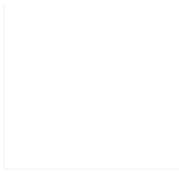


From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 19 May 2022 6:47:24 PM



Your details

Title	Mr
First name	Paul
Last name	Copeland
Email	<input type="text"/>
Postcode	2487

Submission details

I am making this submission as	Emergency services personnel
Submission type	I am making a personal submission
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	NSW SES
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	Local Commander Byron Tweed Cluster
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 worked on shift in Goonelabah ICC from 22 February to 1 March 2022. In that period, I was the Situation Officer. I evacuated out of Lismore on the night of 28 February moving to Ballina. On the morning of 1 March, I received a phone call from Mr James Flockton, Chief Engineer of the Byron Shire Council at around 0620. The gauges of their IMS Guardian had reported that the Brunswick River was above Major Flood Level, yet no Evacuation Order had been issued. I then contacted the Deputy Incident Controller (DIC) as to verifying if an Evacuation Order had been issued to residents in Mullumbimby. After acknowledging that an Evacuation Order had been sent to Wollongong SCC and SOC at around 0200h that morning, it was advised to me that the State Duty Commander (SDC), had not released that particular Evacuation Order. This was relayed to Mr Flockton. It was obviously too late, the Major Flood Level had already inundated Mullumbimby and surrounds. I felt helpless over this situation and embarrassed that NSW SES had not done it's job in a timely manner. I again Evacuated out of Ballina, just in time before it was too late in the next morning (2 March 2022). I sought refuge at the Ballina M1 Interchange as the Bruxner Hwy was impassable due to flooding of Emigrant Creek. After conducting operations from my car for 5hrs, I learned of a backroad via Alstonville. I reported to the IMT Goonelabah of which I briefed the Division Commander of the situation and I needed to get to Mullumbimby to check on the NSW SES Unit there and talk to the Unit Commander. Access to Mullumbimby at that stage was not possible, but Byron Bay was and I obtained Accommodation there. Communications had failed in the area, so I had very limited Communications with Mullumbimby up to Tweed Heads. This was because the mobile and NBN networks had failed. On 3 March I managed to get into Mullumbimby

and received a briefing from the Unit Commander.

After a while I managed to travel by road off the M1 and reported to the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) at the Tweed Heads Police Station. I briefed the Local Emergency Officer Controller (LEOCON), Superintendent David Roptel of the situation in Ballina, Byron, Mullumbimby and the problems with Communications.

From 3 March to around April 2022 I remained on Shift at the EOC as either or both the NSW SES LO/Sector Commander.

During that period I had repeatedly signalled to the IMT in Goonelabah and later IMT Grafton, the need to source relief in place of my Cluster Units, of myself and suggested Communications alternative sources, particularly suggesting deploying Defence Tactical Communications to the hardest hit areas to provide Internet and Mobile communications.

I felt that these requests were either ignored, or overlooked. I was frustrated that there was no effective support in these requests. There was a great deal of confusion as to the identity of principle Functional area personnel.

There was a significant lack of information flow and I virtually had no idea who or what extra assets were deployed in my Tactical Area of Responsibility (Byron Tweed Cluster).

Unfortunately this situation remained throughout my Shifts in the EOC and later.

This situation made it impossible to provide timely information to the LEOCON.

After around 9 days of no Mobile or NBN connectivity in my Cluster, some data and mobile voice services returned.

I have been struggling with my health after this event, because of the attitudes of various Senior and Junior NSW SES Commanders to undermine my Command status as the Local Commander.

I have since been advised of matters that I haven't been given the Right of Reply, let alone

the courtesy of discussing such matters with an SES Assistant Commissioner. My Well-being has therefore been significantly affected.

I feel abandoned and hung out to dry due to Internal Politics at play. Effectively weather events since October 2021 to May 2022 have me deeply concerned as to the Functionality of the NSW SES.

There are serious concerns over the standards of effective leadership from Team Leader upward.

The Information and Warnings System with Flood Level warnings from BOM Gauges currently in use is technologically inept and archaic.

The level of Communications planning, operations and support requires significant review and adequate training to consider external resources, including ADF DACC support needs to be considered as vital redundancy measures toward the effectiveness of Emergency Management during such Disasters. Adequate training and resources are needed to enable effective NSW SES Capability, particularly in the Northern Rivers. A Training Academy and Facilities are required to take such burdens off Volunteers. The Training System needs to be adequately resourced and funded for full time and part-time employees providing timely Training and Development delivered to SES workers.

I am enthusiastic to present my matters of concern to the Inquiry Panel.

Regards

Former Chief Inspector Paul Copeland OAM,
FRVAHJ, MAIES.

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

Upon Hearing with Panel

1.6 Any other matters

As presented, with further testimony to the Inquiry Panel

Supporting documents or images
