

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Tuesday, 17 May 2022 9:53:39 PM

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## Your details

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**Title** Miss

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**First name** Breanne

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**Last name** Cottam

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**Email**

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**Postcode** 2480

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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** While I do not currently want to go into detail about my story, it was traumatic and the worst day of my life, I feel I need to contribute to this inquiry in some way. We are a single income family of 3, with a 6 yr old daughter. I am a nurse and was too traumatised to work for 7 weeks post the flood. We lost absolutely everything we owned, had to completely demolish the interior of

our beautiful 100 yr old home (which had never had flood water in it in it's life) and rebuild entirely from donations. To date, almost 12 weeks on, we are still waiting for government grant assistance. We were completely prepared for a "major" flood.. in 2017 we still had a metre between the flood water and our floor boards. We enacted our flood plan, and like most South and North Lismorians who were confident of flood vs floor levels, elected to stay at home because everyone there knows when the flood waters go down, you want to be on our side of the river to start cleaning out downstairs immediately rather than being caught on the other side and not be able to get back home for a few extra days. We took our daughter and our car up the hill, and settled in for a few days of being isolated in our island home with our animals. Unfortunately, this did not end up being a reality. From when the flood waters hit to when it reached the floorboards of my home, which is over 2 metres high on stilts, was legitimately less than minute. I watched it rise. I tried to stop it entering my house by putting towels at the front and back doors! The water came up through the floor. We were in disbelief and shock. We simply could not believe the water had come into the house. It was not a possibility we had considered based on the information we were given. We waited for it to stop rising.. surely it couldn't go much higher? But it didn't stop. We waited as long as we could. The water was chest high when we left to get on the roof. We had to leave our cat and dog in the house, my partner and I were lucky to make it onto the roof ourselves. It was devastating. Once on the roof we saw nothing but water, every direction to the horizon, no land. We called 000 several times who told us they knew where we were and would get to us as soon as possible , we could not get through to the SES. We spent 5 hours on our roof, in the rain, waiting to be rescued, yelling, screaming, whistling at passing boats - watching the water continue to rise. I honestly thought we had

orphaned our daughter. Eventually an absolute legend on a jet ski pulled up at the front of the house. Turns out this guy from Ballina busted down to Lismore first thing in the morning, ignored the police and SES telling him it was too dangerous to cross the river, went anyway because he knew people were literally drowning, and spent the day rescuing people from South and ferrying them to the Ballina st bridge, where the civilian tinnie army were waiting to ferry us to the safety of the hill (very coordinated effort!). We were finally safe. Next comes almost 12 weeks of trauma, grief, despair. However our community is amazing and the amount of support we've received from friends, family and strangers is insane. Anyway, that's a bit of my story.. The one point I want to make clear, which I think is important to this inquiry, is that South Lismore (at least) NEVER received an evacuation ORDER. This is the SES correspondence that I received during the event..

Sunday 27/02/22 5.38pm SES FLOOD EVACUATION WARNING for low lying parts of Lismore. Evacuations are likely sometime on Monday 28 February 2022. Prepare now. Listen to radio. [www.ses.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ses.nsw.gov.au) or Tel 132500. Between this message and the next, a vehicle either SES or police drove down our street, hit the siren a few times, and kept driving. Monday 28/02/22 12.43am SES EMERGENCY FLOOD ADVICE. LISMORE IS ISOLATED. FOR YOUR SAFETY EVACUATE TO HIGHER GROUND NOW ONLY IF SAFE TO DO SO. AN EVACUATION CENTRE IS OPEN AT SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY P BUILDING, RIFLE RANGE ROAD. ONLY TRAVEL VIA KEEN ST, LEYCESTER ST AND NEW BALLINA RD VIA LISMORE HEIGHTS. DO NOT ENTER FLOOD WATERS. FLOODING AROUND 1974 LEVEL POSSIBLE. LISMORE LEVEE WILL OVERTOP. THIS IS A LIFE THREATENING SITUATION! RISK TO LIFE IMMINENT. THIS IS A RAPIDLY EVOLVING SCENARIO. FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

CALL 000. At this point there is no escape. We can not reach the “last roads out”. The water hits at 1.55am. Would an evacuation ORDER have changed things? Saved lives? I’m not sure, but it’s worth thinking about. I note that when the second major flood hit 4 weeks later South and North Lismore were issued an evacuation ORDER 3 days before the flooding.. Monday 28/03/22 8.25pm FLOOD EVACUATION ORDER for LISMORE South. EFFECTIVE NOW. Residents must evacuate by 10PM TONIGHT. Evacuation Centre Location at Southern Cross University, Military Rd, East Lismore. Please follow the order to EVACUATE. Take pets, essential items, warm clothes, medicines, insurance documents and valuables with you. For more information listen to local radio or visit [www.ses.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ses.nsw.gov.au) or call 132500 for emergency assistance. A lesson learnt, but sadly too late. Thank you for reading my story.

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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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<b>1.1 Causes and contributing factors</b>	Inadequate warning systems, poor storm water drainage, not enough emergency support when needed.
<b>1.2 Preparation and planning</b>	Personally we prepared completely adequately for the information we were given, unfortunately emergency services were not adequately equipped to respond timely to the emerging disaster.
<b>1.3 Response to floods</b>	Very slow in terms of financial support, community response and organisation incredible.
<b>1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery</b>	We have had to self fund all rebuilding of our property from donations from family, friends and charity organisations as we wait for government grants, because we need to be able to move home, we can not wait 12 weeks while in unreliable temporary accommodation.

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**1.5 Recovery from floods**

Everybody left. We have had countless phone calls and visits in person by various organisations regarding requests to assist in property clean up, we have a half acre property backing on to Hollingworth creek, covered in tonnes of flood rubbish. Multiple agencies have “escalated” our requests for help. As yet nothing has been done.

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**1.6 Any other matters**

Lismore still needs help. Please don't forget us, this is a long long road. We just want to be able to go home.

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**Supporting documents or images**

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