

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Friday, 20 May 2022 10:05:10 AM

Your details

Title Ms

First name Thea

Last name Orr

Email

Postcode 2480

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 I am a resident of Jiggi NSW, a rural hamlet within the Lismore LGA and closely connected to the more remote Georgica and Mountain Top communities (the J/G/MT area), with a total population of 679 people according to

the 2016 ABS Census data.

I live with my family on Bertoli Road, an unsealed, no-through-road with two low bridge crossings over creeks between us and the sealed Jiggi Road. Normally we have access to the invaluable Goolmangar General Store, however Lismore is our main centre for food, supplies and health care. I am a sole trader, operating as Northern Rivers Word Services, offering professional services primarily for community consultation projects, and providing these services from my home office. My partner is a public servant, still predominantly working from home as part of COVID-safe procedures, and I have two children who attend the local public school and preschool respectively. Neither my home nor business suffered physical losses or damage due to the flooding, and I do not intend to apply for, nor directly benefit from, the Government-provided flood relief grants.

As a result of the first major flooding incident on the 28th of February, we experienced an extended power outage, which was to last for approximately a week. Our already-limited mobile reception failed approximately 24 hours after the power outage commenced, when the backup power supply for the local phone tower was depleted, and due to the telecommunications switch over to the NBN, we no longer have access to a copper-wire phone system and rely on our internet connection for all communication, including for work and for emergency services if needed. This was not available throughout the power outage, and neither my partner nor myself were able to work throughout the outage.

Whilst the flooding was occurring, we were stranded as creeks flooded over the road on both sides of our property. This cut us off from the Jiggi community at large and from residents further up Bertoli Road, so for some days we were only able to reach two of our neighbours. During this time, all three households were able to support each other, with one of our neighbours kindly lending us a generator, which we ran intermittently to preserve the food in our fridge and freezer.

By the 2nd of March, flood waters had subsided enough that we were able to use 4WD to get across the heavily-

silted bridges, back to Jiggi road, and could travel close enough to Goolmangar to get a low level of mobile reception, enough to SMS family to let them know that we were safe. By that afternoon we could reach the Goolmangar General Store, which had suffered substantial losses and could not at that stage provide supplies to the community. One of our immediate neighbours drove to the end of Bertoli Road to check on other residents, including elderly and young families, and discovered that one residential property had been heavily damaged in a landslip, however the resident had not suffered any physical injuries himself. Several residents on our road were unable to get out towards Jiggi for some time, either not having access to 4WDs or were not confident enough to drive safely on the heavily damaged roads. During this time, they relied upon neighbours for essential supplies.

At this time, I discovered that the volunteer administrators of the Jiggi Post Facebook Group had started working to ensure that all members of the J/G/MT communities were safe and accounted for (more details in the submission below).

By the 5th of March, we drove through Lismore to see the devastation, passing through en-route to Alstonville to source fresh food, and were at last able to call family to speak to them directly. At around this time, power started to come back on to locations around Jiggi and Georgica, including to our house, and mobile reception returned on the 7th of March, however landlines did not return until almost Easter for some of our neighbours.

We personally count ourselves extremely fortunate coming out of the flooding disaster, having not suffered any losses personally due to flooding or landslides. We had sufficient food and supplies (which was coincidental to the flooding but not due to any major prior planning as we had not been expecting to be cut off for so long due to the unpredictable severity of the flooding).

However, I would like to address the need for better rural community resilience to severe flooding and other natural disaster events, based upon what I witnessed within the

Jiggi/Georgica/Mountain Top communities throughout the two major flooding events in February and March and during the recovery efforts made to date. During this time, the local SES and other emergency services were already overwhelmed by the disaster within Lismore itself, and predominately leaving rural communities to fend for themselves due to both capacity and access issues. Many community members were stranded behind landslides that rendered access roads impassable to vehicles and extremely hazardous to cross by foot.

With this situation in mind, anyone needing help within the Jiggi/Georgica/Mountain Top communities was entirely dependent on neighbours and other community members, who readily provided this help, going above and beyond, but often without the backup or resources of Government-supported services. After the immediate aftermath of the flooding, community support remained vital in co-ordinating assistance, ensuring access to food and supplies, and cataloguing and reporting damage to roads and property in need of immediate remedial works. I have addressed these issues within the Terms of Reference below.

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	N/A – I do not have any comments regarding the causes and contributing factors of the flooding.
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1.2 Preparation and planning	Communication: A reliable communication method is needed in rural areas during times of crisis. Under normal conditions, mobile reception here is patchy, provided by a local tower but affected by the hilly and forested landscape of J/G/MT area. This tower, and others in similar locations, need a reliable source of power to maintain communication. It is my understanding that the prolonged power outage drained the emergency backup power supply of the local tower and it failed upon the second day. Coupled with the
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failure of the internet (both ADSL and fixed wireless NBN) and any remaining landlines using the older copper network, most within the J/G/MT area were without any way of communicating with emergency services or family members for extended periods.

We were lucky this time that no community members suffered any life-threatening injuries or illnesses during the period that J/G/MT was cut off from major towns, however there are a number of vulnerable people in our community, including the elderly, young families, and people with varying degrees of special needs. Severe injury or illness when cut off from normal services is a possibility that needs to be considered for future major events similar to the 2022 floods.

As an outcome to this Inquiry, I would suggest:

- Mobile and fixed wireless NBN towers need discrete power generation facilities to bolster backup power systems, such as solar recharging capability.
- Improved mobile and fixed wireless NBN coverage to remote areas, to reduce or eliminate the shadow zones caused by local topography, and to extend coverage to areas in which there is no existing network.
- Community-controlled emergency position indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs) need to be available at central community locations such as community halls, schools, or located with community volunteers, for times of absolute medical emergency within the community, when all other communication options are unavailable and air lifts are required.

Community-controlled resilience and emergency planning:

The major factor in ensuring the safety and resilience of the J/G/MT community was the community-run support offered primarily by the volunteer administrators of the Jiggi Post Facebook Group. Under normal circumstances, the Jiggi Post is utilised by the J/G/MT community to share news of upcoming community events and to casually discuss local news. However, in the aftermath of the

February 2022 flooding event, it became the primary source of highly-specific information pertinent to the safety of J/G/MT residents. This included which roads were flooded and unsafe to cross, the location of active landslips and fallen trees, and reports on the safety and whereabouts of community members who were unable to be contacted by any other means. During this time, the group saw an upsurge of new members, being the family members of the community who had no way of contacting their loved ones to ensure their safety and wellbeing, and relying upon community reports and sightings of their loved ones in areas that were unable to be reached.

In response to this, the administrators of the Jiggi Post became the de-facto point of contact for the area, a role that they took up admirably and selflessly, and without whom the J/G/MT community would not have fared as well as they did. Amongst the functions the administrators adopted for this period of time, they:

- Created and maintained a register of all known community members, including name, address, household details, possible special needs, whether the person had been seen or reported in as safe, and the last reported contact and welfare details, to be able to assist SES, emergency services and family members conducting welfare checks. Privacy was kept paramount at all times, whilst ensuring that enough information was recorded to help keep people safe if needed. The admins actively co-ordinated efforts in seeking community members reported as uncontactable by family and friends, to relieve their stress and worry as quickly as possible and to ensure everyone's safety.
- Liaised on behalf of the community with Rotowing Helicopter Services to organise air drops of supplies to community members stranded behind landslips.
- Created a Google Maps record of all reported road damage, including location, nature of the damage (landslip, bridge or crossing damage, washed-out unsealed roads, driveway damage, etc) and passability (2WD accessible, 4WD-only, or impassable), then liaising with the RFS, SES, Lismore City Council and ADF to

ensure that safe access to all areas was rectified as soon as possible. On March 13, this map was shared with the community via the Jiggi Post to ensure that the reported issues remained up-to-date.

- In conjunction with the Jiggi School of Arts (the Hall Committee), organised a local supplies depot at the Jiggi Hall for all donations of food, hygiene and baby supplies, and actively ensured that these could be distributed to anyone in need, for an extend period as access to remote dwellings was gradually repaired.

All of this was done with support from the broader J/G/MT community, with community members volunteering information to keep records as up-to-date and accurate as possible.

With such a heavy reliance on local community members to actively manage the local situation and the unavailability of emergency services during this time, as outcomes to this Inquiry I would suggest:

- All planning for future disaster events needs to be undertaken collaboratively with local rural communities with codesigned or community-controlled outcomes.
- Fully funded community-controlled resilience groups, who can bolster (not replace) and direct SES and emergency support services in times of large-scale crisis.
- Upskilling community members to be able to respond to emergency situations prior to the arrival of emergency services, such as through the provision of free physical and mental health first aid training.
- The creation of local community emergency management plans and strategies, codesigned with the community, that address the specific needs each area in conjunction with the broader scale regional planning.

1.3 Response to floods

I have covered much of this off in section 1.2 above as these suggestions would need to be planned and put in place prior to the next natural disaster in order to be effective. However, to clarify, the J/G/MT response to the major flood events in February and March 2022 was

community-based and directed, and the rural response to any future widespread disaster events needs to ensure that emergency services are guided by the local community, utilising local knowledge and connections.

**1.4
Transition
from
incident
response to
recovery**

Again, in rural areas this needs to be guided by the local community, ideally in the creation of funded community resilience groups, but I have nothing further to add here that isn't already covered off in section 1.2 above.

**1.5
Recovery
from floods**

The short- and intermediate-term recovery of the J/G/MT area has predominately focused on the clean-up and repair of damaged property and the recovery and repair of roads and bridges.

I am aware of, and commend, the work of the ADF and SES within the Lismore township in assisting in the clean-up of private property and businesses, however within the rural area of J/G/MT, clean-up of properties again relied almost entirely upon community. The Jiggi Hall and neighbouring Tower Preschool were both damaged by rising flood water and the subsequent clean up was completed entirely by community working bees. As piles of garbage accumulated on roadsides near properties impacted by flood water, run off and land slips, I am aware of people within the community being advised by Lismore City Council that bulk garbage collection would not occur in rural areas until the collection had been completed within the town itself. While this is understandable, given the scale of detritus caused by the flood events, this meant that the decomposing garbage piles that had built up next to school bus stops and immediately in front of the Jiggi Hall, Tower Preschool and the connected residence remained in place for several weeks, creating health and safety hazards while requests went in (again by proactive community members) to the ADF for assistance.

Additionally, work on repairing and maintaining the roads within the J/G/MT area is ongoing and will be for some time. I regularly drive along Jiggi Road between Goolmangar to the Jiggi Public School, and I am aware through the Jiggi Post and through talking to friends of the condition of roads around the Georgica and Mountain Top

area. The roads within the J/G/MT area are not well maintained in normal circumstances. Jiggi Road itself is regularly made hazardous by deep or numerous potholes, and the community were famously told by Lismore City Council to “buy a 4wd” in 2017 in response to repeated requests for urgent road repairs in the area (<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/lismore/buy-a-fourwheel-drive-councils-advice-on-potholes/news-story/6ee83b8322831170f886dbdafbdd6a7a>).

Rural areas are in dire need of rapid, high-quality road repairs with a transparent maintenance schedule under normal circumstances, but this has been made much more imperative after the February and March floods.

After the February floods, Kyogle Earthworks made emergency repairs to many of the dirt roads (and became local heroes because of this!), and to the LCC’s credit, the more dangerously damaged sections of Jiggi Road have recently been repaired (at least as far as the Jiggi Public School – I am unaware of what repairs have been needed or made to the sealed roads past this point).

However, since the repeated flooding in March, no maintenance has been undertaken to repair the damaged caused on dirt roads by the March flooding event and the continued, long-term daily rainfall. Dirt roads are rapidly threatening to become impassable again due to washed-out bridge approaches, deep ruts and channels, and washed-out verges. Potholes are again becoming a major issue on the sealed Jiggi Road, causing severe safety issues for road users, especially as deep potholes appear unexpectedly around blind corners of the road.

This cannot continue to be passed off as “part of living in the country” by numerous governments at various levels, as it will result in the loss of life and limb. Roads that would have been cheaply maintained had timely remedial works been regularly undertaken will now need to be extensively repaired at great cost.

As outcomes to this Inquiry, I would suggest:

- All planning for the clean up of flood detritus resulting

from future events should include how to clean up detritus from rural areas concurrently with that of urban.

- All through-roads to major centres are upgraded as a matter of urgency and regularly maintained, to be both better able to withstand damage from flooding and to ensure that access to multiple towns (including to essential supplies and health care) is possible (for example, if the route to Lismore was cut off to rural areas, than alternative safe routes would be available to Nimbin instead).
- The approaches to bridges and causeways along dirt roads are sealed for a distance of at least 20 metres in either direction, to minimise the possibility of these being washed out during flooding.
- Additional and repeated grading of dirt roads is undertaken after flooding events and during prolonged wet periods, on top of the regular maintenance schedule, to maintain the condition of these roads for access reasons and to prevent serious degradation that requires more extensive road reconstruction.
- Road maintenance schedules and constraints are transparent and publicised, to reduce community stress over whether if and when roads will be repaired and to allow for community input into the prioritisation of road repair.

**1.6 Any
other
matters**

NA

Supporting documents or images
