

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
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Your details

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Submission details

I am making this submission as	A member of the general public
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 am a long term resident (61 years) of the Northern Rivers region, currently living in Bangalow. I have previously lived in flood affected areas of Lismore and I am very familiar with previous floods in the region, having seen several major floods first hand. After the February 28, 2022 flood I was involved in providing voluntary assistance with cleaning up
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residential areas in Lismore and Coraki, and also food distribution in Woodburn and Broadwater.

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

The very high flood peaks in Lismore were primarily caused by a record rain event. A rain gauge in Dunoon recorded 775 mm on Monday 28th. This seemed to be a result of an atmospheric river event whereby high levels of moisture came off the Pacific Ocean. It's likely that precipitation higher in the catchment may have been greater due to orographic effects, and this would have contributed greatly to the flooding as well. My understanding is that this may have been the highest rainfall event recorded in the catchment. What is of great concern is that there may be a trend in increasing major flood events with three major floods in five years. If there is a trend in increasing major flood events then maintaining town infrastructure on severely flood impacted river flats may not be viable due to the increasing flood severity and frequency of major events. I believe that climate modelling is essential to understand if major floods caused by intense rainfall events are increasing in frequency, and whether this is likely to become more intense due to climate change, especially the possibility of changed climate patterns (increasing La Niña), warmer oceans and warmer atmosphere. This requires climate modelling by professional climatologists who are familiar with climate modelling. It has been suggested that CSIRO would be a suitable agency to undertake this.

1.2 Preparation and planning

The existing flood levee in Lismore was inadequate to prevent damage to the CBD from the major floods of 2017, and the two floods of 2022.

There seems to be inadequate overall preparation for the possibility of an increase in

major floods resulting from an increase in atmospheric river/rain bomb type events, caused by La Niña events and possibly climate change. Predictive modelling on these events is essential and would have helped impacted communities better prepare, whether that is general preparedness advice or seasonal preparedness advice.

1.3 Response to floods

The three major floods over the last five years have overwhelmed the local SES which is primarily voluntary and was inadequately resourced for the scale of the disaster, especially the first event. Members of the public had to participate directly in assisting in rescue operations.

Pre-warning of the severity of the weather event from BOM was also inadequate.

One of the very important indicators of the severity of the flood event, is the mortality. It gives the outside world an indicator of the severity of what happened in the region during the floods. However, it was noticed by many people that the overall mortality figures for the floods in Northern NSW February/March net were not compiled and made available. That was unusual. Why weren't the mortality figures compiled and released for the region as a whole? Privacy should not have been an issue with this because we are talking numbers and not necessarily names.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

Having been directly involved in the clean-up and recovery, it was noticeable that government response was initially slow. While I witnessed the presence of military early in the clean-up, there were calls for a greater level of assistance from the ADF at an earlier stage, and there was the sense that this could have been officially requested earlier. However, when the assistance from ADF was forthcoming in greater numbers it was greatly appreciated by the community.

One of the things that also became very noticeable was the flood impact on essential communication, and the need for more resilient

mobile phone communication infrastructure. Phone communication is vital during a crisis of this magnitude.

1.5 Recovery from floods

One of the biggest issues for the community is assessing whether the riverine towns will need to be relocated, or whether the infrastructure can be made more flood resilient coupled with improved mitigation.

This is of course a huge question, but I think that the model used in QLD where a 50/50 State/Federal funding was made available to provide voluntary buyback, rebuild, land swap, is needed on the Northern Rivers. In the worst affected areas the buyback should be made available as soon as possible. People should not be encouraged to rebuild in the worst affected areas. Many people with house mortgages feel that they have no choice but to rebuild when they should relocate for safety (especially if major floods are increasing in frequency), but if government funding was available to relocate, impacted home owners would not feel so much pressure to rebuild in unsafe places.

If relocation of the worst affected areas to flood free sites is to be undertaken, then this needs to also be considered as a regional undertaking, as relocating will be very impacting. Local peoples opinions on any CBD or major residential relocation needs to be taken into careful consideration.

There will be a need to supply a significant amount of emergency accomodation on an ongoing basis, not just for people who have lost their homes, but also to trades people who will be involved in rebuilding and relocation houses and infrastructure. Given the existing shortage of trades people in the region anyway, the Government should consider giving priority to immigration visas to suitable trades people to assist in reconstruction in the region.

1.6 Any other matters

The severity of the floods and water flow was so intense that it caused unprecedented infrastructural damage, and in high flow areas

any rebuilding is going to need to be engineered to withstand these high flow rates- if buildings are going to rebuilt.

I question the wisdom of raising the levees higher. The cost of upgrading the levees may reach a point where it ultimately more expensive than relocation, and even if a rebuild does occur, will flood insurance be available at a reasonable cost? If flood insurance is prohibitive, then perhaps the better choice is relocation.

Supporting documents or images
