

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Friday, 20 May 2022 8:24:04 PM

Your details

Title Mrs

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Submission details

I am making this submission as Other

Submission type I am submitting on behalf of my organisation

Organisation making the submission (if applicable) Coordination Cooperative Limited

Your position in the organisation (if applicable) Secretary of the Board

Consent to make submission public I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Your story

I am a resident member of a 250 person rural residential multiple occupancy community, Co-ordination Co-operative. Our property of 1800 acres is situated in the Lismore Local Government area. We are 8 kms from Nimbin and our lands border the Nightcap National Park. We have been in existence for almost 50 years and in that time we have endeavoured to protect our natural environment and to create a functional community.

Residents here experienced the 1974 flood, as well as the many other major flood events which have impacted Lismore since, including the 2017 Cyclone Debbie floods. In 2019 we also experienced bushfire on our property which had spread from the National Park.

On the 28th of February my husband and I were at our residence on the property. We received a text from a friend that morning warning us that the current weather coming was going to produce severe flooding. In the late evening I received a text that my friend in Lismore had lost everything to flooding in Lismore. I tried to call emergency services at this point but was unable to contact 000 and the SES. In the course of the night we heard and felt rumbling and felt the ground shake. This was landslips occurring in the gully's on either side of the area where I live.

The next day we looked at the damage created by these slips and tried to contact emergency services and friends, again the phone services were not working.

On the next day we walked out to the centre of the community to assess how people had fared in the event, touch base with any board members available and see what response we were able to establish to assist members.

I discovered that my neighbours and I were isolated from the rest of our community by

massive landslips. Even foot access was difficult as we had to negotiate a jungle of fallen trees and massive amounts of mud where our road once was. To compound our distress, we were also cut off from the rest of the world by telecommunications failures. Our only source of information was local radio. While occasional text messages could be received or sent in the early hours of the morning, phone calls were impossible. My friends and family who had also been affected or were concerned about me, were not able to contact me and this heightened the distress and isolation we all felt.

All mains power was cut and due to huge landslips across our only access road, our community had no access to fuel for generators. However, after a few days, we were fortunate to have members travel cross-country with fuel supplies and to transport one seriously ill child to hospital and bring urgently needed medical supplies for other people. With fuel for generators, there was power for the fridges at the centre to preserve perishables and provide power to recharge devices. One of our community members relocated their Starlink satellite internet service to our community centre where we could all use the internet to communicate with friends and family. We set up a community hub, created a vulnerable peoples list and directed able bodied members to do a welfare check on all their neighbours. We started a preliminary assessment of the damage to shared infrastructure and individual homes. We created a cooking roster and food distribution centre for members and neighbours. For those with medical issues we did welfare checks and made runs into Nimbin to get prescriptions for those people. As well, we learned what was happening elsewhere, which was as horrific as our experience.

At the end of the 1st week we received a visit

from the local RFB, they warned us that we couldn't expect any help from Government agencies in these initial stages due to the level of devastation all though the RFB could be available if we had an emergency situation. This was the situation as we were pretty much on our own for the 1st 2 weeks.

By now, it was obvious that our whole region had experienced a major catastrophic event. We have been recovering ever since and for those of us living in the hills, while our recovery is not from flood but from the massive damage caused by the rain event, it is a recovery as major as any we have ever experienced. We and many other rural communities will require assistance that we have yet to receive.

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

COMMUNICATION:

The loss of both mobile and landline networks was devastating for members. The lack of accurate information and a timely response from emergency services also contributed to the sense of trauma.

LAND CARE: The property since the purchase of the 1st land parcel in 1973 has be the subject of intense regeneration work by members. The land was deforested despite the steep topography and subjected to rapid flooding and landslides in the early days. A policy of tree planting on steep slopes and river care projects along both sides of the Tuntable creek that runs through the property. It is our belief that the landslides experiences would have been much worse without these mitigating factors.

BUSHFIRE 2019: The property was affected by the bush fires in 2019 covering a substantial

section of one side of the property and may have weakened the ability of vegetation in these areas to hold the slope together.

CLIMATE CHANGE: In the almost 50 years of occupancy of the land we have never experienced the number and severity of natural disaster events as those that have occurred in the last 5 years. The event was unprecedented with over 1000ml caught in rain gauges on the property in 6 hours. More than that experienced during Cyclone Debbie.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Better early warning systems would have really helped the community prepare for the event. An app similar to the Bushfire warning system "fires near me" would be really helpful.

Due to our emergency response during the bushfire in 2019 we were able to respond quite quickly to assess the situation and establish a hub for support and distribution of resources and information.

We didn't expect the communication systems to drop out as we had relied heavily on mobile phone networks during the bush fire event.

1.3 Response to floods

During the event and for the 2 weeks after it was local volunteer groups who responded and contacted the community and checked on our welfare. The community felt abandoned by government agencies as we didn't even get a call to check on our welfare.

Even now it is local unfunded volunteer organisations like Resilience Lismore, Koori Mail, Nimbin CWA and Nimbin Neighbourhood and Information Centre that have provided practical on the ground support for affected people.

People are still struggling through the various funding options available for recovery and I have not yet heard of anyone who has received funding from the event. Many of the most devastated were not able to access online

services and missed out on early disaster relief funding available from the Red cross and other agencies.

Those affected by landslides have initially not been eligible for funding support despite suffering losses to housing and infrastructure.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

Many communities including our own are not recognised by authorities for funding support. We have already spent most of our reserves dealing with clearing landslips from community access roads and repairing water and paper infrastructure. Our members have had barriers when accessing funding and despite being rural properties have so far had no access to funds available for other rural landholders and primary producers.

Our communities save local councils considerable funds every year by self funding roads, water and power infrastructure and missing out on services like garbage disposal. We spend collected member rates locally managing and maintaining our properties. Our members contribute to the local economy both as workers and customers and many are volunteers for important emergency and social support volunteer organisations.

We find ourselves struggling in recovery because of the lack of access to available funding and the considerable costs of stabilising landslip and repairing infrastructure like roads etc. Many members are low income earners.

1.5 Recovery from floods

We need;

More access to mental health support- levels of support before the event was really low due to funding in rural areas for mental health workers. Many traumatised people will need support for years to recover from this event.

Access to housing- local rental housing reserves

were depleted and unaffordable for local average wages before the event. This situation is now even more acute with rental rates increasing since the event by an average of \$100-200 per week with increasing competition for diminished supply. This needs short medium and long term response from Government as some people may take years to recover.

1.6 Any other matters

Our community has agreed to set up a CB network, purchase a satellite phone and a Starlink satellite internet connection to ensure we have a reliable communications system on the property.

Since the events of Feb 28, our local Nimbin community has formed a CB radio network, solely to assist in preparing for and recovery from natural disasters. 10 base stations of at least 5w capacity were donated and the network covers an area from Blue Knob in the north to Bishops Creek in the south and from Tuntable Falls in the east to Stoney Chute in the west. Regular monthly check-ins are held to ensure the system is functioning.

There are now also Facebook groups set up to link such networks with others and to provide information and education.

If such citizens radio networks were to be set up in all vulnerable areas, they can function independent of possible power and telecommunications breakdowns as they do not require 240v power, but can be operated using battery power. Many rural properties have standalone solar systems which can be relied on also.

Some local Rural Fire Service members are now part of our local network. If RFS personnel can be funded to relay messages about river heights from local citizen networks to the SES, communications can be more expeditious and effective. This will save lives and property in

communities, towns and cities further downstream.

In the event of power and telecommunications failures such as were experienced during the Feb 28 event, communications from local radio networks will need to access satellite telephone.

Funding for centrally located or mobile Satellite dishes or phones which can be activated in emergency to ensure warning messages get through to SES is essential backup in the event of telecommunications failures.

Funding to support the SES and RFS at the same level as Defence forces would be the most sane solution to disaster warning, response and recovery in what are becoming more and more frequent events - and would enable these interconnected communications systems between citizens and agencies to be implemented in the most effective way.

The government should be planning for stand alone solar and battery backups for mobile phone towers as the current diesel run generators require access to the site in order to supply power.

Government should recognise and support local responses to emergencies. During this event many more lives would have been lost if locals had not sprung into action with out waiting for Emergency Services.

Supporting documents or images
