

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Friday, 24 June 2022 4:59:12 PM

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## Your details

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## Submission details

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<b>I am making this submission as</b>	Other
<b>Submission type</b>	I am submitting on behalf of my organisation
<b>Organisation making the submission (if applicable)</b>	Creative First Aid Alliance
<b>Your position in the organisation (if applicable)</b>	Chair
<b>Consent to make submission public</b>	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

The Creative First Aid Alliance (CFAA) is an alliance of Northern Rivers arts organisations, independent artists, creatives, teachers and youth workers committed to supporting each other, collaborating and delivering creative recovery projects for our communities. It was initiated soon after the February 2022 major flood.

CFAA exists to facilitate community arts and cultural development programs for community wellbeing, social cohesion and recovery across the Northern Rivers. We are invested in the long-term activation of culture and the arts as a tool for preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery to disaster impacts, ensuring more resilient and healthy communities into the future.

Many of our members also experienced the March 2017 Major Flood and are aware of how our people heal. The arts play a deep, real role in supporting our particular communities and individuals to reframe life, landscape and connection before and beyond disaster impact. An arts/cultural response can mean many things – care, comfort, reduced feelings of isolation, increased community cohesiveness, empowerment, reimagining, celebration, memorialising, new personal and creative skills, strengthened connections to place, and a sense of shared optimism.

Through CFAA we are working with local artists and communities to create and achieve locally owned visions and goals, putting local voices in the lead, building on local strengths and collaborating across sectors.

The community arts and cultural development sector has been traditionally partnerships and relationship oriented. This focus is intentional and adaptable, and works to achieve systemic change focused on communities' self-determination and resilience building.

Members of CFAA are a creative intersection that has developed long term partnerships across the region with health, education, local government, regional development, community development and social cohesion for decades.

This submission has been developed in consultation with the members of CFAA. The primary focus of this submission is on the ways to achieve greater opportunities for the arts and cultural sector to contribute to the building of resilient and healthy communities in the context of disaster planning and mitigation. We embrace this Inquiry as an opportunity to acknowledge and support what we already know – participation in the arts produces positive social impact and outcomes, and community arts practice is a vehicle to foster active community participation, citizenship and collective responsibility.

CFAA Members:

Independent Artists:

- Katie Cooper-Wares - Movement Artist, Storyteller, Facilitator, Environmental Educator & Advocate.
- Claudie Frock - Visual artist, Performer, Arts worker, Educator, Community Arts Engagement Consultant and Accessibility Advocate.
- Ilona Harker - Musician and Creative Engagement Specialist
- Jeanti St Clair - Journalist, Journalism Educator & Story-Catcher
- Karenza Ebejer - freelance, award winning short film producer, writer, director and educator.
- Jenni Cargill-Strong - Professional Storyteller & Storytelling Coach
- Emma Newman - Cultural & Community Development facilitator, Arts Manager, Performer
- Gabrielle

Organisations:

- Lismore Regional Gallery - Established in 1953, Lismore Regional Gallery is one of the longest-

running cultural organisations in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales.

- Lismore Quadrangle - The Quad is a central public greenspace in the heart of Lismore CBD dubbed 'Lismore's Creative Playground'.
- Arts Northern Rivers
- Northern Rivers Conservatorium - a key cultural, education and community organisation and the largest single provider of quality music education in the Northern Rivers.
- Sprung!! Integrated Dance Theatre Inc - a not for profit and community-based organisation providing workshops and specialised dance and theatre training for people with disability.
- SeedArts - a not-for-profit whose mission is to deliver high quality community arts projects in regional and remote communities.
- Real Artworks Inc - a not-for-profit arts company dedicated to developing creative arts projects utilising the skills of artists of varying abilities to interact with other professional artists or marginalised groups.
- The Clubhouse Lismore - a creative hub for young people aged 12-18 - With a focus on creative arts, music and the 'STEM' fields: science, technology, engineering and maths.
- Roundabout Theatre - one of Australia's most popular outdoor theatre companies, creating roving acts, educational theatre, installations and children's theatre and events.
- Red Inc - a dynamic, creative community organisation working with young people and people with a disability
- LightnUp Inc - community, arts-based, not for profit - the producers of the annual Lismore Lantern Parade and run year-round programs and workshops throughout regional, rural and metropolitan

Mental Health Professionals:

- Dr Caroline Atkinson - Chief Executive Officer - We AI-li
- Sarah Daley - Child and Family Counsellor - Social Futures

- Philippa Rose - Expressive Therapies Counsellor - Social Futures
- Professor James Bennett-Levy - Professor of Mental Health and Psychological Wellbeing - University Centre for Rural Health (North Coast)

Partners:

- Resilient Lismore
- Creative Recovery Network

Supported by:

- Lifeline

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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**

An appreciation of the complex nature of regional and remote communities' circumstance, lifestyle and history is crucial for effective disaster management. Literature on resilience raises the need to foster greater community engagement, capacity development and empowerment, on better communication strategies and the need for enhanced knowledge as to how emergency services are delivered.

The arts can and do play a vital role in this process, but need greater support to enable an embedding of cultural representation within the disaster management planning structure and relevant activation of services pre, during and post disasters.

**RECOMMENDATION:  
INTEGRATION OF CULTURE AND THE ARTS  
INTO WHOLE OF COMMUNITY/LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
PLANS**

Good planning is imperative for clear and responsive activation to manage disaster impacts and the ongoing recovery needs of our communities.

Participatory community-focused art practice is recognised as an area of the arts that has been at the forefront of developing access and active participation strategies for communities and is innovative in partnership development with other sectors. It is a resourceful sector that can collaborate in the strengthening of preparedness and holding communities through recovery.

Over the past five years members of our Alliance have established connections with the local emergency management stakeholders, but these became quickly fractured with activation and the changing of people and roles. In the longer-term context this is a constant challenge when political shifts occur, people move away from positions and priorities shift in peace-time.

Without a recognised place at the table of regional or local disaster management planning, we are not able to feed into or offer broader, creative opportunities in the process of response and recovery. It has meant in the immediacy of this flood that our process of engaging, connecting and activating through state and local networks has been delayed, which in turn has been detrimental to responsive community programming.

**RECOMMENDATION:  
SUPPORT FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY  
CREATIVE RECOVERY PREPAREDNESS  
PLANNING TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE,  
COMMUNICATED AND SUPPORTED STEPS  
ARE IN PLACE FOR ACTIVATION AND LONG-  
TERM RECOVERY**

An important learning from this flood impact is the lack of broad, people-focused preparedness within our local cultural institutions (libraries, galleries and museums) for diverse and multiple disasters impacting their people, collections, audiences and infrastructure. A deeper relational

understanding about the value of public cultural sites across the region and their contribution to the public and social lives of our community members, their role as place makers and connectors will grow an understanding of the intrinsic participatory value of the outreach programs and safe places these institutions offer for social, cultural and wellbeing needs.

A Creative Recovery Preparedness Plan will identify the direct and possible roles culture and the arts can play within local activation, and how to implement and activate these roles, supporting procedures and tools to fulfill defined responsibilities whilst further supporting capacity development for disaster preparedness and response. A Creative Recovery Preparedness Plan puts the arts front and centre as people rebuild their communities. We want to use the arts to build connections and spirit, bringing communities together and creating events to remember.

Support from local government and disaster management leaders for the development of these plans will ensure an upskilling of local community leaders and creatives, positioning culture and the arts within the broader ecology of disaster management and how we might work best in collaboration across the roles and responsibilities before, during and afterward.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

INITIATE AND SUPPORT CAPACITY BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD CREATIVE RECOVERY CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY LED PROJECTS, ENSURING GOOD PRACTICE AROUND CONTEXT, DELIVERY AND TRAUMA INFORMED CARE.

A recognised outcome of successful recovery is the strengthening of local capacity, ensuring legacy for programs and preparedness for future disaster events.

Creative Recovery, as a framework and a process, requires skilled facilitation, consistent support and resourcing. It is a process of connecting and embedding creative approaches within the disaster recovery activities of the broader community, particularly with local decision-making in collaboration with community members, community organisations and private industry. When implemented, this approach creates more effective opportunities for sustainable delivery and community support. There are a range of opportunities and methods to engage local artists, organisations, service bodies, training institutes and government employees, agencies and departments to join the broader community recovery process.

Whilst our Alliance is made up of rich diversity in skill and capability, access to specialist training in the area of disaster mitigation and recovery will ensure that all programs are consistent with best practice and local practitioners are better placed to ensure the development of programs that are safe, understand the disaster context and work from a strength-based approach for building resilient communities.

As we move into a future of compounding disaster impacts we need to build a network of experienced, trained and trauma-sensitive facilitators who can operate with autonomy within a high-pressure environment, working with multiple partners. This establishes new employment opportunities that promote training, education and career pathways for artists. Moreover, this contributes significantly to a national workforce development strategy that sustains the sector by considering longer-term perspectives throughout the creative industries.

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

Communities by their very nature present considerable complexity, are multidimensional and rapidly changing. In such an environment, direct contact with affected populations,



understandings of local cultural and political contexts, and development of close working relationships with local partner organisations do not come easily and can take second place in the priorities of traditional emergency agencies, their staff and funding.

As the emergency management work is divided between organisations, an overview of the whole process becomes increasingly difficult to achieve, let alone keep in focus. In this context, local knowledge, experience and linguistic and cultural skills are key to ensuring effective participation of local people, as well as access to other non-traditional response and resilience building opportunities.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

IMMEDIATE ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION WITH ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY OUTREACH RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONS TO ENSURE DIRECT KNOWLEDGE OF IMPACT, ACCESS AND EQUITY FOR ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY.

Stable, recognised community programs and organisations that are linked to participatory, safe spaces offer the real potential of relationship, engagement and connected communication. Arts and cultural programs establish a platform for community voice and a safe place to connect and feel supported. These are the places and people that our vulnerable community reach out to in times of shock and stress. Connections that can be trusted to care and respond appropriately and have the information needed to make decisions.

Inclusion of the leaders of these programs into the preparedness and response planning process will ensure effective and relational communication and support in the immediacy

and short-term response phase. Inclusion and sharing of information and response actions will ensure thorough integration of energy and activity, building a whole of community perspective and a coordination across roles and responsibilities.

**RECOMMENDATION:  
REGION WIDE RECOGNITION OF  
NARRATIVE OF IMPACT AND NEED TO  
ENSURE EQUITY OF RESPONSE**

The immediate narrative of impact was presented through disparate, politicised media which seem to have a direct relation to the response of politicians and consequential resource release.

In already difficult times to feel you have been looked over or not seen as worthy of response and care is deeply hurtful and results in anger, mistrust and disempowerment. An engagement in broader communication and sharing of the disaster narrative is imperative to ensure an equitable, conscious and balanced approach to need, priority and therefore longer-term planning across the whole region.

Disaster impact by its nature drives reactionary outcomes but we cannot afford a reactionary media that drives decision making. A deeper engagement across media and journalism in conversation with the disaster management system is required to articulate responsibility and an ethical framework of engagement.

A conversation in respect to new digital and community-directed channels and their integration into data gathering for planning and response is required. These channels, whilst vulnerable, as sources of trust and influence and need to be understood most specifically within the communications of disasters and their ongoing impacts.

## **1.5 Recovery from floods**

While mainstream service providers generally focus on hard assets and notions of personal safety, there are likely to be different understandings of risks and additional assets that are valued at the community level. These may for example include cultural assets; relationships; aspects of Country; and livelihood activities. These may be regarded not only as vulnerable to disasters but also key resources to ensuring the ongoing resilience of communities.

Our Alliance aims to address the complexities inherent in identifying and building on the existing knowledge and understanding of disaster management in a region-wide context and how we might support and grow this.

Community arts and cultural development encourages people to use the arts for self-expression. It engages people in the process of art making to explore their own ideas, to reflect on matters affecting them and their community, to dream a different future for their children, to unlock a spirit of play and discovery, to share stories and build community connections. The intrinsic value of the arts is to the fore in this approach with the personal satisfaction that arises from art making combined with the creative engagement of people's heads and hearts in addressing personal, community and social challenges. For us, this is what participation and engagement with the arts really mean.

Thus the CFAA considers active participation in arts and cultural activity as the bedrock to achieving truly transformative local cultural enrichment. Therefore, we ask that the inquiry specifically address the need to support and encourage more local community members access to actively participate in the arts.

Community arts and cultural development practice also enables active participation where

people are enabled to safely engage in discussions and take action on issues that matter to them. This active collective engagement in civic matters is an important antidote to passive acceptance. Engagement in community arts exercises the muscles of cultural participation and citizenship, very necessary in the reframing of community post disaster.

The role of community arts and cultural development in the development of positive health outcomes, particularly in mental health, has been widely recognised and there is a substantial body of research that points to this. Finally, community arts plays an important role in developing social capital of communities, as these activities foster the development of social networks, trust, and cohesion.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

SUPPORT ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES FOR COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE REGION TO BUILD STRONGER, CONNECTED, RESILIENT COMMUNITY.

There is a real need to create opportunities for diverse communities to tell their disaster story and find pathways to making sense of and assimilating the experience into their lives. These processes create cultural content that enriches the cultural fabric of communities and affirms local identity, connection and empathy.

Actively intersecting community arts practice with other sectors ensures access and equity in recovery. This interdisciplinary approach strengthens outcomes for communities through synergistic resourcing and the alignment of mutual objectives. Dedicated budgets for participatory creative recovery projects will enable direct, accessible and quick turn-around

programs to support community project ideas and capacity building based on community needs for psychosocial recovery.

Research highlights that the members of our communities most impacted through disaster are those already marginalised. Our diverse marginal communities offer an incredibly rich source of stories that are unique, challenging and demonstrate the capacity and resilience of the human spirit. Current locally-run creative programs work with these communities and have built strong trustful relationships, inhabiting this marginal space, rich in diversity and can ensure trusting safe environments for these communities in recovery. Support to ensure these programs are re-established as soon as possible and have a consistent presence in these difficult times is imperative.

Due to existing networks and small avenues for shared resources a number of targeted programs have been developed since the impact of the floods. This Alliance is aiming to garner support to connect disparate programs and interested creatives to grow these programs and respond to knowledge of specific community need. A long term strategy of communication and planning across the recovery community needs to be supported to ensure strong inclusive response and long-term support.

Specific local examples of this in action after the floods are as follows:

Claudie Frock Community Engagement Officer, Lismore Regional Gallery are currently supporting 2 creative flood recovery programs: The Collage Club & Slow Draw.

The Slow Draw is a monthly community participatory drawing gathering led by a different guest artist. The first Slow Draw partnered with SeedArts Soft Circus in the Lismore Quad, as a

free accessible weekly community creative recovery program open to all ages and skill levels- collage as an art form can literally be seen as a way to stick things back together, providing a place to gather, share stories, collaborate and create. Materials are both purchased and donated by community & has grown from 30-50 people attending.

Jeanti St Clair: As creator of the Lismore Flood Stories audio walk project, which presented the experiences of people flooded in 2017, opportunities to capture stories from the floods and re-present them to the community has huge resonance and is an important aspect of both community and individual healing, continuing community conversations about flood preparedness and resilience, and the importance of community-led responses to disaster. Photographer Raimond de Weerd & I are documenting civilian rescuers from the 2022 floods in portrait and trauma-informed audio story. Rescuers, and the people they rescued, are referred to the Lismore Head to Health program for triage into mental health support and services. We anticipate the Rescue project will result in a book of portraits and stories, and an exhibition to commemorate the first anniversary of the 2022 floods. In addition, a monthly ukulele strum-along night will start in coming months as a resurrection of the Lismore Ukulele Club. Mahalo Ukuleles and Byron Music have graciously donated 28 ukuleles to be given away to flood-affected people who feel they would benefit from a gentle and fun community-engaged music club for trauma recovery post-floods. At the moment, a shortage of suitable venues is slowing the kickstart of the uke club.

Virginia Woods and Zerina Millard are offering trauma-informed Dance Movement Therapy sessions for flood affected individuals and communities. The work focuses on calming the

nervous system through somatic resourcing and uses physical storytelling and creative journaling techniques within a recovery framework.

RealArt Works Inc deliver professional projects intersecting the most relevant and exciting regional arts practices with disability led arts and socially engaged practice. Our most recent work is Love Level 2022 : a series of unprecedented events. A multi arts live response of original work by professional and emerging artists and community in a creative response to flood experiences, stories and memories. The project will continue to evolve as we move, explored and play with local flood affected towns. Real Art Works!

Second Nature Strategies vision is making inclusion second nature. We do this by engaging with organisations who are interested in increasing their accessibility and providing services to all community members. We offer consulting, advocacy and engagement through creative collaboration and practise.

SeedArts Inc is a small community arts organisation based on Bundjalung Country, NSW. Over 6 days in May/June we delivered a community focused creative recovery project, 'Soft Circus' in the Lismore Quad, which researched the therapeutic benefits of circus and the performing and visual arts/crafts activities for a community in trauma from recent devastating floods. Our aim was to bring people together in acts of calming creation to connect, relax and bond. The response from the community was overwhelming and positive. The need for play and desires for simply joy was evidenced by the looks on the adults and childrens' faces as they were playing swamp soccer, walking the wire, learning to juggle, making their own dance moves, creating digital stories, pasting up with the collage club or chalking the pavement. These activities were only made possible through

specific flood recovery funding from the Regional Arts Fund and the collective strength of the Creative First Aid alliance, which was able to draw on extensive social networks and cultural capital to connect to the community in authentic and socially engaged ways. In responding to climate fuelled 'natural' disasters, grass roots arts alliances such as Creative First Aid are leading the rehearsal for change that will become the norm in the future as the catastrophe unfolds in our present lifetime and beyond. In this way, artists are creating the response template for a very uncertain future. If the only constant is change and artists are known as change makers, then supporting artist to lead creative responses to climate change is an imperative and an investment for all - for the communities we serve and in which we live for our capacity to be more adaptable, flexible and empathetic in a literal and metaphoric sea of mud.

RECOMMENDATION:

#### PLANNING ACROSS MULTIPLE DISASTER IMPACT AND RESPONSE TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE USE OF ENERGY, RESOURCES AND PLANNING

The layered impacts on our communities brought about by sequential disasters and emergencies – from drought to bushfire to COVID-19 - does not seem to have been fully acknowledged and managed from the point of view of response and recovery programs.

These have been managed in separate silos of investigation and planning which has meant a disconnect, and often a doubling up, of response packages (eg mental health support has been layered and has not had a coordinated or broader impact focus than direct services paid from multiple funding streams). The inability to view the multiple disasters as a whole rather



than a sum of its parts seems to have caused fractured rather than collective and collaborative problem solving. This inability, coupled with a determined focus on the economic impact of these emergencies, has undermined the possibility of engaging in more holistic conversations around forward planning and future-ready recovery processes.

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### **1.6 Any other matters**

Transformative community arts can help to change dominant narratives and help create different stories, whereby communities can be the protagonists of their reality and, from that reflection, hope can be envisioned. Within emergency management there is an implicit assumption that the bulk of the work is undertaken by service agencies. This view fails to recognise that the bulk of work is actually undertaken by local communities, with the support of local government and organisations and community groups. Our practices are embedded by values and principles that are fundamental to building relationships and gaining trust.

Community arts practice is a key vehicle for creating safe forums to express, and to cope with, the loss and grief that community experience. Often what arts practice does is hold a space for people and make it safe for people to be vulnerable, enabling the collective (re)generation for a sense of hope and social/civic normality.

The Creative First Aid Alliance is striving to support emergency management and our communities in disaster to be more functional, efficient and resilient. We work from a starting place that recognises that if we are able to truly connect and join each other in the human story of endeavor and survival we will be stronger, adaptable and hopeful – the cornerstones of resilience. We believe that the arts are the bridge that enables us to meet and build strength together.

RECOMMENDATION:  
A PLACE FOR THE CREATIVE FIRST AID  
ALLIANCE ON THE NORTHERN RIVERS  
RECONSTRUCTION CORPORATION  
ADVISORY BOARD to ensure the cultural and  
creative voice is activated as a leading force in  
the necessity of place-making, resilience building  
and establishment of new community stories that  
will support the strengthening of identity and  
connection so necessary for the recovery,  
reconstruction and potential relocation journey  
ahead.

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**Supporting documents or images**

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