

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 5 May 2022 3:57:10 PM

Your details

Title Ms

First name Florence

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Email

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Submission details

I am making this submission as A primary producer

Submission type I am submitting on behalf of my organisation

Organisation making the submission (if applicable) Richmond River Cane Growers Association

Your position in the organisation (if applicable) Secretary Manager

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 represent the Sugar Cane Growers on the Richmond River who have been decimated by the recent flooding events. The vast majority of growers live on their farms and they have lost their homes and livelihood all in one foul swoop. The crop losses depend on the growing area but in and around Woodburn for example, the new crop was wiped out and the existing crop damaged from 30% to 80%. While we can identify reasons why there is so much damage we are also suggesting solutions.

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 lack of operational flood monitoring equipment in the region impacted on the ability to accurately forecast the severity of the first flood.

Obviously the weather system was slow moving and very intense, however, it seemed to take everyone by surprise, including those agencies who predict water levels, advise on evacuation and rescue those who were unable to leave their homes. It came as a surprise apparently, why is that?

Given the history of flood levels in the region, locals knew the areas that were higher and safe, where it had never flooded previously and were then completely unprepared for the enormity of the flooding. They had built homes well above Council Flood level requirements and still had meters of flood water inundate their homes, while they were still in them. This in itself, created a desperate need for so many people to be rescued.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Flood mitigation on the floodplain is not a high priority for local government and is a major contributing factor to the severity of the recent flooding. Sugar Cane has been grown on the floodplain since the 1800's with government-owned flood mitigation drainage assets in place

to reduce the impact of severe weather events. Unfortunately, these drainage assets have not been maintained, for a number of reasons. Rous County Council are responsible for the maintenance of these drains, however, they have not had an increase in funding since the 1980's. There is a lack of funding, but there are also bureaucratic stumbling blocks. The permitting process is complex with many departments being involved and the main stumbling block is getting the go ahead from Fisheries. They will claim they only play a small part in the permitting process, but this is incorrect. They interpret the legislation to suit their own agenda. Therefore, if we are ever going to have operational drains we need a more equitable and streamlined permitting system.

1.3 Response to floods

It was a difficult time for emergency organisations, but they did seem to be missing in action. The SES phone system was unable to cope with the influx of calls. I personally called the emergency number only to get the engaged signal. The phone system was unable to cope with the extreme number of calls.

The only option was for many private boat owners to go out and save as many people as possible. Specifically, Woodburn, Coraki and Broadwater. This community effort was coordinated using social media and mobile phones.

In situations such as this it is imperative for locals to be included in the rescue, to direct out of town agencies to specific areas. Local knowledge cannot be overstated. The SES and any other emergency response agencies should be coordinated by people who are completely familiar with the region.

1.5 Recovery from floods

There are primary producer grants of up to \$75k which is positive. The way the funds are means tested and rolled out is not as positive for many of our growers.

After losing everything including the family home all of the crops have been either destroyed or

seriously impacted in a vast area, many farmers don't have \$75k to spend up front and then claim back. Can this be reviewed to make it easier to access this funding.

My suggestion would be \$25k be paid up front and acquitted before the next \$25k can be applied for and then acquitted until the \$75k has been fully granted and acquitted.

The other issue is means testing the grant funding. Many farmers have to work off-farm to make ends meet. Or their partners may have well-paying careers and that negates the opportunity to access funding. Farmers who grow less cane and crops are no less important than the larger growers and they shouldn't be excluded from the grant funding. They have on a pro-rata basis lost just as much as the larger growers. One suggestion I have is to reduce the grant value to 50% or thereabouts. With all the same stipulations for proving expenditure. This is an inequity that needs to be addressed.

1.6 Any other matters

The aerial photos of the area cannot be uploaded. I will find another way to provide them to you.

Supporting documents or images
