

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Tuesday, 31 May 2022 2:19:08 PM

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## Your details

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**Title** Ms

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**First name** KERRY

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**Last name** TURPIN

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**Email**

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**Postcode** 2477

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## Submission details

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

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**Submission type** I am making a personal submission

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**Consent to make submission public** 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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**Your story** Wardell emergency Evacuation Centre  
hello,  
On the weekend prior to the floods, we were at a family wedding on the Gold Coast in a gazebo. We were ankle deep in water - it was torrential. We drove home on Sunday through torrential rain. The ground was saturated. We have had rain since November.

## Wardell Floods 2022

Monday 28th February

- Had Discussion on where we can set up an evacuation centre – saw RFS, then Warren Barnes - One of the Trustees for the Sport and Recreation Club in Wardell. ( This whole area has now been allocated to The Department of Housing to erect up to 400 pod homes - huge mistake!!)

Reasons for Choosing this area

It is on high ground

It has a large area currently used as a golf course so suitable for landing helicopters if required

Has a commercial kitchen, outside BBQ area and bathrooms

Has some air conditioning

Has parking

is separate from the town

- Had extreme difficulty contacting, discussing and organising Club. The Committee refused to help as they felt community doesn't support them.

At this stage, many residents were sandbagging, were apprehensive but did not expect the flood to be of too much consequence. There had been no information from the BOM

- 6.00pm meeting at the club with committee – Tony and Fran . They reluctantly agreed to use the club as an evac centre. They remained at the club as the water was rising at their home – they would also need to evacuate.

- Spoke to Rex Farrell – captain – RFS . We informed Ballina SES - Gerry that the club would be the official evac centre for Wardell and Rex also informed the club that it must not close - it would need to remain open 24/7 as an emergency evacuation centre

- 2 travellers arrived at 7.00 pm – couldn't get petrol and M1 was closed heading north. Tony fed them hot chips and coffee. He thought that they would be the only customers - He was so wrong!!

- Many started to arrive all through the night. Fran and Tony became so supportive and helpful. By the morning, we had about 60 people in the Club. they had been rescued by local fisherman and RFS and local residents. They all arrived with nothing! no medicine, documents, clothes.

The club was busting at the seams and we had no bedding, clothes of food

## TUESDAY

- Water rising in West Ballina. Club needed food. My daughter Simone from Sydney and myself went into West Ballina to the butchers to get 15 kgs sausages. No other shops opened. the water was rising. we were in a Pajero and managed to get back to Wardell. We were unable to purchase any other food.

Kristina ( Fran and Tony's daughter) got into Coles but needed an escort to get out. She Managed to get food for the club before Coles closed.

The M1 was closed later that day

- 3 Evans Head Marine Rescue volunteers were stranded after delivering their fuel trailer to Goonellabah –Unit commander Ken , Coxswain Ian and James – Army medic. They couldn't get back to Evans Head as all the roads were cut. They rang me because I am also in Marine Rescue Evans head as a radio operator and a crew member to see if I had any accommodation.

At this stage, I had my daughter and her husband staying as flights were cancelled and she couldn't get home - she was 8 months pregnant, My elderly auntie and uncle who live on the river bank in a 2 storey house. They were inundated to the second storey. I had 2 people from the other side of the river who had set up their caravan at the front of my place - they only needed my electricity and water. Now I had another 3 men from marine Rescue. I had one of

the RFS 's elderly father (82 and his niece) we were full and I had little food too - 12 of us to feed.

- The Marine Rescue (MR) guys helped me at the club. We were all in our uniforms. It gave everyone some stability. Good to have uniforms present.
- Flood waters rising and more people started evacuating
- Many sleeping in cars in the car park of the club as they had so many pets. We had some issues with people wanting to sleep with their animals in the club.

We lost internet and phone reception. Luckily Rex had gone into SES in the morning in the Fire Truck and Managed to get a radio from Gerry

. We used this over the next 2 weeks but it was not reliable. The RFS was the emergency base. as we had no phone reception, I was constantly driving from the Evacuation Centre to the RFS with updates, messages

- So many dogs, cats, birds.
- Fran and Tony – lost home but were amazing. they ran the club. their daughter had bought so much food.

Paola , the Vice President of the Wardell and District Progress Association had set her caravan in my front yard. She had sporadic phone reception. She and myself are administrators of the local facebook page - WARDELL COMMUNITY CONNECT. We were able to post requests for bedding, food, tents, clothes road updates. The local community was amazing. Not all of Wardell was flooded. Those that weren't, donated so much to the evac centre. People arrived to cook and care for the traumatised. Not only had they lost everything, it was the shock that this could actually happen in Wardell. People started to donate bedding, so we got things sorted for the evening. The cooks did a BBQ - had enough snags and bread and condiments from the club.

Problems we encountered at this stage...

1. We have no local council plan for an evac centre - where it should be and how it should be run.
2. We had NO WARNING - the RFS didn't sound the fire alarm BUT it would not be heard by everyone in Wardell. We had no plan yet we were impacted and threatened by bushfires only a few years ago.

The automated texts from the SES told us to evacuate but there was no direction as to where to go.

3. We have no automated river gauge at Wardell to give river heights. there is only one at Woodburn and then at Burns Point ferry.

4. people refused to put their animals outside and wanted to sleep with them. - taking up more bedding that was needed for people.

5. There was No one in charge – we had no co ordinator - or phone call or help. No police, no councillors, no Govt agencies. Only had RFS - many of their houses were flooded and 4 members of the MRescue

3. The committee of the Club opened the bar that night – large amounts of alcohol consumed by some. People were very scared. No one had any authority to stop this. There were lots of children and babies there. It was a very difficult and harrowing situation.

4. People wanted tobacco, drugs and alcohol. They became very agitated.

5. We had Limited food

6. Call out on the fb community page - these were answered

7. No internet, spasmodic phone coverage

8. The rescue boats were running out of Fuel.

UC Ken organised a generator to get the petrol pumps activated at the service station.

The BP service station opened its doors for customers - they have a few groceries ect BUT no one had any cash and the eftpos machine had no power

Wednesday 2nd March

- Katie arrived at evac centre – from the Department of Community and Justice and said that she had been tasked there. However, Katie lives in Wardell and her house was flooded to the roof. Katie had her phone and was dressed in her brother's clothes. She was staying at her Dad's. We organised the bedding as well as we could. The whole of the club was used. Many were sleeping in tents and their cars but they were safe and there were toilets and meals available.
- My daughter, Simone came out to the club and brought the computer. We entered names, Addresses, contact numbers and medical conditions of people we processed. and where they were staying. She entered 400 names.
- We were able to get some volunteer doctors. They were boated over from Alstonville along Wardell Road which was inundated to up to over a meter in places. Dr Nick and Alex came to the evac centre.
- We had to find an area to set up for the doctors and nurses. to provide some privacy. They Wrote scripts and saw sick and elderly. I asked Wendy – former RN who was at the evac centre to check triage some of the elderly. Many had arrived without their medication and were getting very agitated./ although the doctors had written scripts, it would still be another 2 days before these could be filled from the chemist in the next town
- Janet – chemist assistant from Evans Head was rescued in the morning but cooked large Spag bog for the club for dinner. It was a great distraction and help for Janet.
- The club had Limited food - we were accommodating more people than we had anticipated and we were cut off from other areas.
- Cheryl and Bonnie took about 17 kids for a swim at their place – Bonnie is the Principal of Empire Vale School. They walked the kids to their place. We checked permission from parents and working with children. It was fabulous - gave the kids a break and it was a hot

sunny day.

- Lots of donations of food, clothing and bedding arrived from locals – no one to coordinate. It was just dumped at the club. We needed some of the evacuees to start sorting clothes and bedding.

Many people grabbed what they wanted and others stood back

- Liz [redacted] ( Daughter of the Deputy Mayor - Ballina Shire Council) and Tane [redacted], and many other organised donations to come by boat from Alstonville

1. Pizzas from Dominos

2. Large amounts of curries from Indian restaurant

3. Many containers of spag bol from another restaurant

4. Sourdough – large crate from .....Alstonville

5. Milk

BP was opened – no power, no petrol. UC from MREH decided to get what was needed from the petrol station and take to evac centre. Asked owner to prepare invoice. Not sure if this was ever paid - we took almost everything from his stock. He lost 3 of his BP service stations

- Katie [redacted] did not stay at the evac centre – no one in charge.

- Asked the owners NOT to open the bar tonight.

- Evacuated 2 x 90 y o – to boats – both had significant medical conditions. MR boys plus the RFS carried them to boats and met an ambulance on the other side of Wardell RD.

Evening

- Ken spoke to Gerry [redacted] from SES.

Wardell evac centre not sustainable – no showers, blocking toilets. he said that everyone will be transferred to SCU. we would need boats and the RFS

- Liz J [redacted] trying to organise buses at the other end to transport people.

I was concerned about the people at the evacuation centre that were obviously drug dependent and were becoming quite unpredictable and extremely agitated. They

needed to be segregated and monitored. We also had some people who had organised private individuals to bring in drugs and alcohol which became a huge issue. This again made the evac centre unsustainable. We had no authority over these people and they knew it.

- We moved some elderly into the Catholic Church Hall and Tongans, Vanuatu people taken to Wardell Kindergarten – very upset about the drinking at the club the previous night.

Thursday

- 3 boats in water with MREH, UC Ken [redacted], Ian [redacted], James - army medic, Blake [redacted], Alex and Tanya [redacted], Greg [redacted], - all used private boats - had to be shallow because the water was starting to recede.

People were being relocated to better evacuation centres where there was more support.

- Gazebo set up at water's edge. Table and chairs organised by local residents
- Set up food and water at Gazebo
- People were loaded into the fire truck and Billy Gibson's Council truck, also myself and Lucy [redacted] used our own vehicles (for older people) and taken to drop off point.

They were then helped into the back of fire trucks. These were backed into the water and then the people were helped straight into the boat as they were in the water.

- Finished transferring at 1.00 pm
- Many people refused to go – wanted to stay in the area. I explained that there will be no support from the club - no food or electricity. – it will be returned to a private business. Many people chose to stay in their cars. Unfortunately, we had to leave them there.

All donations from the club were transported to Catholic Hall by volunteers. The club needs to be returned to the committee and a licensed premises. – Billy [redacted], Emma and partner

FRIDAY

- Saw Katie [redacted] – had message from Bill



– expect food delivery via helicopter.

Ask RFS to secure the area. We went to the sport and Rec club to wait for the army helicopter

- Didn't arrive. Food was delivered by truck late in the afternoon to the Church Hall
- Katie organised the last of the evacuees to Alstonville.
- Rec Club cleared of most people.
- Huge amounts of deliveries of donations of food. These were sent to the Church hall and local kindergarten.

#### SATURDAY

- I volunteered at the RFS. i said that I could help with comms. Many of the mactive members of the RFS had been flood affected and needed to start cleaning all the mud out of their houses
- I Set up a register of people who require their houses to be cleaned
- South Ballina Caravan Park reported they had 50 -60 people that were stranded and needed food. SES was tasked and RFS were packaging food and water but after 5 calls we found that they had had a helicopter drop and someone had been across the river to collect meat from Troy and fuel and generator. Mick Fanning also had donated money for helicopter drops. Had to cancel SES. there was so much mixed messages and doubling up of requests to both SES and private corporations.
- People requesting wash out of homes. these people live on the flood plane. They had no electricity and are on tank water which need electricity for pumping. The RFS provided the service of washing out homes, sheds and drive ways

#### SUNDAY

- Request for food drops + fuel
- Medics organising a clinic??
- Volunteers turning up with food, clothes, hot food. - We needed to coordinate where these would go. I worked very closely with Rex ,

the Unit commander of the Wardell Rural Fire Station. This became the emergency centre. We accepted deliveries of water, food garden equipment, gloves, hand sanitiser.

The local Rotary Club from Ballina asked what they could do. I asked if they could set up a BBQ and feed the volunteers and residents. They came and stayed for a week serving bacon and egg rolls and sausage sandwiches. We also organised drivers to take these out to the people and volunteers working in the area. They were amazing!! Fabulous job - need recognition.

Monday 7th March and Tuesday 8th March  
Gerry and Margaret from Ballina SES came to the Fire Station. We finally met the voices on the other end of the radio.

Many units from other Rural Fire Stations arrived and these needed to be tasked. We used the white board and did lists - no internet or mobile phone service. I sent every truck out with printed instructions to inform residents to ring the Fire Station on the LANDLINE - it was our only communication. Unfortunately the landline handset was still on the wall - so there was lots of exercise getting up and down to answer the calls and record addresses and requests.

Rex and I drove along Riverbank drive to do welfare checks - there were people there that were still stuck in their homes.

I made a request to Marine Rescue Ballina to send some radio operators so that they could assist with recording all phone calls into the Rural Fire Station - 3 operators arrived in uniform for duty on Tuesday. We all worked from 7.30 am - 6.00pm. the Unit Commander from Marine Rescue Ballina organise lunch and snack bags and bottles of and drove around the district delivering them.

At this stage, many people were starting to pull out all the flood damaged furniture and household items. Many people didn't know what to do.

Many many volunteers arrived from the Gold Coast, Brisbane, the sunshine coast, coffs

Harbour - all around the wider area. We must all be heartened, they were the young uni students, doctors, nurses, counsellors, tradies. We were overwhelmed with the support and donations. these people went out and helped people clean out their homes. My son actually spent his honeymoon helping in Wardell for 4 days!! More radio operators from Ballina MR came on Tuesday - we had a good system going by then. they were taking lists of volunteers names and sending them to lanes on the floodplain. Rex had drawn up a mud map of the area so that we could cover the whole area.

Rex and I drove over the local area - We checked on an elderly lady who had been reported missing to the SES - found her. We checked that people knew that there was assistance at the Fire Station if required.

I sorted goods at the fire station and organised room for the volunteer doctors that came - did mostly cuts and sent people to hospital because of infections.

We transferred donated goods from the Fire Station to the Hall

I picked up all the medical supplies from the local primary school which was flooded and took them to the Fire Station.

The army had arrived in Wardell by now, so we were able to give them the lists of houses that needed housing and organising houses that were in the same location. they had no knowledge of the local area and the type of roads they would be travelling on.

unfortunately, the captains were using google maps to work out distances between houses and farms. they were using buses to transport the army - it would have been far better to put them into a few mini buses and we could have utilised them so much better. We organised them to go to flooded homes before the fire trucks,

I was tasked as media person. I met with Channel 7, did an on air interview, ABC. traveled around the local area with film crew from channel 7. Our local member came to Wardell finally on

Tuesday 7th March. I jumped in her car and did a quick tour of the area to show her the devastation. She was very unfamiliar with the area .

We had a Jeremy [redacted] NSW Resilience come to the Fire Station - the first person in over a week that may have had some idea. He was there for an hour and then told us he was moving out of the area the next day.

Wednesday 9th March

Was invited to Ballina SES and met Stephanie Cooke. Also had conversation with Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Minister Bridget McKenzie with rex and Di [redacted] .

Thursday 10th March

Went to Marine Rescue Evans Head to meet with Deputy Commander Alex [redacted] and the zone commander Malcom [redacted] to discuss Marine Rescues role during floods.

The unit had been fully involved in rescues at Woodburn and relocating Woodburn residents to Evans Head.

Friday

Continued with tasking the 15 Fire engines and volunteers from the army base.

This work continued for days but at a less frantic pace .

I finished volunteering in this capacity on the Friday

Problems

- Social media allowed people to post that they needed food, water fuel, generators. These were tasked by the SES but also by private individuals and sometimes Council without any communication between them all. Result was an overflow of food and a waste of resources.
- Communication. No internet so even if people had mobile data, it was intermittent and could not get the message out via social media – facebook.
- Intermittent phone service.
- No Council “road closed” signs in town. To stop

- people coming for a look and rubber necking.
- Lots of traffic on local roads and nature strip.
- No communication between agencies.
- No contact person allocated to the area to coordinate the clean up.
- Council also tasking people to deliver food ect
- No authority to take over the club, stop service of alcohol,
- Needed police to help with problems

#### Positives

- Marine Rescue worked with RFS to evacuate people
- Lucky that we had a few agencies on the ground Katie = Dept of Justice and Community. 3 from MREH, RFS, and SES. Wonderful example of interdisciplinary agency work.

Many people need to be recognised for their work in the emergency response

Particularly

Di and Rex

Ballina Rotary Club

Kristina and Billy

Ken - unit Commander - Marine Rescue Ballina

John and Gary

All Rural Fire Services that came to our aid

Radio operators from Marine Rescue Ballina

Vicki - who fed all the Fire crews for nearly 2 weeks at the Wardell Fire Station.

All the residents in Wardell who were not flood affected - so many had up to 13, 19, 20 people staying at their homes in the initial emergency phase

Bonnie and Cheryl housed 26 people - some of whom had severe disabilities

Prue - a single mum with 3 kids housed 19 people in her small 3 bed home. Lots of tents and caravans.

Lindsay Cres looked like a caravan Park.

So many people cooked huge amounts of food, allowed people to stay and use water electricity -

no reimbursement.

A pity that these families could not be eligible for the \$1,000 FLOOD GRANT for all the work they did supporting the community.

There are so many others  
Thank you for reading this.

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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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### 1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Rain, Rain, Rain  
We had a particularly wet summer and the ground was wet as the east coast low just stayed in one spot!

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### 1.2 Preparation and planning

Little preparation  
incorrect information from BOM  
No information from SES  
No warning Signals or alarms  
No evacuation centres formally identified  
no automated river gauge at Wardell or Broadwater  
texts from SES - too generic - no body knew where to go.

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### 1.3 Response to floods

all volunteers ran the response  
local fisherman - Gary and John did  
something like 80 rescues  
no assistance from police, government agencies  
excellent work by the Rural fire Brigade  
no internet, limited phone reception  
used the old pen and paper  
Ballina Rotary Club - excellent  
Army - travelled in huge buses that could not navigate the local rural roads. The captain had them walking between houses that needed stripping if the walk was less than 2 kms. what a waste of time and resources!!  
Army should have been allowed on the Fire Trucks so that they could all work together  
Fabulous response from the next town -

Alstonville - in donations, food, transport, boats, accommodation.

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**1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery**

Many individuals have amazing resilience and are well on the way to recovery  
Govt assistance - so difficult to get . too difficult to fill out the forms. Not everyone has a computer or phone - some have been lost in the floods.  
Ballina Local Council - particularly the Mayor and Deputy Mayor were excellent - they were real boots on the ground.

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**1.5 Recovery from floods**

Very little funding made available to flood affected families  
PODS -  
up to 400 pods have been promised to Wardell. We believe that these PODS will not be for just Wardell People but a mix of people from here and Lismore.  
The land on which the Wardell Sport and Rec club is located is Crown Land. This land has been taken for PODS. Therefore, there will be no money going to the local government in terms of rent and as such, there will be little money spent in Wardell to improve facilities.  
Wardell has lost its Golf course, football field and cricket pitch, the grounds for the Primary School's athletic carnival, footgolf and archery.  
Where do we go for recreation?  
Where do we ALL go now??  
The current population of Wardell is approx 700. The introduction of PODS will potentially double this number. We have no supermarket, no bus service to Ballina - approx 20kms away. we have no operational Police Station. The very small commercial centre we have will not support this volume of people. We have one small Cafe and they ran out of food on election day!!  
we believe that many people have already said that they would not live in PODS as they are not enticing. they have no kitchen. What is security like at these new housing developments.  
Many people have all their possessions in a shed in which they are living. Up to date, we

have had few problems with theft and personal safety. This will change.  
there has been no community information or consultation. People are feeling very nervous. what will happen to house prices in this area. It would be good if we could see some plans about what is planned for our small sleepy village.

I would like to think that funding for mental health is very heavily monitored. I hope that it does not go to organisations that have set them selves up as recovery organisations. Some of these organisations are looking at grant money to pay themselves wages and join the gravy train.. These grants should be given to professional counsellors with university degrees. It is very dangerous to deal with the mental health of people if people do not have the respected qualifications.

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**1.6 Any other matters**

Most people just want to go home. It is disappointing seeing so many people from Govt here in the area but no money is flowing in. How much is it costing in accommodation, flights, transport and food, hiring locations for these travelling senate inquiries - how many washing machines would it buy??? Just a thought

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**Supporting documents or images**

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