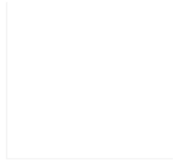


From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Monday, 9 May 2022 3:05:08 PM



Your details

Title Ms

First name Madeleine

Last name Smith

Email

Postcode 2480

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 family are one of the lucky ones as we live in the hills above Lismore. After going through 2017 we knew on the night of the flood that it was going to be a massive event. Where we live we had 775ml in a 24 hour period. As we live uphill we knew it wouldn't take long for all of that water to make it's way into the tributaries of the Wilson and Richmond Rivers and top the levee.

Our downstairs was flooded with water up to our ankles purely from not being able to manage the amount of water. We were stressed and sleepless. We own a commercial building in North Lismore which we attended on the Sunday before the flood to assist the tenants in lifting things up. We thought it was going to be a repeat of 2017 so had an idea of how high to put stock and equipment. We felt well prepared. It turned out that this was a futile exercise as every level of our building ended up being fully submerged. Why weren't we advised by BOM of the expected river heights? Again the BOM let us down. We were on alert and texting friends as the SES messages came through. The first evacuation happening at North and South Lismore at 8:17pm on Sunday, 27/2. We were advised there was an evacuation centre opening at SCU and that CBD had until 5am to evacuate. Sadly too many friends didn't evacuate as they were all expecting it to be as high or a little higher than 2017. When I woke up on the morning of 28/2 the first place I went to was facebook only to find many friends calling out for help and doing live videos of them, their kids, their dogs up on the roofs. The SES were not responding. They looked cold and distressed. I felt helpless. Then we got a message from SES at 6:20am on Monday, 28/2 that said "If you are below Rocky Creek Dam evacuate NOW. Rocky Creek Dam has reached RED alert. Please stay safe." This sent immediate panic through me. Fortunately my husband knew we weren't downstream from the dam but were very worried for friends we knew who were downstream. This text should not have been sent to us. A friend who lives in Whian Whian called and asked whether they should evacuate but to where? It was just adding more nerves into an already heightened situation. This friend along with others in the community of Whian Whian were stranded for the next week and cut off due to landslides and compromised bridge across Rocky Creek. So that day I heard via facebook

that people were being rescued and dropped off at the top of the basin in Tullera and were being ferried to Modanville Public School and the Dunoon Sports Club. Via facebook I put a call out for clothes, blankets, food etc. and did a couple of donation drops to Modanville. A friend had a call to pick up a friend's relative from Tullera, I went along. This elderly couple were in complete shock and had a bag each, no shoes and said when they woke up at 3am and got out of their beds the water was up to their knees. We took dropped them to a friend's place who would accommodate them. Meanwhile the Dunoon Sports Club had opened up as a temporary evacuation centre. I attended there to volunteer. The donations were coming in thick and fast. By the time I got there in the afternoon there were many climate refugees sitting in shock and despair, one poor man detoxing of methadone and unable to get his script filled. I spent a few hours there assisting with food etc. I was so heartened to see our small community come together to assist with time, food, clothes and bedding. A lot of these newly displaced people were desperate to get to family in Goonellabah or Lismore Heights. I thought what a shame a big Army helicopter couldn't come and take them to the other side of the hill where they would feel safer and more comfortable. Neighbours were staying close. One street from North Lismore where three neighbours were sticking close together were looking after a 90 something year old and said they'd take her with them wherever they found themselves. She was rescued by them while sitting on her kitchen bench with her legs dangling in flood water. I spent time there on and off for the period they were there, happy to be kept occupied until the waters receded and we could get in to start the clean up. It felt panicked and strange as we were low on food and fuel and had no cash. We were having patchy telephone reception and internet for at least a week during and after the flood. We took in two friends who were freshly displaced, one

stayed with us for two weeks until he went to family in Tasmania. The other stayed for four weeks until he was offered a house sit. On the Tuesday afternoon a friend and I drove into town to have a look at both of our buildings. The roads were still under water in many places. Our first stop was North Lismore. Our 10,000L water tank was dented and lying on it's side. We had debris strewn all throughout the yard. The building looked ok from the outside with the gutters hanging from the sheer amount of water. When I looked inside it was shocking to see the level of destruction that had occurred. We then drove through town where my friend hopped onto a kayak to have a look at her building which still had water up to the second story. We walked through the CBD which felt like a war zone with windows blown out and air conditioning ducting hanging down as water had made the ceilings drop. In the days after this I went from friend to friend to friend to assist in their cleanup. I did not see army for many days. When I did see them a few of them were helping at the Art Gallery and then as I walked towards Magellan Street I saw them standing around smoking. We did feel abandoned at this point. Then Scott Morrison came, we were again disappointed he didn't seem to want to really hear from the people. He hasn't been back. The community self mobilised. We remembered 2017 all too well, it felt like a fresh memory. The Koori Mail became a hub, Resilient Lismore became a hub. The Quad services centre set up and felt buzzing and alive. The army arrived after a couple of weeks. The RFS arrived with many trucks from around NSW assisting. I took my 11 yr old son down to the Koori Mail hub where we volunteered and so he could feel how special it is to be a small part of the recovery and get a sense of the strong community spirit. Both campuses of his school were in the Lismore CBD so he was part of the collective displaced school children. He is now attending school at the Uni. We got covid just as the second flood washed through the town.

When I went back in after this flood the town felt smaller, sadder, slower. The adrenaline had worn off, people were exhausted. We are still cleaning and stripping interiors and walls in our building in North Lismore. I saw a facebook message from the Council a week ago that the curbside rubbish collection was ending. It is too soon, we haven't finished yet. I called them and was told to call Public Works. I called Public Works and left a message. I still haven't heard back. The skip bins are still there so we will continue to use them. We have lost our tenants, they left after a week and their lease has been surrendered. We have lost our rental income and still have mortgage, rates and insurance to pay. We don't have flood insurance, it's just too expensive. We have put a claim in for storm damage. Our insurance company have sent a registered builder and a loss adjuster. I received an email a week ago that advised a hydrologist will be coming but expect to wait in excess of six weeks. So we wait. We are also waiting to see whether the Council will waive our rates, this will be discussed at the Council meeting on Tuesday night. So we wait.

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

Climate change

1.2 Preparation and planning

Like in 2017 we were not alerted to the possibility that this one could be higher than the previous flood. We were expecting the same level. The town felt prepared this time. We were all down there lifting and taking things to higher ground. We may as well have just walked away as the result would have been the same.

1.3 Response to floods

The response was not good enough. We felt unsupported by all of the government services.

The pure fact that civilians in their tinnies were the ones doing the rescuing was so bizarre. Many of these people you will never know about. They carry their heroism and their trauma with them and continue to live their lives in anonymity. We are a developed country, where is the governmental support. The army could have been here at that point taking charge and completing these rescues and assisting with the evacuations.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

Everybody I speak to at this current time is in 'limbo'. They are back living in their shells of houses either waiting to hear about their insurance claims (most, like us, don't have flood insurance but are crossing fingers they might get some money for storm damage) or they are waiting for grant money. They have kids and need to make their houses habitable but don't know how much money to pump into their houses as there is talk of North and South Lismore being moved. We need a faster response so that people can have hope and know how to proceed. There are little rentals available now in this area. A good friend has moved to Brisbane as she couldn't find anything. Another friend, a single mother has just applied for a rental and has offered to pay 6 months rent in advance, she says this is what you have to do now to try to get a house. Of course they don't want to live in the floodplain, the place of their trauma, especially as it hasn't really stopped raining for weeks. Housing, or rather lack of it, is big issue.

1.5 Recovery from floods

Mental health support has to be funded in this region for the long term. Everybody has experienced trauma whether it be first hand or as part of the community collective. This needs to be a priority. The children need support too, please don't forget about the children. I'd like to see buy backs or land swaps for North and South Lismore. I believe Council already has 4000 house sites that have been earmarked for development. Let's use them. Fund people with

homes and commercial premises (like us) to move to higher ground, restump, connect to services etc. This would be cheaper in the long run than to keep going through major flooding events. We can't keep going through this. I'd like to see North and South Lismore regenerated and turned into parklands, skate parks, bike tracks maybe even used as a festival venue. We can't control the river and its tributaries, no levee or dams will change the outcome. All shops in the CBD need to have innovated flood mitigation built into their buildings. Sponge cities. Floating buildings. We now know that 16m is the new height. More pop up shops.

1.6 Any other matters

Why has Mick Fuller been chosen to decide on our future? Firstly, what experience does he have? Secondly, he still has a cloud of corruption hanging over him, this does not bode well for our trust in him. I'd also like to know how he got this job and how much he and Professor O'Kane are being paid? More transparency please.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [7D17AF36-F638-452B-A805-CE249568617A_1_105_c.jpeg](#)
 - [B87C5E42-1270-43BB-9EEE-C055B8AFE358_1_105_c.jpeg](#)
 - [479F3BDC-B43F-4B28-A4D1-8B3CF5C5F94B_1_105_c.jpeg](#)
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