

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Tuesday, 3 May 2022 6:39:45 PM
Attachments: [Bungawalbin floodprone lands.pdf](#)
[100 Year ARI Peak Flood Levels Sheet 3.pdf](#)

Your details

Title Ms

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Email

Postcode 2469

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 I live in the general area of Whiporie, close to Gibberagee. This is in the Myall Creek part of the Bungawalbin subcatchment of the Richmond Valley.

My property access is via the Bungawalbin-Whiporie Road. This road has been cut off by flood waters many times since late 2021. Most notably, it was closed by floodwaters in the week before 28 February, only re-opening on 26 February. It was covered by flood waters again at midday on 27 February.

My neighbour's house was flooded at levels never encountered before (almost a metre higher than the 1974 flood). I recognise I am very much one of the lucky ones as my house was built on higher ground and escaped the flood.

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 The substantial amount of rain received this past spring and summer is obviously the immediate cause. This extreme weather event is one of a series which appears to be occurring with greater frequency and severity. I point to the extreme rainfall event in March 2017 and the prolonged drought over much of 2018 and 2019, leading to bushfire events. The frequency and severity of extreme weather events has long been predicted as one of the consequences of global warming. It is one of the undesirable aspects of the climate change induced by global warming.

It appeared from the aerial photos that the severity and longevity of the flood might have been exacerbated by the construction of the M1 motorway. The attached photo clearly indicates that it formed a barrier to flood dispersal.

1.2 Preparation and planning The lack of preparedness and failure of models to predict the level of flooding indicates two failures - a failure of the models to estimate runoff from fully saturated catchments and a lack of equipment providing real-time data on rainfall in those catchments. The events from this year reflected the same failures that were encountered in March 2017. The moderate floods in mid-March 2017 were an indicator to me that catchments were saturated and any further extreme rainfall events would prompt a major flood. I kept asking myself, why the BoM and SES didn't share that view. At

Whiporie, in 2017, the BoM gauge was not working and so that event has no official recording - but many locals recorded >500mm in 48 hours. However no warning was given to people living at Bungawalbin. I recall the SES being surprised so many locals were caught out by that event. With no data, no warning could be issued. This year, Whiporie's rain gauge was working. Record-breaking rainfall occurred on two dates: 24 February and 28 February. The flood caused by the rainfall on 23-24 February was heading downstream to the Bungawalbin-Swan Bay area when the rainfall of 27-28 February hit. This was a double whammy. However, apart from the rain gauge at Whiporie, there was no measurement of that flood heading towards Bungawalbin.

The Bungawalbin forms 26% of the Richmond catchment. It has as much influence on flood levels at Woodburn and downstream as the Wilson River at Lismore. However it only has two rain gauges both of which only record the previous 24 hours of rainfall at 9am AEST each day. It has only one flood gauge is listed on the BoM's website (Myrtle Creek near Rappville).

It seems reasonable to expect that the BoM and SES need real-time data of water levels in this subcatchment to be able to predict flood levels at Bungawalbin and Woodburn. Without that real-time data no real-time predictions can be made to trigger adequate preparations.

Another issue is the limited mapping available, including in the Richmond River Flood Mapping Study. Flooding in this part of the catchment has been ignored for too long. Without decent mapping, planning for floods and preparation will be flawed.

Flood mapping for the Bungawalbin catchment is inaccurate. The first attached PDF comes from the Bungawalbin Catchment Management Plan, published in 2000. It grossly under-estimates floodprone lands but at least covers the entire catchment. The second attached PDF comes from the Richmond River Flood Mapping Study and are for the 100Y ARI peak flood levels. It barely extends to West Bungawalbin - the extensive floodplain south-west of that in Gibberagee and Whiporie are not even shown.

A few years ago, a low-lying house was built near Neileys Lagoon Road (shown as 'flood free' in these maps). The couple were misled by Richmond Valley Council as to the required height of their house to keep it flood-free. Council advised that the area did not flood. And Council indicated that a ground-level house would meet the requirement for it to be 500mm above the 1-100 flood event. And so, a low-lying house was built, quite legally with development consent from Council. The flood waters this year came up to the roof and the house has been condemned.

Councils should be using the Probable Maximum Floods (PMFs) in all their planning, and when approving new residential buildings. Ballina Shire Council attempted to do this years ago but was stymied by the then NSW Department of Planning.

Mapping of and planning for the PMF can prevent future heartache.

But data are required to map the PMF. The sign at the Whiporie end of the Bungawalbin-Whiporie Road warns that the next 35km are flood prone and that indicators show depth. But there are no indicators at most areas where the road floods. We need more flood gauges along both Myrtle Creek and Myall Creek upstream of their junction with the Bungawalbin Creek, and then downstream on the Bungawalbin Creek. I believe Council had a flood gauge at Yellow Crossing (near Neileys Lagoon Road) but I've heard it was destroyed by this year's floods.

The Richmond River Flood Mapping Study needs to be re-done now, while the 2022 flood levels are still clearly visible. It is dangerous for the current misleading and deceptive mapping to still be available. It must be removed.

**1.3
Response
to floods**

A common complaint from the Bungawalbin and Gibberagee areas is that the evacuation orders and flood warnings came far too late - roads were already cut by floodwaters and it was dangerous to advise people to leave their homes when roads were impassable.

I have been told of two issues with the use of army personnel:

1. More than one person commented to me that the army helicopters were not fit for purpose of rescue and

provisioning in forest environments due to the substantial downwash of these machines. This downwash caused additional damage to already flood-damaged structures and the tarps that people had put up to prevent further damage from rain. I note that helicopters used in forest fires in this region are typically smaller and better suited to rescue operations in forests.

2. One person commented to me that the army personnel assigned to help him with removing flood-damaged furniture and equipment were all new recruits that lacked any relevant experience or training, and should have been accompanied by a social worker who could communicate properly with someone who was still in shock about the event and experiencing grief.

One issue is apparent in the attached photo. There was no dirty floodwater flowing out of the Evans River. Was the floodgate for the Tuckombil Canal not opened? This diverts water from the Richmond River, upstream of Woodburn, into the Evans River. Historically it has been used to mitigate flood impacts to Woodburn and downstream communities in the lower Richmond. Why did it not perform this function in 2022?

**1.4
Transition
from
incident
response to
recovery**

The post-flood response included a complex array of announcements for various grants and subsidies but it was a maze of conflicting advice. If you received grant X, you would be ineligible for grant Y. A lot of the rules and restrictions didn't make sense. Why if you accepted \$1000 or \$3000 from the Cwth Government, were you then ineligible for \$20,000 from the NSW Government? But, whatever grant you wanted, you needed to have access to a computer and the internet. This was impossible for many given that they had lost their computers and modems. Centrelink was the ultimate insult - once you'd worked with someone who had a computer on a weekend to try and link Centrelink to your MyGov account, including providing all the relevant documentary evidence of your identity, you needed to ring them to get a code. But their call centre was not open on weekends, including over the entire Easter long weekend.

Recovery centres were helpful but only accessible to those who could get to them. Large sections of the Bungawalbin-Whiporie Road were largely impassable for part of March and most of April due to damage

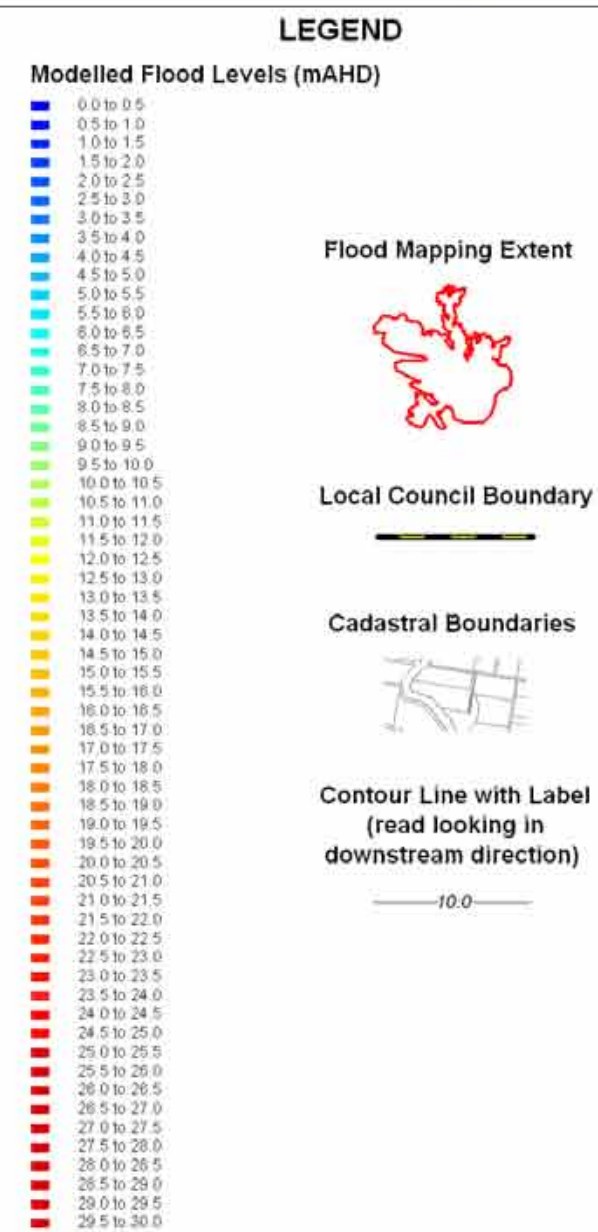
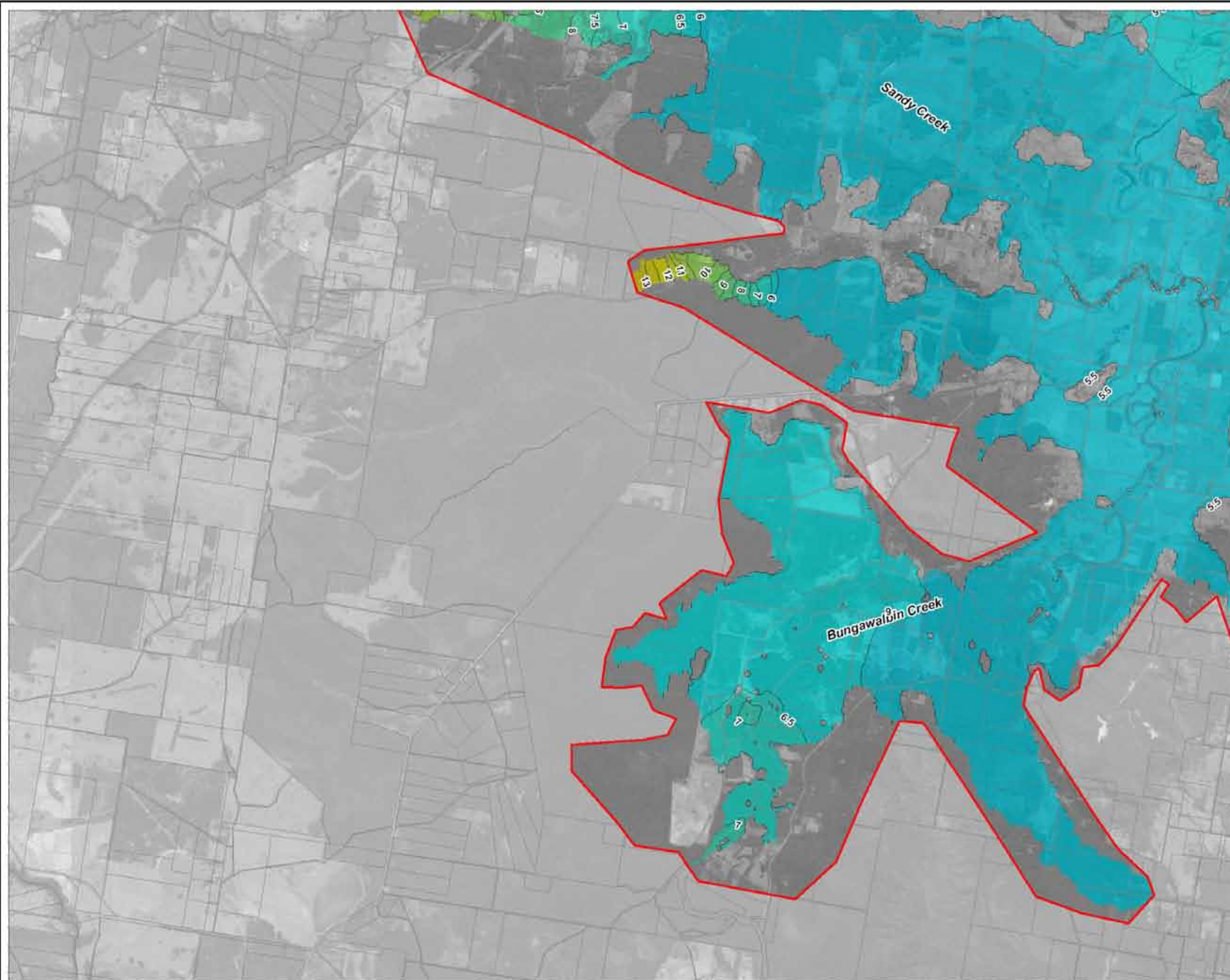
caused by heavy vehicles (including the army trucks) and ongoing heavy rain which flooded the road repeatedly after 28 February. But most people were housebound, relying on transport of others, because they hadn't had the chance or the funds to replace vehicles lost in the flood.

A dedicated case worker available by phone might have been more useful to many people in isolated areas.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [Aerial of mid Richmond flood - towns marked.jpg](#)
 - [Bungawalbin floodprone lands.pdf](#)
 - [100 Year ARI Peak Flood Levels Sheet 3.pdf](#)
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1. Actual flood events can significantly differ from the design flood events presented here. The flood behaviour shown is predicted to occur during a typical design flood event, under the physical and topographic conditions prevailing at the time of preparation.
2. The approximate extent of land liable to flooding is based on survey data available at the time of preparation. Refer to Volume 1 of the Richmond River Flood Mapping Study for details of the survey data used.
3. Local flooding of other areas, or in excess of the levels shown, may occur. The extent of flooding shown relates primarily to long duration rainfall events. Shorter duration events leading to flash flooding may result in higher localised flood levels and velocities in some areas.
4. Local increases in flood levels, depths, and/or velocities from those shown may result from local factors such as full or partial blockages of drainage structures, and obstructions to overland flows such as changes to agricultural characteristics, farm levees and drains, fences and buildings.

Title:
100 Year ARI Peak Flood Levels - Sheet 3
Bungawalbin Creek and Lower Sandy Creek

BMT WBM endeavours to ensure that the information provided in this map is correct at the time of publication. BMT WBM does not warrant, guarantee or make representations regarding the currency and accuracy of information contained in this map.



Map: 6-5
 Rev: C





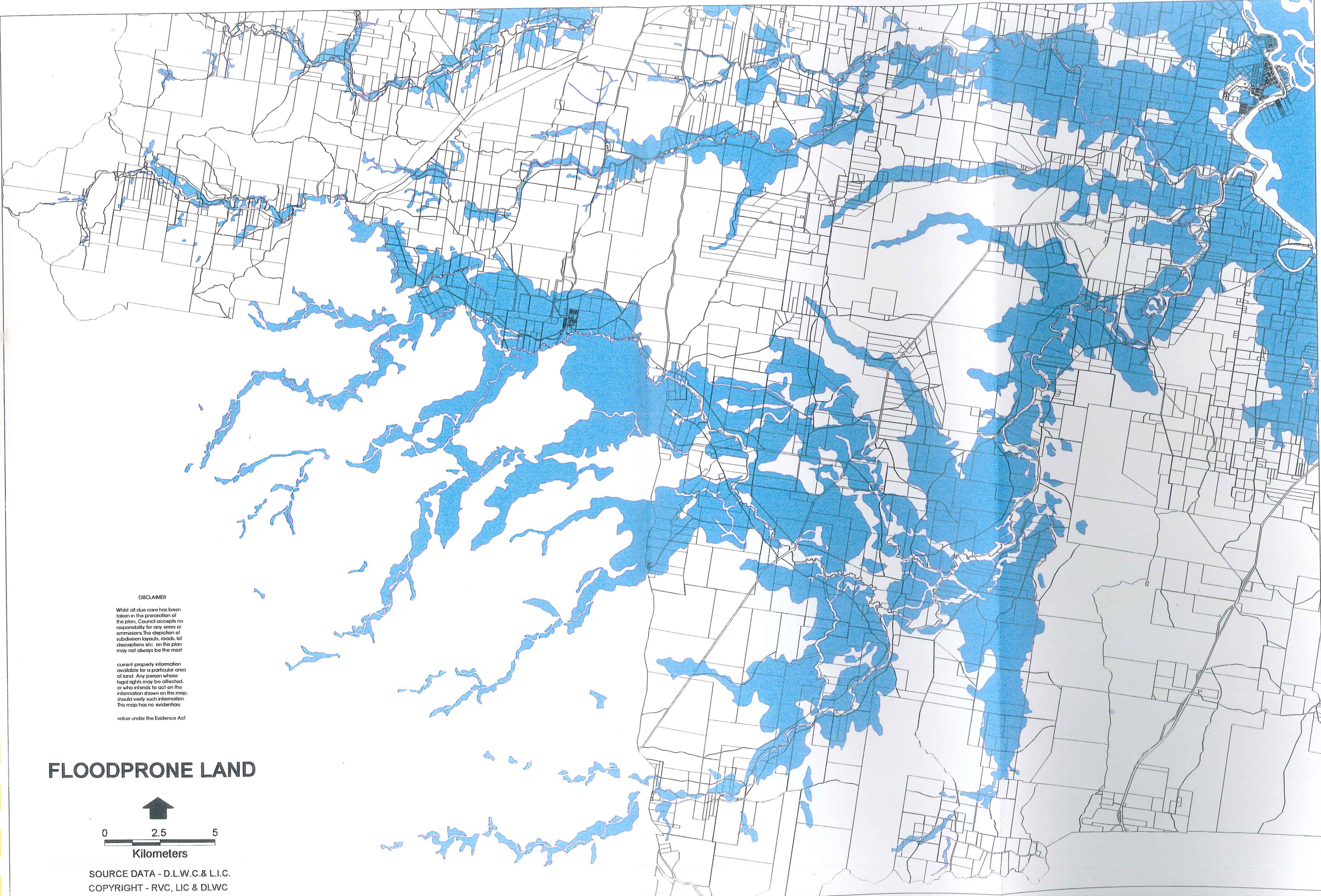
Evans Head

Broadwater

Rileys Hill

Woodburn

Coraki



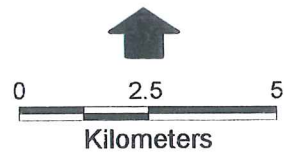
DISCLAIMER

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current property information available for a particular area of land. Any person whose legal rights may be affected, or who intends to act on the information shown on this map, should verify such information. This map has no evidentiary

value under the Evidence Act

FLOODPRONE LAND



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