

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Saturday, 7 May 2022 4:54:32 PM

---

## Your details

---

**Title** Dr

---

**First name** Graham

---

**Last name** Watson

---

**Email**

---

**Postcode** 2482

---

## Submission details

---

**I am making this submission as** A resident in a flood-affected area

---

**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

---

**Your story** On February 27 and 28, the quantity of rain at our Huonbrook property exceeded anything we had previously experienced in nearly 50 years of residence. In that 24 hour period I recorded 1022mm of rain. The roar on our roof just went on for hours and hours. During the day of February 28, on which a further 300mm fell, I discovered that our property had suffered from a

number of major landslides. Most of these occurred where our mile-long driveway snaked around the escarpment from Huonbrook Road to our house. The 50-year-old driveway had been well maintained but the 16 culverts along its length were no match for the amount of water and debris that came down the hillsides. The driveway was effectively ruined by thousands of tonnes of rocks and debris that came away from the escarpment. The consequence is that our home is no longer habitable. This is not because of flood damage to our dwelling (although I did have to repair some roof leaks that occurred) but because our property just collapsed under at least seven major landslides and numerous landslips such that our house, even though the building is relatively unaffected, is no longer accessible. Access to our house is now only possible by a one mile trek up a makeshift bush track and involving scrambling over the rocky rubble and fallen trees from several landslides. I included some photos of these landslides in an application to Service NSW for assistance under their Back Home grant program..

This trek just referred to takes about 45 minutes from the house to the public road and from there, as our car is on the house side of all the landslides, we have to hitch-hike or borrow a neighbour's car to get into town. When we get back, all groceries, fuels, hardware etc that we might have bought have to be carried in by backpacks. This is demanding for most folk but as my wife and I are well into our 70s, this effort is very stressful and not sustainable, and, possibly, life-threatening.

As things stand at the moment, we can't live here anymore, not only because of the arduous access situation but also because the mile-long entrance road may have to remain unrepaired for some time. We had an earthmoving contractor in to look at our damage and he found it too difficult to quote for the reconstruction of our access because of the general instability of the grounds. He suggested it might cost as much as \$50,000.

We applied for the Back Home grant because we will need help to fund that work whenever it will be possible to do it.

We have now been advised by Service NSW, while acknowledging our grim situation, that our application for assistance under the Back Home scheme is unlikely to be successful. In my view, there needs to be a complementary grant scheme that assists those residents who have been rendered homeless by landslides caused by the major rainfall event just as deservedly as the assistance offered to those rendered homeless by floodwaters.

---

## **Terms of Reference (optional)**

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

---

### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

There seemed to be a complacency about the long build up of rainfall saturation of (at least) the Wilson River catchment. Where I live, we had been experiencing virtually continual rainfall since the wet season began on 12 October 2021. In the 139 days from that date to the 27 February, rain was recorded on 107 of them at an average of 18.5 mm per day. The soils and regolith layers in the catchment areas had reached their maximum water holding capacity such that it needed just one more very wet day to trigger the release of those waters. While we upper catchment residents could see the writing on the wall as the rain in February intensified, with no prospect of change in the prevailing weather system, none of that concern seemed to register with the local media, the SES, or even the Bureau of Meteorology itself. My recommendation to the Inquiry is that there should be a substantial increase in the number of observers reporting to the Bureau and to the SES that are located in the upper catchment areas where the heaviest rainfall occurs. An increase in the number of observers also will help to smooth out variations in temporal, geographic and elevational variations in the

distribution of rainfall in those upper catchment areas.

---

### **1.3 Response to floods**

One of the belated responses to the desperate situation facing flood victims all across the far north coast was the dispatch of ADF personnel to assist with the clean-up and offer general help. I can't speak for the efficacy of their deployment in other parts of the region, but in my valley they were worse than two men short. They, apparently, were constrained in what they could do in order to ensure that they did not encroach on the recovery activities of the Local Government authorities or any other active agencies. So, for example, we would witness the ludicrous situation where a vehicle and trailer, loaded with food destined for residents isolated by landslides, would be escorted along the badly damaged valley roads by six ADF vehicles, each with two personnel on board. On arriving at the food distribution point, the army boys parked all their vehicles then just stood around while residents sorted and allocated all the food. In the meantime their vehicles with their heavy tyre treads were just churning up what was left of our vital remnant roads. When not being a general nuisance on the roads, they were just sitting around on deckchairs at one of two spots which could safely contain all their vehicles. They simply had nothing to do and there appeared to be no monitoring of their situation that might have led to a more effective use of their time and capacities.

---

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

The damage to infrastructure and properties in the upper catchment areas has been momentous. While the media have focused in the main on the appalling consequences of the flooding rivers, the impact on the upper catchment areas will be with us for years to come. Some public roads may never be rebuilt. Some properties have experienced so many landslides and soil slips that they are no longer safe. The streams in the upper catchment, once characterized by scattered deep swimming holes

and pools along the edges of the stream banks are now just flat. The holes and pools have been filled with sand, gravel and general debris that came away from the escarpments, roads and driveways. It will take many years, maybe forever, before these streams will ever regain their prior characters. Recovery from this event is assumed, like the postulated recovery from the pandemic, to be inevitable. But that may turn out not to be right. The scars of this event may be with us forever.

---

### **1.6 Any other matters**

There have been numerous meritorious initiatives aimed at the re-housing of people who lost their homes to floodwaters, including the dispatch from Sydney of the fleet of mobile homes. The community support for victims in general has been absolutely fantastic. But still, people are falling through cracks in the recovery effort. Some people may not have lost their homes but have lost access to them because of landslides or washouts. There is no particular help for them. Some people remain traumatized such that the delightful sound of a waterfall in the night just fills them with dread. I do not know whether one can experience degrees of PTSD but amongst my neighbours and family I see signs of distraction and disturbance. How are these mild and, presumably, temporary symptoms going to be treated, particularly if they are not recognized by the individual concerned? What are the longer term consequences for the well-being of our community? There are numerous reports of on-going terrible impacts that the bushfires have had on the residents and the communities that were impacted at the time. Can we expect similar long-term impacts for us as well?

---

### **Supporting documents or images**

---

---