

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Friday, 20 May 2022 7:08:24 PM
Attachments: [Inquiry Submission-Floods 2022-The Channon Emergency Centre.pdf](#)

Your details

Title Ms

First name ROBYN

Last name KELLY

Email

Postcode 2480

Submission details

I am making this submission as Other

Submission type I am submitting on behalf of my organisation

Organisation making the submission (if applicable) The Channon Emergency Centre-The Channon Resilience Group

Your position in the organisation (if applicable) Coordinator

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

Our community mobilised an emergency service to manage the first response to the event, by providing a hub that catered for medical, welfare, supplies and fuel for residents stranded. Our service was without communications and was cut off from Lismore Emergency Services, our local RFS members were amongst the stranded and unable to mobilise. Attached is our story, we believe it has merit and with in it recommendations that could be adopted to best 'prepare' communities for the future.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [Inquiry Submission-Floods 2022-The Channon Emergency Centre.pdf](#)
-

The Channon Emergency Hub

Submission-Flood Inquiry-2022 -Northern NSW

Established March 2022 in response to needs of community members after services in Lismore CBD services were cut off. This catchment included Terania Creek, Tuntable Creek, Keerong and Pinchin Road, including Siddha Farm and Tuntable Falls Coordination Cooperative both located in isolated pockets.

Our centre was set up without authority or control of other agencies.

We did not have internet coverage or phone reception.

Located originally at The Channon Public School which had been set up as an evacuation point for residents as the school retained its power supply for a majority of the time our centre was open. We were able to establish connections with emergency services in random locations in the village and informed agencies and Lismore Council that the Hub was established. Internet was disabled at the school due to power outages and DET personnel were unable to access the region to reestablish connection.

The school facilities included an outdoor undercover areas, a canteen and a library that had a kitchen and bathroom, including a shower and bath, the school principal approved both the evacuation centre and the emergency centre hub,

Access to the village was by foot only or tractor, all bridges located around the villages were laden with debris. The community opened most bridges, gullies, causeways allowing access to the village from outlying areas, local contractors used machinery to move landslides allowing residents to access medical services and supplies. Our village was fortunate to have Lismore City Council Engineer living close by, Alan Madden was managing the larger contractors and prioritised which residents needed access first.

Power was limited to the village only, services to the general store were not operating for supplies including fuel and gas, when services were repaired the fuel was contaminated and the neighbouring village service centre had run out of fuel. ATM facilities were down and only cash was accepted. We used our local market account to purchase gas and self funded \$1500 to enable supplies to be purchased, including medicine, baby formula, nappies, emergency supplies.

Within the operations of the Emergency Hub the following support was offered to residents until agencies could be engaged or individuals could access appropriate services.

Medical support

Doctors and Nurses were engaged to provide first response to the community's needs, this service was open from 8am-5pm, supported by Lismore Base Hospital providing access to

- First Aid
- Emergency Management
- Prescriptions
- Referrals/Advise

Welfare support Team

Members of the community were identified as per skill register/experience and provided advocacy with 1:1 support to families and individuals referring them to other agencies/services and/or given a cuppa and a hug. The welfare support team followed up with phone calls or drop ins for weeks after the event.

Supplies Team including fuel, water, gas

A team was appointed to manage the ordering of supplies with various agencies that were identified and organised other key personnel to pack and keep an inventory of supplies.

Food Chains and Depot Team

A system was developed, and residents mapped that were affected by the severe road slips and landslides along Wallace Road and Terania Creek Road, depots were created in specific drop points where supplies could be accessed if needed.

The process included identifying key people who would be responsible for distribution of food and assessing people's needs. The needs of the community would then be relayed to the centre and supplies sought and delivery was arranged to coincide with medicine drop offs, fuel, and gas bottles.

Infrastructure Team

Community assets and council assets including roads, causeways and terrain were identified early and areas of greatest concern were relayed to council engineers and contractors to action. This included assessing who was stranded due to road network collapse or flooding creeks and collating information about the safety of residents for future consideration.

Hub Management and Advocacy

Members of the group supported the delivery of this service by encouraging the community to take on roles to enable the centre to operate. These people enabled the agencies a point of contact for the community and a central hub for relaying information with rebuilding and recovery whilst advocating for the needs of the community.

The Emergency Hub had many challenges that it faced from lack of communications and resources to accessing local services to start the process of recovery.

As a collective we believe that major consideration needs to be undertaken for the following points as outlined in the terms of reference, this will enable the community and authorities to take action to protect its future generations. Immediate action from both the State and Federal Government is required to oversee the recovery of the region, taking into account the economic challenges faced in regional and rural Australia and empowering local councils by funding and guiding this process.



Terms of Reference

1a. *the causes of, and factors contributing to, the frequency, intensity, timing and location of floods in NSW in the 2022 catastrophic flood event, including consideration of any role of weather, climate change, and human activity;*

1.a. NSW Independent flood Inquiry Terms of Reference, NSW Government, 2022

1.a.Key Issue 1

BOM or other agencies did not factor the high tides or the amount of water saturation already present over the past month preceding the flood, with the forecast of rain for the region for that period.

Key Findings:

Data was not released or made public in the appropriate time frame to allow for evacuation orders to be in place earlier in all areas.



There is no method for local reporting or collecting information, when people did report there was no process or action taken, a structure is required to report and respond to locals information gathered. Localised reporting and management, means decisions and communities ability to predict and prepare for any environmental event relies on outside support only.

Emergency Service Centres need to be localised. Currently with them being located outside LGA disables emergency services thus creating confusion and mismanagement when describing circumstances and events and their locality.

Case Study:

Farmers were requesting information about moving livestock up until the 27th February 2022 to agencies and departments within our catchment.

Public warnings were not clear, requests from community members asking for advice on river conditions and moving livestock to higher grounds were not clear due to inaccurate river heights as per BOM did not define the extent or impact on low lying areas.

Recommendation:

Accurate modelling of floods requires the capturing of tidal changes, past and current weather events and forecasts to predetermine the extremity of severe weather events.

Key Issue 2:

The fires of 2019 weakened and compromised the landscape surrounding The Channon. This catastrophic event that occurred changed the environment by creating charred and raw open ravines, hills and valleys. These areas were not regenerated due to many factors, including funds to support this project or the personnel required to implement these projects.

Key Findings:

Recovery from fires in regional landscapes requires support with the planting of natives and regeneration of areas during the recovery phase.

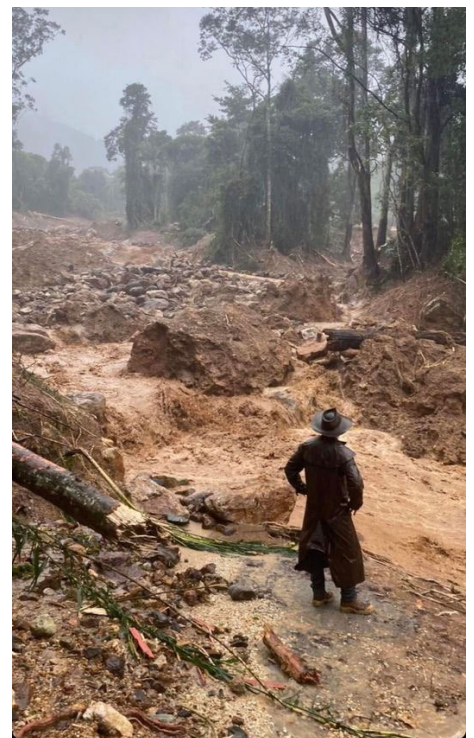


Photo taken by Tim Gilliland at Doon Doon

Case Study:

Properties adjoining Nightcap National Park affected by fires had landslides and erosion occur in pockets and hills where infestation of weeds and exotic species flourish. Nitrogen fixing plants are not reestablished, impacting and restricting the germination of natives that are pioneer species supporting the growth of the forest.

Recommendation:

Initiate State and Federal Grants for landholders to regenerate areas or potential areas of concern in order to create stability on their properties from further landslides/erosion.

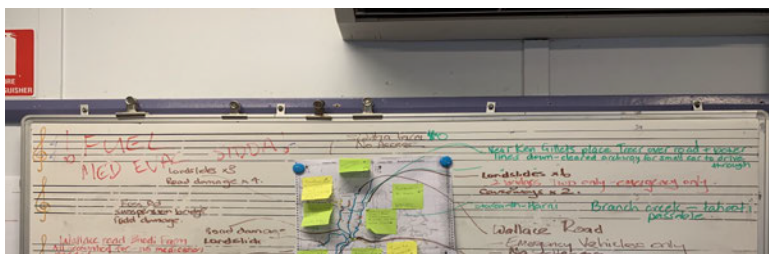
- b. the preparation and planning by agencies, government, other entities and the community for floods in NSW, including the accuracy and timing of weather forecasts, current laws, emergency management plans, practices and mitigation strategies, their application and effect



1.b. NSW Independent flood Inquiry Terms of Reference, NSW Government, 2022

1.b. Key Issue 1:

The lack of immediate response from the State Government left not only the local emergency services but also the local council and the outlying villages isolated without services and support for numerous days. The event was so large that local services were unable to access or attend to all the needs of the community in such a large catchment area scattered across numerous regional LGA. Our village did not see services for over 9 days.



There is no regional plan in place when villages and communities are cut off and

who is responsible to oversee the execution of emergency management in isolated areas

During the first month the challenges in relaying our needs with emergency management teams was frustrating and disempowering for many. The agency responsible for emergency management changed regularly which made communication extremely difficult. This resulted in telling our story over and over again to agencies, ADF, SES and ResilienceNSW.

This confusion and constant change in hierarchical control contributed towards the delay in helping the community.

There was no preparation from the local council nor communities to take action for such an extreme weather event.

- Fuel supplies were cut restricting movement between villages and the CBD
- Roads were cut off to our village and the community responded with clearing the road networks to establish communication.
- Communications were down and power was intermittent or non-existent for many
- Logging jobs to either SES or ServicesNSW resulted in many tasks still not being completed.

1b: Key Issue 2:

BOM and other agencies have outdated, ineffective, broken river gauges and flood warning equipment across NSW that do not allow correct modelling or forecasting to take place. In particular the catchment of The Channon has had broken and lost river gauges since 2017, Cyclone Debbie.

Key Findings:

Members of the community have highlighted and informed agencies of these warning systems and have been advocating for the installation and fixing of the creek gauges. This issue has been raised on a local, state and federal level via relevant Ministers and Departments and Agencies.

Case studies:

Causeways and bridges were already flooded and restrictions in place for many locals accessing services the week leading up to the flood. Residents were already requiring medical supplies, prescriptions, had low supplies for livestock, fuel, food and missing appointments.

The impact on the community by the weather cell and the volume of rain over that 48hr period prior would not have changed these circumstances unless flood warning systems and cooperative monitoring plans that include local reporting and data collection that is accurate for each area are engaged, installed, managed and maintained.

Recommendations:

1. If flood models were shared amongst agencies the weather cell in Brisbane that developed and moved down the coast the fortnight prior would have gained momentum. The information then relayed to the regions of how much potential impact this would have in time for the community and business to take action. This warning system may include evacuation orders based on accurate modelling of major flooding.
2. Immediately assess and replace current flood warning systems across the region including accessing local members for data on river rises and rainfall in remote areas.

1.c. NSW Independent flood Inquiry Terms of Reference, NSW Government, 2022

1.c.i Key Issue

There is no regional plan in place if local emergency services can not respond when required due to the breakdown of communications or saturation of services due to such high demand this includes SES, local RFS and 000. Reliance on a single structure for communication is not effective in times of disaster.

Key Findings:

Advanced systems are required for regional communities and local emergency services to communicate via an alternative model that is robust. There is no redundancy plan, once individuals lose this basic infrastructure the conditions change dramatically. It is essential that communities,

individuals and councils need to become self-sufficient, and have alternative options in place to manage this resource to save lives.

Case Study:

Communication for the first 9 days at the Emergency Centre was sporadic and unreliable with limited access to clear reception making management challenging and time consuming.

Recommendations:

- UHF radios and satellite phones are installed in each regional area allowing 24/7 communications with both emergency services but also residents.
- Provide grants to allow for community organisations/individuals to apply for UHF radios
- Provide grants to amateur radio clubs to install receivers at various locations in regional areas to allow for clear transmission to residents and agencies.
- Provide grants/funds for organisations/individuals to host workshops on UHF radios and current communication devices enabling connection during a disaster.



1.c ii) NSW Independent flood Inquiry Terms of Reference, NSW Government, 2022

Key Issue

Small communities do not have emergency management plans or equipment to mobilise in place outside their local RFS or local council, when the RFS cannot be mobilised resources are restricted and first response delayed, this impacts the initial phase of ensuring our residents are safe.

Once cut off from the Lismore Services, the initiation of The Channon Emergency Centre became a necessity as services were not able to reach the villages, The local council and community was stretched to its resources within its own CBD, leaving the outlying areas without management and resources for several days.

10 weeks after the flood the response for assistance is delayed due to the lack of personnel and resources to manage the recovery phase. With volunteers making up the majority of the task force the jobs requiring assistance are not occurring in a timely manner.

Key Findings:

ADF was deployed days after the disaster hit the CBD and did not seem to have a defined action plan or process to support the community. It was 3 weeks before the ADF came to the village. Residents had logged their jobs and the Hub had reported the findings numerous times to agencies.

Large piles of rubbish, flood debris and properties inundated with silt and debris are scattered around our region. No effective reporting or resources are in place to remove this from properties outside of the CBD.

Case Study:

Once the ADF were present in the village, they arrived without equipment needed for large scale operations and at times empty handed. The tasks requiring assistance needed specialised equipment and machinery. Several times they left unable to help suggesting it was 'beyond their capabilities' or 'if they had equipment they could have helped'.

The lack of equipment and planning with identified tasks by authorities wasted both ADF time but also that of the communities, now the ADF have left and there is still so much to do.

However whilst saying this some platoons went beyond their 'duties'. The teams that eventually came out to clear the debris were incredible, the team that helped our residents clear their homes were very much appreciated, the team that went shoulder deep into cold water to release logs and debris and cleared a bridge are heroes.

Recommendations:

As per our initial reports to agencies, immediate deployment of personnel and machinery is required to manage the amount of debris including placement of large skip bins to deter wild dogs and feral animals from making contact with high population areas such as the village.

1.c.iii NSW Independent flood Inquiry Terms of Reference, NSW Government, 2022

Key Issue

When power, internet and telecommunications services failed, locals were not only stranded but isolated from each other, this occurred on the 27th February at midnight in our area.

Key Findings

Locals reported that they had no idea what was occurring nor were prepared to lose communications or power, some residents rely on other systems that do not fail whilst others rely on mains connection, areas in our catchment did not have power for upto 18 days. Generators were kindly donated by Mullumbimby Civic Centre, Mullums Emergency Hub and locals.

Communication to emergency services, agencies, the hub and SES was cut off when mobile phones ran out of charge or their battery backup ran out of charge. People were not pre warned therefore not prepared.

Case Study

Of the 5 generators sourced, 3 were used for medical conditions and 2 were used sporadically at residents homes when required.

Mullum Civic Centre donated to the community, starlink, for internet access, dozens of battery packs, batteries, head torches and water filters that were distributed out to the residents affected.

Recommendations:

Resource equipment to regional community hubs that will enable residents to be self-sufficient for a period of time and update facilities to store them

1.d. NSW Independent flood Inquiry Terms of Reference, NSW Government, 2022

1.d.Key Issue

Having different agencies and government departments take over local control with emergency management hindered the response and left communities isolated without assistance. It was a week before supplies were flown in, which was dropped to the wrong location, this occurred twice. Our original order never came. There was no chain of supply.

Once the roads to Goonellabah were open, members of the community hub and some residents could reach shops and community organisations who were offering food, gas and fuel. We were able to stock our supplies, this included SES dropping off fuel and Red Cross and C3 driving in more supplies. Every day medical supplies and prescriptions were dropped to town and then picked up and distributed around the area with other supplies.

It was just fortunate that a local quarry owner and his team plus many locals opened up the roads to allow access for residents to leave their properties under the guidance of our local engineer. Immediate response from information relayed from the community saw the team prioritise who got access first. Priority was for the elderly and residents with medical conditions.

Lismore Base Hospital and Dunoon Medical Centre provided experienced and trained Doctors and nurses who volunteered their time to support the needs of the community.

Key Findings:

As a regional community the transition from incident response to recovery was frustrating, time consuming and inadequate for a region of this size. We were informed by ResilienceNSW 17 areas, outside of the CBD, found themselves in the same situation. At The Channon we were very fortunate to have an amazing team mobilise so quickly and provide the support that was needed. This was within The Hub but also on the roads where the community sprung into action to support agencies, Councils and others.



Case Study:

Communication occurred from locals to SES that they were stranded and needed supplies, on 3 different occasions locals ordered their own airdrop, the supplies asked for did not arrive, instead they were 'other items not needed'.

The supply chain was broken and was chaotic, in our opinion wasting much needed support that could have been directed to areas requiring immediate assistance.

With saying this an organisation called C3 (community group from the Gold Coast) arranged 2 airdrops of supplies to areas we were caretaking, this was a relief to the residents stranded. From this point both of these communities were managed by Nimbin Community Centre and RFS.

Recommendations:

Local hubs are set up by ResilienceNSW and stocked to enable community members with or without their own emergency services to mobilise in a central location. Each hub contains equipment that buffers a community in case all communication is lost.

Each community has identified members that can mobilise and are central to the hub who are trained in setting up an emergency centre. Members would have access to topographical maps and data about the landscape, including roads, fire trails and residents properties. They would be able to initiate various areas to support community needs.

If the RFS or other emergency services are available the hub may not be mobilised; this would depend on availability of emergency services members already associated with that service and if required by them.

1.e. NSW Independent flood Inquiry Terms of Reference, NSW Government, 2022

1.e. Key Issue

20 homes were affected and flooded, this does not include the other properties with major damage to buildings, outhouses, sheds, fences. Clean up is still occurring, homes are empty and still uninhabitable, the tasks needed to be done required specialised equipment and resources to support these residents. ADF completed some of the tasks, however now they have left the clean up for residents and council.

Local businesses affected are still awaiting to reopen and the local market awaits assistance with a crane to move its shipping container.

Logging jobs was simple, the result was painstakingly slow, 10 weeks on we still await.

Residents of 16 of the 20 homes damaged or destroyed have moved to temporary accommodation often losing their community too.



2.Recommendations:

- a. safety of all emergency service personnel and community first responders;*
- b. preparation and planning for future flood threats and risks;*

State and Federal Government priorities should include engaging all emergency service personnel into a role that is offered payment. Presumption that community members will manage, coordinate and volunteer their time needs to be reassessed. As the population increases the need to meet the demand of services rises, this includes providing adequate emergency services so people feel safe and supported in all communities. Action is needed to be taken to empower the SES and RFS to engage members of the community who may not have time to volunteer in the normal circumstances.

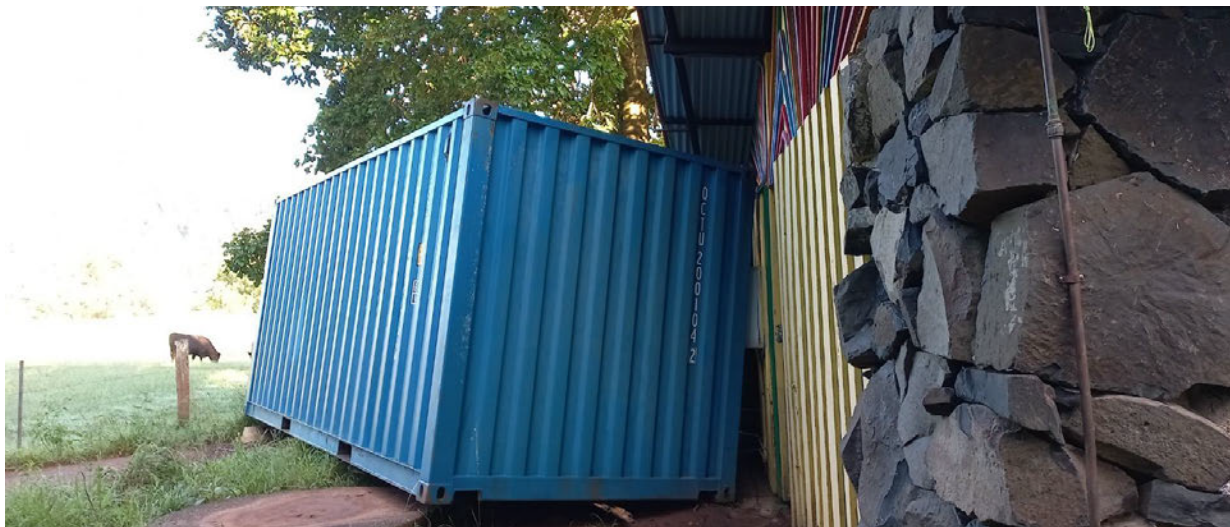
Every Council engages local community members to work with agencies to prepare all residents in areas of their catchments to be 'self reliant'.

That every regional area within a council is captured and community hubs are set up to support emergency management within their LGA.

- This includes satellite phones and the internet.
- UHF (cb) Radios and Repeaters
- Access to alternative power supplies to charge phones/torches
- Access to medical supplies and support
- Access to immediate supplies via air/road

c. use of flood gauges and other warning structures and/or strategies for improved flood prediction;

Evacuation orders in place were based on data from BOM and were not accurate, this system that failed resulted in much loss and increased associated trauma to residents who were still in their homes at midnight. This created incredible pressure and challenges to the first responders who saved the 1000's of residents in the early hours of that morning.



*d. impact on essential services, including electricity supply, water supply and telecommunications; ****

e. land use planning and management and building standards, including:

i. the instruments, policies and programs applying to existing development in flood prone locations across NSW; and

ii. the instruments, policies and programs applying to proposed future developments in flood prone locations across NSW;

The change in climate significantly impacts the intensity of storms and other environmental disasters across Australia. The development of flood prone areas including farm land should be considered 'high risk'.



Bridges currently within the area are not built to withstand the volume of water nor the debris associated with landslides across the landscape. They lack height, drainage and foundation. The river crossings have widened and are now compromised. Immediate funding is required to heighten the bridges, clear the debris and engineer bridges that are more robust.

f. appropriate action to adapt to future flood risks to communities and ecosystems;

With appropriate warnings, action to remove risks to communities can be minimised, individuals can pack up and move to higher ground, businesses that may impact the environment can relocate and take action to reduce the risk.



g. coordination and collaboration between the NSW Government and the Australian Government;

A lack of on ground community consultation resulted in mismanagement and allocation of goods to areas that were not deemed 'immediate'.

h. coordination and collaboration by the NSW Government with other state and territory governments and local governments;

i. public communication and advice systems and strategies.

In a state of emergency logical thinking and actions need to be guided and planned to support regional lives. A system needs to be in place to engage communities to handle and manage the situation of closed roads to facilitate support for medical conditions and access to supplies. We need connection between emergency services and regional towns and villages, cut off from all services.

We ask that the Inquiry implements processes to make communities mobile and effective in extreme weather events or disasters that may affect our livelihoods, events that shut down entire communities from each other and their Councils.

We ask that these resources are both in the form of equipment and also training.

We request that immediate action is taken to ensure accurate flood warnings and creek gauges on all major tributaries are managed and equipment that is broken be replaced immediately.

We request that the ADF or similar agencies be reinstated in the region to assist with the clean up and recovery of our region. Bearing in mind the people left on the ground a majority of them are victims of this flood.

We need help.

Robyn Kelly
Coordinator
The Channon Emergency Centre
On behalf of

Helen Quinlan
Community Liaison
The Channon Emergency Centre

The Channon Resilience Group and The Channon Community.