

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
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Attachments: [Submission Flood Inquiry.docx](#)

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Submission details

I am making this submission as	A member of the general public
Submission type	I am making a personal submission
Consent to make submission public	I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

1.3 Response to floods	please see attached file
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1.5 Recovery from floods please see attached file

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [Submission Flood Inquiry.docx](#)
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SUBMISSION TO FLOOD INQUIRY

Recommendation 1

Issue an urgent bulletin (before the 20 June preliminary report) on actions which require immediate attention. There will be some issues which will be obvious as needing action and can't wait. Perhaps:

- Providing support to remote communities who feel overlooked and forgotten
- Providing accurate information and support for dealing with mould in houses (this is an ongoing issue and there are so many versions of treatments)
- Demonstrate there is action being taken to track all residents and the status of their situation – including those who have moved out of the area, and those living in locations which are not their original address
- Offer immediate support for those trying to access grants with mixed success
- Offer immediate support for those with insurance issues.

This will build confidence in the community that the flood inquiry is not just empty words but will address immediate issues as well as looking at long term problems.

Recommendation 2

Monitor community based social media sites (such as Resilient Lismore on FaceBook) to:

- Gauge community sentiment
- Identify both immediate and ongoing issues needing attention and support for both individuals and groups.

The monitoring needs to start very quickly after the disaster and continue for 2 – 5 years.

Recommendation 3

For the purposes of this inquiry consider all the posts on Resilient Lismore FaceBook site:

- As a measure of the intensity of issues
- To ensure early and ongoing issues and concerns have been identified.

The Resilient Lismore FaceBook page has been warmly accepted by the community as a safe and responsive space to ask questions and discuss concerns. It was built as a grass roots initiative and is well moderated.

Many in the community feel far more comfortable voicing their concerns on a familiar social media platform than making submissions to an inquiry which is a process not widely understood. Many of the posts are written for a wider audience and have an expectation that actions will flow from their comments. While Resilient Lismore certainly acts on those comments within its remit of help, major issues which need a government authority response are easily lost and overlooked.

Recommendation 4

After an emergency, provide support to community based, grass roots, support groups and networks such as Resilient Lismore:

- Identify these grassroots community groups quickly
- Work with them, in partnerships, to provide support they need. Don't impose, listen and follow their needs. They will evolve and adapt in response to the community and as they build on their experience then the concomitant government support needs to be flexible through these processes
- Maintain the community leadership and voice of these groups and networks as the community will have more confidence in them rather than a government interface.

Recommendation 5

Identify and support individuals in the community who are responding and helping in remarkable ways at the grass roots level.

One example is Sophia Watt who has for weeks and weeks been cooking and distributing hundreds of delicious free meals to those who want them. Such a warm hearted and positive initiative by one hard working individual. There is also a fellow featured on Resilient Lismore who is an expert in successfully restoring old homes to help with future flood resistance. His techniques need to be recognized and shared.

Recommendation 6

Provide information, information and more information to the community through a variety of platforms including social media, traditional media (press, radio, TV), physical locations staffed in multiple settings across the affected area. This includes effective information on topics including:

- Weather forecasts
- Anticipated and actual flood levels
- Evacuation warnings and orders
- Rescue and evacuation help
- Availability of emergency accommodation
- Medical aid – availability of doctors
- Animal rescue
- Clean up – when, by whom, advice on how to do it
- Safety – of houses, of polluted soils and grounds, drinking water
- Grants – what’s available, how to apply, how to appeal, how to get help with applications
- To rebuild or not
- Insurance issues – where to get help and advice
- Legal advice on many issues.

A major issue which is ongoing is that community members continue to be confused about the grants which are available and how to apply, how to appeal if refused, how to chase up promised grants which haven’t been realized. Through sites such as Resilient Lismore there is much shared and helpful information but it can be haphazard and not always accurate. Information and help relating to grants needs to be widely available and easily accessible as soon as possible and extending for a long period after the emergency (2 – 5 years).

Recommendation 7

Establish teams very quickly after the disaster who can personally visit all flood affected homes, locate those no longer in their home, and who can:

- **be a personal ongoing contact for the flood affected**
- **develop a report on each resident and dwelling and the issues which need attention – immediate, short and long term**
- **liaise with the resident/s in ensuring they are accessing the help they need – clean up, medical, grants, food, accommodation**
- **work effectively and kindly with the residents to achieve positive outcomes, and without taking over the agency of the resident.**

Similar teams have been established in the last couple of weeks through Resilient Lismore – but so slow to be done.

Recommendation 8

Ensure there is swift access to medical help.

There are many posts about the difficulty with getting doctors’ appointments.

Recommendation 9

Provide mental support services quickly in the early stages and continue this for 2-5 years after the emergency.

There is still so much pain evident in social media comments throughout the community and there will be a long term need for mental health support provided through multiple services.

Recommendation 10

Provide support for accessing insurance claims and have an oversight role in ensuring insurance companies are responding in a timely fashion and fairly.

There are many posts about insurance issues. One concern was about teams authorized by insurance companies to enter homes without warning to owners or tenants to make them safe for inspection. This process often made the residence even more unlivable than previously. This a rough shod and cruel approach for already stressed people and insurance companies need to act with compassion and kindness.

Recommendation 11

Provide advice and support to corporations in working effectively with disaster impacted communities.

Private individuals can order online from Coles and Woolworths and have the items delivered directly to the Resilient Lismore hub. This is an excellent approach as we order based on a list of needed items published regularly by Resilient Lismore and we know the items are going to an effectively organized distribution hub. It would be nice for Coles or Woolworths to offer a discount to those ordering for flood relief help, or to remove the delivery charge.

There were several posts about a Smeg offer for 50% off already reduced major appliance items. While this seemed a generous offer there were complaints about the overly onerous proof Smeg was requesting (photographs etc) to ensure the requests were from genuine flood victims. The process was unduly stressful. Providing some guidelines and ideas to corporations on how best to help could be very useful.

Recommendation 12

Provide temporary accommodation swiftly and effectively

The news that 4000 homes were uninhabitable was known quickly but the provision of alternative temporary accommodation was achingly slow and remains inadequate.

Recommendation 13

Speed up the clean up process

There have been weeks of posts about delays with cleaning up people's home and businesses. This has been particularly where asbestos has been identified, and also in outlying areas which have been overlooked. More assistance needs to have been provided in a faster timeline and with greater resources. Also private 'good Samaritan' groups need monitoring that their work is effective and done with compassion. While it was like this in most instances there are some posts about private groups entering homes without permission and clearing out personal and valuable items which resulted in more angst and stress for the resident.

Recommendation 14

Streamline the protocols for engaging support from the defence forces so help can be provided swiftly and usefully.

Surely with the weather forecasts looking dire the defence forces can be put on alert immediately to move equipment and personnel to the impacted area. There must be some way to smooth and speed the clumsy process of whether state or federal governments respond to a request from whomever. The nonsense of not having defence force helicopters, boats and personnel available immediately is beyond belief. While they're not preparing for war, or fighting in a war, then my tax dollars should be spent on a defence force which moves swiftly and capably to help a community in need – and they do it immediately, not days or weeks later.

Recommendation 15

Address the fraudulent claims for grants and keep the community informed

There have been many posts about evidence of fraudulent claims through improperly using a false address located in the flood zone. This has caused considerable stress to the community and information needs to be provided to the community on measures being taken to address this issue.

Community recommendations

I asked the community for recommendations they'd like to make to the flood inquiry and following are some useful responses

Recommendation 16

Provide adequate storage facilities

"Storage desperately still not been addressed... I see a need for storage...where are people supposed to put anything food and cleaning products and tools aside what has been salvaged may need moving during repair and cleaning up and then anything they may need to rebuild their homes. I have thought about trying to set up a community network of people that can offer others temporary space but wonder why that issue wasn't immediately addressed by the government once everyone was accounted for. Temporary sheds as well as tents." Zoe Aya Ludellan Resilient Lismore FB page

Recommendation 17

Provide a 24/7 community hub that provides all the grassroots services in one place

"We need to turn the tafe carpark into a tent city. I believe we urgently need a 24/7 community hub that provides all the grassroots services in one place. People need community like never before. It's already started with the Trees Not Bombs free food cafe and the amenities. More tents and stretcher beds. And there is 2 big generators. It will assist people to transition from flood victim to recovery volunteer. And it needs to be developed at a grass roots level." Russell Good Resilient Lismore FB page

Fran's comment: There is a need for multiple community hubs to be provided throughout the impacted area.

There are many posts from people who are unable to travel – without a car, relocated to distant places, in remote locations still lacking passable access roads – who cannot physically visit a single central hub.

Recommendations 18, 19 and 20

18 "1. Effective Contingency plans

19 "2. Accepting the reality that Community Response is needed in regional areas as there will never be enough government services to deal with this level of disaster. These Community Response teams need to be able to access Federal Government Funding Immediately so they can act completely to care for the community until the Government have got their support sorted

20. "3. A Disaster Response Centre like QLD and VIC have."

Bec Luxton Resilient Lismore FB page

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