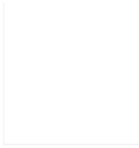


**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Friday, 20 May 2022 3:07:03 PM



## Your details

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<b>Title</b>	Miss
<b>First name</b>	sigrid
<b>Last name</b>	macdonald
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Postcode</b>	2480

## Submission details

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<b>I am making this submission as</b>	A member of the general public
<b>Submission type</b>	I am making a personal submission
<b>Consent to make submission public</b>	I give my consent for this submission to be made public

## Share your experience or tell your story

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<b>Your story</b>	I am a Deaf business owner in Lismore. I am a passionate and involved member of the Deaf community and my work is in the field of accessibility. In the days preceding the flood of Feb 28 2022, I was in hospital for a surgery. I was closely watching social media, and the warnings coming from NSW SES, and Lismore City Council. Given that my business premises
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were in the CBD, and that I knew there were Deaf residents in the flood impacted areas I was concerned at the lack of Auslan interpreted emergency information, an issue that was raised during the 2017 flood response.

I contacted my Deaf friend, trying to make sure he had the right information as I knew it would be completely inaccessible to them. As I hadn't heard back, I sent messages to Resilient Lismore, the SES and local councillors requesting that they make a welfare check and ensure that this particular resident was aware. SES and a local councillor made a welfare check however they did not arrange interpreting - it was through pure chance that another Deaf resident/community worker had also checked in at the same time that they were able to facilitate communication as best they could.

I then contacted a number of organisations in the Deaf sector to ask if there was a plan to ensure interpreting for these announcements was going to happen. There was no plan.

No plan. No State, Federal or Local emergency organization had connected with interpreting agencies to make arrangements.

At this point I was extremely worried for our Deaf community. I reached out widely to my personal networks and through messenger three interpreters from various agencies said they were available to interpret emergency updates after they were released to the public. They asked if I would send them the information as it came through. A local interpreter was able to negotiate with council to upload the videos to their posts as they became available - however this was not always done in a timely manner.

This was a dangerous and cumbersome process as it was not a response to any formal procedure or policy, but rather an attempt my myself and

the interpreters to fill a gaping hole in the information available to the public. I had grave fears for my community's safety, and spent several sleepless nights monitoring emergency updates, sending to interpreters and sharing with contacts on social media.

The night of the first flood (Feb 28th) was one of the most terrifying nights of my life - I truly thought I was watching my people's final moments play out of social media. My heart was pounding and I could barely breathe, not knowing if my friends and family were alive, and being powerless to help them. As it turns out there were multiple Deaf people and their families across the region who were impacted by this event.

However, as I have the good fortune of my home being out of the flood zone, despite my business being completely inundated I was initially able to monitor emergency updates. Unfortunately our internet and mobile access was sporadic so there were long periods over the days following the flood that was out of contact - which was anxiety inducing as I was not able to send through the interpreting requests as quickly as possible - what if something critical was missed?

While I was supported in my callout for interpreting of local emergency updates by representatives from ASLIA, Deaf Connect and Sweeney Interpreting - I am appalled and frightened at the lack of response and initiative from our public organisations tasked with producing the emergency updates for public safety. That equal access to critical information as prescribed by the Disability Discrimination Act had to be initiated and driven by a community member, untrained in emergency response is nothing short of negligence.

Sadly- this roundabout process had to be reproduced in the second flood, a mere month

later.

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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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### **Supporting documents or images**

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