

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
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**Attachments:** [18052022 - NorthernRiversFloodResponseReport.pdf](#)  
[20221805- Submisison to Select Committee for Flood Response.pdf](#)

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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>	End Street Sleeping Collaboration
<b>Your position in the organisation (if</b>	Community Impact Officer

applicable)

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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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**Terms of Reference (optional)**

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#)

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**Supporting documents or images**

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**Attach files**

- [18052022 - NorthernRiversFloodResponseReport.pdf](#)
- [20221805- Submisison to Select Committee for Flood Response.pdf](#)

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# Northern Rivers Recovery Data Collection

A collaborative response for individuals experiencing homelessness post-floods

May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022



Together,  
street sleeping  
is solvable.



Social  
Futures



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End Street Sleeping Collaboration (ESSC) is a non-for-profit organisation that aims to halve homelessness across NSW by 2025 and work toward ending it by 2030. Signatories to the Joint Commitment to End Street Sleeping include the Premier of NSW, the homelessness sector's leading NGOs, City of Sydney and homelessness peak bodies. Collaborators include local governments, philanthropists, homelessness sector NGOs and the Department of Communities and Justice. ESSC was specifically established to lead the collaborative effort, deliver on the Premier's commitment, and reach the targets set.

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# Introduction

Across the Northern Rivers, it is difficult to accurately measure the number of individuals experiencing homelessness. The vastness of the region, combined with scarcity of services, and the often-hidden nature of homelessness makes it difficult to build a comprehensive picture of homelessness in the area. This difficulty has been exacerbated by the recent floods in the area which prevented the 2022 street count from being fully completed in the Byron Shire. Due to COVID Health orders the 2021 Census was also unable to release their estimates of homelessness in NSW.

Estimates of homelessness in the Northern Rivers:

- In 2016, the Census<sup>1</sup> estimated that there were 1,494 people experiencing homelessness across the Northern Rivers<sup>2</sup>. Estimates of homelessness are not available from the latest census.
- According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)<sup>3</sup>, specialist homelessness services assisted 1,918 people who were identified as homeless<sup>4</sup> across the Richmond – Tweed Region<sup>5</sup> in 2020/21.

While services and government agencies are responding to the emergency, a gap has emerged for those who were previously experiencing different forms of homelessness before the floods.

During the floods, individuals experiencing homelessness were displaced, moved quickly, and were unaware of supports. Many of these individuals who were experiencing homelessness prior to the floods lost possessions, incurred damage to their vehicles/shelters, lost access to outreach and temporary accommodation services, and have had difficulty navigating the new supports set up in flood affected areas. Additionally, homelessness services were left unaware of their clients' circumstances.

The floods have compounded the disadvantage experienced by people at risk of and experiencing homelessness both directly and indirectly. This has further increased their risk of and exposure to traumatic experiences leading to housing insecurity and homelessness. Unfortunately, it has been difficult to obtain basic information on the scale of homelessness since the floods to understand the support needs for this cohort. Therefore, End Street Sleeping Collaboration (ESSC) worked with services and government agencies in the

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<sup>1</sup> ABS Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016, Cat No 2049.0

<sup>2</sup> The Northern Rivers includes the following LGAs: Ballina, Byron, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley, and Tweed.

<sup>3</sup> Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020–21 – Data tables

<sup>4</sup> As measured by the client's housing circumstances at the beginning of their first support period.

<sup>5</sup> The Richmond – Tweed Region (Statistical Area Level 4), spans Richmond Valley, Richmond Hinterland and Tweed Valley.

Northern Rivers to respond to this need and understand the number of people in the area experiencing homelessness.

## Project Overview: filling the gap

Harnessing the power of the local collaborations established in the Northern Rivers, a network of services got together to identify how they could gather the information required to fill the gap. The Byron Shire Council and Fletcher Street Cottage from the Byron Shire, and Social Futures, Fred's Place and Tweed Assertive Outreach program from the Tweed Shire contributed to this project by developing the goals, creating the approach, and completing the morning outreach.

### Goals

The project's three major goals were to understand:

1. The number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Northern Rivers. This will help fill the gap in knowledge for local communities.
2. Whether the number of individuals experiencing homelessness has increased, decreased, or remained the same post-floods.
3. The areas and locations in which individuals are rough sleeping post floods.

This information is vital to responding to homelessness in the Northern Rivers, and to developing a collaborative response to the flooding matched to individuals' circumstances and needs via the By-Name List (BNL).

### Approach

To achieve these goals, morning outreach was completed over a 7-day period across the Byron, Tweed, and Lismore Shires. An Observations app was developed by ESSC to gather geospatial and non-sensitive information during the morning outreach. The Public Space Liaison Officers, Social Futures, and the Tweed Assertive Outreach team, who have professional experience identifying and engaging with rough sleepers in their areas, assisted in the outreach.

Criteria was established for the observations to determine who would be included in the observational count. These criteria were used to create consistency and evidence-base in the observations being made by different workers completing the outreach. The criteria included:

1. Vehicles: if there was condensation on the inside or on the roof, there were open windows/fans for ventilation, there were a large number of belongings, the bedding was unkempt, parked on level ground.
2. Rough sleeping on streets: sleeping bags, bags of belongings, cleared ground, tents.
3. Rough sleeping in bushlands: trail leading into the camp well-defined, sleeping bags, bags of belongings, tents, tarpaulins, ground sheets.

Exclusion criteria for travellers and/or rented campervans: larger camper vans, newer vans, minimal wear and tear, stylised/expensive fittings/aesthetics inside the vans, branded campervans (ex. “Byron Campers”).

The outreach also aimed to facilitate initial engagement with individuals, to add them onto the By-Name List (BNL), and in the process identify who was already on the BNL. Criteria was established to ensure engagements were respectful and safe and included:

1. Do not engage if the individual is sleeping.
2. Do not engage if people are in their vehicles.
3. Do not engage if there was a large group. If there are more people than staff, engagement was not taken for safety reasons.
4. Do not engage if there was evidence of substance use.
5. Ensure the physical environment is safe to enter.
6. Look for verbal and non-verbal cues from the individual. Some cues to not engage include the person having closed body language, does not make eye contact, does not say “hello” back, appears upset, or walking at a face pace.

The outreach included engagements in the drop-in centres of Byron (Fletcher Street Cottage) and Tweed Heads (Fred’s Place). These drop-in centres are safe spaces for workers and individuals. Individuals experiencing homelessness would be given a warm referral and introduction to ESSC staff through their existing relationships with Assertive Outreach/Public Space Liaison Officers/drop-in staff. If willing to give their consent, individuals would be added onto the ESSC’s By-Name List system, and where possible completed a VI-SPDAT survey.

## Terminology and definitions

ESSC’s By-Name List (BNL) System: an application, accessed through a desktop or mobile, used by homelessness service providers throughout NSW to store information about those who are experiencing homelessness. Through the BNL people’s stories can be shared which enables a collaborative service response.

Northern Rivers flood events: The NSW Floods event began on 22 February 2022 with severe weather, heavy rainfall, and associated flooding. It was declared a natural disaster up until May 4, 2022. The floods effected the 7 local government areas across the Northern Rivers.

Observation: evidence of rough sleeping homelessness witnessed firsthand during the outreach by ESSC staff members, Byron Shire Public Liaison Officers, or collaborators, in line with the criteria discussed above. Observations were recorded with a location type, latitude and longitude coordinates, and a short description.

### People experiencing Rough Sleeping Homelessness:

Homelessness can be defined in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this paper, *The Institute of Global Homelessness* (IGH) (2022) classification will be used. The IGH classifies people without accommodation as the following<sup>6</sup>:

- 1A.** People sleeping in the streets or in other open spaces (such as parks, railway embankments, under bridges, on pavement, on riverbanks, in forests, etc.).
- 1B.** People sleeping in public roofed spaces or in buildings not intended for human habitation (such as bus and railway stations, taxi ranks, derelict buildings, public buildings, etc.).
- 1C.** People sleeping in their cars, rickshacks, open fishing boats, and other forms of transport.
- 1D.** “Pavement dwellers” – individuals or households who live on the street in a regular spot, usually with some form of makeshift cover.

In other literature, rough sleeping can be considered as “primary homelessness”. In the *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023* it states “a person does not have suitable accommodation which meets basic needs including a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and the ability to control living space” is considered primary when they have “no conventional accommodation or shelter”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> IGH’s other classifications of homelessness can be found here on their website: [Overview | IGH Hub](#)

<sup>7</sup> This was published by the NSW Government and the report can be found here: [NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023](#)



## Findings

Observations were recorded with a location type, latitude and longitude coordinates, a short description of what could be seen, and some basic details such as apparent gender, age, and the number of people. In total 363 observations were collated.

Where evidence of a person/persons sleeping in a vehicle was observed the vehicles' registration plate was recorded where possible, to both prevent the double counting of vehicles, and to understand the movement of vehicles in future analysis. On 29 occasions a vehicle was observed multiple times<sup>8</sup>. In these instances, subsequent observations were excluded from analysis, leaving 333 unique observations. The number of people in a camp or group was recorded for many observations. The maximum number of people recorded in a group was 4. Where no person was visible (for example when still in a van) it was assumed to be 1 person. There was an estimated number of 378 people observed. Where no person was visible (for example when still in a van) the dwelling was assumed to belong to 1 person.

- Number of unique observations (observations): 333
- Estimate of number of people observed: 378

## Location Type

Each observation recorded was given a location type, to better understand the types of dwellings or location. The vast majority (293, 88%) of observations were of vehicles, either on the street or in carparks. Most of these were vans, however people were also observed sleeping in smaller SUVs, sedans, hatchbacks, and Utes. Roof tents were also classified as vehicles.

**Figure 1 – Location Type by Observations**



<sup>8</sup> One vehicle was observed 3 times, while all others were observed twice.

## Locations

Each observation was recorded along with latitude and longitude coordinates to better understand the areas in which people are experiencing rough sleeping homelessness, and to identify hotspots, patterns, and changes post floods. ESSC developed an interactive map of the observations, which can be viewed if you click [here](#)<sup>9</sup>. Observations are separated by Shire and town below<sup>10</sup>.

**Table 1 - Observations & Estimated Number of People by Location**

Location	Observations	Est. People
Bangalow	6	7
Brunswick Heads	48	51
Byron Bay	125	128
Mullumbimby	16	16
Ocean Shores and surrounding area	12	12
Suffolk Park	7	7
<b>Total - Byron Shire</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>221</b>
Tweed Heads	65	70
Fingal & Chinderah	9	9
Kingscliff	13	13
Cabarita Beach & Hastings Point	5	5
Murwillumbah and Uki	10	10
<b>Total - Tweed Shire</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>107</b>
Lismore <sup>11</sup> :	17	19

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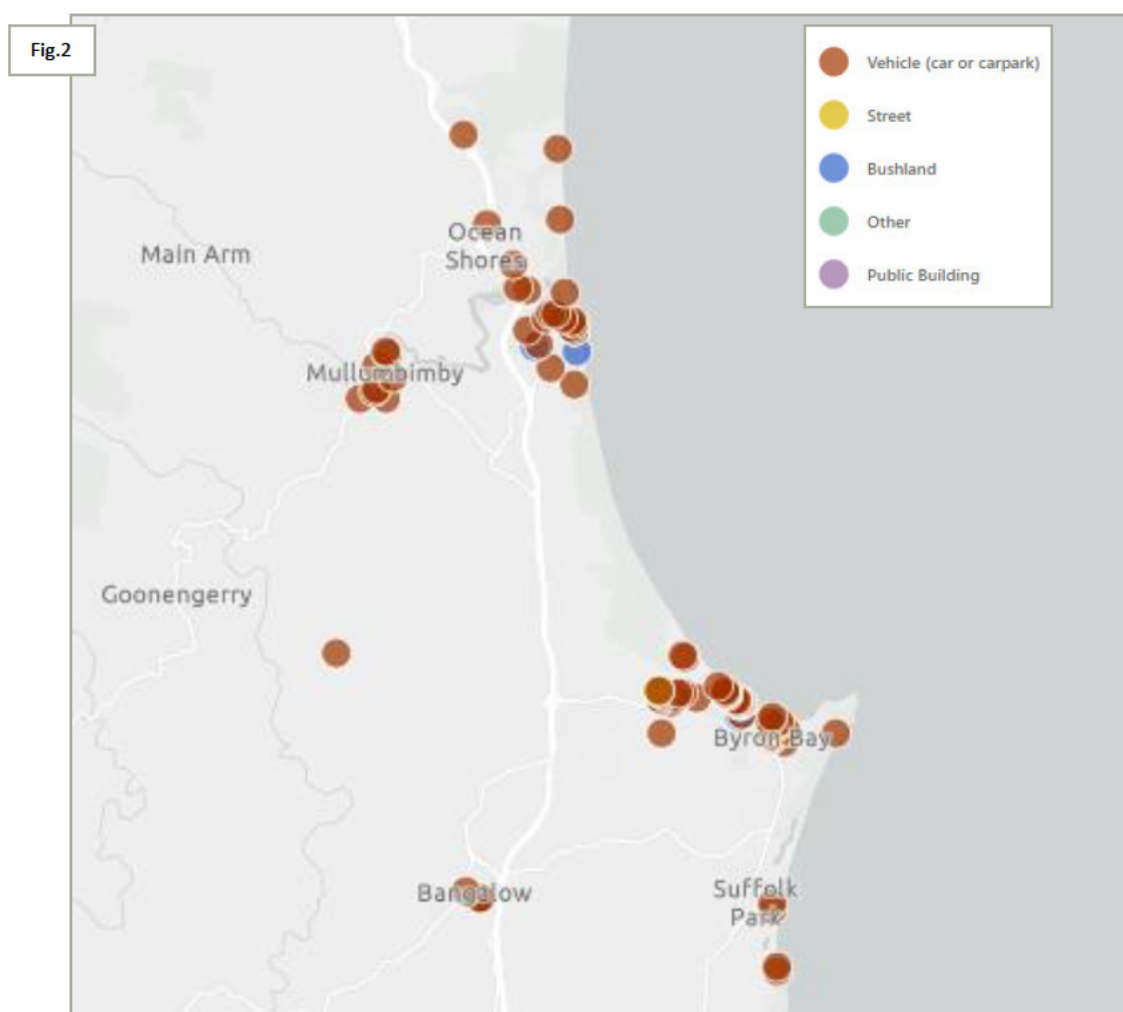
<sup>9</sup> You may need to login to a Power BI account. ESSC can provide BNL members with access.

<sup>10</sup> The maps have been created with Arc GIS software.

<sup>11</sup> Observations of people camping on what looked like their property were not included in the official data, however, roughly 25 camps/campervans were observed on people's property.

## I. Byron Shire

Figure 2 – Observations across Byron Shire by Location Type



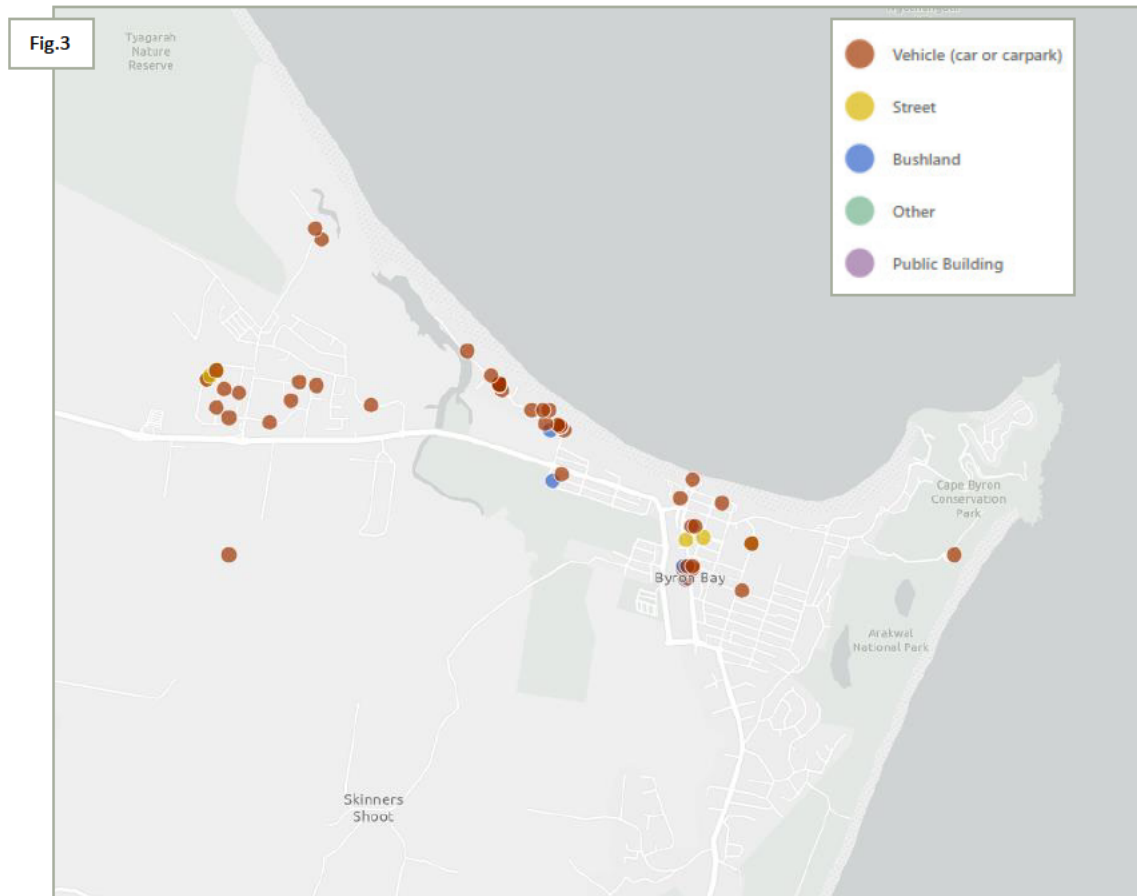
Overall, 201 (94%) observations in the Byron Shire were of classification 1C of the homelessness definition –people sleeping in their cars and other forms of transport.

Table 2 – Observations & Estimated Number of People by Location Type in Byron Shire

Location	Observations	Est. People
Vehicle (car or carpark)	201	203
Street	7	9
Bushland	5	8
Public Building	1	1

## II. Byron Bay

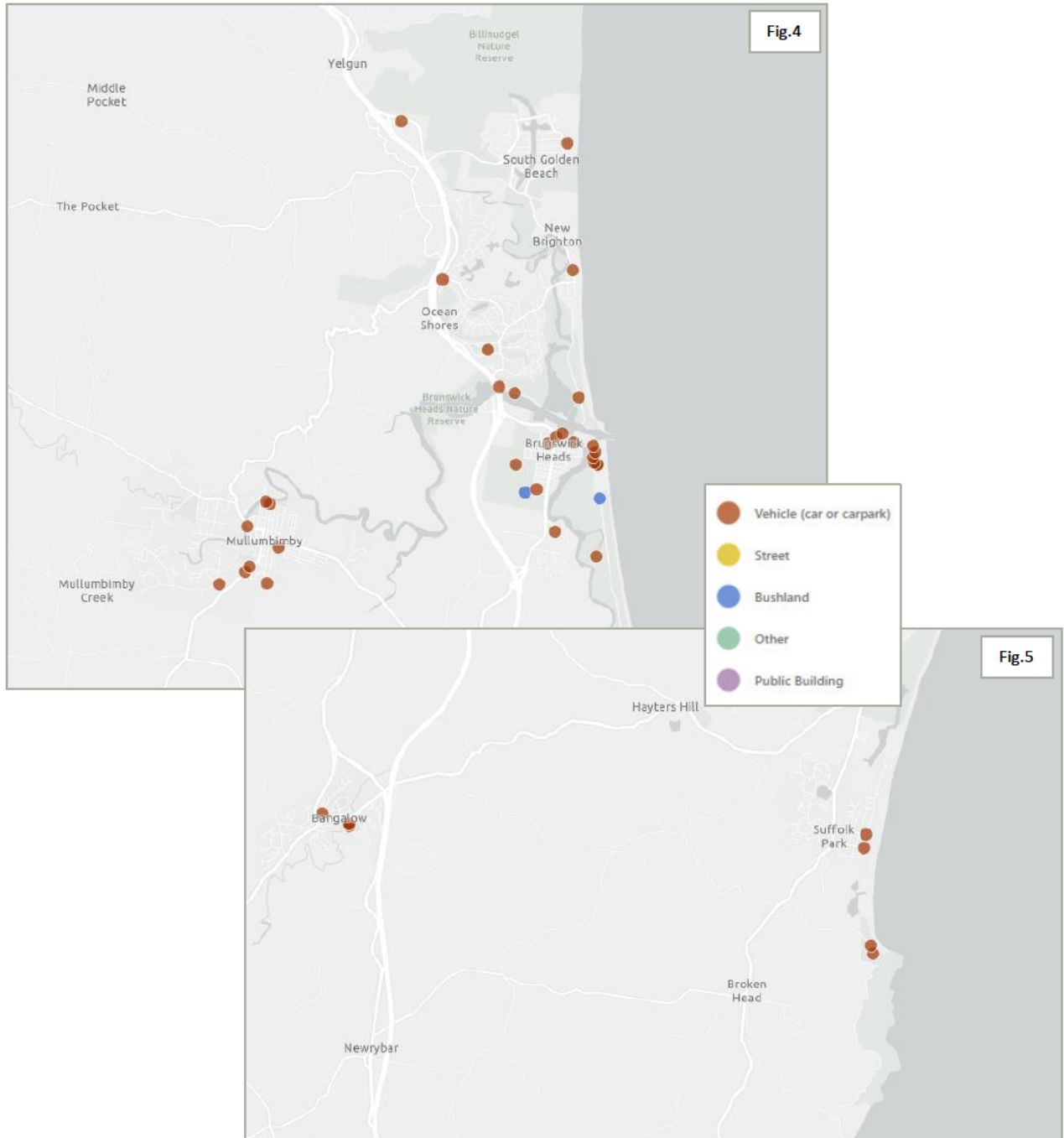
Figure 3 – Observations across Byron Bay by Location Type



Some observations of street homelessness were made in central Byron, but the majority of observations were classification 1C. Two observations were made of rough sleeping in bushland in the area behind main beach and near the Cumbebin Swamp Nature Reserve. Observations of two different groups in the Byron central area. One group had 5-6 individuals camping together, the other had 3 individuals with 4 dogs. Both groups were sighted multiple times in the same spots.

### III. Byron surrounding areas

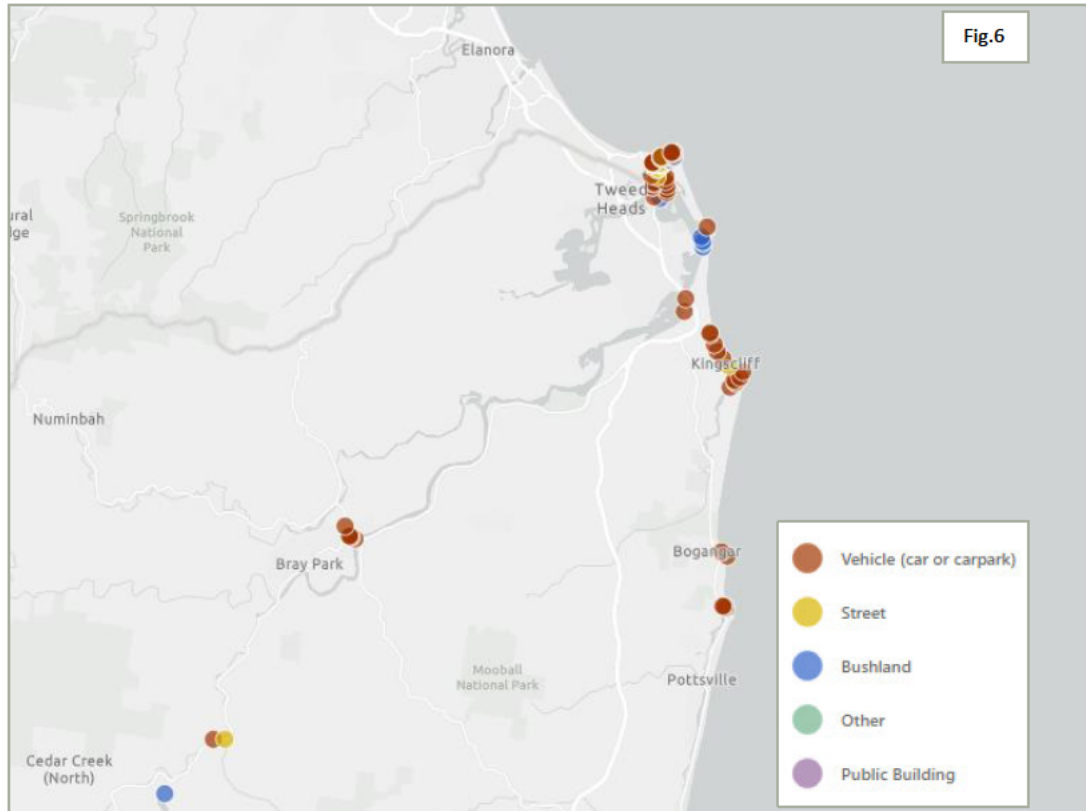
Figure 4 & 5 – Observations across Byron Shire by Location Type



Camps in bushland were found in the bush bordering Brunswick Heads Surf Club. The Brunswick Surf Club car park had the highest concentration of observations.

## IV. Tweed Shire

Figure 6 – Observations across Tweed Shire by Location Type



Classification 1C observations were found along the coast – as well as inland in Murwillumbah and Uki, however observations were far fewer than expected in inland areas. This could support the anecdotal evidence that people have been displaced from inland areas due to the flooding. There were higher numbers of individuals in classifications 1A, 1B, and 1D within Tweed Heads and mostly in the park areas.

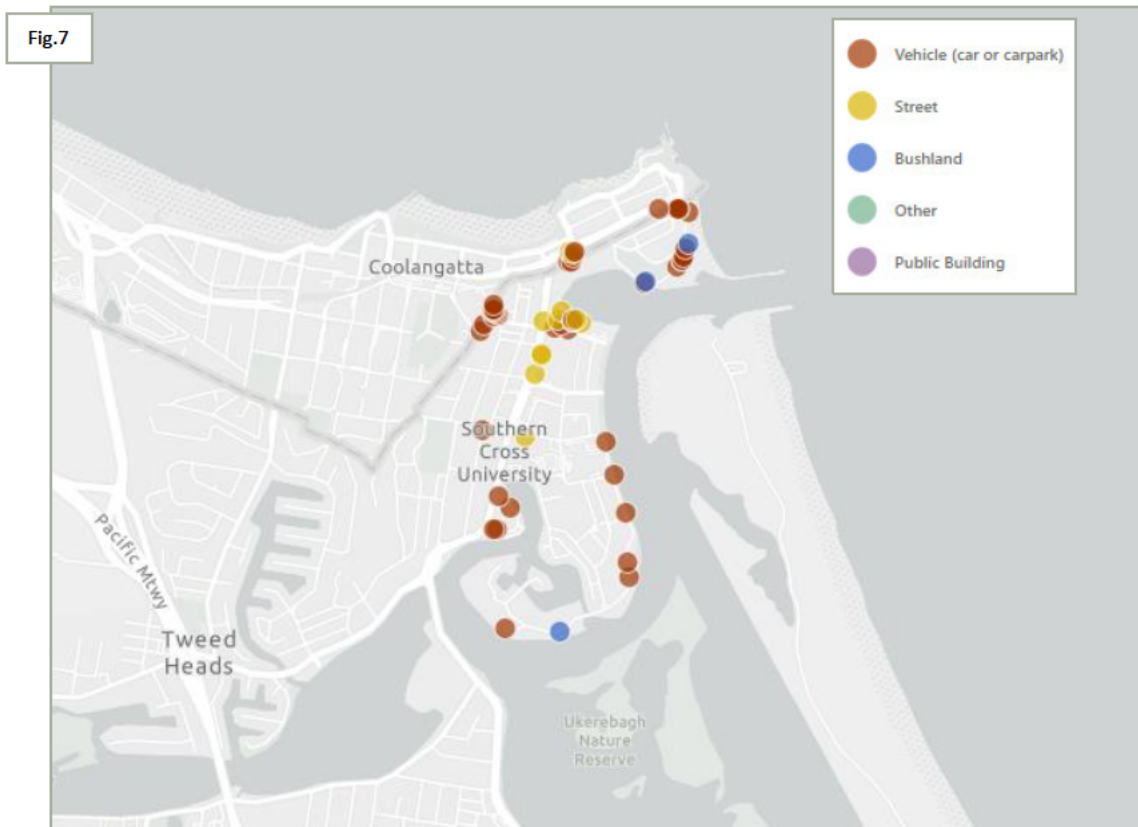
Table 3 – Observations & Estimated Number of People by Location Type in Tweed Shire

Location	Observations	Est. People
Vehicle (car or carpark)	77	79
Street	17	20
Bushland	8	8
Public Building	0	0



## V. Tweed Heads

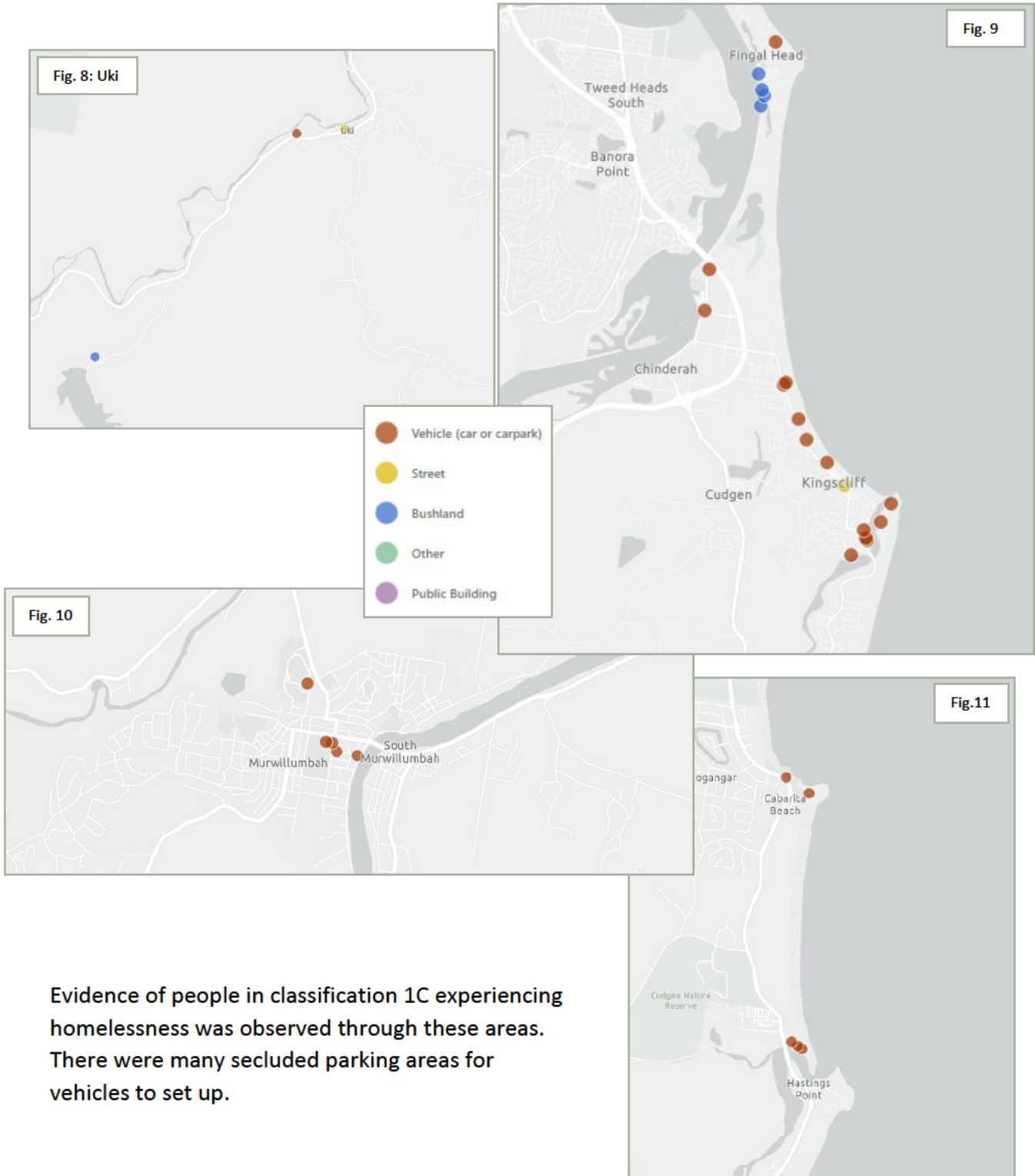
Figure 7 – Observations across Tweed Heads by Location Type



Classification 1A, 1B, and 1D of homelessness was concentrated around Wharf St. and Jack Evans Park in central Tweed. Many vans were also observed near the border suggesting many people/groups living in vans may move back and forth over the border. From conversations with people experiencing homelessness at Fred's Place (drop-in centre), ESSC were told by individuals that people (roughly 25) were squatting in 2 public buildings. They were not included in the observation count because outreach was not able to observe them firsthand.

## VI. Tweed surrounding areas

Figure 8, 9, 10, & 11 – Observations across Tweed Shire by Location Type

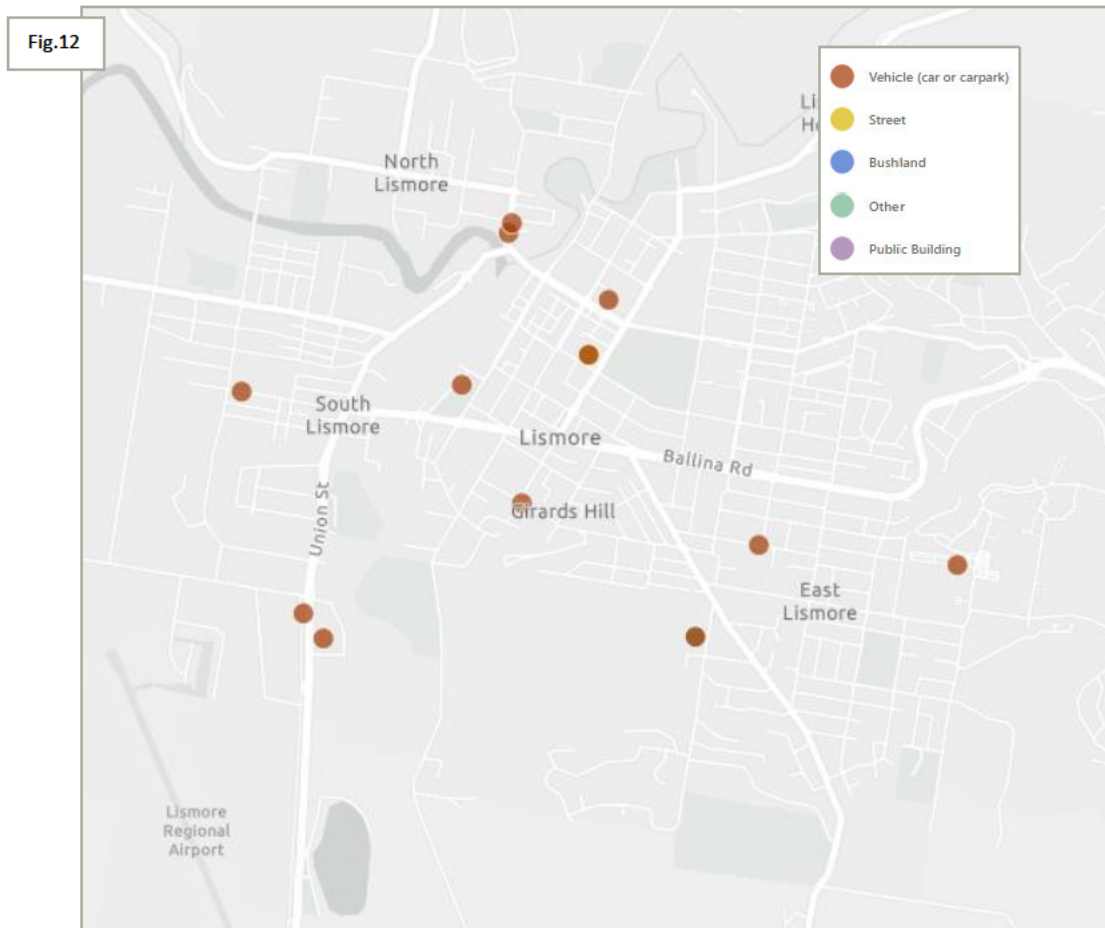


Evidence of people in classification 1C experiencing homelessness was observed through these areas. There were many secluded parking areas for vehicles to set up.



## VII. Lismore

Figure 12 – Observations across Lismore by Location Type



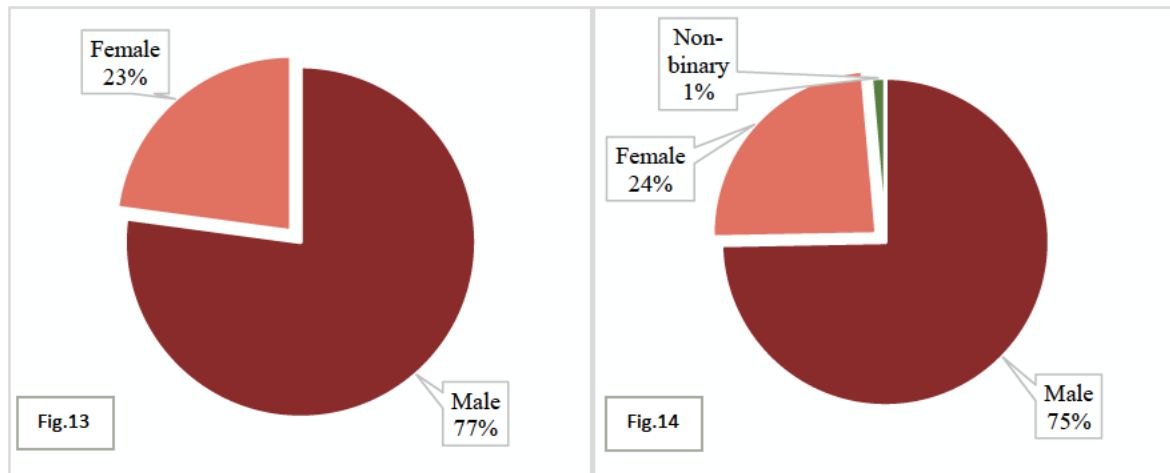
Some evidence of people in vans experiencing homelessness was observed through Lismore. We learnt from a contact at The Winsome (drop-in centre and emergency accommodation provider for men) that all their temporary accommodation was full (despite the drop-in centre not operating due to flood damage).

### Demographics

While the BNL should be used as the primary source for individual level data – some demographic information (apparent gender and age) was captured along with observations where possible.

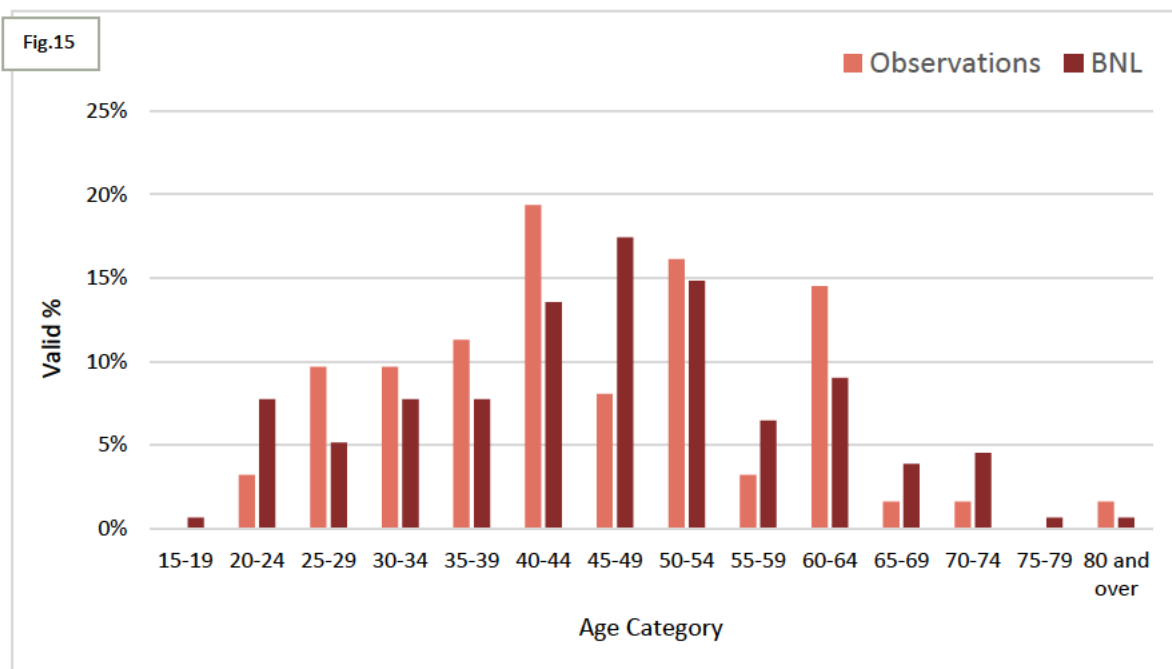
The apparent gender of the person/s was observed in only 70 of the 333 observations (21%). Of those 70 observations, 16 (23%) were noted as female and 54 (77%) as male. Looking at the BNL, 32% of the people who experienced homelessness on the Mid North Coast, Northern NSW and New England regions identified as female - higher than the rest of NSW (24%).

**Figure 13 & 14– Observed Gender by Observations (left); Gender from BNL data (right)**



Similarly, the apparent age of a person was recorded where possible with the observation. 62 (19%) observations of age were recorded out of the 333 observations. The distribution of apparent age was similar to what we observe on the BNL.

**Figure 15 – Distribution of Apparent Age by Observations & Age from BNL data**



The similarities between the distributions of apparent age and gender amongst observations and BNL data suggest that the floods did not disproportionately impact any demographic cohort.

## By-Name List and Engagements

While adding individuals experiencing homelessness onto the By-Name List is vital to the ongoing understanding of homelessness in the region, the focus of this project was to capture the total number of individuals experiencing rough sleeping homelessness. It was decided during the outreach to prioritise the observational count rather than engagements and make engagements a priority in the next phase of the project. This decision was made on the basis that engagements often took a great deal of time, and outreach took place early in the morning while people were still in vehicles or asleep.

There were instances where we were able to engage with people. The majority of engagements were made back in the drop-in centres after outreach, at either Fred's Place in Tweed Heads or Fletcher St. Cottage in Byron Bay. Additionally, in instances where someone was not in a vehicle – and visibly vulnerable (sleeping on street/bushland/smaller vehicle with little equipment) we did engage and ask if they wanted to be added to the BNL or connected to services. The total number of people added to the BNL is 22.

The level of engagement made varied greatly. Some engagements were just casual conversations, letting a person know about what local services were available. Many engagements focussed on building trust. In more than a couple of instances we were able to connect a person with services but did not add them to the BNL, in line with their wishes. This is due to a mistrust of government/services and technology, which will continue to be a barrier to many people experiencing homelessness in the region.

## Discussion

This project commenced within 2 days of its initiation and was designed to be adaptable to circumstances and need. After each outreach, the team would debrief about what worked, what didn't, and determine what the next day goals would be. Some of the learnings from these debriefs includes:

1. **Expanding the response:** after the first day, it was determined appropriate to split into two teams to cover more areas. While the response was initially for the Byron Shire, given the number of outreach workers that participated, the project able to be expanded into other Shires.
2. **Types of observations:** The definitions of the types of observation (car, car park, street, bushland, public building, and other) needed to be clarified. The use of "car" and "car park" was confusing. It was decided to tag all vehicles as "car", even if they were parked in a "car park".
3. **Focus of the response:** during the outreach, it was determined too time consuming to have meaningful engagements with individuals. It was decided that the focus

should be on competing the observations and gaining the total number of rough sleeping homelessness. The time in the drop-in centres were focused on the continuation of meaningful engagements and entering and updating individuals onto the BNL.

There were some limitations to this project that included:

1. **Limited entry and updates to the BNL system:** Since there was a focus on observations and understanding the number of individual experiencing homelessness in each area, the time and ability to enter onto the BNL system was limited.
2. **The Observations:** in many cases it was difficult to accurately determine who was in the vehicles/tents, how many people were in the vehicles/tents, their real age, or the gender in which they identified. The collaborators and ESSC staff made judgements to the best of their ability. While this impacted accuracy, it was still beneficial to make these observations to understand the scope of the rough sleeping homelessness population in Northern Rivers.
3. **The Observation app:** Given the need for expediency, the app was developed for a single purpose. While the app was beneficial and effective during this project, it will need modifications for future use. It is crucial for this app to communicate with ESSC's BNL system to enrich our understanding of rough sleeping homelessness within communities. The Observations app will be continually updated with input from service users.

The above learnings and limitations have provided valuable information for the local collaborations to advocate and implement flood responses in the Northern Rivers. ESSC will work with collaboration partners to building and sharing a knowledge base. We will also use the outcomes and findings of this project to inform the next steps for the Northern Rivers Flood Response, which is discussed below.

## Next Steps

### Collaboration

ESSC will continue to collaborate with government and non-government organisations to engage with those experiencing rough sleeping homelessness. As next steps the goal is to connect with individuals who were previously experiencing homelessness and are now in the camps and/or in temporary accommodation. The long-term goal is to input as many of these individuals onto the BNL system to (1) accurately understand the number of individuals experiencing rough sleeping homelessness, and (2) understand the needs and level of supports for these individuals.

After understanding the total number and what the needs are, ESSC will work with local services to coordinate a response for these individuals to place the appropriate supports around them and advocate for secure and affordable housing.

## Advocacy

This project was established to provide evidence to test the anecdotal view that homelessness in vehicles is increasing. Next steps will be to compare current findings with past and current data to see if this view is correct.

While it is unclear what the direct impact of the floods was on those previously experiencing rough sleeping homelessness, it is clear that those individuals were indirectly affected. These indirect affects on individuals include limited access to temporary accommodation solutions and disruptions to existing supports. The data collected during this project and subsequent work will be used to advocate for access to temporary accommodation and the inclusion of these individuals onto the priority housing list.

## Organisation details:

Legal Name: End Street Sleeping Collaboration Ltd

ABN: 96 636 177 949

Address: Registered Address: Level 8, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Website: <http://endstreetsleeping.org>

Date Established: 13 September 2019

Contact: Graham West,  
Chief Executive Officer,

DGR and TCC: DGR established on 13 January 2020  
TCC established on 17 January 2020

Contact: Graham West as above

# Submission to Select Committee on the response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022

Ensuring the inclusion of those previously experiencing  
homelessness in the flood response

May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022



## Submission

The End Street Sleeping Collaboration (ESSC) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Select Committee for the *Inquiry into the response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022*.

End Street Sleeping Collaboration (ESSC) is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to halve homelessness across NSW by 2025 and work toward ending it by 2030. Signatories to the Joint Commitment to End Street Sleeping include the Premier of NSW, the homelessness sector's leading NGOs, City of Sydney and homelessness peak bodies. Collaborators include local governments, philanthropists, homelessness sector NGOs and the Department of Communities and Justice. ESSC was specifically established to lead the collaborative effort, deliver on the Premier's commitment, and reach the targets set.

In the Northern Rivers region, ESSC partners with Byron Shire Council on the Ending Rough Sleeping Byron Shire project to reduce and end rough sleeping through community action.

## Summary of recommendations

End Street Sleeping Collaboration, in collaboration with the Ending Rough Sleeping Byron Shire, recommends that the NSW Government enact the following key recommendations:

**Recommendation 1.** Increase the provision of emergency accommodation in the Northern Rivers, with special consideration for those who are experiencing homelessness.

**Recommendation 2.** Commit to providing ongoing emergency accommodation options in local government areas that have low or no emergency housing provision prior to the flood events, such as the Byron Shire Local Government Area.

**Recommendation 3.** Ensure equitable access to emergency accommodation during disaster response and recovery, so that those experiencing homelessness at the time of events can access temporary accommodation options.

**Recommendation 4.** Secure a multi-agency government commitment to develop and enact an extreme weather and emergency response protocol for people sleeping rough in the region, based on the functioning protocol from Inner City of Sydney. Partners to include Department of Communities and Justice, Local Government, and key homelessness service providers, at a minimum.

**Recommendation 5.** Ensure that all evacuation and recovery centre staff and volunteers are trauma-informed, and adequately trained to support vulnerable and marginalised community members during a crisis event. It is important to have a specific process and supports to assist individuals who were previously experiencing homelessness before the crisis event.



**Recommendation 6.** Improve co-ordination and communication across government agencies, specifically Services Australia, Services NSW and the Department of Communities and Justice, to meet the specific needs of people sleeping rough and impacted by flood events.

**Recommendation 7.** Ensure that all Recovery Centre staff are aware of and trained in processes to deliver services to persons with no fixed address, particularly in locations with documented high numbers of people sleeping rough.

**Recommendation 8.** Provide timely, trauma-informed outreach service delivery to assist with obtaining identification, accessing temporary accommodation, accessing disaster relief payments and other available supports.

**Recommendation 9.** Increase data-sharing and transparency of Government agencies following disaster events. Government systems that capture disaster related data should have sharing arrangements and agreements in place prior to events to facilitate multiagency access during disaster response and recovery.

**Recommendation 10.** Increase communication and collaboration across Government agencies when responding to housing needs and homelessness during the flood event.

**Recommendation 11.** Increase the role of agencies with local knowledge and experience in delivering housing and homelessness responses including Department of Communities and Justice – Housing and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS).

## Current issues for those previously and currently experiencing homelessness in Northern Rivers

### ***TOR 1. (a) the preparation, coordination and response to the Western Sydney and North Coast floods by Government***

#### **Issue 1. Lack of emergency accommodation**

Prior to the flood events, the Northern Rivers had only a small number of government-funded emergency accommodation providers despite the high rates of homelessness in the region. It is important to mention that the Byron Shire Local Government Area (LGA) had no emergency accommodation prior to the flood events yet had the second-highest number of people sleeping rough in NSW (Department of Communities and Justice, 2021). As well, across the region the emergency accommodations often were at capacity when individuals were trying to access rooms through Link2Home pathways.

During the flood events there was an increase in government-provided emergency accommodation across the Northern Rivers. However, community service providers across the region reported that there are no vacancies for people requesting emergency accommodation via Link2Home. There was also inconsistency in the number of days

individuals were given access to. Community service providers had some clients approved for 28 days, while others were only given 2 days, and others any amount in-between. The provision of emergency accommodation does not match the increasing number of people experiencing homelessness since the flood events.

It has been reported that vulnerable people experiencing homelessness have had to travel long distances outside the region to access emergency accommodation. For example, staff from the Fletcher Street Cottage, a key local homelessness service in Byron Bay, reported that a vulnerable woman escaping domestic and family violence had to travel from the Byron Shire to Sydney to access the only emergency accommodation option available via the state-wide government service Link2Home. The staff had to use donated community funds to pay for this travel. The woman was highly vulnerable, isolated from supports and forced to relocate away from her community.

Community service providers reported that people experiencing homelessness at the time of the flood event were unable to access flood-related emergency accommodation. This has been a particular issue for flood-impacted persons with no fixed address. For example, community service providers have reported that flood-impacted persons who were experiencing homelessness when the event occurred have been told that they cannot access flood-related emergency accommodation via Services NSW but must instead use Link2Home, unnecessarily delaying their access to safe accommodation.

Inequitable access to emergency accommodation post-floods has increased the marginalisation of this vulnerable cohort and left them without any government-provided accommodation options in the Northern Rivers region. This has exacerbated their vulnerabilities and caused re-traumatisation which has impacted their mental health and health concerns. Individuals experiencing homelessness need intensive supports to help with their needs, which is even more important during crisis events.

**Recommendation 1.** Increase the provision of emergency accommodation in the Northern Rivers, with special consideration for those who are experiencing homelessness.

**Recommendation 2.** Commit to providing ongoing emergency accommodation options in local government areas that have low or no emergency housing provision prior to the flood events, such as the Byron Shire Local Government Area.

**Recommendation 3.** Ensure equitable access to emergency accommodation during disaster response and recovery, so that those experiencing homelessness at the time of events can access temporary accommodation options.

## Issue 2. Emergency response for individuals experiencing rough sleeping homelessness

There were high numbers of individuals experiencing rough sleeping homelessness in the Northern Rivers region during the flood events. ESSC's By-Name List (BNL) records information about each person who is currently sleeping rough, couch surfing, or living in crisis accommodation and has measured high levels of vulnerability for these community members in Northern Rivers. This information can be found in the appendix on page 7.

During the flood response, government and community were inadequately prepared to support the needs of this vulnerable cohort. There was a lack of appropriate shelter options for the specific needs of vulnerable community members who were sleeping rough. For example, during the flood event a group of approximately twenty people sleeping rough in Byron Bay contacted local government staff requesting access to community buildings to use as an emergency shelter. They were unable to access evacuation centres due to their location away from the town centre, which was also cut-off by water during the second flood event.

**Recommendation 4.** Secure a multi-agency government commitment to develop and enact an extreme weather and emergency response protocol for people sleeping rough in the region, based on the functioning protocol from Inner City of Sydney. Partners to include Department of Communities and Justice, Local Government and key homelessness service providers, at a minimum.

**Recommendation 5.** Ensure that all evacuation centre staff and volunteers are trauma informed, and adequately trained to support vulnerable and marginalised community members during a crisis event.

## Issue 3. Recovery supports for people sleeping rough

Homelessness service providers have reported that many people who were rough sleeping during the flood events have lost belongings and identifying documentation. This is a significant barrier to their ability to access any accommodation options and other government and community supports.

Feedback from community members who accessed Recovery Centres to seek support were initially informed by government agencies that they were unable to assist them. Subsequently, some community members received support while others did not. Many people reported that they were referred across agencies without any substantive outcomes.

For example, when visiting Recovery Centres flood-impacted people with no fixed address were initially unable to access Disaster Recovery Payments via Services Australia. Local government staff were required to spend time advocating for these payments to be available for these vulnerable persons. It has been reported by homelessness service providers that a number of people sleeping rough continue to experience difficulties accessing these payments.

Local government staff have advocated for outreach service delivery by Services NSW and Services Australia to locations away from Recovery Centres with high numbers of flood-impacted people experiencing homelessness. It has been 12 weeks since the first flood and this has not occurred. Homelessness service providers have expressed frustration at the lack of service response for these vulnerable community members.

**Recommendation 6.** Improve co-ordination and communication across government agencies, specifically Services Australia, Services NSW and the Department of Communities and Justice, to meet the unique needs of people sleeping rough and impacted by flood events.

**Recommendation 7.** Ensure that all Recovery Centre staff are aware of and trained in processes to deliver services to persons with no fixed address, particularly in locations with documented high numbers of people sleeping rough.

**Recommendation 8.** Provide timely, trauma-informed outreach service delivery to assist with obtaining identification, accessing temporary accommodation, accessing disaster relief payments and other available supports.

***TOR 1. (c) coordination between the New South Wales Government, New South Wales Government departments and agencies, the Federal Government, Federal Government departments and agencies, local governments, private sector operators and the community, including requests or offers of assistance***

#### **Issue 4. Access to data**

Homelessness service providers, local government and community organisations experienced difficulties when trying to obtain information about housing need from government agencies responsible for delivering flood supports. For example, local government staff made multiple requests to obtain deidentified information about the number of requests for temporary housing support via Service NSW.

Access to this information was significantly delayed and required staff to make multiple requests across this and other government agencies, until a numerical figure was provided. This information was inadequate to understand and respond to post-flood experiences of homelessness.

In response, local organisations including ESSC, local government and specialist homelessness services had to conduct their own data collection exercise after the flood events. This report can be found as an additional attachment to this submission. This diverted staff away from important flood response and recovery work.

**Recommendation 9.** Increase data-sharing and transparency of Government agencies following disaster events. Government systems that capture disaster related

data should have sharing arrangements and agreements in place prior to events to facilitate multiagency access during disaster response and recovery.

### Issue 5. Multi-agency coordination and communication

Flood-related emergency and temporary accommodation has been delivered by Services NSW. During the response phase, Department of Communities and Justice – Housing and the Specialist Homelessness Services were disconnected from the initial housing response. These agencies have the local knowledge and experience in delivering housing/homelessness supports in our community.

Reports from community members and staff within Recovery Centres and from key homelessness service providers expressed confusion about processes to access post-flood housing and homelessness supports. As a result, a number of community groups formed to temporarily house people. These community groups were not appropriately experienced or skilled to adequately support people and help transition to longer term accommodation.

Many people were diverted away from government services during this time, leading to an initial underestimation of housing need by government agencies and an accumulation of unmet housing need in community.

During the recovery phase, homelessness service providers have reported a lack of transparency about the ongoing housing response in the weeks following the flood events. This has created confusion and difficulties for both community and service providers.

**Recommendation 10.** Increase communication and collaboration across Government agencies when responding to housing needs and homelessness during the flood event.

**Recommendation 11.** Increase the role of agencies with local knowledge and experience in delivering housing and homelessness responses including Department of Communities and Justice – Housing and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS).

## Appendix

### ESSC's By-Name List system: helping to understand the needs of those experiencing homelessness in Northern NSW

#### The situation and needs of people on the BNL pre-flood

ESSC's By-Name List (BNL) system contains very detailed and useful data for understanding the situation and needs of people experiencing homelessness. You can find our de-identified data on our website here: <https://endstreetsleeping.org/data>.

Pre-flood, there were 232 individuals on the By-Name List system in the MNCNNSWNE region<sup>1</sup>. *Table 1* in the appendix shows a visualisation of this data.

- The housing statuses of these individuals include:
  - **97 (42%) rough sleepers**
  - **24 (10%) couch surfers**
  - **50 (22%) in TA/shelter/temporary housing**
  - 51 (22%) in permanent housing and needing ongoing support. The housing outcomes were through Tweed Assertive Outreach, Assertive Outreach Expansion, and Together Home Programs.
- Level of support needed:
  - **167 (72%) of individuals reported a high acuity** (score of 10 or above) on their VI-SPDAT. This indicates the person is likely to need long term and intensive supports, in conjunction with housing they can afford to end their homelessness.
  - **43 (19%) of individuals reported a medium acuity** (score between 5-9) on their VI-SPDAT. This indicates the person is likely to need short-medium term supports, in conjunction with housing they can afford to end their homelessness.
  - 22 (9%) of individuals reported a low acuity (score of 4 or below) on their VI-SPDAT. This indicates the person is likely to be able to resolve their own homelessness with access to housing they can afford.
- 70 (31%) individuals are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 83 (36%) individuals identified as female. Of these females, 70% stated their current homelessness was due to a breakdown of social relationships; **95% stated they are at risk of harm**; 69% stated they were in an imminent risk of violence; and 63% are at risk of exploitation.
- 21 (9%) individuals are under the age of 24 and suitable for a youth response.
- 88 (41.5%) of individuals were identified as likely eligible for My Aged Care<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> When considering this data, it is important to consider the hidden homeless population that may not be accurately represented on the BNL system as of date.

<sup>2</sup> This is based on those aged 50 or above; or aged 45 or above and identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander).

- **86 (37%)** were identified as being **likely suitable for NDIS packages** based on having 2 or more indicators of disability<sup>3</sup>.
- **121 (55.8%)** individuals are identified as displaying **Tri-morbidity**<sup>4</sup>.
- 44 (22%) of individuals have dependent children and/or caring responsibilities.

### Newly identified individuals being added to the BNL post-flood

- There are more than 50 individuals on the BNL who have been added post-floods by a variety of homelessness services. On the BNL, we are capturing these individuals under the programs “NSW Floods 2022”.
- Of the individuals added, 24 VI-SPDATs have been completed. *Table 1* in the appendix shows a visualisation of this data.
- From the 24 completed assessments, the following acuity scores were reported:
  - **High: 18 (75%)**
  - **Medium: 6 (25%)**
  - Low: 0
- From the 24 completed assessments, the following factors were reported:
  - Housing Status: **14 (59%) rough sleeping; 3 (12%) couch surfing; 7 (29%) TA/ in shelter/ temporarily housed**
  - First Nations: **11 (46%) identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**
  - Gender: 13 (54%) males; 11 (46%) females
  - Age: 15 (63%) of individuals are aged 35-54
- From the 24 completed assessments, we can understand the health and well-being needs of a client. *Table 2* in the appendix shows a visual representation of this data.
  - 22 (88%) reported having a physical health condition; 22 (88%) reporting have a mental health condition; 16 (56%) reported substance use
  - **14 (56%) reported having tri-morbidity**
- ESSC worked in partnership with Byron Shire Council and Social Futures to understand the number of individuals currently sleeping rough after the floods. ESSC utilised the new Observations app to geocode and record sightings of individuals across the Byron and Tweed Shires. **333 observations were reported.**
- ESSC staff will continue to build this list with (1) those who were previously experiencing homelessness pre-flood, and (2) those post-floods who were directly or indirectly flood effected and are presenting to homelessness services across the Northern Rivers.

### *What do we know about post-flood individuals, so far?*

In looking at individuals who have been identified for supports through a rough sleeper flood response, we can see what types of supports will be needed. The data indicates:

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<sup>3</sup> The 5 indicators of disability from the VI-SPDAT include (Serious Brain Injury (ABI) or Head Trauma, Learning, Developmental or Intellectual Disability, Mental Health/Brain Issues that Limit Ability to Live Independently, Physical Disability That Limits Housing Accessibility, and reported Mental Health Conditions Diagnosed is one or more.

<sup>4</sup> Tri-morbidity represents the overlap of physical health, mental health, and substance use conditions. Research has shown that those experiencing homelessness often experience tri-morbidity, a factor that increases the risk of early mortality (Vickey et al., 2021: <https://doi.org/10.1097/mlr.0000000000001435>)

- **100% of the individuals are likely to need long term and intensive to medium supports**, in conjunction with housing they can afford to end their homelessness.
- 0% of the individuals have a medium or long-term housing solution to end their homelessness.
- Culturally safe and appropriate responses will be needed to support the 46% of First Nations individuals.
- We can use this existing information from the BNL to understand the specific types of supports individuals will need in the Northern Rivers.

## Next steps for local collaborations in Northern Rivers

### What assistance people experiencing homelessness need

1. Increase access to caseworkers and supports. The waitlists will continue to get longer due to the impact of the floods. ESSC is in conversations with Collaboration partner St. Vincent de Paul to see if remote support can be given in the Northern Rivers.
2. No restrictions on accessing temporary accommodation as a rough sleeper or couch surfer. If the individual is on the BNL, they can be supported while stabilising in temporary accommodation to get housing ready for when properties are available.
3. Collaboration with government agencies and homelessness services to get individuals onto the BNL system and coordinate appropriate supports through service coordination meetings and referrals. This would include supports for ID, connecting with recovery centres, and accessing relief payments.
4. Additional communication from housing providers about how housing wait lists and rough sleeper programs will be impacted. Particularly for people experiencing homelessness on the waitlists without short or medium accommodation options.

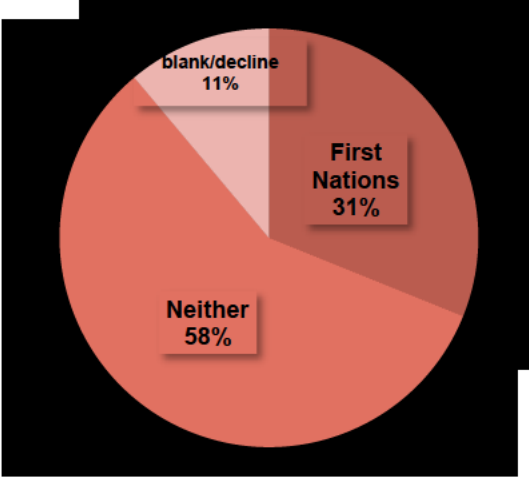
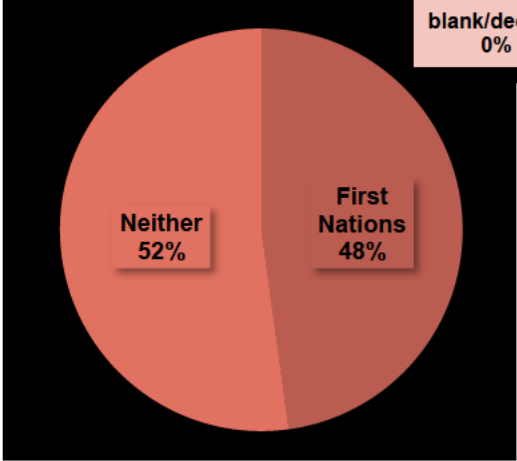
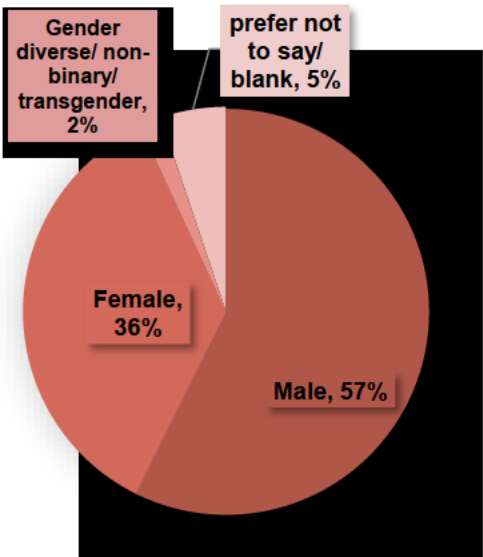
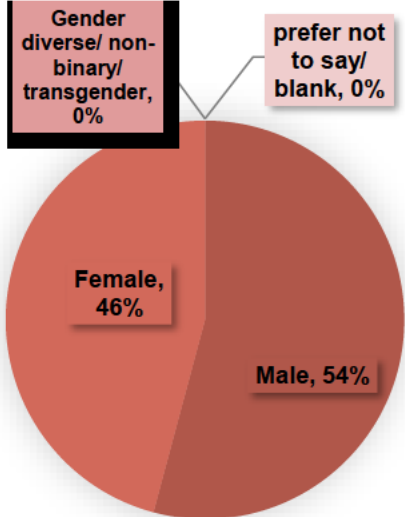
### ESSC's Role

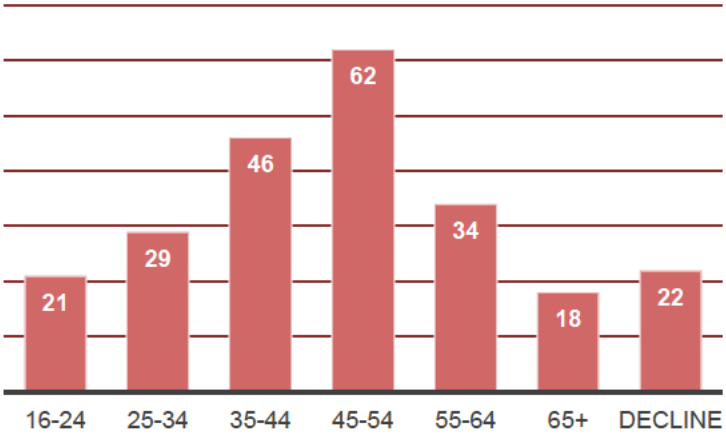
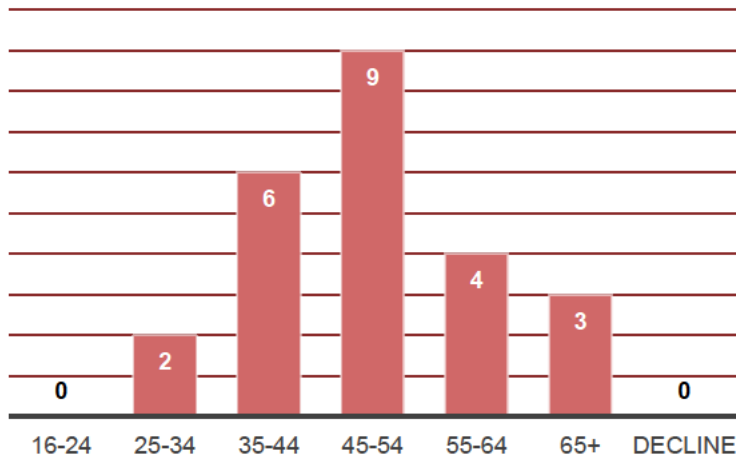
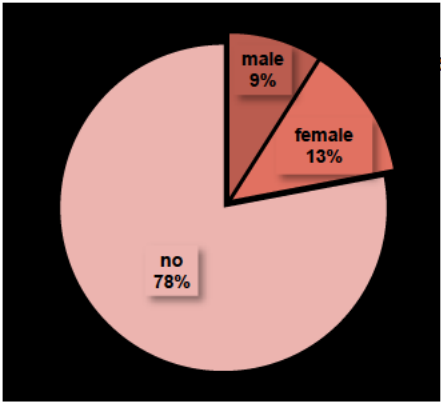
- ESSC will use the By-Name List system to drive a coordinated response for rough sleepers and those experiencing homelessness in Northern Rivers. Utilising the BNL triages individuals from to understand the level of supports an individual will needs and they can be allocated to appropriate services. Depending on their acuity, individuals may be suitable for remote case worker support, or need intensive case management.
- ESSC will support services to identify individuals experiencing rough sleeping and those who were previously homeless to coordinate a response with the local collaborations. This will include creating new BNL records and updating existing client information and using the "Observations" app to capture geospatial information via street counts.



**Table 1:** Visualisation of Pre-Flood BNL data for the 232 individuals and Post-Flood BNL data for the new 24 individuals within the MNCNNSWNE region.

	Pre-flood BNL data (232 individuals)	Post-Flood BNL data (24 newly-identified individuals)																								
Housing Status	<table border="1"> <caption>Pre-flood BNL data (232 individuals) - Housing Status</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Housing Status</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Rough Sleeping</td> <td>42%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TA/ in shelter/ temporarily housed</td> <td>22%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Permanently housed</td> <td>22%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Couch Surfing</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>unknown/decline</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Housing Status	Percentage	Rough Sleeping	42%	TA/ in shelter/ temporarily housed	22%	Permanently housed	22%	Couch Surfing	10%	unknown/decline	4%	<table border="1"> <caption>Post-Flood BNL data (24 newly-identified individuals) - Housing Status</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Housing Status</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Rough Sleeping</td> <td>58%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TA/ in shelter/ temporarily housed</td> <td>22%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Couch Surfing</td> <td>13%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Permanently housed</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Housing Status	Percentage	Rough Sleeping	58%	TA/ in shelter/ temporarily housed	22%	Couch Surfing	13%	Permanently housed	0%		
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<p>First Nations</p>	 <p>blank/decline 11%</p> <p>First Nations 31%</p> <p>Neither 58%</p>	 <p>blank/decline 0%</p> <p>Neither 52%</p> <p>First Nations 48%</p>
<p>Gender</p>	 <p>Gender diverse/ non-binary/transgender, 2%</p> <p>prefer not to say/blank, 5%</p> <p>Female, 36%</p> <p>Male, 57%</p>	 <p>Gender diverse/ non-binary/transgender, 0%</p> <p>prefer not to say/blank, 0%</p> <p>Female, 46%</p> <p>Male, 54%</p>
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**Table 2:** Visualisation of the Post-Flood BNL Dashboard on the health & wellbeing needs for the 24 individuals within the MNCNNSWNE region.

## Health & Wellbeing

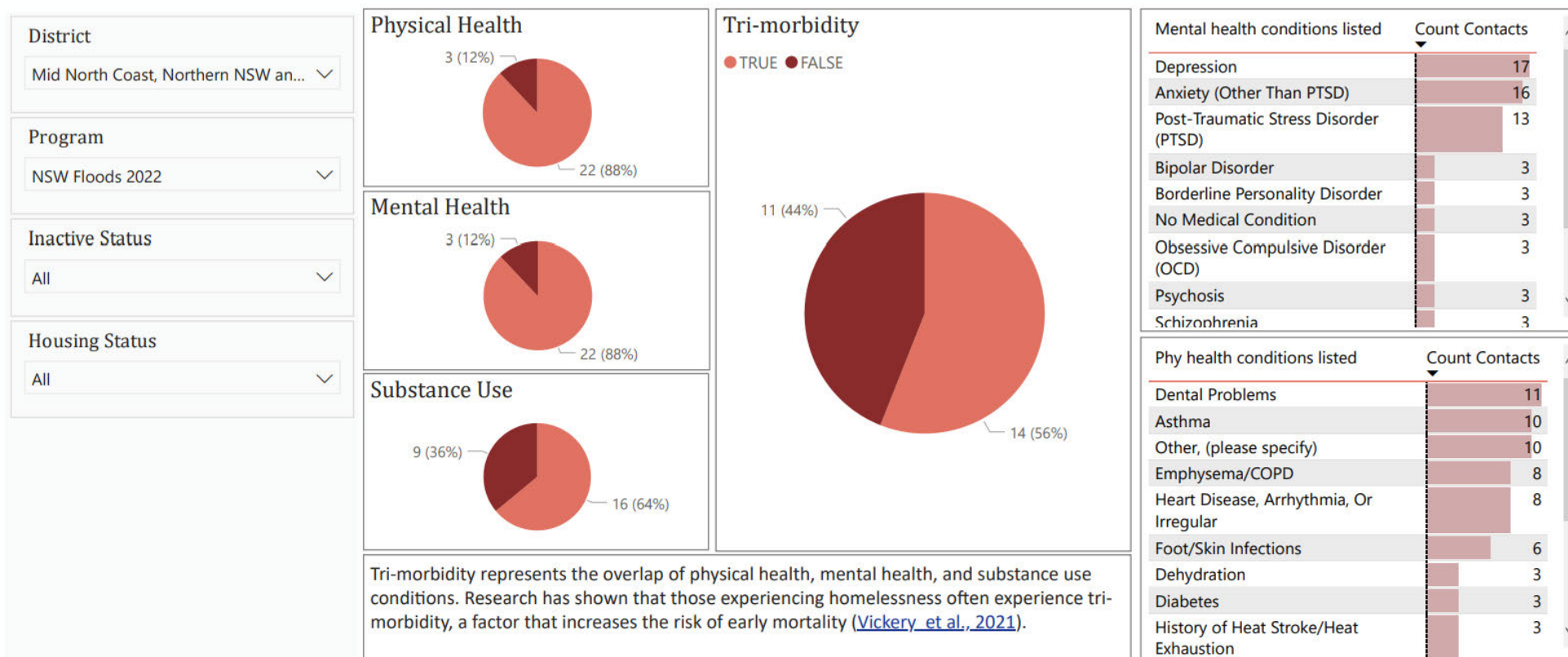


Mental health: Answered yes to any mental health condition listed in Q37 of the VI-SPDAT.

Physical health: Answered yes to any health condition in Q32, or yes to Q25, Q27, Q28 or Q29 of the VI-SPDAT.

Substance use: Answered yes to Q30, Q31, Q32, Q33, Q34, Q35 or Q36 of the VI-SPDAT.

Clients could list multiple mental and physical health conditions.



## Organisation details:

Legal Name:	End Street Sleeping Collaboration Ltd
ABN:	96 636 177 949
Address:	Registered Address: Level 8, 133 Liverpool Street, Sydney NSW 2000
Website:	<a href="http://endstreetsleeping.org">http://endstreetsleeping.org</a>
Date Established:	13 September 2019
Contact:	Graham West, Chief Executive Officer,
DGR and TCC:	DGR established on 13 January 2020 TCC established on 17 January 2020
Contact:	Graham West as above