

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Thursday, 19 May 2022 8:31:56 PM

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## Your details

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**Title** Mrs

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**First name** Rita-ann

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**Last name** Spek

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**Email**

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**Postcode** 2480

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as** A resident in a flood-affected area

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**Submission type** I am making a personal submission

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**Consent to make submission public** I give my consent for this submission to be made public

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story** I spent Sunday with my husband and daughter raising all our belongings under our home to above 2017 flood levels. We had been discussing expected flood levels with family and friends, checking chatter on Facebook. Everyone we spoke to were all saying be prepared for 2017 flood levels.  
We had put our belongings up, we had been

shopping and had enough food for and drinks and supplies for the time we expected to be cut off via flood waters.

Ses volunteers doorknocked Sunday evening before we went to bed and told us there was an evacuation warning for south Lismore, the volunteer was nice and chatty, we told him we had stayed in 2017 floods therefore we knew what we were in for and were prepared to stay and had prepared our home throughout the day. We were told that the alarm would sound for when the flood water breached the flood levee at approximately 6am. We set our alarms for 5:30am that way we could be up to watch and wait for the floodwaters.

During the evening we heard police sirens bleeping as they were driving around. Our phones were ringing, however we chose to ignore them as we needed sleep for the next day.

At around 3am my husband heard what he said sounded like the wheelie bins floating in water. We got out of bed and saw that the water was already at 2017 flood levels. We hadn't heard the alarm for when the levee was breached.

We answered our phone and were getting a call from my sister in law who told us that the flood level warning had changed and it was now going to be higher and we needed to move our stuff up high in the house.

We spent the next couple of hours moving stuff from downstairs up into the house and some of our important stuff higher in the house, onto the kitchen table and benches.

During those hours we were talking to family and friends that lived in north and south Lismore over the phone and Facebook chats making sure they were aware that the water was still coming up higher than 2017 levels. My sister in law rang advising that at some point the water will rise half a meter above our floor level flood heights and we would need to get on the SES evacuation list, however she had already rung the SES and was told they would not be able to start rescuing people until the sun came up. We approximate

that the flood water started coming through the floor boards at 6am. It was at this point that our pet cat started to freak out and my 24year old daughter stated "if we have to evacuate the cat is coming with us", and she knew she had to try and keep her calm, safe and dry. My daughter held onto our cat until we safe (approximately 6 hours).

I tried to ring the SES 3 times at 6:15 am, but the line was constantly engaged. We knew we had to let an emergency service know of our situation so I rang the police assistance line and was able to let someone know that we would need to be rescued as the water was still coming up in our house.

I had noticed on Facebook that a friend was asking for help for his elderly parents to be rescued. He was unable to get them any help from the SES, and water was already up to their waists in their 2nd storey, where the water was only coming through our floorboards. They were on Newbridge street in south Lismore.

We had seen on Facebook that private boats had started driving around rescuing people. My daughter was busy holding our cat, my husband was keeping our dog occupied on our bed and we noticed that there were boats starting to drive around the streets looking for people to rescue. So I went and stood outside our front door to try and wave down a boat.

The water was still rising and I was trying to keep as much of my body out of the water as possible, I found a tow ball near the door and stood on it. As each boat came past I would call out to get their attention but I would be told that they would come back later to get us as they were rescuing other people first.

I rang the police assistance line again at 9:31 am the water would have been around waist height. Our solid timber queen bed ensemble started to float. Everything we brought upstairs was now submerged. Items were falling into the floodwater off the table. The television fell into the water.

When speaking to the police assistance line we were told to get as high as possible, onto our roof if we could. We had no ladder as it was already flooded downstairs. We have 12 foot ceilings so we could not access our manhole and we could not get to the roof. We later found out that even if we had tried to exit through our back-door we would have not been able to, as there was debris blocking the door that was still wedged against the outside of the back-door after the floodwaters receded.

It was also still raining extremely heavily and we had our pets with us as well.

I had lost count of how many boats had gone past and said they would be back later. Every time a boat went past I would have to brace myself for the "wake" water after the boat. The wake would splash across me increasingly higher nearly splashing over my face. The water was still rising and I was having to hold onto a support beam outside the front door.

As the water was getting mid chest height and I was still standing on the tow ball, now on one leg on my tippy toes, my husband started getting cramps in both his calf muscles and was having trouble standing in the freezing cold flood waters as we had been in them for nearly 5 hours. He asked me to ring the police assistance line again. I did this at 11:22am. I told the police that the water was high up my chest, we were freezing cold, my husband's legs were about to collapse out from under him and he would drown. My husband had come outside the front door to also try and help me hold on as the water was high up on me. Whilst talking to police I told them how I was standing on the towball and was holding a support beam, at this point I saw 2 private rescue boats coming down the street, I told the police that I had to try to hold on really tight as with 2 boat wakes coming I would probably be knocked into the water. And my husband's legs were now constantly cramping and he was trying to stop me from falling in the water, especially with the two boats about to

go past. This also meant our daughter was standing just inside the front door, holding on to the cat about to watch both her parents drown. The police were telling me to hold on tight as much as I could, the first boat went past and the wake was washing close to my face and the 2nd boat pulled up and said they were stopping to pick us up as they could we were in dire trouble. We were rescued by 2 private citizens in a boat that was supposed to seat 4 people. The boat ended up with 5 people, a cat and a dog. They took us to the Norco bridge which was under flood waters, so we had to walk across the bridge with what we had taken from our home which was the clothing we were wearing and important papers and what we could fit in a small handbag and a plastic shopping bag. Once across the bridge we got into another boat to be taken to the evacuation Point at the other end of the street. There were boats going in all directions. Some were getting stuck on the bridge handrails. The people driving the boats were yelling out to each other where the people were to be rescued. No other forms of communication only word of mouth.

As we started down ballina road in the boat we were told to duck as we were coming up to power lines. This is when we actually looked around and saw that the flood waters were high enough that we were ducking the power lines, with the power turned off, and there was a shipping container wedged at the front of the city hall and we were level with the roofs of the businesses along ballina road.

It took an hour to get from our house to the evacuation point. Once there people were put onto a waiting bus and taken to an evacuation centre. I rang a work colleague instead and asked if we could stay with her.

We stayed at the colleagues home for about a month. During this time through talking to friends and family in the same situation and looking through Facebook we heard about the hubs set up for flood victims.

We couldn't get to our home for about a week until the waters receded. One of the first days we were going to look to see what our house was like we were told not to go there as a petrol tank had leaked fuel down a street and a lightning storm was heading towards south Lismore and everyone was being told to leave in case the petrol caught fire.

When I got out of the 2nd rescue boat I looked around and didn't know where to go or what to do....I saw 1 familiar face, I hugged this lady and cried and told her all my family was back in south Lismore. I still had a brother and 2 sisters and all my nieces and nephews stuck in south Lismore. Over the next few days every time I saw a familiar face I hugged them and cried. I am not someone who cries, ever.

We spent a couple of weeks cleaning everything out of our house, it was all covered in mud, it smelt horrible, there was still floodwater in everything. Cupboards were swollen and couldn't be opened. We were throwing everything we owned onto the street as it was unsalvagable.

As we had only the clothes on our backs we were having to go to the evacuation centre and try to find clothing, we couldn't even get new underwear.

Being insured we are unable to access grants. We can only apply for gift cards when we come across that information through word of mouth. We registered as flood victims at service nsw, but haven't had any correspondence of what to do, or where to get assistance from.

We have been talking to our insurance agency representatives at the university and they have been somewhat helpful.

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## **Terms of Reference (optional)**

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#)

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### **1.1 Causes and contributing**

At no point were we made aware from Bureau of meteorology or SES or any official agencies that

<b>factors</b>	the flood waters were going to be any higher than 2017 levels. By the time we realised the flood was going to be higher it was too late to go anywhere.
<b>1.2 Preparation and planning</b>	<p>We have lived in and raised our family in south Lismore for the last 27years.</p> <p>2017 was the first time we had seen flood waters on the ground at our home.</p> <p>We were told to expect 2017 level. And we prepared for 2017 level.</p>
<b>1.3 Response to floods</b>	<p>We are being forgotten. There is very limited donations at the hubs.</p> <p>When going shopping there is limited stock available, limited car spaces. If we go to another town to shop, people are abusive and rude. The roads are still damaged.</p> <p>I went to Canberra for family reasons and spoke to a shop assistant she said..."obviously Lismore has never flooded, Lismore wasn't prepared, homes need to be two stories, 3 stories high."</p> <p>Yes we have flooded, yes we were prepared, for the height we were told to prepare for. Yes there are two and three storey homes. You can't prepare for a 14 metre flood in lismore.</p>
<b>1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery</b>	There is no transition point. We have not recovered. We don't feel as though the floods have finished.
<b>1.5 Recovery from floods</b>	<p>We have not recovered. Our home is not livable. Even with insurance we don't know what is happening. We tried to rent, but there is limited available.</p> <p>We are sleeping in a caravan in our backyard. And living in our bbq area.</p> <p>This is not living. Being back at work ( took a month off) working 10hour days not even being able to sit on a couch to rest at night, before going back to work again the next day.</p> <p>Husband has already been to hospital twice due to illness and injury from the floods.</p>
<b>1.6 Any other</b>	We are in limbo. It is taking way to long for

**matters**

government and charities to let us know what our options are.

Land swap would take too long and is not for us.

We already have a 2 storey home, raising our home in pug soil is not an option it would go over council regulations and be structurally unsafe.

A BUYBACK, with prices before flood rates, is the only option for us. It would allow us to actually start living. We have spoken to other people in North and South Lismore who agree that a buyback should be offered, as some people have already started leaving Lismore with next to nothing.

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**Supporting documents or images**

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