

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
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Your details

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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	<p>On Friday 25th February 2022, myself and my partner discussed the likelihood of a major flooding event and decided to enact our flood plan. We had of course been aware that it had been raining nonstop, and, as our home is next to the river and has a floor height (11.3m) below the 1974 flood level, we decided to be as prepared as possible. We spent Saturday</p>
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morning cleaning up underneath our home and moving everything of value upstairs. As the only available information at this point said 'minor-major' flood, we prepared for the possibility of a major flood, but thought it unlikely that water would enter beyond the floor of our home. Even on Saturday afternoon, when the information changed to 'moderate-major', we thought we had prepared adequately. On Sunday, my partner and I went to various businesses in town, assisting to move industrial equipment into vans and out of the CBD, and moving art and musical equipment to the mezzanine level of See Space, a centre for disability arts in South Lismore. While we were doing this, at 3.30pm the first estimated height came in: 9.7m overnight, with possibility of reaching 10.6m on Monday. The owner of See Space was concerned - that was almost certainly an overtopping of the levee, and therefore would inundate his property. We re-checked the property and moved anything electrical or of value to the second floor, then returned home to refresh our own preparation, with the time now nearing 6pm and a few hours of daylight remaining. 10.6m would have seen the water still below our floor level, but certainly would rush strongly below our home, and ruin anything left under the house. We moved any remaining items (including building materials and recycling) upstairs to avoid polluting the neighbourhood. Upstairs, we built trestle tables out of old doors and stacked the furniture as high as possible - my partner built a hardwood frame for our bed, putting it 170cm in the air, and then we put anything valuable on top, including all of his power tools for his business as a carpenter, as his vehicle was already well out of the flood zone.

The SES came by at this time to check on us, ask if we intended to stay at home - and said "be careful, the water gets a strong current around here. But we don't expect it to overtop the levee". The general consensus was that the estimations must be generous, because in 2017 they had

been so wrong. THE IMPORTANT THING TO NOTE IS THAT PEOPLE MADE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR PREPARATION AND FLOOD PLAN based on the offered information - People trust the information given and act accordingly. Most people in our street opted to stay at home - many people have lived through flood before, many have raised their homes to a "safe" level, and had already moved their vehicles out of the flood zone. At 8.30pm, the update was again changed- 11.5m, with the levee overtopping at 6am. As this would see our floor wet, we decided definitively to leave our home and go to our neighbours (raised to the maximum height of 12.6m, just that year, which cost them \$100,000 in renovations). We spent a couple more hours finalising our preparation (turning off gas and power, again moving everything as high as possible- too late to take out the power tools or valuables, both our cars kms away), grabbed our passports and laptops and headed to our neighbours for what we thought would be a few days of board games. We got the evacuation message and laughed nervously as the SES truck siren sounded as they drove by telling people to leave on a loudspeaker- to leave we would have had to walk through shin deep (and quickly rising) contaminated water, in the dark and pouring rain... best to just go to the Neighbours and watch our home be inundated from the safety of their verandah. Over the next few hours the pattern repeated: we watched the water rise rapidly, too rapidly to match the text messages we were getting with estimated heights. The estimations were hours behind and gave people false information about how much time they had and what to do. Our hopes for our home to just survive a normal, or even the most major of historical flooding events, were stomped on, as we quickly realised that everything we owned would be destroyed- and then watched it happen. Our neighbour (on another raised verandah) called to us at midnight that he had called to be rescued, that his kids were scared.

We got the texts from the SES and LCC at nearly 1am- realising that this "safe" house we were in would be wet, too. We quietly moved around our neighbours home, moving things higher, creating a safe space in the ceiling for them to move their sleeping 2 year old up to, putting an esky of food up there, filling water containers, stacking their precious belongings as high as possible. No one spoke, especially not about the money they had invested in making their home safe, so soon ago. My partner kept watch on the verandah for the SES boat and we tried to sleep, hearing sirens and the incessant heavy rain. The water was moving up a step every 10 minutes, rapidly rising up to the floor. At 5.30am, the water came into the house. Soon after, the SES arrived to pick up our neighbours. We woke the baby and their parents in the roof cavity, yelled to the SES to rescue us, too. By the time we were in the boat, about half an hour later, the water had gone from ankles to knee deep. Our home, across the road, was already halfway up the windows. In the boat, we ducked under power lines, going house-to-house in our street to collect our neighbours and pets. One man stayed behind because his dogs were too big for the boat, the water already waist height in his home. We were taken to the evacuation centre and switched on our phones to messages from friends, in their ceilings with small children in South Lismore, asking for us to send help because they couldn't get out, the water was too high already. We quickly left the evac centre to a friend's home, where we tried to sleep, but instead checked our phones constantly, directing friends with boats to save others, running on adrenaline and anxiety until darkness fell again and worrying that there were still people out there in or on their roofs. This anxiety repeated the following days, as the water moved downstream and hit Bungawalbin, Coraki, Woodburn... we were in shock.

It was days before we could get anywhere close to our home, and when we did enter, we saw the

scale of devastation everywhere in our town. Everyone has a story but they echo the same principles: we didn't know it would be so bad, we didn't have time to get out, we were in danger of losing our life or someone we know, someone is missing, etc. We are completely unprepared for disasters of this magnitude and should NOT be relying on volunteer organisations such as SES as our only form of disaster management. Almost all meaningful communication was via Facebook which just seems ludicrous.

The recovery process is another impossible situation to navigate. Power completely cut off (literally the fuse box destroyed, by Essential energy), with no information as to the next steps to repair. As my partner is a tradie we had some connections and got an electrician in quite quickly to establish a temporary point- nonetheless it has now been nearly 3 months and WE STILL DO NOT HAVE POWER RETURNED TO OUR HOME.

No one has assessed our property - we have just been rebuilding as best we can.

The only contact I have had from government was a water meter reader coming to tell us we had used more water than usual and there might be something wrong with our pipes. Yeah, we gurneyed our house and everything we own, twice, and our hot water system was ripped off its stand, sending water free flowing for several days until we could access our home again.

We're now facing a \$700 water bill.

There is a complete shortage of tradespeople and materials and no set process to recover your home. Grant money is slow to come in and being targeted by frauds.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

1.1 Causes and contributing

1. Climate Change
2. Poor riparian health and no water retention

factors

strategies upstream

3. Poor information and accessibility to that information in a timely manner
4. ill-prepared response for when disasters do occur

1.2 Preparation and planning

1. We need information packs MANDATORY for new renters and owners in flood-prone areas. This should include data about your floor height, and what the minor / moderate / major flood heights are and mean for your property and routes out. Flood plan should be made and registered with others in your street. Easy to follow step-by-step instructions for flood preparation e.g. turn off water main, turn off and secure gas bottles, turn off and remove fuses. Tell people "At 10m, your routes out are inaccessible and power will be turned off to the residence". COORDINATE A FLOOD RESPONSE.

2. Street coordinators: with knowledge of who lives where, who is vulnerable and needs help to get out. Can give this to SES so evacuation information and assistance is targeted and timely (ie, very very early).

3. An SES (or similar organisation with disaster response capacity) to be accessible to South Lismore- these people could not be reached because rescue crews could not cross the river. We need evacuation possibilities in all directions.

4. Life boats, rescue platform, or planned 'high point' buildings to evacuate to in each flood-prone area. life boats could be on street poles, take people from a street all out at once, and to a central location for mass evacuation.

5. life jackets/ inflatable boats in roofs. Design a trapdoor for roofs in flood-prone areas so that people can get OUT of roof cavity safely and sit on the roof on a non-slip platform, ideally covered so they are protected from elements.

6. Develop a database / website where you can register you need help / that you can help, to remove the doubling up of hysterical facebook posts.

7. The SES truck telling people to evacuate

should be a big bus which people can actually get into, and be evacuated with.

1.3 Response to floods

- dedicated and trained disaster task force and centres in multiple locations to provide emergency assistance in a timely manner, eg evacuation. Like the rural RFS but for floods.
 - immediate defense force assistance (even prior to event, be on standby or assist with evac)
 - ask entertainment industry to assist cause they can set up events (and therefore accomodation / big tents / etc) in no time
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Supporting documents or images
