

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 19 May 2022 5:23:59 PM

Your details

Title Ms

First name Svea

Last name Pitman

Email

Postcode 2482

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 The night of the floods, I sent a text to Jack, my friend's son in Ocean Shores at 1.08am, to see if they were flooding - it often floods there and his mum was away. "No", he said. They were fine, so were we, the water wasn't even over the road yet at our home. Thats how it happened in 2017, the weed clogged drainage channels at the front of our home opposite the Mullumbimby show

grounds, joined with water to the road drainage and the show grounds became a lake, that flowed through our home. But the road was clear at 1am. We said goodnight and I went to bed.

Around 4.30am the morning of the 2022 floods, I assimilated a mermaid into my dreams as my dog Saki jumped off the bed and made a splash. She jumped back on the bed and on me, wet! I sat bolt upright in the dark, my legs went knee deep into cold water. I rushed to the hall in disbelief, turned on the lights and ran to my son Ezra's room. "Noooooo" I wailed.

"Martina!" I called my girlfriend, "We're flooding again". We rushed from room to room half dressed as the water rushed at our legs. In ten minutes it had risen 20cm to the hall and was swamping at the artworks that were stacked there. I sobbed. "Not again."

Five years ago, I had finally broken the cycle of renting. I bought this home, a humble three bedroom brick house in Mullumbimby. A few months later, in 2017 our home flooded for the first time since it was built, in 1972. We had been renovating ever since, and just finished the final deck the week before the 2022 floods.

This time we had a flood plan. Ezra, Martina and I worked for hours on Sunday in the pouring rain heading to the local SES to pack the sandbags and repeat. It had been raining heavy for days and we wanted to be prepared this time, just in case. We had received no formal warning or any texts or alerts at all, however acted on our instinct and the fact Main Arm had been having heavy rains since last Thursday.

The rains were torrential and it was nearly 6am. Light was breaking and we moved the contents of the house from room to room and lifted everything we could that wasn't floating around the house. I sent Ezra, my 17 year old son, to

see if our elderly neighbours were alright. He is 6'3 and 85kg and struggled to make it with the kayak as the force of the flood was so strong, heading straight through our home.

The water was chest high in the front yard, he tried to use the kayak to move through the water but the current was strong and he used the trees and fence to haul himself along. The neighbours were okay and grateful he'd come to check.

The water kept rising for a few more hours with the tide, bubbling black liquid spurted from the sinks. Not sure what else to do, I cooked us breakfast, making what I know now, was the last meal we'll ever eat in our home.

Ankle deep in flood water, I made eggs and fried tomatoes on toast and for the first time since having Covid in December last year (I think because of the adrenaline) I could smell and taste the food!

Things didn't get much worse over the next couple of hours so we sat the deck (lake) seat, watching people in canoes and small blow up boats paddle down the road. The water started to subside and as we opened the doors like a plug, the water ran out. We had no texts still, no information, no alerts or warnings. I called my mum in Melbourne in the morning when we still had service and got her to check the BOM and forecasts - no more rains she said, just a few mm. I have a screen shot of the BOM app for Mullumbimby for that day attached.

Within fifteen minutes the rains were back however, in full force and the water was once again rising in the house. We shut the door and watched in total shock as once again the water rose, metres within minutes, raging loudly the torrent rushed through our garden. As we wondered how high the water could go, a neighbour appeared half wading, half swimming

to tell us to get out if we could. It was about 3pm when this second flood occurred and within an hour it was as high or higher than the morning.

Our neighbour told us when the water got to his fridge-height he had gotten out through his front door but that the lady next door wasn't so quick and smashed her way through the ceiling, into her roof cavity to fresh air.

Okay, my brain was trying to compute. It could still get worse.

Zara, my 20-year-old daughter, had arrived by bike with her boyfriend. They were revealing in the road-lake and made us all smile with their antics. We decide Ezra should go with them, he got a bike and they waded with the bikes on their shoulders to Tallowood where Anicca lives on higher ground.

Martina and I could not leave, there was no road, just water everywhere, my 4x4 car was flooded in the driveway and we had the dogs. We used the remaining dry bedding from the top of the cupboard, expensive sleeping bags sacrificed to make a damp bed for the night on the wet soggy mattresses, one for us and the dogs.

The next day is one I cannot easily put into words. My kids were still gone, Martina had gone to check on her van home she had luckily moved to higher ground, and so I was alone with the dogs. Mud. Everywhere. Piles of our life, upon wet soggy piles of our life. Everything was everywhere. Like the house had been put through a washing machine, room by room.

I didn't know what to do. There was no power. There were no phones, no internet, I had no one else there and I was in shock. I have been in varying states of shock ever since these past 11

weeks.

After an hour or two just walking around staring, I started to pick things up, put things on the deck. One by one. I slowly started to move our belongings outside; the rugs were heavy. My beautiful rugs, books, bedding... small bits of furniture that had floated around the house. Lots of it new, much of it very old and loved.

By the afternoon, I had worked alone for a number of hours when a couple arrived, "Are you okay?"

"Um, I don't know, no," I called out. "I think I need to find my kids. The phones are out. My car was flooded and I have a medical condition that means I can't walk far". They drove me to Tallowood, the high suburb the kids went to. We found Ezra and went home. He helped me as we continued on the huge task of removing our now muddy flooded life from the house to the roadside.

An hour later Fran arrived. Another stranger, who was just taking it on herself to drive house to each house and see if anyone needed help. She could see that we had a huge task ahead of us to clear out all our belongings and assured me she would be back tomorrow with help. Fran has since worked as a volunteer in food support for the Lismore community as one of hundreds of locals who have been incredible in their immediate, and continued giving and direct support. She just turned up. I didn't know her. Turns out I used to work with her father, it's a small town Mullumbimby.

Fran took me to the community centre and there were people everywhere just arriving and offering to help. I asked for a shower. They didn't have showers, but a wonderful woman Sylvia, helped me call my mum online and register the insurance claim.

Sylvia got to action and started ringing around to see if there was somewhere for us to stay. Another stranger, Gen, approached "Would you like to have a shower at my place? I live just out of town and we have a phone that is working."

Gen took me to her home, it had been two long wet days and I washed the floods off me. I was overwhelmed that she had swept me up and taken me to her sanctuary. She offered me a glass of wine and I choked back tears.

Her husband Peter went to get my son and the dogs and we used their phone to organize emergency accommodation. I am so grateful for their support and their kindness. Gen took me out of the trauma zone and gave me some normality. I was immediately feeling better. I realised how in shock I had been.

We found emergency accommodation in Byron for three days.

I arrived back home the next day, on Wednesday morning and after an hour on my own again, walking in circles, a 4WD full pulled up full of people, and another person I'd never met, Pete, called out, "Do you need a hand?"

More people arrived, 2 more cars. Within hours the carpets were gone, most of the furniture and Pete managed the job, directing people he had never met, to move our coats, the artwork from the walls and strip one room to dry it then move the things we'd saved there. People came all day. The mud army arrived, a group of men with shovels, and they literally shovelled the mud from each room.

Then Tam arrived, and I realized my old friend who lived around the corner was the first friend I'd seen since the floods. The incredible, overwhelming amount of work that was being done to remove the aftermath of the floods; our

life, our home, to the street, had all been done by people I had never met before.

I had seen no one of any official capacity at all - on the first day of the floods the SES and a few others, had gone past on a boat, a couple of SES people called out to us to see if we were ok as we sat in the lake on the deck

Day four and we were at it again. A group of fifteen young women came door knocking house by house on our street where everyone had flooded to mop each room. The mud was going, bit by bit, from the hands of more strangers helping me.

All aspects of need were being addressed by the community, as the gravity of the disaster was slowly being understood. Massive landslides, houses washed away, people who died, dozens of roads destroyed like cake, with asphalt icing. My old road at Huonbrook, Johnsons Road, was completely destroyed. Gone.

Stories were shared of people using their own boats to rescue their neighbours in Lismore and surrounds. 'Phil' who saved over 100 people, 2 brothers in Coraki who did the same. Hundred of un-sung local heroes literally saved lives, 100s of them.

It is yet another astonishing factor of this catastrophic disaster that '000' was not available.

We received no texts or warning, no information at any stage.

Phones and any contact was lost, for dozens of families stranded in the valleys, no help could be called. There are no systems in place, to respond, almost at all, to this kind of cataclysmic event. In the days following the water supply was contaminated and we were dropped drinking water again by community volunteers, as we

ripped our lives apart piece by muddy piece and dragged everything onto the growing mound on the roadside.

In this time of shock, trauma and grief it was the community that came through, in all the ways a community can and will continue to in the face of Climate Change. It was the kindness of strangers that saved me. That helped me. That gave me information, and even water, a mattress to sleep on.

About ten days later maybe the Army arrived - we'd spent every day toiling to remove the mud and our belongings to the street and literally the day we finished, 30 of them turned up at my door, asking if I needed help? I did laugh. I had needed help.

The last ten days had been gruelling and strangers had helped me. I could not have done it on my own.

We had a laugh together after my initial rebuke. I sat with the Army engineer, John, and we talked about the bridges and roads that were out - apparently they had not come earlier as it was only today the National state of emergency was declared. A few of them from Brissy said they got the call at 5am to be ready to go in 20mins but had just been 1.5 hours away the whole time and wished they had come earlier to help. They were only tasked with helping homes he said and we went to look at my remaining, exploding, chip board, built in robes; I insisted they go and check out the main Arm road bridge that had cut off the villages up that way, and as he was trying to look it up on his phone, with no service, so I drew a map, he got a call from the truck to go and do the same thing and off they went.

Tragically and un-believably, a month later, we all flooded again. Our home in Mullum was again

inundated but not as much and this time we sandbagged all the doors and much higher. Our salvaged possessions are in boxes and garbage bags still in trestle tables in the house, high enough to be out of the minimal flood water.

Entire lives were destroyed... again. Byron Bay, where we were staying in emergency accommodation, flooded through the main streets, in what they described as an entirely unpredicted extreme weather event, "a rainbomb". Again there was no warning for Byron Bay, although we did receive one this time to evacuate Mullumbimby - at 5.03am, with the evacuation order to 'be out by 5am!' luckily, we weren't there this time, we got to watch it in Byron Bay instead.

The landscape had changed here forever. The community is devastated. People are in trauma and shock and their whole lives have gone, changed, and will never be the same. This is climate change. We are now Climate Refugees, another new term in the community vernacular here.

We have moved 5 times in emergency accommodation, including into a tent for Easter as there was not one single option for us to go, and the insurance has done very little (one day of 5 hours work on the 'make-safe' when they found suspected asbestos and downed tools - we are still waiting for test results so even the most basic emergency house work to remove the mould and walls has not been done yet!).

I have now had to consider breaking up our family. Renting separate rooms for my kids, my youngest is in year 12, and this has been insurmountable in the challenges to his schooling on top of 2 years of Covid. He has no bedroom. No desk. No home.

I have no idea where we will be staying next

week when this Air BnB runs out. And the Insurance housing department closes every weekend from 5pm Friday so there is a weekly anxious few days of me trying to find us somewhere to live and not even being able to talk to them if I do find something until 8am Monday.

I have not been well before the floods however my health and particularly my mental health have been greatly affected by this disaster. I have no idea where my family will live, how long it will take to re-build our home, or why we would even do this knowing it will, of course, flood again.

I have heard of 'wet-proofing' amongst a plethora of new terms since the floods, and to this I have doubts as I had renovated our entire home over the past 5 years, some walls were cement sheet, in the lower part that was the only bit flooded in 2017, however all this has to go to 1200mm just like the gyprock. We had put new tiles in the bathroom, toilet and laundry, just finished this year, however all that has to go; the floors in the master bedroom and living area were all high quality lino - all gone. Perhaps timber instead may be removable and washable. I am interested to learn and want to 'build back better', however my insurance, the NRMA, does not all for this!

This surely is something your inquiry can address - insurance companies must be made to build back better as my home had never flooded in nearly 50 years since it was built, and now has flooded 3 times in the last 5 years. This 2022 flood was 5 times the height of the 2017 floods in my home - where it only came in the lower bedroom in 2017 to ankle high, this time it was over my knees, a metre in that room and the entire house was flooded and destroyed.

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

The 2022 floods and recent extreme weather events are undoubtedly due to human induced Climate Change, as a result of increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, particularly CO₂, from the burning of fossil fuels.

My home has not flooded since it was built in 1972, however has now flooded 3 times in 5 years, twice this year. In 2017 the floods went into the lower bedroom as a 1/100 year event it was ankle deep. in 2022 it was almost a metre deep in the same room! And we flooded again to a lesser extent again a month later.

This is not within the 'normal'. My home was not in the flood zone like parts of Lismore, it had not flooded prior to my purchasing it in 2016, ever.

In the more immediate sense, the lack of maintenance of the drainage outside our home in terms of weed removal by Council, does contribute to the lack of water movement when we have heavy rain. This in turn then adds water to the storm water system on the other side of the road, then they both flood and connect and our yard joins the show grounds to become a lake. I do not think maintaining this would have stopped our house flooding this time, however if this system of drainage was deepened, and maintained, it could dramatically assist and form part of a community wide solution for the future.

1.2 Preparation and planning

There seemed to be no planning, or preparation, although Council did action a report after the last floods I am unaware of much action on this to date.

The maintenance of drainage at our home, as above, was not done, the drains were full of weeds, as usual.

We had no information, text or warnings from

SES or Council or the government. At any stage in the first flood event. There was an evacuation text (2, one to prepare) for Mullum for the second flood event, however the evacuation text was sent at 5.03am and was stated to leave by 5am!!

In terms of the weather forecast, it was wrong! i had my family searching online and the BOM app on our phone when it worked in the morning, said only a few mm of rain for the day! Yet we flooded again that same day at 3-5pm, as high as the morning and inundated rapidly within an hour to 1.5m in the yard or more again.

1.3 Response to floods

There were no public warnings and zero immediate management save a blow up boat with 2 SES volunteers driving by the next day calling out were we ok, which was nice.

The ADF arrived too late for their initial deployment task of helping the community. They needed to be there on day 1. The trucks and machinery that came were great and the road work needed however more long term road support rather than initial fixes that were then lost int he second foods a month later would have been better; apparently engineering standards are too high for this to occur but this barrier needs to removed. Prefab some designs that can be quickly deployed for bridges and roads in times of natural disasters perhaps?

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

I am still not sure what this looks like for us, aside from personally my adrenaline subsiding, until each new rain threat.

Our home has not been 'made -safe' the flooded walls, kitchen and bathroom all still mouldy and ruined but in the house. The insurance cant find us a home. The builder has done half a days work and not even the basics finished let alone a scope of works or timeline - next year to start at the earliest!!!

Our salvaged belongings are in the house, as we

were also evicted from emergency accommodation after a double booking, we had moved everything out and the house was empty, but then had to move everything back in. We have moved 4 more times since then and not had any time, or any where to put our things. Staked in garbage bags and Bunnings buckets. I am still functioning only day by day, and now also have Covid, again. I don't know when the recovery begins? When we have a stable place to sleep?

When I have removed all our belongings we have left and put them in storage?

When the builder has done the 'make-safe' and the contaminated wet walls and cupboards are finally gone?

When I get time for a massage? Some time to stop? When we have a home I guess but that seems it want ever happen right now... when the asbestos is gone from our home maybe and I can park the motorhome there safely I will have somewhere to be, but my kids want be there and it is a miserable prospect on so many levels - I will try and find somewhere else to stay in the next few weeks hopefully.

1.5 Recovery from floods

I don't think I have got to the recovery stage yet? If its having a house? somewhere even semi-permanent to stay? We still dont even have that. I did get a replacement car a few days ago. And am going to hire a motorhome for myself and the dogs and rent my kids seperate rooms I think as I cant keep going moving week to week with no idea where we will be. But that is not a solution for long. Its heart breaking and not ideal at all as I have a physical disability, however it is all I can manage to figure out at this stage.

I have not cooked a meal since the floods. My ability to do basic things like that has been affected and food support is still very much needed I think, in Mullum as well as Lismore. There has been some of this from the Neighbourhood centre, however more support

for nice home cooked meals or even takeaway vouchers for families as this costs a fortune and for me still I just cant cook.

We have also had trouble getting things like donated clothes that fit us as we are quite a tall family. and even a mattress when i needed it at Easter as we had to stay in tent in the soggy wet muddy flooded back yard, we couldn't not get. I did get a single one but as we are all tall this wasn't ideal. I am still on 3 waiting lists for queen sized mattress.

1.6 Any other matters

I cannot understand, how still there is not data, at all on how many houses were flooded in Mullumbimby.

I want to know how many people cannot live in their homes?

How many homes in total were flooded?

I cant understand how any flood response and recovery can occur now when this first most basic information is still unknown?

I have called everyone from NSW Service to Resilience NSW and the Premiers office, Council, the SES the community Residents Association, no one knows.

This is unacceptable and must be addresses now and into the future for the next natural disaster..

With a bushfire it is immediately apparent if someone has lost their home entirely or it has been damaged, or not. However it is not the same with the floods and some houses were just high enough to be saved right next door to ones that were flooded.

But a simple number of total flooded houses out of total houses in Mullum would seem a most necessary statistic for ay recovery and support going forward? For a myriad of reasons. For all towns. As well as the number of families cut off by roads being out, bridges out and houses lost to landslides, all this data should have been compiled weeks ago, and of course it would be

assumed NSW services would have this with the grants being given out, however it has not in any way been made public. If we dont know how many families were affected, how many people owned the home they lived in and are now homeless, how can there be adequate support for recovery? (and of course also those renting, however I am just referring to my situation).

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [IMG_8158.jpg](#)
 - [Image 1-4-22 at 1.08 pm.jpeg](#)
 - [Image 1-4-22 at 1.31 pm \(2\).jpeg](#)
-





Mullumbimby Weather (beta)

View the current warnings for New South Wales

Change location

Start typing, then select from list (town, city, postcode or lat/lon)

Locate

Find Me

23 °C

Lowest 21.9 °C
Highest 23.5 °C
6:54 am 12:14 pm

15 mm
of rain since 9 am

Latest weather at 1:10pm

96% Humidity
↓ N Wind Direction
1005.1 Pressure (hPa)
30 km/h Wind Speed
16 knots
93 km/h Highest Gust
50 knots (7:15am)

WEATHER STATION

Cape Byron

Approx. 17.9 km away

ID: 94599



ALL WEATHER STATIONS

Forecast

issued at 11:00 am AEDT on Monday 28 February 2022.

Rest of Monday 20 °C 25 °C

When will it rain?

	Possible rainfall	Chance of any rain
11:00 am - 2:00 pm	2 - 3 mm	80%
2:00 pm - 5:00 pm	2 - 4 mm	70%
5:00 pm - 8:00 pm	0 - 0.6 mm	40%
8:00 pm - 11:00 pm	0 mm	20%
11:00 pm - 2:00 am	0 mm	10%
2:00 am - 5:00 am	0 - 0.2 mm	30%

Tue 1 Mar 20 °C 29 °C

Possible rainfall: 0 to 0.4 mm Chance of any rain: 30%

Wed 2 Mar 20 °C 29 °C

Possible rainfall: 0 to 0.2 mm Chance of any rain: 30%

Thu 3 Mar 21 °C 29 °C

Possible rainfall: 3 to 15 mm Chance of any rain: 70%

Fri 4 Mar 20 °C 27 °C

Possible rainfall: 6 to 25 mm Chance of any rain: 90%

Sat 5 Mar 20 °C 28 °C

Possible rainfall: 2 to 8 mm Chance of any rain: 70%

Sun 6 Mar 20 °C 29 °C

Possible rainfall: 2 to 8 mm Chance of any rain: 70%

WARNINGS

[WATER](#) | [CLIMATE](#) | [ENVIRONMENT](#)

[Tropical Cyclones](#)

[Tsunami Warning Centre](#)



Radar



Sat



Maps

[Rainfall Forecasts](#)

[Seasonal Outlooks](#)

[MetEye™](#)

[National Weather Services](#)

[Aviation Weather Services](#)

[Defence Services](#)