

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
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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 I was living in a rental on Coleman St, opposite the Greyhound Track and just up from Simes Bridge, when the flood came. My daughter and son had helped me late on Sunday night, when we realised the flood was going to be worse than expected, to ferry a lot of my personal items to the top floor empty flat (probably 14.5 or 6 above the ground level. Furniture and much of the other

household goods, books and clothes stayed downstairs on high shelves and the flood shelves (boards that were put across high shelves) apparently these would keep everything above any expected flood.

We sheltered upstairs with residents and their dog (6 adults), sleeping a little from 1.30 am, until we were woken from screams from the roof of the house closest to the bridge. We signed and yelled across that we would contact 000, eventually an hour or so later they were rescued. The crew promised to come back and get us when they could, attending to rescues of 70 people on Ballina Bridge and many other roof rescues in the meantime. The realisation came quickly that it was too late to go back down to save anything, the water was rising fast, news was coming in of the dam being at red alert level, advising those below it to evacuate, or that the flood might reach 16 metres. We hammered a hole in the ceiling, so that we all six adults and dog, might climb up into the ceiling and onto the roof, we each chose one thing to save. My grandchildren were on the other side of the river in Wotherspoon St Nth Lismore, with our last bit of phone charge, we spoke to them, they were crying and afraid, wondering if they were to be rescued. All around them, people were screaming from roofs, or under them.

My flat at 11.4 had been flooded but this was different. Everyone in the street, in houses that had never had water inside were rescued from roofs. My elderly neighbours watched their dog drown in front of them, eventually at the last minute they were rescued by helicopter, too frail to climb on the roof.

I am now living in my daughter's home in Wotherspoon St, quite eerie, because most people have not returned and the houses that were swept off stumps or away, lie crashed and crumpled. The task of cleaning up and getting normalcy back is forbidding, and this house is one of the better ones, made of hardwood more than a hundred years ago.

But what now, many of my friends are camping in tents, or left, I volunteer a couple of days every week, wondering how long this kind of community response, now essential services will be needed. The life of Lismore has changed forever.

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

I believe that the science is undeniable. Climate change has and will continue to cause more extreme weather events. As the atmosphere warms it holds more moisture and weather systems are getting trapped, hence the rain-bombs that contributed to the floods. The fact that this massive weather event, affected much of the east coast from Sth East Qld to south west Sydney should be a wake-up call. The future is now. Other factors, the levy, land clearing and de-forestation mean that the floods will be more catastrophic, leading to such events as the massive landslides in the catchment at places like Main Arm. Climate change is not the cause of the floods, but climate change means that the severity and the impact and regularity of extreme weather events are now the new normal.

1.2 Preparation and planning

I was in Lismore on the Saturday before the flood, helping friends pack away and clean up at the Enviro Centre at the Transit Centre in town. My friend noted that in 2017 just before the flood, the streets were quiet. This year, everyone was busy putting their flood plans in place. In my daughter's neighbourhood of Nth Lismore, young people who had purchased homes there because it was affordable, had been raising them for the past year, according to the requirements determined by Council and building advice. We did the best we could, based on the advice, but it wasn't enough.

1.3 Response to

Everyone in Lismore understands a grim truth. If

floods

it wasn't for the 'tinnie flotilla' for the ordinary citizen rescue teams, hundreds of people would have died. No-one could have predicted that the SES building would flood, or the pumps not work, but it is clear that government withdrawal from the public sphere in recent years (as with bushfire response) has meant that it was and is left to community to do for themselves.

Government has to decide where they stand on this, not piecemeal bandaid solutions, but long-term provision for disaster. By all reports the situation at Evacuation Centres, especially early on, was stressful and even dangerous. Centres need to be set-up so they are ready to respond immediately, now we know what is possible.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

Yes, the Army came and were helpful, but so were community. Local groups led in the transition (Lismore Helping Hands, Koori Mail, Trees not Bombs and many other small groups and individuals. Women in particular have led and volunteered in recovery organisations and programs. There has been funding, but it is so disjointed and often piecemeal, and the application process cumbersome and difficult for people already struggling to cope or with specific needs. Now that the future is known, might it not be time for the Army to organise and train for this role, in disaster response and recovery, using some of the billions given to weapons corporations every year (at least 30 billion a year).

Above all the transition should be informed by the community. This town has a university and a wealth of knowledge and experience, that should be used. Political grandstanding or blanket statements by politicians are not helpful.

1.5 Recovery from floods

This flood has changed everything, or it should. We must plan for positive adaptation. Any plans for re-location must take note of mistakes made elsewhere. The grand 100 year old timber houses should be moved, alongside business and cultural venues. Lismore is a significant regional centre, any plan must acknowledge that

extreme floods will happen again, and big decisions need to be made. Re-wilding parts of the basin, turning the CBD into open plaza, market places and festival sites, perhaps with towers for eco-education/tourism. A relocated business district and residential areas out of flood. Any relocation or buy back must be based on inclusion and social justice. There is an opportunity here to be brave, creative and clever, to think about the future, not try to pretend that everything can go back exactly as it was, as if it were only a dream.

1.6 Any other matters

Smart, ethical and inclusive thinking, led by the best people we have and informed by the whole community must be at the forefront of recovery. If recovery and rebuilding is dominated by developers and corporate government interest, it will not serve the people of Lismore. We must start to consider different options and ways of living. Much more cooperative housing, small and tiny homes, land sharing and sustainable building design. The housing developments currently on offer, are over-priced and not in line with the new and best thinking. Any response to temporary housing should be clever, not destined to become permanent, unless they are appropriate.

Hopefully what could come from this is informed by best practice, including ideas and experience from other places that have had disasters similar such as Christchurch. More listening, less talking at, might be a good start.

Supporting documents or images
