

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
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Attachments: [Wyrallah3.png](#)

Your details

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Submission details

Submission type	I am making a personal submission
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	51 Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	Volunteer
Consent to make submission public	I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#)

1.5 Recovery from floods Submission to the Flood Inquiry from Lisa McCormack

Introduction

This submission is based on the lived experience of a volunteer from the Lismore Flood Relief Centre known as Wyrallah Road Flood Relief Centre, Lismore. The input to the submission comes from a belief that by sharing my experience and making a range of recommendations based on this experience, I may influence government strategies and plans to ensure that communities in the future will be more fully supported to prepare for and recover from natural disasters. This submission is in no way complete - it is simply what I could put together with the limited time I had available.

In summary, the 51 Wyrallah Road Flood Relief Centre was a community-run distribution centre that received donated goods for flood affected Lismore and surrounding residents and distributed the donated goods through a supermarket style environment warehouse. The centre was open for approximately 15 weeks.

Apart from a small contribution from Resilient Lismore, the Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre received no support or funding from any government agency.

The only support was from various charities, clubs and many individual community donors.

Summary of Recommendations

- various buildings need to be identified before disasters as distribution centres
- all community groups and organisations who

provide flood relief should be provided with funds by governments to assist in establishment and running of distribution centres

- there should be an easily accessed manual (based on community input) on the various ways to run a distribution centre

- government support workers should be employed to assist volunteers in establishment and implementation of distribution centres

- potential volunteers and volunteer leaders should be given training before disaster's occur

- networks of governments and non-government disaster management and recovery groups should be brought together in the strategic planning phases of policy and program development

- staff should be employed by governments to work with volunteer groups to assist in integrating and managing donations and distribution

- financial resources should be provided to community groups and charities to support the combined volunteer effort

That various locations are identified before they are needed as possible Disaster Relief Distribution Centres within a Northern Rivers Disaster Management Plan

That an annual process is established to review and update the availability of sites with the aim of ensuring sites are established immediately upon the event of the disaster

That a Process Plan/Handbook is developed to guide staff and volunteers in the establishment and running of the Distribution Centres

Establishing the Distribution Centre

Our first Flood Relief Centre began on Day 1 of Lismore's first flood on 28th February 2022 at The Summit Fitness Centre, Goonellabah in a little squash court. Various problems became

evident very quickly that led to a change of location including:

The size of the area was too small for effective sorting and distribution of donations

The location was 7kms away from Lismore CBD which was problematic because so many people had lost their cars in the flood and could not access relief.

This led us to the move to Karen Willott's Used Furniture Store at 51 Wyrallah Rd at Girard's Hill 1.5km from the centre of Lismore on a semi-main road. This new location is a large warehouse that was flooded in the first flood (but has never flooded previously).

Karen and the volunteers had to clean the whole warehouse and remove piles of rubbish from the footpath to establish the Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre. The new centre was established on approx. 6th March 2022..

Recommendation:

That various locations are identified before they are needed as possible Disaster Relief Distribution Centres (DRDCs) within a Northern Rivers Disaster Management Plan

That an annual process is established to review and update the availability of sites with the aim of ensuring sites are established immediately upon the event of the disaster

That a Process Plan/Handbook is developed to guide staff and volunteers in the establishment and running of the Distribution Centres

Support and Donations

The Wyrallah Road Flood Relief Centre was set up as a friendly supermarket-style environment so that flood affected people could 'shop' with dignity. We also, in the initial days of Flood 1,

sent food/hygiene packages out by helicopter to remote communities via Rotor Wing. When donations were received that we could not manage these were forwarded to other relief centres.

We received support and donations of goods from a few charities such as Turbans 4 Australia, Brothers in Need, Good360 and animal welfare groups such as ARRG, ARC, Gold Coast Pet Flood Relief and Lucinda Dyason from Pets and Saddles (which also flooded), local Rotary Clubs and several RSL clubs. Many of the people who donated and volunteered had also lost businesses and homes in the floods but continued to support others.

The majority of the donated goods came from the wider community. We received mostly anonymous donations from far and wide eg: Wangi Wangi, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Sydney, Coffs Harbour, Brisbane, WA, Hervey Bay, Newcastle, and plenty from locals who were not flood-affected. When we put the call-out on social media that we could now receive online deliveries from Australia-wide via Coles and Woolies in Goonellabah, the donations kept rolling in. We continued to receive donations until the day we closed on 4th June 2022

Initially we were over-run with donations. The generosity from the community was heartening. However, there were also many challenges as a significant amount of donations (especially clothing and manchester) were unfit for distribution as they were dirty and damaged. This resulted in a large amount of time wasted by volunteers in sorting and further added to the amount of goods that were waste items. As a result, after a few weeks, we only took clothing and manchester that was new or in very good condition. As other organisations were focussing on clothing we focussed our attention on the following core items:

Bottled water - huge amounts of water was distributed as the water supply was initially affected

Small amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables due to a lack of refrigeration

Cereals

UHT Milk

Specialist UHT Milk (Oat, Lactose-Free, Soy, Almond)

Tea

Coffee

Sugar

Softdrinks

Up & Go poppers

Sweet Biscuits

Savoury biscuits

Baked Beans

Spaghetti

Pasta

Cooking oil

Condiments: Vegemite, Peanut butter

Tinned Fruit

Tinned Tuna

Tinned beetroot & pineapple

Tinned Vegetables

2 minute noodles

Pasta Sauces

Chicken Tonight Sauces

Gluten-free food

Soup (if we had stock, we would go through 500 cans/day)

Tinned beans (chickpeas, 4 bean mix, lentils etc)

Packet pastas (carbonara, mac & cheese etc)

Toothpaste

Toothbrushes

Tissues

Toilet Paper

Razors

Shaving Cream

Deodorant

Soap

Dishwashing detergent

Hand wash

Shampoo & Conditioner

Feminine Hygiene products
Adult incontinent products
Condoms
Panadol/Nurofen
Hydrolytes
Band-aids
Vinegar
Bleach
Disinfectant
Clove Oil
Laundry Powder
Spray & wipe
Cleaning products
Paper towels
Antibacterial hand sanitiser
Cleaning hardware: mops, buckets, scrubbing
brushes, cleaning cloths etc
Manchester: Sheet sets, blankets, doonas,
pillows, towels
Clothing: mainly new items
Socks & underwear
Dry & wet dog food
Dry & wet cat food
Guinea pig, bird and rabbit food
Kitty Litter
Medication for Dogs/Cats
Batteries
Butane Gas Cooktops
Butane Gas
Hoses, extension leads, power boards etc
Tools
Small appliances - kettles, toasters, heaters,
microwaves etc
Gift vouchers for local businesses on Wyrallah
Rd that were also flood affected - Petrol station,
SPAR, 3 Little Butchers, CETNAJ **
Nappies
Baby wipes
Baby Formula
Clothes pegs
Plastic storage tubs
Cutlery, crockery, glassware
Shoes, Boots, Gumboots
Occasional white goods and some furniture

pieces and mattresses (though we had very limited space)

For the first 6 weeks we also had hot/frozen meals available + the use of a microwave if frozen

Odds and ends

****As we were not comfortable accepting cash donations and wanted to stay accountable, we would suggest that donors go to these locally owned flood-affected businesses and support them by purchasing gift vouchers. We would then give out the vouchers to people visiting the Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre.**

Recommendation:

That a handbook lists the most needed items in times of major disasters so that the various distribution centres can co-ordinate what each centre can focus on and the community can 'shop' accordingly without having to go to each centre to meet their needs.

That government resources are also provided to the distribution centres to fill in the gaps in donations.

Our Volunteers

We had an amazing team of 20+ volunteers. Several of them were there all day of every day we were open (Karen Willott, Heather Fletcher, Lisa McCormack), others such as Al Petty took several weeks long service leave to come in every day for weeks on end to assist with the running of the Flood Relief Centre. There were about 15 other volunteers who came in whenever they could to help out. We have made life-long friends—many who were flood-affected themselves.

Initially we opened every day from 9-5 and (apart from Good Friday and Easter Sunday), since Day 1 of the 1st flood. From 8th May 2022 we decided to close each Sunday to allow our 'full-time' volunteers to spend time with their own families.

Why do we volunteer

We have met many amazing people that have come through the 51 Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre - both donors, volunteers, and people there because they require assistance. We've heard harrowing stories, been shoulders for people to cry on, and given out many hugs.

But we have also been there to hear joyful stories. After about 14 weeks people were coming in absolutely 'beaming' and sharing with us that they are able to move back into their residence. We have formed such a connection and bond with so many people in our community that they take the time to share their good news with us, after us helping them out for the past few months. I couldn't tell you how many times we have heard "I don't know what we would have done if you guys weren't here doing what you are doing for our community".

Support for the Distribution Centre by governments

Apart from Janelle Saffin's quick 15 minute visit in the early days, we did not have any Local, State or Federal politicians or staff visit to see what we were doing and how we were 'Feeding Lismore' as we say. There had been absolutely no support, acknowledgement or gratitude from any sphere of Government. A local, controversial Councilor member who did briefly visit (on his own agenda) criticised the Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre because he thought the Centre should be run differently and posted his

comments in a rant on social media.

Whilst we would like this submission to focus on 51 Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre, we know we are not alone in the lack of support from governments to many of the community and charity run relief centres. One example was Lifeline at the Lismore Showgrounds. One of our volunteers went to the Showgrounds Centre around Week 9 and all they had was a wall of Weetbix, a heap of hand sanitiser and a little bit of baked beans and spaghetti.

Imagine the sense of hopelessness community members must have felt when they had to go to every relief centre to try and get enough supplies to feed their household. The waste of time and effort in the fragmented approach we were forced to work with and the waste of time and effort for already traumatised members of the community trying to find supplies is shameful.

Why hadn't government representatives been to all the Centres and helped to ensure that all relief centres had basic supplies for the community?

Why weren't we consulted on our needs?

The fact that we had to fight the government to even get a skip bin, and have it continuously emptied disgusts us, given what we are doing for our community. We were only given ONE skip - emptied ONCE initially at the Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre. It took a phone call pleading for help to an acquaintance, Michael Barnes, who owns Richmond Waste to get what we wanted, deserved, and needed. Michael organised to get two skips - one for general rubbish and one for recycling to be emptied every two days. Both skip bins were both FULL of packaging every two days - that is how much stock we are going through.

Karen's landlord gave her the first week's rent

after the flood for free, and after this Turbans 4 Australia continued to pay the \$800/week rent for the warehouse so the centre could stay open.

Turbans 4 Australia also loaned a truck for our use at the centre.

Why weren't the government supporting and helping us to coordinate our efforts?
Why weren't Centres such as ours, that had no 'Charity' status and therefore no infrastructure or funds, supported by governments?

How many people were helped

It is estimated that initially 500 people per day every day visited the Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre for the first 12 weeks. We became aware that some people who visited the centre were not from the flood affected homes and also that some people, although not flood affected, usually relied on many Lismore charities to provide financial, food and other assistance which had not been operating in the area due to flooded premises. 500 people per day was beyond our resource capacity.

Karen Willott contacted various charities eg Lifeline, Vinnies and Anglicare, soup kitchens, Salvos, Food Bank etc to ascertain which charities were again up and running and what support they could offer. As many of the charities for people who were financially stretched and not flood affected, we restricted access to only those people who had lost their homes in the flood. This meant that we had enough supplies for the directly flood affected members of the community.

We then changed our model of operation from one of "open for everyone" (because the whole

community was especially vulnerable in the beginning) to “open for people who had lost their homes in the flood”.

After this change, from Week 13, it is estimated that 200-300 people per day came through the centre.

In total we estimate that in the 16 weeks were we open, approximately 50,000 people have come through the Wyrallah Rd Flood Relief Centre’s door needing supplies/assistance.

Recommendation

Develop an app that allows distribution centres to input addresses to ascertain where/how badly flooded/affected residents were

There is still such a huge need for a food-bank type service in Lismore - and there will be for years to come as people put their lives, houses and businesses back together.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [Wyrallah1.jpeg](#)
 - [Wyrallah2.jpeg](#)
 - [Wyrallah3.png](#)
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NO
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