

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 5 May 2022 1:24:44 PM

Your details

Title Ms

First name Heather

Last name Selwyn

Email

Postcode 2479

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 My story is simply as a concerned member of the northern rivers community who frequents and is a part of the Lismore and Ballina Communities. I, as many, witnessed the harrowing flood event through the eyes of the media and social media and do not have first hand experience to add. What I do have is experience as a manager of a major hazard facility, for which we are required

to understand the hazards, prevent the potential events and mitigate the consequences as far as reasonably practical.

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

Existing affordable housing crisis: Forcing low income families into high risk accommodation;
Poor Planning: Permitting dual occupancy conversion of existing stilt homes in "low flood risk zones"
Failure to acknowledge climate change at a cultural level across the nation, leaders failing to act at any governmental level in terms of prevention of planning for.
Failure to adequately fund reliable mitigation (levy pumps, river guages, communication networks, pre-flood river management. reliance on underfunded volunteer rescue groups (flood & fire).

1.2 Preparation and planning

Flooding clearly is not something new to the region and I was also here for the 2017 Lismore event. The existing baseline level of attention to flood prevention, warning and mitigation from the local authorities has been appalling and such behaviour in an industrial context would result in a "loss of licence". Now when we add the predicted increased frequency and intensity of these (and other catastrophic) events due to climate change into the mix, we have a situation where it is inevitable that luck will no longer be enough and there will be significant loss of life and hardship in future events if we continue to do nothing. In terms of planning, there is no point now considering historic events as baselines, they are not good predictors of what is to come. What instead is required, is the same approach which is applied to other major hazard industries that can result in similar catastrophic public consequences; that is to apply a conservative approach in identifying and assessing possible

impacts and likelihoods and to, wherever practicable, eliminate or prevent these events / impacts. The old adage "An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure" is most appropriate here. Observations from recent events include that there has been a:

Failure to acknowledge and communicate existing and growing events that have and will affect this area.

Failure to regulate the amount of housing taken out of the long term residential market.

Lack of investment at all levels in emergency preparedness including transport infrastructure, communication systems and emergency resources.

1.3 Response to floods

As an community spectator, it was horrific to witness the cries for help from people trapped in roof spaces awaiting rescue. The volunteer organisations were inadequately prepared, under-resourced and not trusted. The community rescuers no doubt did their best job. The learning from this should include recognition of this and inclusion of these community members in future plans in a paid, structured and exercised emergency response unit.

The evacuation centers did their best, but again, lack of regional structure, communication and central coordination meant that available resources were not well matched with need. For example, we had a private cottage listed for 2 weeks on the various ad hoc accommodation sites before a family from an evac center were allocated.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

Communication and access to emergency funds have been a joke. Why were people in flooded addresses having to apply for grants, it should have been automatically assigned via Service NSW.

People are still in limbo many weeks after the event. 3rd world countries following natural disasters have commenced building replacement towns in this timeframe. Its so cruel.

1.5 Recovery from floods

The recovery must not put our communities back in this same situation for future events. Not only is this cruel, but it is adding to the carbon footprint (a positive feedback event like the bushfires). These community re-builds should be approached as an opportunity to build a positive future where people can recover. It needs a suite of residential options that the flood affected can choose from including land swaps, re-location to other regional towns, land buy-backs. For re-build / new builds the most conservative requirements should be developed and applied in terms of flood proofing, fire proofing and energy efficiency / self sufficiency to achieve a high standard of resilience. This has a significant cost, but a much smaller one than not doing so. The half house example in Chile has a lot of merit in terms of giving people a habitable option in a very small timeframe and then over to them if they want to make it their own by extending.

1.6 Any other matters

The flood zones within these existing towns should be rebuilt as the cultural centres of the communities in terms of for example outdoor performance & sports sites nestled in regenerated rainforest, wildlife corridors supported by mobile cafes etc. This coupled with some more reliable flood monitoring / modelling would then have a minimal impact on the communities when the floods happen again. Hopefully we have a break for a couple of years and hopefully not straight into catastrophic bushfires due to the massive growth from the big wet, but what is clear is that we have to act quickly to get these communities out of limbo and have clear offerings on the table for them. This is going to need the best we can find in terms of community leadership and engagement. There will be a significant resistance to change, mixed in with grief, trauma and ongoing hardship, which will make "going back to normal" seem possible and attractive, which we know isn't. Tough love.

Supporting documents or images

