughout this whole situation and communication was incredibly difficult for everyone, let alone if you were trying to co-ordinate rescue, accommodation and general assistance.

When my husband's phone was recharged he had 18 missed calls and voicemails from Ambulance & Police asking if we still needed picking up! Why on earth do these people not realise it is an emergency and if you have asked, yes you do! Don't call people with no power, physical or literal to see if they still need assistance. We saw the SES once on the Monday evening and we told him we had requested a pick up, he said he would come back for us if he didn't find the people he was looking for, we didn't see them again.

The feeling of helplessness, being stranded and desperation through not being able to contact people should be a large take away from this traumatic experience in that everyone relies on mobile phones and access to internet to contact one another. Even if you are trying to obtain accommodation to leave to you have to register online, complete i.d checks etc online. This is impossible with no reception and more importantly no charge and no way to charge your phone. For emergency services to not think about these factors is disappointing to say the least. Maybe if services actually concentrated on person to person at these times it would be more helpful and successful.

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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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## **1.2 Preparation and planning**

I work for the Government organisation and was contacted by a friend/colleague on the Sunday asking why I had not evacuated. I informed her that the text message had been received too late to do this safely. She then informed that the evacuation centre had been open since 2am that morning, I received the text message to evacuate at 9.10am.

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## **1.3 Response to floods**

As a resident I feel this was severely lacking. Whilst I appreciate that the flooding was wide spread and emergency services were being utilised everywhere, we saw the SES once. We logged a call for rescue with 000 and no-one came. We ran out of food, fresh water, phone charge, no way of contacting anyone. As I said above we logged a call for rescue and no one came, but we had 18 missed voicemails asking if we needed rescuing. Why would you call people when you know where they live, how many there are and that they need rescuing. To make a phone call uses a lot of charge. Maybe this inquiry could look into a SMS line being set up to log calls and communicate with emergency services in these situations as a more practicable solution when phone lines are not working, no internet and very little charge available.

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

Once in the evacuation centre donations and assistance was plentiful initially. The government should of stepped forward more quickly with financial aid as well as allowing the ADF to assist.

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## **1.5 Recovery from floods**

Individuals have lost everything and may not have insurance. These grants are great but how quickly is the money getting to families that need it to get back in their homes. I know of families that are separated between friends etc. in order to have somewhere to sleep, or are sleeping in their flood affected homes on mattresses on the floor as they have nowhere to go. Funding to even start a house is crazy, plasterboard alone could cost upwards of \$18,000 just to get walls in

your home.

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**1.6 Any other matters**

I would suggest that either SES or Police or ADF do rounds of flood affected villages everyday around lunchtime, use a loud speaker and announce as they go that they are logging people who wish to leave. As a family we would of waived them down, logged and waited for rescue. You don't need to know exactly what time you are being collected, but the fact that you know that someone else knows you are there and will becoming for you that day would be an amazing relief and feeling.

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**Supporting documents or images**

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**Attach files**

- [Bawden Street, Tumbulgum.jpg](#)
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