

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 7 April 2022 12:00:30 PM

Your details

Title Mr

First name Stephen

Last name Bocking

Email

Submission details

I am making this submission as A member of the general public

Submission type I am making a personal submission

Your position in the organisation (if applicable) Byron Studios Operations Manager (Evacuation center 3/3/22 to 12/3/22)

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 am employed as the operations manager for Byron Studios which is based in Alstonville NSW. We operate out of a building that was once a public hall, but for the last 16 months has been operating as a film studio. My submission will address the period of time

(3/3/22 to 17/3/22) that the was used as an emergency evacuation centre and I fulfilled the role of operation manager.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

1.2 Preparation and planning

There was zero preparation or planning prior to the use of the facility as an evacuation centre.

Background: Alstonville showground is located up on the plateau between Ballina and Lismore. The Alstonville Leisure Centre / Byron Studios facility was used as an emergency evacuation center from 3/3/22 to 17/3/22.

When the flood event started in late February 2022 I had a suspicion that our facility may be called into service, but leading up to the 3rd of March we received no official request.

On the morning of Thursday the 3rd of March an elderly lady from the Red Cross came running up to me telling me to open the doors of the building as there was 100 people coming. That was all the warning that we had. By the time I had opened the doors a few workers from Ballina Shire Council had arrived and we started setting out tables and chairs.

Following shortly after this a local church group arrived with mattresses and bedding and a core group of local business people started arriving to see how they might be of assistance. Following this initial flurry of activity the first of our evacuees started arriving along with a singular representative from the DCJ. At this point I was contacted by the GM of Ballina Shire Council and I handed direct management duties over to the DCJ and I fell back into an overall supervisory role.

Over the next 48 hours the community organised

itself into a management group that was able to assist our evacuees but this was performed largely without government assistance and guidance. To highlight these shortcomings below.

1.3 Response to floods

The facility: At no stage did anyone ensure that the facility was fit for purpose. It was pure luck that I was able to get the showers functioning and that we had any of the toilets stocked for use. If we had been in mid production at the time, there would also have been quite possibly zero floor space available. It was just plain dumb luck that we found ourselves in a position to be able to help anybody.

Security: Our only security presence for the first week was from a local policeman on his free time which he donated. Apart from that the community tried its best to provide a secure space.

Catering: We had zero government assistance in feeding our evacuees. If a local take away store hadn't voluntarily closed his doors in order to operate as a commercial kitchen along with several local restaurants we would have had zero ability to feed our guests on anything but donated cake.

Guidance: Apart from one extremely overworked DJC employee on site for the first 48 hours, we had very little guidance for the majority of the time. The DJC staff that followed this initial staff member seemed to have either little training or interest in their task. We were quite literally, just making it up as we went along.

Site hygiene: For the first week, we had no professional cleaners and we had to rely on the efforts of the volunteers. When eventually a cleaning crew organized by the DJC arrived, their efforts were so unprofessional it was distressing. The fact that we didn't have a Gastro of Covid outbreak on site is simply down to good

luck.

Materials: We literally had nothing but a few chairs and table on site for use. We had no mattresses. We had no bedding. We had no cooking facilities. We had no toiletries. We had no rubbish removal service. We had nothing and yet somehow the community managed to pull together an effective evacuation centre.

Medical assistance: As luck would have it, a Ballina based medical clinic became inundated by flood water and off their own initiative the medical staff decided to scatter throughout the shire to the various evacuation centres. With the goodwill of these professionals, we were able to set up a working medical clinic on day one. But this again was simply good fortune and good will. In this matter there was zero government assistance or planning, and given slightly different circumstances, would not have eventuated at all.

Communications... As we were receiving very little information from official sources we had to rely upon media and social media to get an understanding of what was happening around us. In an effort to ensure that we did not add to the confusion from the evacuation centre we had one single person who would communicate of our behalf 3 times a day using Facebook. There was no central, controlled official communication channel either internally or externally.

Donations... We were swamped with donations of materials that were simply unneeded or unfit for use. In some instances we quite simply became a dumping ground. This misguided or unguided goodwill from the community became a management issue in itself. Again here we and the broader community were given zero guidance.

Conclusion: The fact that the community was

able to pull this centre together into a working facility was simply good luck and good local people, not good civic management. Nobody in any government sphere should be patting themselves on the back here. This amount of lack of planning or forethought is simply criminal and this amount of community goodwill should never be relied upon again.

We require structure, clear guidance and adequate materials and facilities. We were left to make it up as we went along and that is dangerous to the point of negligent.

I would be happy to give further evidence or information if required

Supporting documents or images
