

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
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Attachments: [Tweed Drainage Council Flood Inquiry submission \(2\).pdf](#)

Your details

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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) Tweed Drainage Council

Your position in the organisation (if applicable) Acting Secretary

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

Tweed Drainage Council represents the combined Private Drainage Boards of Tweed Shire. We call for improved floodplain drainage which must include proper examination of dredging as a flood mitigation measure. Severe siltation in the rivers, creeks and drains of the floodplain existed prior to the 2022 floods but is worsened by large landslips depositing more silt into the river system. This silt build-up impedes the flow of water to the ocean and increases the height and duration of flood events.

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

- [Tweed Drainage Council Flood Inquiry submission \(2\).pdf](#)
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Tweed Drainage Council
PO Box 5087
Murwillumbah South NSW 2484

Thursday 23 June 2022

Commissioner Professor Mary O'Kane AC
Commissioner Michael Fuller APM

Dear Commissioners,

NSW Independent Flood Inquiry Submission

Tweed Drainage Council represents the combined Private Drainage Boards of Tweed Shire and previously made a submission to the NSW Independent Flood Inquiry on 20 May 2022 that called for four actions:

1. Funding from NSW Government to model the drainage systems on the floodplain, similar to that undertaken following the 1974 major flood. We ask for the river to be modelled to establish if removing the impediments in the river would reduce the drainage times, not just from towns and villages but also the prime agricultural land;
2. Funding from NSW Government to undertake the requested floodgate upgrades (specifically to install 24 winches in the locations identified by the Private Drainage Boards);
3. The support of the relevant NSW Ministers to enable the removal of protected vegetation from man-made or highly modified drainage systems and waterways in recognition of the vital role this infrastructure plays in draining water from the floodplain and to protect the properties and livelihoods of residents;
4. Expansion of the eligibility criteria for Disaster Recovery Grants that are made available to primary producers so that Private Drainage Boards are also eligible to apply for these grants. Private Drainage Boards have a responsibility under s202(1)(b) of the *Water Management Act 2000 (NSW)* to maintain the drainage systems in a state of efficiency yet are not eligible to apply for funding to enable them to carry out these duties in the wake of flood disasters.

Much of the floodplain drainage infrastructure was designed and built 60-80 years ago and was fit for purpose at the time. Ongoing development of residential and industrial land has placed more pressure on drainage systems by creating more hardstand, increasing the rate and volume of runoff into drains. Meanwhile, decades of neglect have led to drainage outlets and waterways choking up with vegetation, silt and other debris. Private Drainage Boards continue to advocate for drainage maintenance but funding is limited and drainage of the floodplain does not appear to be considered a priority to Tweed Shire Council's employees. There is a distinct impression that floodplain drainage is not taken seriously as an issue that affects the livelihood of farmers and many in the broader community.

On 25 May 2022 Tweed Drainage Council representatives met with Tweed Shire Council's Director Engineering (David Oxenham) and the Manager of Roads & Stormwater (Danny Rose) to discuss these issues as well as problems with the Black's Drain-Condong Creek drainage system on the floodplain of South Murwillumbah. It is recognised by Tweed Shire Council that the South Murwillumbah basin requires significant drainage upgrades to reduce flooding. One project is to widen Condong Creek upstream of the floodgates as recommended in Tweed Shire Council's *Condong Creek Drainage Management Plan*. Installing winches on the floodgates in Condong Creek is also urgently required. The second major project in this area is to redesign the Black's Drain outlet where it intersects with Tweed Valley Way. The previous design has repeatedly failed during major floods, increasing damage and risk to residents and businesses in South Murwillumbah.

These actions are desperately needed but will be of limited efficacy if the state of the river itself remains unaddressed. Numerous large silt banks were problematic prior to 2022 but since the February floods landslips upstream of Murwillumbah have contributed even more silt into the river system. It is crucial that the effect of this increased siltation in the river and drains is properly studied to understand the impact it may have on future floods, minor and major. We were taken aback when David Oxenham bluntly stated to us that river dredging "is not going to happen". He told us that he was arranging a report to be produced that would review previous studies but there would be no further examination of the costs and benefits of dredging. It is unacceptable that decisions on river management might be based on the opinion of staff rather than objective studies and facts. It is disturbing that the Director of Engineering displays such arrogance and preconception on a matter that affects us all and has strong community support. A thorough and holistic hydrological study of the entire river and drainage system is badly needed in the wake of the past two major floods, and should address the impact of:

- Existing modifications to the river bank (e.g. rock banks and roads both sides for much of its length)
- Proposed modifications to river infrastructure (e.g. potential raising of Bray Park weir and modifying Black's Drain etc.)

- Dredging
- Building Byrrill Creek dam as both flood mitigation and water supply as Clarrie Hall dam walls are raised (rather than piping water from Gold Coast during the Clarrie Hall construction phase).

We were therefore pleased to note that at its Ordinary Council Meeting on 16 June 2022, Tweed Shire Council successfully moved a motion with Councillors unanimously voting that:

1. Council approach the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation and the CSIRO and requests that flood modelling be undertaken to show the benefits or otherwise of dredging of rivers, creeks and drains as a flood mitigation option with a focus on:

- Past and current dredging regimes;
- Previous studies;
- Benefits;
- Indicative costs;
- Environmental impacts; and
- Approvals pathways.

with the information received to be presented to Council.

2. If the organisations listed above decline then a future report be submitted to Council.

Tweed Drainage Council very strongly supports this action and asks for support from NSW Government to facilitate this request to the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation or the CSIRO. If those organisations decline then a suitable independent organisation must be engaged to carry out this modelling.

Tweed Shire Council's submission to your inquiry recommends the following in respect of flood mitigation:

That government substantially increase its investment in flood mitigation schemes which in the case of Tweed Shire could include expansion, additional funding and acceleration of Voluntary House Purchase, and Voluntary House Raising schemes, a review of the Murwillumbah CBD levee and drainage study and enhancement of the Murwillumbah CBD levee and pump systems.

Sadly this completely ignores the large number of farmers and businesses based on the floodplain for whom it is either impossible or prohibitively costly to relocate to higher ground. There is insufficient support for the agricultural industry on the floodplain and there is little recognition that the much-touted industrial land swap program is simply unaffordable for businesses that require large premises or have substantial infrastructure. Additional flood mitigation schemes must be considered to support these important

contributors to the local economy. In the case of the agricultural industry, this must include improving drainage to reduce crop losses from extensive inundation.

In conclusion, our community needs adequate funding to be directed to varied and substantial flood mitigation measures so that we can be better prepared to survive and thrive on the floodplain. We thank you for considering our submission.

Yours Faithfully,



Joanne Iva
Acting Secretary
Tweed Drainage Council