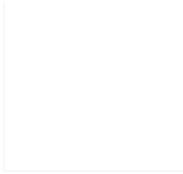


From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Friday, 20 May 2022 8:47:14 AM



Your details

Title	Mrs
First name	Lyn
Last name	Katschke
Email	<input type="text"/>
Postcode	2480

Submission details

I am making this submission as	A business owner
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>My husband and I are property owners of Shops 1 & 2 on the ground floor of the Strand Arcade in Molesworth Street, Lismore - the main street. For several days prior to the flood we had been watching the rain radar on the BoM website. A large rain band was hovering over the SE Qld coastal area, collecting moisture and which was kept stationary by a high pressure system</p>
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located to the south - similar conditions as prevailed in 2017 with cyclone Debbie. On the Thursday prior to the flood, at a press conference, a BoM meteorologist declared that the coming event would not be as severe as in 2017. This set the tone for a series of mistakes that gave the impression to many (inexperienced) people that it was just another irritating storm like many that had previously occurred and so complacency ensued, especially in official quarters. However, on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday prior to the flood, many Lismore businesses (and some residents) removed their contents to a safer position. In the case of the Strand Arcade, which is a 2 storey building, some heavy items like photocopiers were only able to be moved to the mezzanine level and hence suffered total loss when the record flood of 14.4 metres of water totally inundated the entire ground floor of the building. It cut off the electricity supply and caused extensive damage to walls, floors, ceilings, windows, electronic and manual doors, the landline phone system, security shutters, light fittings, carpeted stairs and the electronic emergency exit facility (which had only been installed at significant cost in December 2021.) as a river of mud and debris was funnelled through the Arcade's main walkway and surged into each of the ground floor premises. As well as being property owners, we are also on the Owners Corporation Strata Committee and so are responsible for the continued operation and maintenance of all common areas in the building. I recently contacted Service NSW and spoke to a concierge who advised that there is currently no financial assistance for Commercial Strata bodies. As funds are limited in the Admin and Capital works accounts and are needing to be spent judiciously on repairs and refurbishment, the Owners must collectively bear the full costs. As many owners, including ourselves, have not received rent from tenants for nearly 3 months due to premises being unable to be occupied, we

can't raise a special, additional levy, we simply continue to expend personal funds or postpone reinstatement over a protracted time frame. In my conversation with Service NSW, it was indicated that there may be financial assistance available to Commercial landlords, that I should apply and await a decision. as previously stated, however, there is no financial package available for Commercial Stratas.

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

Failure of the BoM to recognise the severity of the impending disaster

Failure of successive governments at all levels to inject sufficient funds into flood risk recognition, preparation and management in a known flood area.

Failure in the operation of protection systems to be fully functioning at the time, such as river pumps (apparently only 1 of 3 was operational), the siren system, which was not working at all and the drainage system, especially in the CBD, which had not been cleaned out periodically to allow water to flow away.

Failure to dredge the Wilsons River to create a deeper channel that can cope with a greater volume of water.

The ludicrous and ultimately dangerous decision by the SES to issue an evacuation order at 3-4 pm in the afternoon prior to the flood, rescind it at 6 pm, then reinstate it at 1 am and expect people to be awake, to escape or to be rescued in the dark. Lismore has a sizeable elderly population, many of whom do not have computers or mobile phones. They cannot check face book or the SES website and were not watching TV in the middle of the night for warning updates and had to rely on family or neighbours to alert them to the imminent danger. If the siren system had have been operational at least that could have been used to advise there

was a problem and to make preparations to respond immediately.

Inadequate capacity of the mobile and landline network to cope with the demand for help. We checked on a friend who lives in South Lismore, the hardest hit area, on the night of the flood. He was on his roof awaiting rescue. We phoned both 000 and the SES but there was no response. This experience was repeated many times over the ensuing few days.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Almost totally inadequate planning and preparation in the face of known risk. Dorothea Mackellar's "droughts and flooding rains" is not a new phenomenon. Ensure that the SES, Police Rescue and the army are on stand by ready to mobilise when a disaster is recognised (although recognition is part of the actual problem) and that these bodies have the equipment appropriate to the expected event. The army is perfect in this scenario as it is already well equipped and has trained personnel. The SES was woefully deficient in rescue craft, hence the need to call on the public to assist with their boats, canoes and jet skis and the attendant problems this potentially creates, namely untrained but caring people risking their lives to save others, who then need saving themselves. As it turned out, they were successful in rescuing many who would otherwise have had to wait much longer to be helped by official rescue efforts.

Listen to the locals who have the experience of previous floods and have a vested interest in preserving their homes, farms and businesses. Invest heavily in the infrastructure to handle floods by investigating how other flood prone cities have met the challenge. Refer to the Delta Works project in the Netherlands, the Thames project in London, the tidal surge schemes in Venice and Boston Harbour. The essence of flood preparation and mitigation is to capture the water flow before it reaches a populated area via a series of dams, reservoirs, weirs and interconnecting canals upstream of Lismore that channel the water into holding facilities and that

are subject to small, controlled releases as appropriate, prior to an expected severe rain event. Pipelines could also divert water westward to supply towns like Tenterfield which suffer periodic droughts with the resultant economic effect on citizens, businesses and agriculture. Such dams and surrounds could also provide recreational and scientific research facilities like boating, skiing, camping, wildlife wetlands etc that would bring in tourist revenue for the area.

Ensure that evacuation centres are well signposted on the street so fleeing people (both locals and visitors/tourists) know where to go, how to get there and when they've reached the place that can help them. When I was looking for the evac centre at the Summit Sports and Swim complex on the Bruxner Highway at Goonellabah to drop off items for needy people post flood, there was no sign outside to indicate to people where to turn in or come to. A standard evac sign using agreed on eye catching colours should be clearly displayed and expected to be seen in the wake of all natural disasters (be they fire, flood or cyclone), where evacuation centres are set up.

In Ballina, signs supposedly directing people to the designated recovery centre were small signs on a wooden post a metre off the ground, using pale blue writing on a white background and almost invisible until you were right on them. They could easily be missed. Not good enough and can easily be improved with a standardised, highly visible presentation.

1.3 Response to floods

The local SES did a great job with inadequate resources, so better equipped brigades could do much more.

Mobilise the army much sooner as it is well trained and has the heavy machinery needed to respond and deal with the debris that results from devastated and destroyed buildings and contents.

Devise a government subsidised insurance scheme where state and federal governments

collaborate to provide cover for natural disasters like fires, floods and cyclones in all areas of Australia. Allocating a smaller amount of funding over a time frame of years in the various state and federal budgets, is surely better than having to spend billions of dollars all in one go to rehabilitate people and infrastructure.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

Learn from this current disaster and previous ones as to best practice in all sectors of disaster preparedness, response and ongoing management in the aftermath, instead of re-inventing the wheel each time a fire, flood or cyclone occurs. We've had many royal commissions so the knowledge is there, all it takes is commitment by all levels of government in collaboration with locals.

1.5 Recovery from floods

Form a committee consisting of government reps, SES personnel, police and committed, educated, local citizens who together can meet regularly, discuss and decide on how best to deal with the ongoing challenges of a flood prone area, then give public announcements of plans and preparations for future natural disasters, such as public education campaigns similar to bushfire awareness - having personal kits ready, what to do and where to go when the siren sounds etc.

Either utilise the services (whatever they may be) of Resilience NSW to demonstrably, materially and visually assist in the recovery effort or disband the entity and its bureaucracy as no one is sure what its role is.

1.6 Any other matters

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. It is much appreciated.

Supporting documents or images
