

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Friday, 20 May 2022 9:05:25 AM
Attachments: [NSW Independent Flood Inquiry - Sub.pdf](#)

Your details

Title Mrs

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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 Our submission is attached as a PDF (I think).

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [NSW Independent Flood Inquiry - Sub.pdf](#)
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NSW Independent Flood Inquiry – Submission

About us

We have lived in the Lismore local government area for 22 years, having retired here in late 1999, well aware of the region's long history of flood events. Since our arrival we have experienced something like 15 moderate or major floods without direct consequences other than relatively minor inconvenience.

During our retirement we have been active in environmental conservation matters across the region, particularly koala conservation.

In November 2021 the imperatives of age, downsizing, proximity to services and more diverse social activities drove us to relocate from the rural district of Wyrallah into East Lismore where we are existing with our 'hill survivor guilt'¹ and a considerable degree of anxiety about Lismore's capacity to satisfy our expectations of it into the future. We are also deeply concerned about the cataclysmic disfigurement of the landscape; particularly the destructive landslips and rampaged watercourses in the upper catchment, and the consequent loss of biodiversity.

Terms of Reference

We are disappointed that the Inquiry's Terms of Reference do not directly extend to addressing the devastating damage to the natural environment and the wildlife it supports. Indeed, we have little to contribute to most of the matters on which the Inquiry is required to report.

We support the establishment of the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation, noting that it will set and implement reconstruction priorities in the region "quickly and for the long term." We wish to express the following in regard to Lismore's situation:

- (a) Lismore floods regularly and those events are getting more catastrophic and more frequent due to the impact of the climate crisis. Land-use practices since European settlement sit heavily, adding to the destruction and hindering natural recovery.
- (b) Flood mitigation measures have failed to adequately protect Lismore from flooding in the past and are unlikely to protect the town as it exists from future flooding. Forecasting based on incomplete and obsolete historical data is unreliable and therefore, dangerous.
- (c) A strong economic case as well as social and well-being considerations exist to move the CBD and residential areas on the flood plain (or parts of them) to higher ground however not at the loss of the town's intrinsic sense of place.
- (d) Broad, inclusive community engagement in the 'reimagination' process is essential for genuine commitment to and ownership of a stronger and safer Lismore.
- (e) Reconstruction planning must take account of the native wildlife and flora for which Lismore is renowned. As already mentioned, the devastating contribution of the floods to biodiversity loss has been largely unremarked.
- (f) Once a reconstruction policy direction is in place, it must be implemented speedily and adhered to over time. An earlier policy (post-1974) to relocate and strengthen service, commercial and industrial facilities in Goonellabah and to introduce planning laws to limit growth in the flood plain apparently fell by the wayside to the extent that in the early 2000s

¹ On higher ground – a better future for Lismore by Barbara Rugendyke, Jerry Vanclay & Angus Witherby, April 2022, p. 17.

there was considerable community deliberation on redeveloping the CBD under the banner of 'Return to the Heart'.

Conclusion

Much has been written and spoken about Lismore being at the crossroads. Driving through the still derelict CBD and adjacent residential areas confirms this critical moment in its history. Months on and there is so little sign of recovery. No significant amounts of the hundreds of millions of dollars required for reconstruction have been announced. Indeed, a couple of weeks ago the Insurance Council of Australia and the Australian Banking Association advised Premier Perrottet that the window for recovering the region, particularly Lismore, is closing.

Next week we will attend a Council consultation workshop to give our feedback on its growth and rebuilding Lismore discussion paper. Time will drag on – months into years but we will try not to lose hope for the city's future viability and the unique biodiversity of the land in which it sits.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine & Rick Vass
19 May 2022

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