

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Sunday, 1 May 2022 11:41:38 PM



## Your details

**Title** Mrs

**First name** Karin

**Last name** Burn

**Email**

**Postcode** 2480

## 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 a part of Bexhill that wasn't flooded, at least the house wasn't flooded as they were at the bottom of the hill in Bexhill. We did watch the water rise in the paddocks below. The 2LM radio building was getting more and more inundated and the water was creeping closer up the hill on the neighbours' properties. It did stop, eventually however, and it was the greatest relief. I can't

even begin to imagine what it'd be like actually having to crawl out of your house onto the roof hoping to be rescued.

Even so, having moved into the area three years ago, never having experienced any major weather. Or at least, nothing that may affect your life in any substantial way, this was majorly scary. The rain didn't stop. I was checking the BoM radar on my phone every 5 minutes or more and the cloud just kept circling, never moving away. Perhaps changing shape slightly but not moving anywhere. For hours. In the 24 hours to 9am on 28/2/22 we had 445mm of rain. The next 24 hours it was 102.5mm. The total rainfall for February 2022 was 990.5mm, just about half the annual average in one month. Our house was not really at risk. Nevertheless, this event caused major anxiety and constant worry about what the weather might do. Would we get landslides, will the next flood be higher, what type of trees should we plant, what else can we do? The ground is so wet, even more than two months after the first flood, we can't go anywhere without gumboots as you sink into the ground like it's a sponge.

My husband and I helped clean up at some places in Lismore once the road was open again. One place, in Union St, was full of mud and had had no cleaning done at all and this was on 5 March. The older gentleman living there had borrowed a gurney from a friend and we and others brought brooms, shovels etc. A total of 6 of us worked for around 7 hours getting the worst out and most of the gurneying done. There were people walking around giving food to people cleaning. There were only private people helping, nothing from any authority. If this person had no support from strangers, he would not have got the house cleaned for a much longer time.

Long time Lismore people seem so resilient; "we just get on with it, we rebuild, this is what Lismore is like, blah blah. After a couple of

months helping people clean and listening to people talk, I think there is so much more behind the scenes. Major mental health issues such as anxiety, worry about finances and what will happen with the town. Some want to rebuild, some don't.

In my mind, they've all become so used to status quo it's almost sad. Like doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result. This should be a huge opportunity to change things for the future and become a truly resilient town. Not just one that comes back for more and suck the same shit over and over again.

---

## **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**

I don't think anyone can deny that decades of degradation of our environment has had an effect on the weather that we are seeing now. Lismore is also built on a floodplain which is not helping.

The removal of trees from the hills and riverbanks have increased runoff downhill as there are no trees there to absorb all the water. According to a Richmond Landcare seminar, a tree can absorb up to 200 litres of water a day. Removing 1000s of trees is obviously going to create some issues.

The riverbanks have had vegetation removed resulting in runoff from the hills going into the river. Lack of vegetation on the riverbank inhibits the rivers' ability to filter water, leaving it brown and all the top soil and mud flowing downstream and out into the ocean which can be seen at Ballina.

---

### **1.2 Preparation and planning**

There was inadequate warning for a lot of residents. They didn't heed the initial warning, going on past experience that the water wouldn't come as high as it did. The forecast was not clear in the severity of the event that was unfolding. The estimate of the river height was

way out as was the estimate of the speed of the rise of the river.

There was not enough SES people on the ground to help. The planning on this front seemed hugely inadequate. People calling emergency services were left high and dry with no response or no result from their calls once the flood was reality. SES need paid staff and to be much more resourced with equipment, staff and training since these events are likely to be bigger and more frequent as Australia's lack of climate action has more dire results.

---

### **1.3 Response to floods**

. i. Public warnings were insufficient for the first flood in that the severity of the flood was not communicated and people were taken by surprise. The second flood in March was also unexpected as people were told that all was clear at first and then the warning was reinstated, creating confusion.

People were rescued by private citizens, which is admirable. There were not enough professional rescuers such as SES etc though. They also seemed to complain that private people in boats did more harm than good which is laughable when, in hindsight, most people probably agree that without private heroes, many more people may have died waiting on or in their roofs

ii. We need a one stop shop that responds and acts on disasters such as floods, fire etc. They will become more frequent and likely more severe. That the government hasn't been prepared for this is astounding, considering decades of talk about climate action from scientists.

The SES needs more resources and paid staff. It needs to be equipped to respond as an emergency authority that is not mostly based on volunteers. It should be a complete unit and the need to use the ADF could be reduced. What if there is a war at the same time? They could provide training to SES

Coordination was non cohesive and it was hard to work out where to go for various items. Many people wanted to help with cleaning up but there

was no real central point to go to be allocated someone who needed help. We were relying on Facebook and sometimes the posts didn't come up until hours after they were posted.

The ADF appeared too late. Major road infrastructure was blocked exposing the inadequate supply chain.

The number of trades people and other professionals is also an issue. There is still no electricity for large parts of the town. Insurance companies seem to be dragging the chain on processing claims.

This is not the making of individuals but a creation of governmental lack of action on climate change, lack of services in regional areas, reduction in funding for services in general and a governmental lack of care of the people it is governing for.

People should not be left high and dry if they have no connections in society, if they are old or incapacitated in some way. What if private people weren't available to help? What then? There was no help from anyone from any authority until weeks later.

The state and federal financial help was late and inadequate and extremely confusing to get. People are still waiting for money even though they have applied. Support for business was focused on only small business and NFPs. Lots of businesses do not have huge revenue but more than 10 employees. It may have been extended to bigger business by now but why the haphazard, non cohesiveness in the response? It adds to the frustration and highlights the government's lack of actual care.

iii. Communication needs to be updated. Internet and mobile communication cannot be allowed to go down and such infrastructure needs to be made emergency proof.

---

**1.4 Transition  
from incident**

Again it would be great to have a one stop shop with a government agency that have a clear



## **response to recovery**

remit as to what assistance is available, when they will start and finish the assistance. They will organize and manage any volunteering, donations of money and things from the community and anyone else.

This entity would make sure that all businesses and private dwellings have been looked after and are ready to proceed with rebuilding.

---

### **1.5 Recovery from floods**

i. Temporary housing needs to be available much quicker for everyone. There should be no need for people to couch surf or live in tents or at evacuation centres for longer than you'd normally overstay your welcome.

The help with cleaning was left, pretty much entirely to the goodwill of fellow citizens. The same with providing food, clothes, furniture, living arrangements etc. There seems to be no substantial government response, or ability to respond which left the community feeling abandoned. Any help that did come after a long time, seemed reactive and band aid like; let's try hard not to lose the next election level of help.

There should be equipment available at central points. For example more expensive equipment such as gurneys. People who are not able to clean should have a central point to call on for assistance, be it from volunteering or cleaners supplied by the government/council.

ii. Longer term rebuilding assistance should be a federal issue if it is deemed to be a climate change/natural disaster. This would make the response cohesive for all states even though the states could manage it but the finances should be a federal issue.

Rebuilding may be practical in a bush fire situation but when an area floods repeatedly and will do so again, it would seem more practical and economical to look for other ways rather than to rebuild. Landswaps for example. Each area would have to be looked at individually. If there is not an immediate move to higher grounds for flood victims and the government insists on 'building back better' in the same spot,

this needs to happen immediately, not months later. There needs to be clear procedures for what this entails and, considering there will likely not be any future insurance available on the private market, the government needs to underwrite 100% of all businesses and private dwellings in these areas. This should be legislated

---

### **1.6 Any other matters**

Janelle Saffin said that Perrottet has said “We’ll build back better”. What does that actually mean? Who will do this building? It cannot just be down to the people to rebuild their town. A lot of people do not have insurance and it should not be up to charities and the goodness of people to do this. The government need to step in and substantially support these people and businesses.

Lismore has not just been flooded, it’s been obliterated. Without a business centre, there is no town. A town needs cafes, restaurants, hairdressers, grocery shops, dentists, clothes shops, etc to be a living space. It is not sustainable to have a city that doesn’t have any long term viability. Not many businesses can afford to repeatedly rebuild and continue. The area needs stability and the CBD needs to be moved to higher ground. People can’t keep losing their jobs just because the town is flooded. People can’t keep living with uncertainty regarding their living situation.

This is an opportunity to think outside the box and find areas on higher ground to move the town and those who want to move.

The land remaining on the flood plain could be made into parks, sports areas. The river should be regenerated and could be a great place for sport and recreation. Restaurants could be built (flood secure) where people could gather and enjoy life.

The below YouTube seminar from Richmond Landcare is worthwhile as it discusses the need for a natural response to prevent landslides and

to clean up the river system  
Landslide management and prevention  
workshop April 24, 2022 - YouTube

---

**Supporting documents or images**

---

---