

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Friday, 20 May 2022 2:44:16 PM

Your details

Title	Mr
First name	Kingsley
Last name	Searle
Email	
Postcode	2444

Submission details

I am making this submission as	A resident in a flood-affected area
Submission type	I am making a personal submission
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	Captain North Shore RFS, President of Northside progress association at time of flood SES cat team member
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 am a long term resident of the North Shore of Port Macquarie. The North Shore is located on the Northern side of the Hastings River and connected to Port Macquarie by two vehicular
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ferries. The North Shore is often impacted and isolated by floods. Due to my position as Captain of the North Shore I have been running the floods in conjunction with the Port Macquarie SES for over 25 years.

After the floods of 2013 the North Port Macquarie Flood Reference group was set up with Steve Lawence, the SES community Liaison officer which culminated in a flood scenario being held to help our community prepare for future flood events. Members from the surrounding communities, representatives from Council, Police, SES, NSWRFs, Fire and Rescue were present. The local ABC radio recorded flood bulletins which were played to those present, and each was asked what would they do as the bulletins were played, going from a Heads up to full blown extreme event. This was extremely enlightening and highlighted some confusion between roles played by different agencies and how they would respond. The event was very successful with a certificate of appreciation being presented to the members of the group for outstanding contribution towards building local flood preparedness, by the then commissioner of the SES. Fast forward to March 19th, 2021. Heavy Rain. Mt Seaview, near the head of one of our catchments has had around 3 meters of rain since December. I drove north past Kempsey on business that morning. The ground around Fredericton was saturated and large puddles forming. I drove back late that afternoon and the areas under the bridge at Fredericton were totally under water as far as you could see in some places it was just under the fence height and raining very heavy. It rained heavily all night. I got up early and checked the BOM web page and the readings for Mount Seaview were the same as when I went to bed, and it was still just a flood watch. I rang a friend of mine who runs the lodge at Mt Seaview and has the BOM gauge on his property and asked how were things up there. I have made this call many times over the years, but this time Ralph

was straight to the point. He said" Kingsley I'm shit scared for you guys down there, I don't know how much rain we've had. I've never seen the river so high!" I checked the Bom again and still no change, so I rang Steve Lawrence (SES) and told him what Ralph had said and he thanked me for the heads up.

I put a message out to all the people on my flood list throughout the village and to Farmers up along Maria River Road and told them to lift there pumps etc. as we have a lot of water coming down from mount Seaview. The North Shore is at the mouth of the Hastings River. We get flood water from the Hastings catchment and depending on the flood the Macleay and Wilson rivers. We usually have 8 to 24 hrs. to prepare. Going back through the flood records this is the first time I have found that the rain fell not just in the upper catchment or on the coastal plain as usual but fell over the whole area at the same time. We found out later that over 1.5 meters of rain fell at Mt Seaview and over 600mm fell over the plain. The BOM reading were still showing readings from the night before and it was still a flood watch in the morning. I rang around to people along the river and farmers along Maria River Road, areas that are usually impacted, and gave them the heads up that there was a lot of water coming down from Seaview and start lifting pumps and belongings. It wasn't till 6pm that night that the warning went from Minor to Major. Everyone had by then moved their cars to higher ground and done our usual preparations. Most residents never saw the major warning. We woke in the morning to a disaster. I have lived at this address for over 38years and we have never had a flood come anywhere near our property. In 2013 we had some water in the back yard but still no threat to our house or any other surrounding houses. We had 450mm of water through the house and over 1.5 meters in our front yard. power was out which means no water no toilets and as we found out later no ferry. I started putting bulletins on the North Shore

Community Notice Board (a face book account run by the progress association) to be contacted by the local SES controller saying I was not to post bulletins as I had no authority to do so from the SES. All I had been doing was posting their SES bulletins as they came out! I still posted bulletins but had to put a note saying that these were my comments only, Meanwhile the SES CAT team trailer was underwater and useless. The first day everyone was in shock, usually our floods occur on the high tide then start to recede and we are able to move around till the next high tide till the flood abates. This time the waters stayed around and restricted movement for three days. During this time the SES had organized a contractor with punt to help with the evacuations. Troy use to be a member of my Brigade so he contacted me and we coordinated as best we could. The local oyster farmers also swung into action and carried out many rescues, in some cases they definitely saved lives. As the floods started to recede the punts were unable to get to some residents and Troy asked if we could help with the fire trucks so we use our tucks to pick up evacuees and transport them to the punts for evacuation. when the waters dropped enough for us access the Fire station we started to organize ourselves and set up the station as a community hub. We had locals using punt and tinnies brining in supplies of food. At 11am each day we held a meeting and all the remaining residents came down where our local resident and his wife, both doctors would offer assistance to those who need medical assistance and for the first half of the meeting I informed every one of the situation as it was at that time and the second half of the meeting we used for locals to share resources and write messages on the notice boards re helping each other out. Our biggest issues were lack of information. Very poor if not non existent communications. As the days rolled on, we were able to organize ourselves. We recorded the meetings and put on the Community notice board for those who had

evacuated. We had a local who made her truck available to us to cart food and equipment and fuel for generators. There was no communications amongst the agencies. I had phone calls from Police telling me that there was food being dropped off at one location then another from SES saying food was being dropped off at another location the more food being dropped off at the council and they were dropping it off at another location. I had three members whose houses were not impacted by floods and while everybody was great pulling together they all had their own homes to look after. I was being swamped. At one stage I had to organize a local with a punt to take me into Port Macquarie, hitched a lift to the SES control center. I knocked on the door soaking wet and only because they all know me was I let in and asked who was in charge and asked if I could see her. She asked me to come into their room and I gave her a briefing as to the situation on the North Shore. What I noticed in the IMT was how when I walked in they were more concerned about me using the hand sanitizer than what was happening, all the different agencies were in their own space. there appeared to me to be no cross pollination of information, they were all in their own worlds and very little interaction. While I was there, and order came through for a mandatory evacuation of the North Shore. I asked the SES controller to confirm that it was indeed a mandatory Evacuation and after phone calls were made, she came back and confirmed that it was, so I said we needed to get the script right so there was no confusion. I pointed out that the biggest concern was the looting which was occurring and residents would not be keen to go unless that was sorted. I went into the room where the police were set up and pointed out the situation and asked if they were doing patrols buy boat for looting. He told me that they were patrolling the area so I went the SES controller and we agreed that people needed to be told that it was a mandatory evacuation that

the police were going to be patrolling to prevent looting and where they could be evacuated to. I then got a lift back and as I was walking up the road to my home, I saw three police officers who told me that there was an evacuation order in place but if I was OK I could stay!! I made some calls and found out that some people were being told they would be arrested if they stayed, and others were getting the message I got. the whole thing was a mess and deteriorating. I evacuated with my wife, one to set an example, but mainly as I was sick and tired of trying to organize things and having every conversation drop out our not get through at all. At this stage it was starting to really get to me. The North Shore was completely left with no help, everyone had to clean mud out of their houses by themselves and help their neighbors as best as we could, mange food supplies and fuel etc. All I got was kick back from the agencies demanding we do their bidding, no concern for what we wanted. I noted during my discussions with all the agencies, with the exception of Steve Lawence who's support was the only reason I kept going, was not once did they ever ask how I was going! The day I evacuated to my son's place in Port I was really feeling over whelmed and frustrated at the lack of support. I picked up the phone and rang our state member Leslie Williams, our federal member Pat Conahan, and a contact in resilience NSW and explained my frustration and our plight. I can't praise them enough. The next day I had a contingent of RFS show up to help and the attitude of the incident management team changed from one of constant bickering and negativity to almost embarrassing co-operation. The next meeting at the station we had representatives for the power company explaining the procedure for returning power, SES liaison officer giving a run down on their side of things ,the red cross and life line reps talking to the community. From then on, I was able to run the north shore like an RFS IMT and I had a briefing from the agencies at 10.30 after

their briefing so I was given up to date info. I would then meet with the recovery crews that were operating on that day and organize them. We had the area broken into sectors with maps on the wall so there was no confusion, we then, all addressed the community and things started to happen. One of my dept captains went home that night and produced a spread sheet with every house in there sectors and with columns eg, impacted by flood or not, resident home or vacant, assistance required or not, observations as to the welfare of occupants etc. This gave us a structured way of capturing what need to be done and stopped us going over already completed works. It wasn't till April the 6th that the rubbish was finally cleared for the front of our house. Having to look at your belongings and memories for so long had a devastating effect on our community. I worked with resilience NSW and there contractors and was able to provide assistance and on the ground knowledge which helped target their resources. Thanks to funding from our Local member Leslie Williams and a huge effort from one of our residents in pushing grants through we were able to put on a flood party at the end of May'21. We held the event at the Fire station, hired a marquee and had a bush dance for the community. You could see the change in everyone immediately. it was like every had a chance to come together and say this is it we can now get on with our lives. It was an important event to help the community start to heal. it's been 12 mths and we are still working with resilience NSW. Unfortunately very little has been done to prepare for another event. I know COVET played a role in slowing things down but the fact is nothing has been put in place to prepare us for the next one. The council tried a zoom meeting with went nowhere . We had another flood scenario planned for May, it's been post postponed. Council is trying to organize community engagement, very inefficiently without talking to the SES and I am getting very disillusioned. This is the reason for the late

submission, I nearly wasn't going to waste my time as to date nothing has changed. I was recently part of the RFS contingent to Lismore and it was frightening to see not only the scale of the destruction but how it was a repeat, almost to the day of what occurred to us. I truly hope this enquiry make a difference.

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 have been in RFS for over 38 years During that time I have see the fire season stating earlier and earlier and increasing in intensity. I live in a flood prone area. Flood events are also increasing in intensity to levels beyond records kept since white settlement. Combine this with increase in water temperature's and the science being produced, you would have believe the Earth is flat not ta acknowledge climate change is real and upon us now.
1.2 Preparation and planning	nobody on the ground had the faintest idea what this meant and why change the names of structure in the middle of an incident??? It just caused confusion and that is not a good thing in these events.
1.3 Response to floods	Resilience is doing a brilliant job, Mainly because they have been getting out on the ground to see what is required, Long term, 12mths and we still are recovering.
1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery	nobody on the ground had the faintest idea what this meant and why change the names of structure in the middle of an incident??? It just caused confusion and that is not a good thing in these events.
1.5 Recovery from floods	The bush dance was a landmark in our communitis recovery and the ongoing support from Reilience NSW etc

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [1636333246848.jpg](#)
 - [1636333048116.jpg](#)
 - [IMG_20210529_202023.jpg](#)
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WILLEADES PHOTOGRAPHY

