

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 19 May 2022 10:55:25 PM

Your details

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Submission details

I am making this submission as	A resident in a flood-affected area
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	We live on the western bank of the Richmond river at Alleys Hill, directly opposite Rileys Hill. Our location is on the major constriction of the river between the two hills 3.5km upstream from Broadwater. Prior to the flood I started monitoring a number of rain gauges and river heights however my wife and I were in Sydney and we quickly realised that we were in for a
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Major flood and rang our neighbors to make arrangements to look after our livestock. As the events unfolded we decided to head home. Normally we have security cameras that we use to monitor the property, however prior to reaching flood peak, our property lost power and we were unable to monitor anything. As the water rose faster than we could drive home, we became isolated in Grafton and had to rely on neighbors' to provide updates on what was happening until we could finally return home. Our house was above the flood peak, however 80% of our property became inundated. We had a number of cattle and a horse swim into our property and seek refuge. Whilst we lost no stock we did loose most of the river riparian restoration project we have been undertaking with Lismore city council for the last 6 years. What we discovered when we returned was similar to everyone else on the river, an unbelievable amount of rubbish that was washed in, especially cane cuttings which in some areas are 400mm deep. Whilst our riparian project can be restarted and rebuilt and our riverside fences can be repaired, our road side fences which were flooded, survived intact with minimal damage. Whilst it took considerable time to restore grid power to our region, we isolated our house from the grid and ran on our solar and battery power. Given the considerable number of power outages we have in this region, we elected to install solar and battery 12 years ago.

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

During the event there was considerable runoff from the Alstonville plateau, in excess of all previous records which created an additional 1m flood surge into the lower river. As the 21 catchment basins upstream from our location were already overflowing, combined with the Alstonville runoff, the river was effectively

blocked at the two major constrictions at the Alleys/Rileys Hill neck and the Baggotville Barrage whilst it continued to be backfilled from the upper catchments. This can easily be seen from the aerial photos. The rainfall the entire east coast region received over an extended period, was an unprecedented incalculable event and was in all probability created by confused east coast atmospheric sediment conditions compounded by the recent Tonga volcanic activity.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Despite numerous requests there is still minimal flood planning and preparation for the lower Richmond River farming Community covering the Coraki / Woodburn / Broadwater triangle then down to Patches Beach. There are no rain or river monitoring stations in this region and the SES/RFS region responsibilities are confusing and outdated. For example, the entire Kilgin region comes under Lismore SES responsibility which is over 30minutes travel and during a flood, the two regions are separated by flood waters and the community are uncertain of what will happen in a flood. For example, the flood levels for Woodburn are clear and well published but where are the levels for Kilgin, Dungarubba, Broadwater, Baggotville etc. The levels give the warnings and alerts for the affected residents. Farming communities need to be considered especially for the stocks of chemicals and fertilizers that may be held in flood affected areas. A Farm flood plan can be complicated however activation of any plan relies on timely communication which in our region, does not exist. During the event, requests were made to SES management to produce information for the Lower River, nothing happened. This is not the first time we have requested to be included in the flood information. We have been asking to be included since 2008 .

1.3 Response to floods

Communication of what was happening for our region did not happen during the entire flood and again during the second flood 4 weeks later. We

had to try and guess what it meant for us from the information given about Woodburn. We are not in Woodburn and the flood waters change significantly as they get closer to the pinch between Alleys and Rileys Hills and the spill into the Baggotville Barrage behind Alleys Hill which became an island.

Numerous warning and advices were provided for communities from Lismore down to Woodburn but NOTHING was issued for the lower river communities except possibly Cabbage Tree Island. We did not receive an evacuation warning; a considerable number of our neighbors' did not receive an evacuation warning. This is a major failing. Nearly everyone on Broadwater road went to bed thinking they were OK given the last advice received. They woke in the early hours to find they were isolated and required rescuing. There needs to be a complete review of who is responsible for what regions across the lower Richmond River in consideration of who can respond to what in lower river flood conditions. Broadwater, Coraki and Woodburn SES were overwhelmed and in Broadwater Unit's case became inoperative due to the HQ being underwater with one boat still inside as the members were unable to retrieve the boat. During the initial stages of the response, there was no SES presence in the western side of the river (Kilgin, Baggotville, Dungarubba). Even later, when SES OOA members arrived in Lismore, none were allocated to the lower river. One resident on Broadwater Road, rescued 41 residents in a 4m "tinny" and recovered them to his property, then housed and fed them for the next 4 days. Helo food drops were constantly dropped in the wrong location in the Dungarubba region. The DPI response to the displaced stock issues was excellent and they worked hard beyond the 9-5 mentality of others to achieve results. In our region the stock were well catered for and the food drops whilst in the wrong place, were plentiful. I personally believe the ADF should

have been employed in the very early stages of the flood; I cannot fathom why they were not given the expertise and resources they bring to the event. I believe the initial EM response management could have been better, especially considering in this region, the expertise and experience that is available, but for whatever reason was not employed. It would appear that in the last 18 months there has been a drop in the level of executive management performance in the northern rivers. There should be a very clear independent review into the actions and relationships of the Northern Rivers SES executive management and emergency management in general with a view to understanding their actions, their plans and what they are doing to ensure they have the capacity and resources to effectively undertake their role in our region. For example, Why are we still asking when for a number of years now, we have been trying to get rain and river monitors for the lower river which are essential to provide advice to the communities. Additionally, a wider spectrum of rain gauges for the upper catchment areas should be considered as it not uncommon to have 200mm in one area which is not captured by a gauge and it is only first appreciated when a river gauge starts to rise abnormally. Numerous requests have been made to Northern Rivers SES management to progress more gauges (refer PM's Flood visit to NRCU Jan 2021)

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

In our region there have been a considerable number of people coming to help with recovery. This is all well and good but there have been so many groups that they are running over one another and not sure of who is doing what. There was a centre established at Broadwater Hall to co-ordinate and another at Woodburn. Initially, everybody was all over the place and it was not clear who was in charge, even after a week, things were still being organised locally. The township communities knew what was going on but the farming communities were still on the

other side of the river and very few in our region knew what was going on. As we were unaffected and still had a working car, we drove from property to property letting our neighbours know about the recovery centers established.

Transition in farming communities is not the same as a city or town; accordingly these unique circumstances need to be considered, especially given the lack of public transport and poor communications.

1.5 Recovery from floods

the main issue I still see is the recovery of drinking water and sewerage systems for our farming communities. Getting fresh water in a town is not the same as a farm. Most of the properties lost their water tanks as they floated away, even concrete tanks. Steel tanks collapsed. I, as my neighbors, have tried to find out who can help get fresh water back into our farms. Most of our neighbors lost everything even those who raised their houses above the 1974 levels so helping to get something as simple as fresh water is a significant step towards recovery, especially to start the clean up. Those with bores were able to redirect some water to clean, but whilst suitable for stock and crops, most bore water in our region is undrinkable.

1.6 Any other matters

Rearrange the northern rivers SES to ensure effective combat capability in times of major flood or at least plan how to adjust combat capability to meet operational restrictions created by our local conditions and resources with a focus on the entire region including the farming communities.

I am available to further discuss the issues raised in this submission.

Additionally, I am available to provide further detailed information, pictures, analysis, plans and flood modeling of the Wilson/Richmond catchments including the lower river systems.

Supporting documents or images
