

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Friday, 20 May 2022 5:11:05 PM

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## Your details

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**Title** Ms

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**First name** Eleesha

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**Last name** Hughes

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**Email**

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**Postcode** 2472

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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** The rain was torrential for at least a week with minor/moderate flood warnings in place. My eldest son stayed up all night just watching the river on the night of the 26th of February he knew something wasn't right about the river he was scared and worried. We hadn't been given any evacuation orders and had been through several floods while living in woodburn so I didn't

think we needed to worry to much I mean after all, surely the authorities would advise us when to evacuate right.!!! Wrong I was so incredibly wrong. I have so much footage and photos of the river rising from the morning of the 28th of February all day the kids paced back and forward not knowing what to do or if we should pack and evacuate. The rain was so heavy and we watched the river rise all day still with no warning at this stage it was crazy the kids were absolutely stressed by this stage. I made the decision to take my kids to a friends place in new Italy I knew as I was driving away that I wouldn't be able to access them for quite a while but I just wanted to get home to my animals. My next door neighbour who had been living in his place for 67years said that we should put our things up on the benches and get the animals and go to safety this was the stage we're the river broke it's banks across the road from our place and yet still no evacuation orders. We put things up ,packed our car secured the other animals and put them up as much as we could. There was no one to help. By this stage I was in shock and also an emotional wreck I didn't know what to do. I stayed until the water came rushing under the first step and I only have 4 steps so I started to panic bundled up my 2 dogs and 2 parrots and tried to drive up the so called safe place but was unable to even get there as ppl had left cars on the road in the way. By this stage I had absolutely no way of leaving woodburn and no where to go. I sat down at the local servo the lady who had come to open the servo for an hour left the toilet open for us to be able to sleep in there. I sat at the servo watching the water come across the road up to the servo bowzers and realised I had no choice but to drive through the flood water in order to get to safety. I drove through the flood water which went up and over the windscreen and roof I could not see at all with my foot flat to the floor and doing only 20ks and drifting sideways I rocked back and forward till I got to the other side. I travelled from the

servo past my house and all the way on the highway through the flood water until I reached sly brothers wood yard. My neighbour watched the whole time I drove through and said he has no idea how I made it through. Desperation does weird things to people I guess it's not something I would normally do that's for sure.

After being in utter shock I was unable to move or process what was going on all I could think about was my kids and the animals I had left behind . Wow this is so incredibly hard to write I hate reliving this moment. I asked my neighbour for a hammer and tried to break the lock off the sly brothers gate so I could get to higher ground I broke the hammer. By this stage everyone that was standing knew we had to move and we only had minutes to do so. We found another way into sly brothers and drove up to what I thought was a high point I unloaded my animals and was getting ready to climb onto a truck out of the rain. My neighbour drove past me and that I had beater move as the water is coming hard and fast. He said I will be under water in an hour if I stayed there and told me to follow him up to the highest point left there which was only metres from the truck in the shed. The other guys that were with us tried to call the ses and we heard the operator respond saying they were not doing rescues after dark and that we would have to wait until morning. We then informed the operator that we would all be dead by then she then said there was nothing further they could do. We all knew we were on our own and had to save ourselves by that stage. We had a discussion about what we were going to do to survive. We came with a plan to hoist everyone there including animals onto the shed roofs with the front end loaders. My neighbour and I were sitting car next to car. We were vomiting constantly from anxiety and nerves. He kept driving around every hour to see how far the water was from us until eventually he stopped driving anywhere and admitted we were stuffed. He said we are gone not sure if we are going to

make it out alive. We sat there listening to people screaming to be saved animals screaming in fear. The noise all the horses and cows were making I will never forget. The sound of that water I will never forget. I ran my kids and family told them all I loved very much not knowing if I will ever see them again. Said sorry to the animals I had in the car and felt like the biggest piece of shit for the animals that were now drowning at our house. I rang my mum in Melbourne and told her there's no way out and it's not looking very good as no one was coming to help/save us. By 3am and trying to constantly watch the bom app which was only updating every few hours. The water was now rushing up under the car , the wheel wells in the car we full of water it was almost half way up the car. Standing there knee deep water rushing all around us we all had no idea how we were going to survive. One of the guys went through the flood water I have no idea how but managed to get his boat. A noise that gave us just a slight hope. And then my neighbours nephew pulled up in his boat and said we have to save ourselves there's no one to help but locals with there boats. By this stage we were waist deep in water and managed to scramble all of us animals and all into 2 boats. There would have easily been about 10-12 of us in them. We started the boat trip from sly brothers to the woodburn public school. We had to angle grind the Bimini cover off one of the boats just so we could fit under the power lines and quite a few times we had to lay down so as to avoid getting electrocuted. That's how high the water was already. It took so long to get to the school as the current was crazy. We seen dead cattle, animals clinging to things to try and survive and the people that seen us begging and pleading to be saved as well. Heartbreaking just doesn't even cut it. I'm Beyond broken and shattered at this point and I don't even know if my 17 year old had made it to safety. He thought he was safe at his mates place in a 2 story house directly across from the



woodburn school until the water came up the second story and they used there boat to get to safety. Once at the school all the people with boats went straight back out to start saving all the others that were screaming out. We walked saturated wet with our animals up to the school. There were so many people and animals just wandering everywhere. We sat on the concrete so cold and scared not knowing who was alive and who wasn't out of our friends, family and community. By 6am the water was well and truly up and in the school it was only about 6 metres from where we were at the front of the hall. We were told that we would be getting evacuated to evans head by the army. But if we could get ourselves there the ses said that would be better as they had no idea how long it would be with the army. I finally found my 17 year old son. I managed to get a hold of my other kids that I drove out to new Italy and let them know I was alive. My sons mate had a boat and had been doing rescues all night offered to boat us to evans head. Wow nothing could prepare us for what we were about to see. It was one thing sitting there cold wet and hearing all the animals die but to watch it. Now that was horrific watching them die In front of us. It was like crossing a giant brown ocean we could barely see any houses left and the ones we did see had either animals alone on the roof or they were on the roof with their families waiting to be rescued. I knew we had nothing left but the clothes on our back and the animals with us. It was like a hey of boats all were locals saving locals there was only 1 ses boat that I seen. The ses had no resources from what we seen but we're trying to help. What seemed to be the boat ride from hell we finally got to evans head only to be told that we can not go up to the evans head school evacuation centre as it was full. I started crying thinking omg why would they say that when we have no where to go. Luckily my son said we could go to his bed sitter with our animals where we stayed for 8days until we could finally get back to woodburn

to see what was left of our house. Even though there was inches of water still in the house it was still knee deep out the back yard and that was 8 days later. This is just a brief of what happened . We thought what we had been through was hell but nothing prepared us for what followed.

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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**

The new highway

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### **1.3 Response to floods**

There was barely any and still isn't

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### **1.5 Recovery from floods**

I just can't believe the government think that \$5000 will refurbish a house. That's all I'm Entitled to and I don't even have insurance and am receiving a disability support pension. Apparently I'm allowed to get the disaster recovery assistance. I'm so broken homeless and with no housing available or accommodation as I have 2 dogs n 2 parrots. I can't be sent away as my daughter has disabilities and needs to attend her school evans river k-12 otherwise she will disconnect from school completely. I need to stay in the northern rivers for her school and both my son and self study at wollongbar Tafe. I'm ready to shoot myself. I have no idea how I'm going to refurbish a house when I get one. I used all the money granted to buy a shitty car and a caravan so my kids could sleep on the river bank in a safe dry place. So we have no money and will not be helped with disaster assistance. I honestly don't know where we are headed or where we will even live my kids are beyond broken. I donate my spare time to the recovery hub in woodburn cooking for the community and cleaning other peoples houses in between moving our own camp every couple of weeks. We just want this to end I honestly don't

know how much longer I can do this life. Oh and we got stuffed over by the owner of our house we where living but that's a whole other story.

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**1.6 Any other matters**

I have a lot of photos and videos of the day of the floods and after. I have a time line of that day also so you can see what time the bank broke

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**Supporting documents or images**

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