

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Thursday, 23 June 2022 9:35:43 PM

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## Your details

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## Submission details

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<b>I am making this submission as</b>	A resident in a flood-affected area
<b>Submission type</b>	I am making a personal submission
<b>Consent to make submission public</b>	I give my consent for this submission to be made public

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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<b>Your story</b>	I live on Ballina Island and the area where I live, while now affected by high tides with water coming up through the storm water pipes, has never been flooded. In the first flood event, my property had 15cm of water through the yard with a small amount entering the garage, without reaching the back wall. No water entered the living area. I was flooded in for two days and had
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to move my car onto a neighbour's property to ensure it was not affected by water. I was without my mobile phone for 6 days and the Internet for 7 days.

The message to residents on the Island was that it would be inundated by 50cm of water. This was a crude measure because, while Ballina is built on a flood plain, the land is not perfectly flat so the predicted water height gave no indication of which properties would be adversely affected. In addition this measure had to have been taken from a particular site and its location was not common knowledge. I relied on advice from a neighbour, who is a tradie, who told me that the measurement was taken from the Post Office on the corner of Tamar and Moon Streets. Based on this I decided not to sandbag my place and evacuate because Tamar Street was more adversely affected by king tides than where I live. I have since learnt that this is not where measurements are taken so it was pure happenstance that I was minimally affected.

The area where I live was not adversely affected by the second flood. While there was water in local streets, I was not flooded in. This water drained away quickly, with minimal impact.

These flood events were inevitable. The amount of local flooding from king tides that has occurred on Ballina Island has increased as land developments have been approved. The two that adversely affect where I live at Fern Grove and River Oaks. Prior to the developments going ahead, during king tides, water in The Canal would flow in that direction. Because the land in these developments has been built up the water can no longer flow in that direction. This water must go somewhere so it inundates the streets in my neighbourhood.

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### **Terms of Reference (optional)**

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters

### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

- Climate change needs to be acknowledged as real and steps taken to minimise its impact
- The floods were worse than they might have otherwise been because the ground was saturated from weeks of rain.
- Most residents living along the Wilsons River lack knowledge of the history of flood events so notifications that would have assisted people down river to prepare sooner were not passed on.
- There is a belief that the levee in Lismore is protective from most floods.
- There needed to be better liaison between the Weather Bureau and the SES so that the SES could have reacted sooner.
- A breakdown in communication meant people could not call the SES for assistance. Having a centralised call system does not work in a catastrophe.
- State government agencies practised risk aversion by implementing WHS policies. Consequently, agencies with watercraft that could have been used to rescue people were not used and local individuals had to come to the rescue. Responders and potential responders need to be freed from these strictures when catastrophes occur.
- The SES was under-resourced and without the assistance of and other agencies with watercraft and locals using their own watercraft more lives would have been lost.
- It took too long for government agencies to respond and the army to be deployed to provide the support needed to assist people in need.
- Building housing estates on flood plains should be avoided in future. My local area is flooded during king tides and non-king tides when the seas are rough because of the housing developments at Fern Grove and River Oaks. These developments have been built up to meet height requirements. Prior to these developments, water in The Canal at high tide would drain in that direction. This is now not

possible. The water must go somewhere, and it comes through the storm water pipes in my local area affecting Kerr Street, Grant Street, Bentinck Street, Fox Street, Marsh Avenue and Russell Street. It affects other low-lying parts of Ballina as well.

- The role of the Land and Environment Court in over-ruling Council decisions on development, building and planning matters needs to be reviewed because too many decisions reverse Council decisions. Councils give approval to applications because they know that there will more than likely be a successful appeal to the Land and Environment Court. They lack the financial resources to fight such cases, even though not approving an application is in the best interests of the local community.

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### **1.2 Preparation and planning**

Ballina Shire has not previously experienced a flood situation like this. Council's Flood Management Plan needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is fit for purpose and amended as required.

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### **1.3 Response to floods**

- A more sophisticated warning system needs to be in place to ensure better preparation for future flood events.
- Agencies involved with flood rescue need to act promptly.
- Government departments and agencies involved with flood rescue and relief such as Maritime, Department of Communities and Justice, and Resilience NSW, should not be risk averse. They should be free to operate, unfettered by government policies and procedures.
- Where multiple agencies are involved the chain of command must be clear and coordinated locally.
- Flood mitigation must be a priority.
- Serious thought must be given to buy back schemes to enable people living in flood zones to relocate.
- Flood relief grants should be easier for affected people to access. Strategies for identifying

scammers should be inbuilt. Too many people have made false claims against affected properties before owners have been able to make claims.

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#### **1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery**

- Shire Councils responded promptly once the crisis had passed. For example, Ballina Council staff were at work sweeping streets and checking on residents at the first possible opportunity and arranging for curb side clean ups to start once the flood water had receded.
- Service clubs provided support for people affected by the floods and became safe places where individuals could make donations that they wanted to be used to support people affected by flooding.
- Ballina Shire Council provided daily flood recovery news, set up emergency accommodation, and distribution hubs
- State government departments and agencies again practised risk aversion during the recovery phase by continuing to implement WHS policies. Staff at proposed evacuation centres, such as a school in Ballina Shire were quizzed on their qualifications to manage or work at such centres. People evacuated to this site were evacuated to another, only to be returned to the original site. Staff from Department of Communities and Justice managing the evacuation centre at Alstonville Community Centre refused to accept the meals Alstonville locals had cooked for the people taking shelter there because they were not prepared in commercial kitchens. This was despite people having not eaten for at least a couple of days. In addition, several people in their evacuation centre had mental health issues. No supervision was provided after hours to ensure the site was safe. Again, common sense needs to prevail with responders and potential responders being free from these strictures during a catastrophe.

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#### **1.5 Recovery from floods**

The recovery from this flood will take a long time. Not only will people whose properties have been flood affected take some time to recover, but



farmers and professional fishers have lost their livelihoods because of stock losses or contamination of farmland and waterways. Tourism will also be adversely affected because of the impact on accommodation, infrastructure, business, and the physical and social environments. So many properties have been affected that supply chains are not able to meet the demand for building materials, fittings, fixtures, and white goods. People have been advised that it will take 12-18 months before they can return home.

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### **1.6 Any other matters**

- The link between phases of the moon, high tides, and adverse weather events needs to be acknowledged.
- Residents in Ballina need to know where the site measurements are taken from is located and the height of their property in relation to this site. Knowing this, people can make informed decisions about the action they need to take, and it will result in more effective use of human and physical resources.
- The failure of telecommunications during the floods is most concerning. This needs to be reviewed and rectified to ensure it doesn't happen again.
- Flooding around Woodburn and Broadwater was exacerbated by the M1 infrastructure. Advice provided by locals at public meetings prior to and during the construction of the motorway that it would act as a levee or dam wall if viaducts were not used were ignored. The consequence of this has come to fruition and steps must be taken to rectify it. There are too many instances of people from Sydney telling locals what is best for them rather than listening locally knowledge

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### **Supporting documents or images**

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