

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Thursday, 19 May 2022 8:04:16 PM

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## Your details

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**Title** Ms

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**First name** Megan

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**Last name** James

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**Email**

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**Postcode** 2480

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as** A resident in a flood-affected area

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**Submission type** I am making a personal submission

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**Consent to make submission public** 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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### Terms of Reference (optional)

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

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#### 1.1 Causes and contributing factors

I will address the terms of reference 1.2 –

Preparation and Planning, with special regard to the inadequacy of the communication and warning systems employed in the Lismore flood event and suggestions for future improvement. Here is my story. It has taken some courage to revisit the trauma of the event and what has transpired since and I do fervently hope that my submission and suggestions will be taken seriously.

I am a resident of a 250 person rural residential multiple occupancy community, Co-ordination Co-operative. Our property of 1800 acres is situated in the Lismore Local Government area. We are 8 kms from Nimbin and our lands border the Nightcap National Park. We have been in existence for almost 50 years and in that time we have endeavoured to protect our natural environment and to create a functional community.

Residents here experienced the 1974 flood, as well as the many other major flood events which have impacted Lismore since, including the 2017 Cyclone Debbie floods. In 2019 we also experienced bushfire on our property which had spread from the National Park.

I've lived here for 45 years and have learnt to be aware of the signs that indicate possible imminent flooding in Lismore. The topography around my house shows very clearly when rain events are exceeding the capacity of my drains. Once that point is reached and the drains overflow, depending on the height of this stormwater and the length of time the overflow continues, I can predict that Lismore will experience flooding and the likely degree of that flooding. The height and speed of the waters flowing down Tuntable Creek, which is 50m from my house, is another indicator.

On Feb 27, I was prepared for local flooding as predicted by the BOM. I checked the radar map

and the 24-hour forecast regularly throughout the day. By 4 pm, stormwaters had overflowed my drains and begun to seep onto my kitchen floor, which is built on a slab. This has happened before, in April 1989, May 2009, March 2017 and Dec 2020. This time was different however, in that the overflow persisted for more than a few hours. By 9 p.m. I was becoming concerned for people in Lismore, as the seepage had not slowed and was actually increasing. I could hear big trees falling and the noise of the heavy rain and the thundering creek was intense.

I texted several friends in Lismore to warn them, but their responses indicated that they were following the advice given by the SES that the flood would not be major. I then decided to call the SES to report my concerns that this flood was likely to exceed the height predicted by the BOM. I did get through to an SES operator, but she was not prepared to listen to my concerns and referred me to the police helpline. I rang that number and was on hold for 40 minutes before I gave up. All this time, there was a huge amount of water overflowing my drains, far more than I had ever seen before. At this point, I felt great despair. I had been receiving the emergency warning SMS messages from Lismore Council and while the predicted river height was being slowly increased with each text, it seemed to me that there was a huge disjunct between whatever information they were using for these predictions and my estimation based on my real-time experience of the event and the amount of water we were dealing with. It was heartbreaking to think of the lives that might be lost in Lismore.

I take daily readings from my rain gauge and throughout the afternoon and evening, I was obliged to empty the gauge constantly into a bucket to deal with the heavy rainfall which kept overflowing the gauge. I finally measured that bucket of water on the afternoon of Feb 28 and we had received over 800mm in 30 hours.

By midnight, the seepage across my kitchen floor had become a small flood that I mopped constantly with towels and attempted to divert out the door. By 2 a.m. I was exhausted so went to sleep. I woke at 3.30 to find that the water had now become a spring, erupting through the centre of my tiled kitchen floor, which I had to divert out the door. By dawn I needed a rest, so went to sit briefly on my veranda. From there, I could see that there had been a major landslip through the night to the immediate south of my house and that the paddock to the west was strewn with boulders and, alarmingly, building materials from my neighbour's house to the north. I ran there calling his name and saw that his house had been moved some 30m downhill and was surrounded by huge rocks and boulders with a small river flowing down across the paddock to join the main creek. You can imagine my relief when he came walking towards me, unharmed but very much in shock.

I discovered that my neighbours and I were isolated from the rest of our community by massive landslips. Even foot access was difficult as we had to negotiate a jungle of fallen trees and massive amounts of mud where our road once was. To compound our distress, we were also cut off from the rest of the world by telecommunications failures. Our only source of information was local radio. While occasional text messages could be received or sent in the early hours of the morning, phone calls were impossible. My friends and family who had also been affected or were concerned about me, were not able to contact me and this heightened the distress and isolation we all felt.

All mains power was cut and due to huge landslips across our only access road, our community had no access to fuel for generators. However, after several days, we were fortunate to have members travel cross-country with fuel supplies and to transport one seriously ill child to

hospital and bring urgently needed medical supplies for other people. With fuel for generators, there was power for one of our community members to relocate their Starlink satellite internet service to our community centre where we could all use the internet to communicate with friends and family. As well, we could learn what was happening elsewhere, which was as horrific as our experience.

By now, it was obvious that our whole region had experienced a major catastrophic event. We have been recovering ever since and for those of us living in the hills, while our recovery is not from flood but from the massive damage caused by the rain event, it is a recovery as major as any we have ever experienced. We and many other rural communities will require assistance that we have yet to receive. I will address these matters in the TOR 1.5 in a separate submission.

#### Improving Preparation and Planning Communications

Since the events of Feb 28, our local Nimbin community has formed a CB radio network, solely to assist in preparing for and recovery from natural disasters. 10 base stations of at least 5w capacity were donated and the network covers an area from Blue Knob in the north to Bishops Creek in the south and from Tuntable Falls in the east to Stoney Chute in the west. Regular monthly check-ins are held to ensure the system is functioning.

There are now also Facebook groups set up to link such networks with others and to provide information and education.

If such citizens radio networks were to be set up in all vulnerable areas, they can function

independent of possible power and telecommunications breakdowns as they do not require 240v power, but can be operated using battery power. Many rural properties have standalone solar systems which can be relied on also.

Some local Rural Fire Service members are now part of our local network. If RFS personnel can be funded to relay messages about river heights from local citizen networks to the SES, communications can be more expeditious and effective. This will save lives and property in communities, towns and cities further downstream.

In the event of power and telecommunications failures such as were experienced during the Feb 28 event, communications from local radio networks will need to access satellite telephony.

Funding for centrally located or mobile Satellite dishes or phones which can be activated in emergency to ensure warning messages get through to SES is essential backup in the event of telecommunications failures.

Funding to support the SES and RFS at the same level as Defence forces would be the most sane solution to disaster warning, response and recovery in what are becoming more and more frequent events - and would enable these interconnected communications systems between citizens and agencies to be implemented in the most effective way.

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## **Supporting documents or images**

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