

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Saturday, 14 May 2022 8:25:28 PM

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## Your details

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<b>Title</b>	Mr
<b>First name</b>	Gray
<b>Last name</b>	Pritchett
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Postcode</b>	2469

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## Submission details

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<b>I am making this submission as</b>	A resident in a flood-affected area
<b>Submission type</b>	I am making a personal submission
<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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<b>Your story</b>	Flood Inquiry Submission
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Prepared by and on behalf of:

- Gray Pritchett
- Suellen Thompson

Introduction

Ann and Chris live at Woodburn-Coraki Road and have lived there for 22 years. Suellen Thompson and Gray Pritchett live at Woodburn-Coraki Road and have lived there for 2 years.

On the morning of Monday 28 February Suellen and Gray evacuated to Woodburn Coraki road, the residence of Chris and Ann, and stayed there until Saturday 12 March. The river level gauge at Bungawalbin Creek topped at 7.32m on midnight Tuesday 1st March and at that stage the water was estimated at 200mm below the floor level of the house at 965, therefore estimated to be at 7.5m AHD. Approximately 850mm of water went through Suellen and Grays house and therefore estimated to be around 6.5m AHD.

Over the period of the flood Gray and Chris participated in rescues, we all received food and fodder drops and helped with rehabilitation and rescue of animals. This submission represents our thoughts on what went wrong, what went right and what could be improved.

### Rescues

After evacuating to the on the Monday, Suellen and Ann decided to evacuate further up the hill behind our property to the property, 1km to the south but another 10m higher. They stayed there two nights. On the morning of Tuesday 1 March Suellen and Ann were monitoring Television and noticed there were still people requiring rescue. They phoned Gray telling rescues were required so Gray and Chris launched Chris's 6.5m aluminium dinghy with 60hp engine and rescued 7 people and 2 dogs from to Woodburn-Coraki Road. Two people rescued with their dogs were on the roof and had been there overnight, the others were rescued from verandas and were in 500-800mm of water. They were taken to Woodburn evacuation centre at the Woodburn Primary school and Chris and Gray returned to the residence.

The rescued people said they had contacted SES but were still awaiting rescue.

John [redacted] who stayed with us after we rescued him from his property ([redacted] Woodburn Coraki Road) on Monday night was contacted by SES two days later inquiring if he still required a rescue.

#### Recommendation

The SES service was overwhelmed at the height of the emergency and the community driven rescue effort provided an invaluable service saving numerous lives. The community driven rescue service was coordinated through a volunteer on facebook. The two services need to be coordinated and linked and a public list or map made available to shows people requiring rescue. As soon as someone is rescued the list of people awaiting rescue must be updated. A person rescued by a community member service should be able to be removed from the SES list of rescues to be made. A service whereby a person rescued can inform SES that they have been rescued needs to be put in place and advertised.

The community rescue service needs to be encouraged, supported and coordinated for times when the SES service is overwhelmed.

#### Fodder

During the flood, the animals at [redacted] consisted of 30 cattle, 7 horses, 6 goats, 6 hens, 4 dogs, 1 cat, 1 budgie, 2 kangaroos and a fox.

Fodder for the cattle and horses began to run low after 1 day, principally due to the fodder we had stockpiled being water damaged. We sourced our own replacement fodder by boat. Fodder drops began on Thursday March 3 by boat. The first drops were by volunteers who had sourced hay from charity organisations and private donors. The first drops were based upon people bringing the hay and asking if we required it, ie it was pushed out. There was no mechanism for us to register that we required fodder, that came a couple of days later and was

coordinated through the Department of Primary Industries. DPI also coordinated helicopter drops of large bales once we gave them latitude and longitude coordinates.

For hay and supply drops that were delivered by boat, we were using our street address as a physical location. This did not work very well for river borne traffic.

#### Recommendations

At points every 500m – 1km along the Richmond and Wilson River, a section of bank needs to be cleared and signposted as an evacuation point and/or supply drop point. These points need to be numbered according to their distance from the river mouth – eg in front of our house is approximately 40km from the river mouth on the Richmond river. So the river bank in front of our house needs to be cleared for 50m and labelled as R400, R for Richmond River, 400 for 40.0km from river mouth, signs visible to road and river. Then when requesting an evacuation, we could inform SES that we require evacuation from point R400 or when requesting hay or food supplies, we could ask for delivery to point R400. The evacuation/rescue points should have a mound built to 1 in 100-year flood level and have that level marked clearly on a signpost – eg: 6.0m AHD. As property owners, if the flood is forecast to be at 5.5 AHD and we know that the nearest flood evacuation point is at 6.0m AHD then we could evacuate ourselves and our stock to that point safely, especially if it is the highest point in the vicinity.

Where applicable, every property that could potentially require a fodder drop should have Latitude and Longitude for that drop point registered with its PIC number. Property owners should have to nominate the best drop point on their yearly submission stock census and ensure that the point is well marked to a helicopter pilot and kept clear of scrub and other obstructions.

The fodder drop during the second flood of 2022 was coordinated by DPI through a call centre in

Orange. It did not appear to be as efficient or as fast as the fodder drop in the first flood.

#### BOM Data

Throughout the floods the BOM data was accurate, and we based all our decisions on this data. BOM needs to be congratulated for the accuracy of their modelling and forecasting. However, the data is hard to find and needs to be referenced to something the user will understand or can relate to. We have now developed our own reference points on our property and can accurately forecast inundation levels based upon BOM river level predictions but it would be good to know these datum levels without having to go through a flood.

#### Recommendations

BOM website should be mobile phone user-friendly. It is not currently.

The BOM app is fantastic and can provide rain and wind forecasts for my location. It should be updated to provide river height data for the closest river height measuring station to my location, eg: Richmond river at Bungawalbin Creek.

River height rising data/falling data should be provided. We had to interpolate from the tabulated data to get an estimate. River heights are given every 15 minutes so an hourly rising rate is possible to interpolate but having BOM do this simple maths would be better.

The expected height of the river should be made relative to the last flood as well as AHD.

Residents all measure the heights of the floods relative to the last flood in that area, eg: "This is about half a metre less than 74". BOM should do the same in addition to the current AHD datum levels.

An SMS service should be provided telling the user what the river height is and expected to be at their location: eg "The current river level at Richmond River – Bungawalbin creek is 4.9m AHD and is rising at 5cm per hour. The expected maximum level at this location is 5.8m AHD and will be reached late Tuesday afternoon. This



maximum level is predicted to be 1.5m below the large flood of March 2022.”

These SMS's need to be sent hourly when in minor and moderate flooding and every 15minutes when in major flooding. Once the water levels stabilise and/or start to drop that should be hourly.

River level data has a 1-hour time delay. This delay needs to be removed.

#### AHD Datums

It has become clear that many people do not understand the AHD datums and how those levels relate to their own property. Most landowners we have talked to measure the flood levels relative to previous floods. If there were more clear points around the district that clearly showed their AHD level then the data coming from BOM would be of more relevance to locals. A prime example is the flood level signs placed next to low points on the road. If these could have the relevant AHD level placed on them at the 1m mark this would help educate the public to AHD levels. For example, there is a flood level indicator on Woodburn Coraki Road outside our residence. We now know that the 1m deep level on this sign is at 5.5m AHD.

#### Recommendations

At relevant points in the district, eg: boat ramps, flood signs, levee walls, petrol stations – fix AHD level reference signs.

#### Richmond River and Wilson River

The riverbanks in this region are crowded with Cockspur Coral Trees, a recognised invasive weed. The effect of all these trees increases the water friction thus slowing the river and making the flooding worse. Speeding up the rivers downstream of Lismore will reduce the flooding as will dredging the river and increasing carrying capacity. A faster river will deliver more water sooner to Ballina so this needs to be modelled and accounted for. The rate at which the water enters the river systems is also an important factor in the flooding and should be modelled

and steps put in place to slow the flow rate across the farmlands. We need to slow down the water entering the rivers but once it is in the river, speed the river up.

#### Recommendations

Increase the Cockspur Coral tree removal program downstream of Lismore, concentrating on riverbanks first.

Increase the carrying capacity of the Wilson and Richmond River downstream of Lismore by dredging, starting at Ballina and working upstream.

Where possible, increase the ground cover in regions upstream of Lismore where the water can be held back from entering the rivers to try and slow the flooding rate. Trees and shrubs will slow the water more than grassland.

#### Cattle rescue

While rescuing people in the early days of the flood, we observed large numbers of cattle trying to swim to safety. We tried to rescue some, but our boat was unsuitable for that purpose. A dedicated boat or boats for that purpose would be a service greatly appreciated by the local farm owners in this area. Such a boat would need to be punt or barge style with a lowerable front ramp similar to a landing barge that could manoeuvre near to stock and pull them onboard. In normal times, this same boat could be used for Coral tree eradication.

#### Recommendation

DPI or council should invest in a barge type boat capable of rescuing distressed stock and use these boats for Coral tree eradication when the river flow is normal. The boats should be capable of being easily moved between the Clarence, Tweed, Wilson and Richmond River.

#### Communications

Through the duration of the first flood of February the telecommunications around the Bungawalbin area were maintained. The service

was throttled to exclude internet web traffic and image sending but text communication (especially via WhatsApp) was available with almost 100% coverage. Having this means of communications was a vital asset enabling us to communicate with a large number of family members, friends and helpers in unaffected areas. These people coordinated our recovery and supply of essentials.

#### Recommendation

The use of one-to-many messaging apps like WhatsApp should be recommended as means of communication between residents and services in emergencies. The setting up and broadcasting of the availability of a local WhatsApp group for small communities should be supported and encouraged and regularly tested.

Part of everyone's flood plan must be to ensure that all Apps are up to date. This affected Suellen where she could not use WhatsApp as it was not up to date and with no internet we could not update.

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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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