

Red Baron Tyalgum
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Tyalgum Licensed Post Office
29 Coolman Street, Tyalgum, NSW 2484

Proudly serving Tyalgum Village and surrounding districts

20 May 2022

Professor Mary O'Kane AC and Mr Michael Fuller APM
NSW 2022 Flood Inquiry

By: Online Portal

Dear Professor O'Kane and Mr Fuller,

[NSW Flood Inquiry Submission 2022](#)

We refer to the NSW Flood Inquiry and make this submission in accordance with the published terms of reference. We have structured this submission accordingly for your convenience.

Introduction

By way of background, Rebecca and I are small business people who operate the Tyalgum Licensed Post Office (LPO). The LPO is a micro-business that has only 2 employees, our daughter Kenya as Postal Manager, and a part-time casual assistant who is engaged under an access to work program for people with disabilities. The LPO provides postal, banking services under licence from Australia Post and operates in accordance with Australia Post guidelines. We also provide Justice of the Peace services to our Village and surrounding

Rebecca and I live a short distance from the village (4.6km) on Tyalgum Road, and before the flood event in March 22, it was a pleasant 5-minute drive to the Village. Our daughter and our elderly mothers also live in Tyalgum Village, all in their own homes on Wollumbin Street.

Red Baron Tyalgum (the operating company of the Tyalgum Licensed Post Office) was significantly impacted by the flood event directly, with road closures, electrical power interruption (for more than 48 hours) causing significant food losses, loss of mobile and internet connectivity for a week or more interrupting our business operations, bus and garbage services cancelled, and no mail delivery for a week or so. The LPO was forced to close due to the lack of power and internet connectivity for nearly a week. Very significant, was the loss of banking operations which we

provide our community through the Tyalgum LPO. Community members were without cash to purchase supplies during this period.

Importantly, there was no alternative infrastructure available. Because of our geography, the loss of the mobile phone tower meant that the whole community was cut off. The Telstra copper wire network was down because the Murwillumbah exchange was flood damaged. There were no landline or mobile telephone communications available, and there was no terrestrial internet connection at all. FM and AM Radio reception is also poor due to the Caldera's geography.

Whilst these direct impacts were significant, it is the indirect impacts of the damage to Tyalgum Road (which is now completely impassable) and the Zara/Numinbah Road (reduced to a single lane in three separate places due to landslips) that has had the most significant and enduring impact. Our trip to the Village is now a 50-minute drive via Murwillumbah and Chillingham on a secondary road that is reduced to a single lane in multiple places and the road surface is heavily damaged. Our elderly mothers (83 and 77 years old) feel increasingly vulnerable; their small cars are just not suitable for travelling the heavily damaged Chillingham and Zara Roads; and their access to essential services (food, doctors, chemists) is now fragile to say the least.

To put it simply, our mothers (and many other older Villagers) now only travel when completely necessary, leaving them isolated and vulnerable every day the roads remain cut and damaged.

Before the flood event, Tyalgum Village was only a 20-minute drive from Murwillumbah and 45 minutes from Coolangatta airport. But for a week during the flood event, we may as well have been on the moon because we were so cut-off and isolated. Now, the road infrastructure damage has made Tyalgum and the surrounding district even more remote by an additional 40 to 50 minutes each way. That adds up when you go to work every day or require medical attention or support services.

Geography

To understand the impact of the closure of Tyalgum Road, and the damage to Chillingham Road and Zara Road on our community, an appreciation of the geography is required.

Tyalgum lies at the western end of the Volcanic Caldera at the foot of Mount Warning. Due to its unique geography, there is no alternative all-weather access to anywhere other than via Tyalgum Road and Chillingham Road and Zara Road. Tyalgum is effectively sited in a cul-de-sac in the caldera with only two means of all-weather access, one of which has been cut completely (Tyalgum Road) and the other seriously compromised and vulnerable to further damage (Chillingham Road and Zara Road). The landslips on Chillingham Road and Zara Road are in the same locations as previous land slips; the underlying causes of the problems in those locations have not been properly remediated in past repairs.

If there is further slippage at either of the damaged sites on Chillingham Road and Zara Road (which seems probable, even likely), then our elderly mothers and our

daughter will be effectively cut-off from all essential services accessed by road: emergency services, groceries, medical support, aged care services, schools and so on. Similarly, closure of Chillingham Road and Zara Road would have the same consequences.

Our small business will also be cut-off; mail delivery will not be possible. This directly affects the entire Village and surrounding Tyalgum district residents.

Response to Terms of Reference

**1. The Inquiry is to consider and report to the Premier on the following matters:
a. the causes of, and factors contributing to, the frequency, intensity, timing and location of floods in NSW in the 2022 catastrophic flood event, including consideration of any role of weather, climate change, and human activity;**

We are not scientists, so we have no submission to make on causes.

It is a matter of record though that flood events in Northern NSW and SE Queensland are occurring more frequently and are of greater intensity than at any other time in recorded history. It is obvious to us that climate change is happening, that it is likely to get worse before it gets better, and we need to adopt a new 'normal' approach to harden our infrastructure, improve our resilience, and invest in recovery.

This approach needs to be coordinated by government – led locally, connected state-wide, and nationally resourced.

It is a responsibility of government to lead this process for the benefit of our communities, rather than allow the objective science to be politicised.

b. the preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for floods in NSW, including the accuracy and timing of weather forecasts, current laws, emergency management plans, practices and mitigation strategies, their application and effect;

The planning exists, the disaster management processes in the Tweed are robust and well implemented. Floods are not new in the Tweed and the Community knows how to respond. But the available resources and personnel are wholly inadequate for disasters of this scale and frequency.

We need to professionalise the SES and RFS – pay them and train them like ADF reservists so that they can do the job of natural disaster response without having to call out the ADF reserves.

c. responses to floods, particularly measures to protect life, property and the environment, including:

i. immediate management, including the issuing and response to public warnings;

We are content with the BOM and TSC warnings. We all knew what was coming. We just couldn't do anything to prevent it.

ii. resourcing, coordination and deployment, including with respect to the Australian Defence Force; and

As per our comment above, relying on the ADF to do the job instead of having properly resourced civilian agencies doing the job they are responsible to do is just poor planning. Pay and train the SES and RFS properly. Give the Police and RFS and SES the right equipment and resources to do the job properly.

We do not criticise the ADF – John is a serving reservist. We simply point out that calling out the ADF (who are trained in warfighting) is at best a band-aid approach to natural disaster response management. Pay, train and equip the existing civilian agencies so that they can do the job properly in a natural disaster.

iii. equipment and communication systems;

As above. The civilian agencies need better resourcing, training and pay. This includes the equipment to do the job, the communications systems to operate when mobile phone towers are dead, and the skills to operate them correctly.

d. the transition from incident response to recovery, including the roles, structure and procedures of agencies, government, other entities and the community;

This needs the most work. The TSC has been utterly inundated. It simply doesn't have the resources to do more than patchwork repairs. The road infrastructure in particular is severely damaged. Costs and consequences are enormous. There is simply not enough people (even contractors) to do the work. We need national coordination to help communities recover. At the moment, as soon as the flood pictures leave the news cycle, we are on our own.

The announcement of the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation (NRRC) is welcomed – but it won't even begin to start work until next month. This is 3 months too late. The NRRC appears to be a political face-saving exercise rather than a genuine attempt to re-build infrastructure and improve resilience in the Northern Rivers in a timely fashion. In Tyalgum Village and the surrounding areas there are real people suffering with no relief in sight. Community morale is very low.

e. recovery from floods, including:

i. immediate housing, clean-up, financial support and community engagement measures; and

The recovery phase is poorly managed. Our community is in danger of being cut-off, it has been months since the flood event, and there is no plan known to us for the repair of our infrastructure. If we experience another serious event, we will be cut-off altogether.

iii. longer-term community rebuilding support; and

We are not aware of any such support. Not for us as individuals nor for our LPO business. Again, in Tyalgum Village and the surrounding areas there are real people suffering with no relief in sight. Community morale is very low.

f. any other matters that the inquiry deems appropriate in relation to floods.

No further submission to make.

2. And to make recommendations arising from the Inquiry as considered appropriate, including on:

a. safety of all emergency service personnel and community first responders;

As above, we need proper investment in our emergency service personnel. We have for too long in this country relied upon mateship and volunteers to get us through natural disasters. We need to do better. We need to invest in our volunteer services: Pay them properly; Train them properly; Give them the equipment they need.

b. preparation and planning for future flood threats and risks;

We need more resilient infrastructure. We lost everything for a week. No medical support. No access to food. No communications. No internet. No roads. No power. If a single event can knock out all our infrastructure for a week, then our infrastructure lacks resilience. There are no back-ups or alternatives. Simply not good enough.

c. use of flood gauges and other warning structures and/or strategies for improved flood prediction;

We have an excellent river gauge system in the Tweed accessible through BOM. But we can only see the gauges when we have power and internet. When we flood, we have neither power nor internet.

d. impact on essential services, including electricity supply, water supply and telecommunications;

As above, the network is not resilient. This needs to change.

e. land use planning and management and building standards, including:

i. the instruments, policies and programs applying to existing development in flood prone locations across NSW; and

ii. the instruments, policies and programs applying to proposed future developments in flood prone locations across NSW;

No submission to make. Tyalgum Village itself is flood-free (historically – who knows what the future brings). Although Tyalgum Village is often isolated for a substantial period of time, the direct impact is relatively minor. So, planning controls will not be required in Tyalgum itself.

What is needed is better road infrastructure. We are essentially driving around on century old dirt tracks laid by our pioneer ancestors with a thin layer of bitumen over the top. These roads are easily damaged by landslip and flood, lack proper drainage and lighting, and become impassable every flood event. Proper resilient repairs to our road infrastructure are required.

- f. appropriate action to adapt to future flood risks to communities and ecosystems;**
- g. coordination and collaboration between the NSW Government and the Australian Government;**
- h. coordination and collaboration by the NSW Government with other state and territory governments and local governments; and**
- i. public communication and advice systems and strategies.**

Government cooperation and investment in disaster resilience and recovery is essential. For too long disaster management in this country has been an afterthought. Something that needs to be organised and paid for after the event. We have a disaster fund that no one has been able to get money from.

We need considerable investment to 'harden' our communities and their infrastructure, and to enable prompt recovery. Natural disasters are becoming more frequent and severe. This may well be the most important function of government at all levels in coming years.

Red Baron Tyalgum appreciates your consideration of our submission.

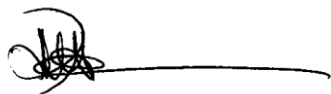
Yours faithfully,

Red Baron Tyalgum Pty Ltd



John Kavanagh AFNI MQLS
Director - Red Baron Tyalgum
Email:
Mobile:

AND



Rebecca McGuren
Director - Red Baron Tyalgum
Email:
Mobile:

CC: Mayor Chris Cherry:

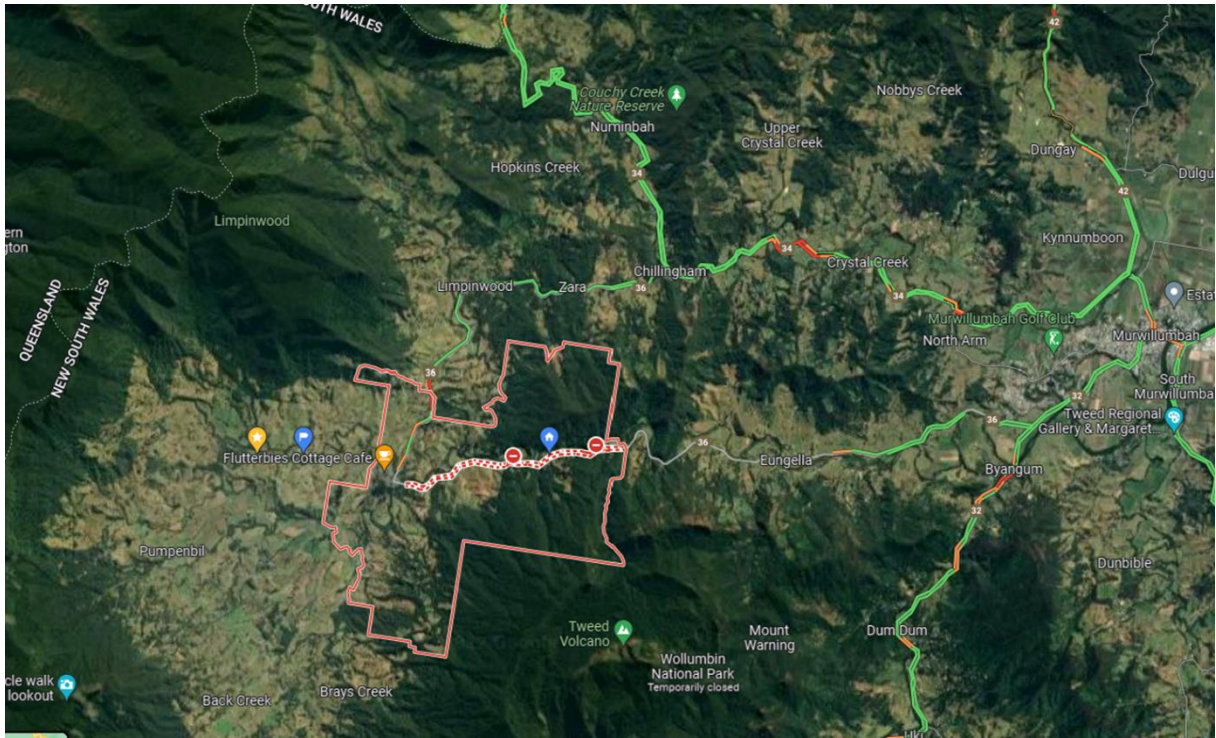


Figure 1 – closure of Tyalgum Road



Tyalgum Road – 1 March 2022