



**Southern Cross
University**

Submission to the New South Wales Independent Flood Inquiry

20 May 2022

Southern Cross University

Contact:

**Professor Tyrone Carlin
Vice-Chancellor and President**

Email:

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**Professor Mary O’Kane AC
Mr Michael Fuller APM
Co-Chairs, New South Wales Independent Flood Inquiry**

Submission via email: inquiry@floodinquiry.nsw.gov.au

20 May 2022

Dear Co-Chairs,

RE: SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY SUBMISSION

Southern Cross University is pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission to the New South Wales Independent Flood Inquiry. This Inquiry’s comprehensive Terms of Reference and tight reporting timeframe are critical to developing a considered and co-ordinated approach to the recovery of the Northern Rivers region and planning for future emergencies. We are keen to support a whole of government approach and work with government to ensure the renewal of the region, its vibrancy and future sustainability.

We make this submission as an organisation with the “lived experience” of the magnitude of personal hardship and grief caused by the devastating floods in February and March this year, 2022. Our Lismore campus is the designated Evacuation Centre for all natural-disasters in the greater Lismore area. Its location, significant infrastructure and size make it the only “at scale” location near the Lismore CBD for mounting emergency response and recovery operations in the face of floods, or significant fire events.

On the night of 28 February this year, it became abundantly clear that the Lismore campus of the University was the only intact, functioning flood-free land in close proximity to Lismore City’s central business district and areas of greatest inundation and impact. Staff members responded immediately to open up the University as the Evacuation Centre, they were on the ground providing support for a range of organisations responding to the unfolding events, and continue to provide support to our local community in a number of critical ways as described below.

Terms of Reference

This submission will outline the University’s involvement in the immediate response to the flood crises, and will focus on its critical role in standing up the Evacuation Centre.

It will also canvas considerations for supporting a more seamless response in the future. Specifically, this will focus on the lessons learnt about our preparedness as a University campus for supporting emergency management. We will also re-ignite a conversation started and explored in our submission to the New South Wales Independent Bushfire Review in April 2020, see Appendix B.

Further, the submission will signal the University’s understanding of its unique location in Lismore, above the flood inundation zone and close to the CBD, with land not yet developed.

A separate submission on our research expertise and research co-ordination roles in response to the crises will be submitted by my Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Mary Spongberg. We are fortunate to have relevant academic expertise, principally in the team led by Professor Damien Maher. His team are currently engaging directly with the CSIRO team working on the project announced in the 2022 Federal Budget to identify options and opportunities for mitigating risk and building resilience in the Northern Rivers Region.

About Southern Cross University

The University is headquartered in Lismore, New South Wales, with campuses in Lismore, Coffs Harbour and the Gold Coast. It commenced operations on 1 January 1994 with the passing of the *Southern Cross University Act 1993* (NSW). The University currently has 18,817 students and 812 staff. The Lismore campus is the research and administrative hub for the University's multi-campus operations, with the largest cohort of staff living and working in the Lismore region. In 2018, the NOUS Group calculated the University's contribution to Regional Gross Domestic Product to be \$127 million for its Lismore operations alone.

Response to immediate crisis

At least five times since 2017, at the request of the State Emergency Service or the Regional Emergency Operations Committee, the University has been called upon to stand up an Evacuation Centre as part of an emergency response. However, none of the previous events have matched the size and scale of the 2022 flood emergency response, nor the sheer scale of loss and devastation. The unprecedented scale of the disaster in 2022 led to the University mounting a response at a scale that it had never before confronted nor contemplated.

As an aside, to paint the full context of this year, the University started 2022 with great hope that the previous two years of COVID-19 disruptions were behind us. We looked forward to our students being back on campus, and our core functions of teaching and research resuming with renewed enthusiasm. This hope was dashed with the flooding in February and March.

The University closed its Lismore campus to normal University operations and devoted all functioning campus infrastructure and substantial human resources to supporting the evacuation effort and planning for subsequent recovery operations. At the peak of the emergency response phase, 1200 displaced people sheltered at the University (along with their pets - dogs, cats, rabbits and even snakes).

We worked closely with other organisations, notably the Red Cross, Salvation Army and NSW Government agencies to provide bedding, clothes, food, water and essential medical care. The University also supported Australian Defence Force (ADF) operations, with over 700 ADF members based at our campus as they went about their important work.

The University's sporting oval was used as a landing zone for a large number of rotary wing movements, namely for the ADF, SES and Police, with the primary focus on transferring rescued residents to the safety of the Evacuation Centre and in some cases, where the aircraft could not land at the Lismore Base Hospital, on to acute medical care.

A summary of activities undertaken by the University and its staff are set out below, many of which have been mentioned above. Setting out the response in list form gives some idea of the scale of the response. However, the list does not provide a true picture of the enormous effort and selflessness that was necessary for each to be realised in the urgent, challenging environment of crisis support.

If pictures can paint a thousand words, perhaps the few photos taken of staff in Appendix A help crystallise the enormous and extraordinary effort. Personally, the wet and muddy photo of my own Director of the Office of Vice Chancellor, Nicholas Hyde is a true reminder of the hands-on approach undertaken by so many in those few days at the end of February 2022 and again in late March.

In summary, the University led, supported, facilitated activities, including the following:

- The Evacuation Centre, set up on campus, initially with the support of a number of staff members. At its peak, it housed 1200 residents, operating for 6 weeks and incorporated all frontline agencies, including meal provision by the Salvation Army. Our support covered essential services for its operations: security, cleaning, laundry, donations, food, waste, COVID management, childcare, bedding, internet and electricity from generators hired by the University;



- Accommodation and launchpad for ADF operations, with over 700 ADF members and significant transport and engineering equipment brought onto our campuses to support the emergency response efforts in the region;
- After week 2, location of the Emergency Operations Centre, that transitioned into the Regional Recovery Operations Centre;
- Location of the Richmond Police Command and a mobile policing unit to support additional requirements for safety and security on campus;
- Supported Resilience NSW and Resilience Lismore to establish the Recovery Centre for all public facing recovery support services, including technology support;
- In partnership with Business NSW, established a Business Recovery Hub as a one-stop destination for all business-related support, including provision of meeting rooms, co-working space, financial counselling and dedicated business support experts;
- Established a Community Banking Hub with the five mutuals in the Region to ensure access to cash and transaction services;
- Established multi-year arrangements for three Lismore secondary schools to enable minimal disruption to school for approximately 2,000 students;
- Integrated TAFENSW Lismore Campus operations into the University's timetabling to enable TAFENSW to return to operation immediately;
- Established a dedicated health precinct ('Head to Health') to provide critical medical services, pharmacy and pathology services in partnership with Healthy North Coast;
- Management of the donations of goods for Lismore, and the subsequent establishment of a food and clothing distribution network into flood impacted towns until Lismore City Council was able to stand up facilities;
- Ongoing hosting and event support for numerous government agencies and key members of Parliament and staff, including the hosting of the NSW Flood Inquiry hearings and public forum; and
- Provision of five research boats to support public rescues on Monday 28 February.

As the Vice-Chancellor, I am enormously proud of the University staff who selflessly provided whatever support was required for the initial emergency response. As a University, we were wholly committed and focussed on prioritising the emergency and local community members in need, which included our own staff and students who were directly impacted (60 staff and 120 students).

There has been little time to adequately reflect on all that has happened and changed on the Lismore campus over the past few months. The immediate response quickly moved to the recovery phase and the co-location of schools, TAFENSW, essential services, hosting of numerous government agencies and local members of Parliament, including the AEC and Centrelink and on 2 May, the Lismore campus welcomed the return of our own students to a very different campus environment.

Every available space is being utilised to ensure a "home" and the provision of essential services for our own students and staff, our co-residents, and the local community.

A short video encapsulating the efforts of our staff and students can be accessed via this link <https://youtu.be/4JoopZEhDNU>

Planning for future emergency responses and management

In considering how to strengthen the emergency response and recovery in the region, there are three overarching themes that emerge from our experience:

1. strengthening the resilience of the campus to provide support in emergencies;

2. clarity of roles and responsibilities in a multiagency context; and
3. recognition of the University's role as a key part of the region's recovery.

Strengthening the resilience of the campus to provide support in emergencies

The University has a deep sense of purpose to serve our local communities. As a regional university we are integrated into the life of the communities in which we are located - Lismore, Coffs Harbour and the Gold Coast - in many ways both tangible and intangible. Our students and staff are members of these communities and are active and involved in many different aspects of regional life, as are our many partners in research, industry, government, health and education.

We were a part of this emergency response, as we have been for past emergencies - and we will be a part of future responses. We will support the lead agencies in each and every event as they arise, as we did from the night of 28 February when our staff opened the University to set up and commence the operations of the Evacuation Centre. From an operational perspective, the University and our staff were critical to a quick and effective response to a complex, if not chaotic and evolving situation.

Notwithstanding that our commitment is unwavering, the question is how do we, as a university, best support and improve our responsiveness in supporting key agencies and community organisations with their work in response to future natural disaster events in the region. This may seem theoretical in nature, but in fact goes to the heart of improving the seamlessness and effectiveness of the immediate response by all to future emergencies, given the critical role we foresee for our campus lands, built infrastructure and human capital.

The *Southern Cross University Act 1993* (NSW) establishing the University, sets out the University's objective to promote "*scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence*". The Act sets out the core functions, including the "*provision of facilities for education and research of university standard, having particular regard to the needs of the north coast region of the State.*" In essence, the legislative framework sets out the University's objective, core functions and primary responsibilities for education and research, and our campuses have been designed with this purpose in mind.

Emergency response is not formally designed into the mission nor the resourcing framework of universities. However, there is a clear role, and need for Southern Cross University - and if I may add other regional universities - to form part of the planned emergency response and be recognised for and supported in this role. We have the scale of infrastructure that is necessary for large groups of people to gather, be housed and fed and have their other immediate needs met. And in Lismore, vitally, our location is above the foreseeable flood inundation zone.

Thus arises a paradox. It is clear that on the one hand, the University is critical for emergency responses of this scale, but on the other hand, we do not by habit or mission live and breathe these issues, nor planning for the next crisis (beyond our core business continuity planning), since emergency response is not part of our core objectives or resourcing.

Although we are not defined solely by our legislative objectives and funding for education and research, needless to point out, when a university campus is switched to an emergency response facility, there will be gaps. The University campus was not designed nor built with a crisis response at the front of mind.

Identifying these gaps now is critical to support our responsiveness and that of all other organisations involved in response work in the future.

In making this submission, it is important to note that we are clear that our role is to support Government agencies and community organisations in their leadership of future emergency responses. We seek to improve our critical infrastructure to support a more seamless, timely and effective response capacity in the future.

We have learnt lessons about our own preparedness that affects your responsiveness. For example, the lack of power in the early part of the flood crisis was a critical risk to opening and effective functioning of the Evacuation Centre and at the height of the crisis our staff scrambled to find generators so that very basic needs

could be met. The community effort to support each other during this time was quite extraordinary and uplifting, but we do not want to rely on goodwill as a future management plan.

To future proof the capacity of the University to support the Evacuation Centre and emergency operations, the University has undertaken its own review and identified the following needs:

- Energy: on campus emergency generation, fuel bunkering, backup electricity storage and solar generation – no power was available initially during the flood event.
- Transport: dedicated helipad for military and civil rescue aircraft, apron, loading bay – the football ground was used as the primary landing area, but the muddy field posed additional difficulties.
- Communications: satellite communications link to provide redundancy, radio transmission and receiving network – communication became nearly impossible during the emergency.
- Water: storage, pump, filtration and mobile distribution capacity – clean water supplies were compromised in the floods.
- Equipment: bedding, secure storage, public address system, mobile charging, privacy screens – basics for an Evacuation Centre.

Our review recommends that the strengthening the above infrastructure will address the immediate known capacity gaps and effectively act as an insurance mechanism for inevitable future events.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities in a multiagency context

As emphasised above, the University was able to mobilise quickly in the recent flood events due to its location and staff living locally who could access the site. In planning for a future event, we can be relied upon to step up, again and again. However, for us to direct our resources more effectively, we would value a government agency counterparty with the capacity and authority for decision making and for interfacing with the whole of government as a presence from the beginning of any future event.

As stated above, we will support the Government agencies leading the emergency response. Our efforts will be magnified with clarity of communication channels, decision and coordination channels.

In our submission to the New South Wales Independent Bush Fire Inquiry, see Appendix B, we outline our involvement and engagement in discussions on the recommendation of the *2017 Independent Review of the NSW SES Operational Response to the Northern Rivers Floods* for the co-location of Incident Control Teams and Emergency Operation Centres. At the time, and as proved again in 2022, emergency response agencies were challenged to find suitable facilities that had the capacity to accommodate a multi-agency approach for the immediate response phase through to the recovery phase. As outlined in that earlier submission, the University has worked in close collaboration with the SES, NSW Police and the Local Emergency Management Committee to facilitate the design of an initial concept plan for a flagship regional emergency management facility for all agencies, for all emergency events on our Lismore campus. We believe the floods of 2022 have demonstrated the continued need for this facility.

Recognition of the University's role as a key part of the region's recovery

As we move beyond the initial disaster response phase, we are beginning to contemplate some of the core strategic issues and opportunities that lie ahead, and how we may work closely with the NSW Government to build a sustainable future for this region. Looking forward, the University is keen to support the development of an approach to renewal that could provide a genuine boost and real impetus for more innovative models of planning, infrastructure investment, commercial and research and education integration. Given the scale of damage to local infrastructure, we believe there is a clear need to plan carefully, both to avoid duplication in the capital investment rebuilding phase, and to ensure the lessons learnt from the latest flooding events are taken into consideration.



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The University is canvassing how we can best support the broader community in these current conversations. We are open to conversations about harnessing our estate, which has the benefits of being on higher ground, close to the Lismore central business district, with undeveloped land in a busy education and research precinct with food, health, communications and transport infrastructure.

We see real opportunities to work towards the facilitation of a vision for the future of Lismore and the long-term renewal of the region, returning its vibrancy and sustainability. We seek to be part of the solution. For the University, our vision brings us even closer to the community. Through considered planning of land for purpose-built infrastructure, the vision for Lismore could include the development of a unique precinct integrating key enterprises, businesses, government agencies, schools, TAFENSW and the University.

The Lismore campus could become a unique, world class regional education hub, servicing secondary and post-secondary education and training, along with services for the local community. There is much evidence recognising the economic impact a university has on its immediate region – increasing job opportunities, innovation, education attainment, attraction for living in a region, and a key driver to developing a local knowledge economy (higher skilled jobs with higher skilled employees). The University should be seen as a key economic driver for the future of the region, with a campus that could easily and effectively turn to supporting an emergency response and emergency management operations when required.

We appreciate the opportunity to work closely with the Inquiry and the NSW Government and its agencies to support the community to build its resilience, a stronger and sustainable future, and preparedness for any future emergencies.

I would be pleased to provide further information to the Inquiry as requested.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tyrone Carlin".

Professor Tyrone Carlin
Vice Chancellor and President
Southern Cross University



Southern Cross University

Appendix A – Southern Cross University emergency response contributions





**Southern Cross
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All hazards, all agencies.



A submission to the NSW Independent Bushfire Review
from Southern Cross University.

17 April 2020



Office of the Vice President (Engagement)

**Professor Mary O’Kane & Mr David Owen
Co-Chairs, NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry**

Submitted via email: inquiries@bushfireinquiry.nsw.gov.au

Dear Professor O’Kane and Mr Owen,

RE: WHOLE OF REGION APPROACH TO ALL HAZARDS BY ALL AGENCIES

This submission draws on lived experience and subsequent multiagency collaboration within the Northern Rivers of New South Wales to address known challenges in the response to, and recovery from, significant natural disasters. The submission represents the views of Southern Cross University and proposes a whole-of-region model for enhanced multi-agency response.

Natural disaster events have impacted the Northern Rivers community regularly since 2017 with the ex-cyclone Debbie flood event. In 2018, the Region experienced a series of winter bushfire events. In 2019, the Region again experienced major sustained winter and spring bushfires that had significant impacts in Rappville, Myall Creek, Long Gully and Border Trail fires. In 2019 alone, the Region’s Emergency Operations Centre was activated for a total of 32 days. In January 2020, the Region experienced a moderate flood event associated with ex-cyclones Esther and Ursi at a time where there were still active fire fronts.

Southern Cross University is a relatively young university headquartered in Lismore, NSW. Created by an act of the NSW parliament, the *Southern Cross University Act 1993* defines one of the principal functions of the University as “provide cultural, sporting, professional, technical and vocational services to the community”¹. Our vision is to be ‘Australia’s Engaged University’, where the University strengthens its role in the delivery of activities and assets that contribute to the growth and vibrancy of the regions in which our campuses are located. We believe this obligation extends traditional notions of ‘core business’ in research and teaching, to incorporate a strategic connection with issues of significance for the residents of our campus regions. In the Northern Rivers, infrastructure related assets are a key area of need.

Prior to the 2017 flood event, Southern Cross University had a nascent involvement in the emergency response infrastructure in the Northern Rivers. As is common for regional university campuses, the University acted as the primary emergency evacuation centre. At that stage, the University’s role could be characterised as non-strategic and passively responsive.

¹ NSW Government (1993), *Southern Cross University Act 1993 No 69*, accessed 26 March 2020: <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/1993/69/full>



Office of the Vice President (Engagement)

As a result of ex-cyclone Debbie in 2017 and the subsequent devastating impacts in the Region, the University resolved to take an active strategic interest in order to define a role that we could play in bolstering emergency response capability in the Northern Rivers. During that incident, the University housed over 115 flood affected businesses and auspiced the 'Healing Hands' volunteer program that mobilised thousands of people to support the recovery effort.

In Mr Owen's review of the State Emergency Service response to the 2017 ex-cyclone Debbie floods, a recommendation was made relating to the creation of multi-agency incident management teams or the co-location of Incident Control Teams and Emergency Operation Centres². The dislocation between the response and recovery effort in the 2017 flood event was a significant learning for the agencies involved, and importantly, for the Region as whole. The risks associated with single agency and single event-focused emergency response capability become evident. Further, the challenges for emergency response agencies became clear in terms of suitable facilities that had capacity to accommodate a multi-agency approach and ensure operation throughout the incident response through to recovery.

In late 2017, the University commenced discussions with the NSW SES through the newly appointed Regional Controller. As these discussions progressed through a myriad of emergency incidents, including the lockdown and associated siege on the University's Lismore Campus in 2019, it became clear that there was a significant potential role for the University to support a new more holistic approach to a unified emergency response in the Region. These discussions have since encompassed all regional emergency agencies, the Northern Rivers Local Emergency Management Committee and the Regional Emergency Operations Controller.

The challenges to developing a stronger emergency response function in the Region include:

- **Scale:** the Region has a dispersed population of greater than 300,000 spanning a series of interconnected villages and townships governed at the local level by seven local government authorities.
- **Volunteerism:** the national trend towards declining volunteerism since 2010 combined with a shift in perception of a loss of local agency and control has impacted volunteering rates for front line services in the Region.
- **Fragmentation:** the limited amounts of integration across the operations of emergency response agencies manifests in the absence of an integrated Incident Control Centre and Emergency Operations Centre across the transition from active response to long-term recovery.
- **Exposure:** the Northern Rivers is one of the most significant at-risk communities in NSW with some of the highest levels of emergency declarations for fire, flood and storms since 1996.

² Owens, D. (2017), *Independent Review NSW SES Operational Response Northern Rivers Floods*, Risk-E Business Consultants: Gympie. Accessed 26 March 2020: <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/media/2344/nsw-ses-operational-response-to-northern-floods-march-2017-final-180717-002.pdf>



Office of the Vice President (Engagement)

- **Infrastructure:** the existing facilities in the Region lack sufficient size to accommodate contemporary multiagency approaches combined with locations that place the function of the facility at risk during a natural disaster.
- **Capacity:** the Region has no dedicated full-time local government officers responsible for emergency management, combined with relatively low levels of qualified emergency management professionals experienced working in multiagency teams across all hazards.
- **Training:** the emergency management workforce has significant training needs to equip first responders to transition to a greater multiagency and collaborative approach to emergency management across all hazards.

In response to the above, during 2018 the SES sought alternate locations for an appropriate specific level 3 Incident Control Centre as identified in the reviews following the 2017 flood event. SES independently identified the Lismore Campus of Southern Cross University as the preferred location. Furthermore, the experience of the 2019 sustained winter bushfires reinforced the view of the Northern Rivers Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) that the existing EOC at the Casino RFS Fire Control Centre and alternate EOC at the Lismore Police Station were assessed as less than ideal in terms of suitability, considering the type of hazards managed, the frequency of large scale emergencies and the consequences of these events on the community within the Region.

In 2019, the SES in conjunction with the LEMC piloted the establishment of an integrated Incident Control Centre at the Southern Cross University Lismore Campus. The ICC managed specific emergency events related to ex-cyclones Esther and Ursi along the breadth of the Region. The single location enabled the multiagency team to scale appropriately in order to accommodate response and recovery operations simultaneously. The pilot has built confidence across the Northern Rivers LEMC that a stronger partnership with the University will enable access to facilities that are often unused during such events. The University has made an undertaking to the LEMC that it is ready and willing to host a multiagency emergency management function at any time it is required. The interim arrangements generated minimal disruption to the University's business as it took place during student holidays, however while it provided immediate operational enhancement, it does not represent a long-term solution to the Region's emergency management challenges.

Whilst interim arrangements were made to respond immediately to the identified challenges emerging from the 2019 winter fire event, the University commenced a collaborative process with the SES in consultation with the LEMC to define best practice requirements for multiagency emergency management facilities. The key principles guiding the process included the need for an effective regional EOC to be always a multiagency facility and that they should be co-located with the combat agency³. These considerations were placed in the context of the overarching principles

³ NSW Government (2013), *Emergency Operations Centres: Policy Document*. Office of Emergency Management. Accessed 26 March 2020:



Office of the Vice President (Engagement)

for emergency management in NSW as defined in the *State Emergency Management Plan: Prevention, Preparation, Response and Recovery*⁴. Subsequently, a detailed design and specification process has been undertaken by the University to articulate an initial concept plan for a flagship regional emergency management facility to be located at its Lismore Campus for all agencies and all hazards.

In addition, the *National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework*⁵ seeks to guide and galvanise response from across all sectors, agencies and stakeholder to reduce Australia's disaster risk. Its seven underpinning principles has been instructive in further guiding the development of a regional-scale model for effective response, recovery and resilience. The principles include:

1. Shared and defined responsibilities to reduce disaster risk is required across all sectors;
2. Across sectors, we need to cultivate a culture of disaster risk reduction, awareness and action;
3. Efforts to reduce disaster risk must be integrated across sectors not in silos;
4. Engage inclusively across all sectors and diverse stakeholders to ensure inclusive decision making and action.
5. Continually improve through learning and innovation to improve practices and share lessons
6. Data and information must inform all facets of decision making and response
7. Commitment and leadership are required across sectors and at all levels to reduce disaster risk.

At the core of the national framework is an emphasis on all sectors and all stakeholders working in a coordinated and comprehensive way to reduce disaster risk and support greater resilience to "...ensure Australian communities can thrive and prosper following these events"⁶.

In close collaboration with the State Emergency Service, NSW Police and the Local Emergency Management Committee, the University has led the design of a new regional facility that would:

- Promote an integrated 'all hazards, all agencies' approach
- Deliver fit for purpose regional infrastructure able to meet the disaster profile of Northern NSW
- Act as a strategic focal point in Northern NSW focused on building preparedness, effective incident response and management, and long-term recovery
- Further leverage the strong partnership between the University, emergency agencies and stakeholders in the region, state and nation

<https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Documents/publications/policies/Emergency-Operations-Centre-Policy.pdf>

⁴ NSW Government (2018), *NSW State Emergency Management Plan*. Office of Emergency Management. Accessed 26 March 2020: <https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Documents/publications/20181207-NSW-state-emergency-management-plan.pdf>

⁵ Australian Government (2018), *National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework*, Department of Home Affairs: Belconnen, page 8.

⁶ Ibid. Page 3.



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- Provide a state-of-the-art regional scale long-term facility to enable facility consolidation, service delivery and enhanced operational effectiveness
- Demonstrate that lessons have been learned from specific events and related enquiries that have severely impacted the Region
- Enable close cooperation and seamless transition between the functions within the Incident Control Centre, Emergency Operations Centre and the longer-term agency-led recovery processes in a unified emergency management facility
- Embed a public information and community education function to improve community preparedness through ongoing education and information activities
- Develop specific research and education projects that support the functioning of the facility whilst addressing workforce skill and professional development needs associated with moving towards a more comprehensive approach
- Harness the university's existing assets, services and partnerships to minimise construction costs and enable rapid development
- Actively promote and support volunteerism across all agencies to staff, students, alumni and regional stakeholders.

The Northern Region Commander/REOCAN and Assistant Commissioner Mr Max Mitchell APM has been provided with a briefing and detailed 'shovel ready' concept plans and has expressed his strong support. The University was encouraged to champion the project as part of a broader shift in NSW towards a leading practice focus on response, recovery and resilience.

In conclusion, this submission describes a long process of partnership underpinned by lived experience that has resulted in the collaborative development of a new style of regional emergency management and resilience facility located in Lismore. As a result of the recent bushfire events, followed immediately by flood events, it has become clear to all stakeholders that a regional scale solution was required, and this would involve championing a new approach in regional NSW to building disaster resilience.

The University is deeply appreciative of your time in considering this submission and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the nature of the proposed solution for the at-risk communities of Northern NSW.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Roche
Vice President (Engagement)

Phone:
Email: