

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Wednesday, 18 May 2022 4:41:27 PM

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## Your details

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**Title** Mrs

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**First name** Melinda

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**Last name** Kent

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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 member of the general public

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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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### Your story

I have lived in Lismore all my life (52 years) and work for Lismore City Council. I have been through all the floods and have never experienced anything like the trauma and devastation of this one.

It still feels like we have been forgotten and

abandoned by the 2 levels of Government, especially during the election process when they are focussing on themselves and not the Australian people. Usually I would be supportive of sending money overseas to help others in times of need, such as the Ukraine war, but our community is a warzone and the help and support we need is not being prioritised. Government dithering, red tape and too many meetings, not enough outcomes seem to be all that is going on.

My mum and dad (79 and 83) have lived at Crown Street, South Lismore for over 50 years. They had sat out floods before and after the 2017 flood when the power went off, they still were determined to sit out the 2022 flood and had bought a camp stove in case the power went out this time. Their floor level was 13.3 metres and flood had never gone near their flood level before. They lifted everything downstairs to upstairs and took their car to higher ground and could not be convinced to leave, as 100's of there weren't, including disabled people, people with small children and babies etc because no one wants to be in the evacuation centres, as they are know to have social and safety issues.

In 2017 the SES mismanaged so much with wrong information, not letting people in the CBD evacuate their shops etc that this time they weren't listened to because they weren't trusted. Everyone thinks "someone from Sydney" is making the decisions and not taking notice of local knowledge and warnings. There was no indication even hours prior to the inundation that the flood level would be so much bigger than any flood we've experienced before.

Needless to say, I don't think anyone in Lismore or the surrounds slept on Sunday 27 February into Monday morning. The rain was relentless and everyone was on Facebook and checking levels. At midnight the BOM revised the Wilson's

River to 13 metres and I text my parents and said "it may be lapping the floorboards". After a sleepless night by 5am it was apparent that it was going to be way bigger than expected with people already on their roof in North and South Lismore and East Lismore having water coming up where it had never been before.

At 7am it was around their ankles and I rising quickly. They were lifting things and getting very worried. At 9am it was around their waist and my mum can't swim. I told them to get paper and put a big sign in the window "OLD PEOPLE HELP" and their phone number (when I saw the paper the week later it was no where big enough for someone read). I told them to put their phones in ziplock bags, but the bags were under water. They were panicking.

I spent from 7am until 10am on the phone to everyone I knew and on Facebook posting everywhere to try to get a boat to them. One of my friends from Lismore Council tried to get his son in to try to go to their Aunt first and then to my parent. His Aunt was the first elderly person found dead in her house. My parents could have been the same. He could not get his boat in near where their aunt or my parent were as police were turning boats away. THANKFULLY people ignored that and went somewhere else and put their boats (and surf ski and any other floating device) and saved 100's of people, otherwise the authorities would have had so much blood on their hands.

Around 10am my parents RANG TO SAY GOODBYE. Do you have ANY IDEA what is it is like to get that phone call? To think of them drowning in the house that they have lived in for 58 years, that we grew up in.

We tried to talk to them about how to get onto the roof, to let the water float them up, but the water didn't get that high and their ceilings were

too high for that. They got out on their front landing and stood and could see their neighbours around them doing the same.

I rang the Police and SES and they said they could do nothing. DO YOU KNOW HOW THIS IMPACTS FAMILIES TO HAVE THIS HAPPEN?

About 10.30am we got a call from them to say a tinnie had come over to the landing and a young couple had dragged them into it (mum and dad are average weight, these people were only small) and had taken them to North Lismore to higher ground near the cemetery because the tinnie couldn't make it through the river to town. This hero's name was Rama Manzart and he saved their lives. So many lives were saved by people who didn't even get the name of their rescuer's. We only identified Rama because he was on tv the next day in his tinnie crying and absolutely broken about what he had seen and done and the lack of help from authorities.

The stress wasn't over though, because after standing in flood water for 5 hours in their house they were now stuck in North Lismore. They were half sheltered under a tarp that covered an excavator. There were 20 other people other there not under the tarp and the rain had not let up. Now we thought they would be stuck their all night because there was still not enough boats in the water and apparently the SES and police with the minimum resources they had were refusing to go over the South side of Lismore.

Around 3.30pm we got a call to say that dad's old neighbour saw them under a tarp while going past in his tinnie and picked them up and got them over the other side of the river.

I can't think about this without crying. So many stories of rescues and heroes but so much trauma. All those people thinking that they were going to die and watch their loved ones die and

drown in front of them. All the people stuck on the hills in Lismore completely helpless. Morning tv showing people on roofs and talking to them and begging someone to help and no one came. Facebook Resilience Lismore group that got set up within an hour of the flood starting was the only place to find out information and help people. It also helped save so many people.

Learning that there are helicopters on standby for this sort of thing but not deployed. Learning that we hardly have any SES or Police boats in a high flood area. Learning that people were trying to rescue people and were turned away.

Then after all of that, seeing the trashed houses and town once the water went down. The rain still not going away.

I worked at the Recovery Centre for Council. Recovery NSW were not organised. There were a few good staff, but many were hopeless. It was overwhelming. People were there with no possessions, no ID, no teeth, no money, no phone, no shoes, a plastic bag is all they owned. They were hungry and tired and wet because it still kept raining. The expectations to prove who you were and the need to have a phone to be contactable were a problem.

I took minutes in some high level meetings for Council and at the beginning they were talk fests with people just speaking about who they were and how important they were but I didn't see anything being achieved.

Then after we threw people's life long possessions on the street in a muddy lump. I still feel guilty about the things I couldn't or didn't save from my parents house. Things I didn't find or didn't see because we had to just strip it while we had help. The streets were clogged with cars and people and everyone's possessions.

Again it came down to the community to organise volunteering, food, cleaning. People turned up from all over the place and got absolutely filthy helping people they didn't know and again thinking about this makes me cry. The people were so wonderful. We had so many lovely people help us. My stepson had 10 extra people in his house. People made meals and donated cleaning and gloves etc. They were unbelievable. While all we saw of the Army was wandering around all clean taking photos.

Eventually someone got them organised to actually help. And again, like the SES volunteers, this wasn't their fault, it is the useless people in charge that did not kick this into action.

I was at the Council Chambers when the useless Prime Minister turned up and snuck in the back door to avoid talking to people and have a photo opp. Our mayor was ropeable. You could see him standing behind him on tv just wanting to punch him, like we all did, for being so lacking in empathy and gutless and always thinking of himself. At least the Premier turned up and stayed for a few days and copped the abuse.

Our MP Janelle Saffin and Mayor, Steve Kreig have been unbelievable in supporting us because they went through it themselves. They lost houses and businesses. It has been good to see them all working together and even Kevin Hogan has done as much as he could I guess, but doesn't look like the Federal Government saw any benefit in helping us before the election. Steve Kreig has been great for getting on every TV program and radio show telling it how it is and trying to make us not be forgotten.

Then after all of this we find out that most people don't have any insurance. A lot of people knew that they didn't have flood insurance for the house but thought they had contents. Personally my contents and house insurance are split and

paid separately. My parent's house and contents was together and they could not pay \$16,000 for house insurance for flood, however if they had had a separate quote for contents for flood they would have paid that. In 2017 their contents from under their house was covered (just a fridge and washing machine). NRMA have been absolutely shocking to deal with. No empathy, no help. Other companies at least gave \$1000 to help while the did assessment.

Now people are in limbo. There was nowhere to live with the housing crisis on the far north coast before. My parents live one week at my house and one week at my brothers. They are lucky. Others are in their gutted houses and now it's getting colder. And the rain hasn't let up and the mould won't go away, its in all our houses even if were weren't in flood. What can people with mortgages do? They can't afford to still pay that and then rent as well, if they can find somewhere to rent. Schools and every type of business imaginable gone. Not just retail but offices, accountants, lawyers etc. We can't get trades people.

What are our options. Sit and wait for someone to offer solutions. QLD has offered solutions, buy backs, building back better etc. We just sit and wait in limbo.

The government needs to help Australians first now, this is not acceptable in a rich country like ours.

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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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### **1.2 Preparation and planning**

In 2017 the SES mismanaged so much with wrong information, not letting people in the CBD evacuate their shops etc that this time they weren't listened to because they weren't trusted. Everyone thinks "someone from Sydney" is

making the decisions and not taking notice of local knowledge and warnings. There was no indication even hours prior to the inundation that the flood level would be so much bigger than any flood we've experienced before.

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**1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery**

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I took minutes in some high level meetings for Lismore City Council and at the beginning the were talk fests with people just speaking about who they were and how important they were but I didn't see anything being achieved.

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**1.5 Recovery from floods**

It came down to the community to organise volunteering, food, cleaning. They had to crowd fund to help pay for things that should have been supplied by the Government. People turned up from all over the place and got absolutely filthy helping people they didn't know and again thinking about this makes me cry. The people were so wonderful. We had so many lovely people help us. My stepson had 10 extra people in his house. People made meals and donated cleaning and gloves etc. They were unbelievable. While all we saw of the Army was wandering around all clean taking photos.

Eventually someone got them organised to actually help. And again, like the SES volunteers, this wasn't their fault, it is the useless people in charge that did not kick this into action.

Then we are left in limbo without insurance, without help with trades people, without some project planning help. There are so many old and



disadvantaged people who do not know where to start and are not on Facebook where they can find out information.

Resilience NSW were never prepared for a disaster this big and need to be looked at to see whether they are relevant at all or whether this should be part of the SES and more people should be paid to do these roles rather than relying on volunteers.

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### **1.6 Any other matters**

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## **Supporting documents or images**

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