

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
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Attachments: [submission flood inquiry.docx](#)

Your details

Title Ms

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Submission details

I am making this submission as Other

Submission type I am making a personal submission

Your position in the organisation (if applicable) Lismore City Councillor

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 As the Former Mayor of Lismore and Lismore City Councillor since 2004 and Chair of Councils Floodplain Management Committee (2016-2021)

and member of Rous County Council (2008-2021) I have a strong interest and deep knowledge of the flood issues that Lismore faces.

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

Meteorological research says the frequency and magnitude of major flooding in coastal southeast Australia is increasing significantly, which means Lismore must get ready for floods like 2022 and higher. There are no engineering solutions so we need effective responses that will give certainty to the people of Lismore and with facilitation and investment through NRRC, help the Northern Rivers region thrive.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Can we prevent Lismore from flooding? No, we cannot. There are no practical engineering solutions to the problem of major flooding in urban Lismore. Using levees to try and protect Lismore from floods at 15m AHD is almost impossible due to the narrow cross section of the river channels and size of the floodplain. The location of Lismore in relation to the Wilsons River catchment indicates the problem and absurdity of building a flood mitigation dam on one small creek.

1.3 Response to floods

Here are some effective responses that will give certainty to the people of Lismore and with facilitation and investment through NRRC, help the Northern Rivers region thrive.

1. retreat from the floodplain

Housing is the critical issue in Lismore now, with thousands of people homeless and many too traumatised to return to their damaged homes. While some temporary accommodation is being provided, the longterm response to more frequent major floods is to retreat from the floodplain. These flood liable homes are 100 years old and built from big scrub rainforest

timbers unavailable today, they are worth moving to sites that consolidate the urban area and villages. This is feasible with over 3000 residential house lots already zoned and mapped in Councils Growth Management Strategy. NRRC can fund and coordinate voluntary land swaps with adequate additional funds to move or rebuild homes on flood free sites.

For those who choose to rebuild in place with flood ready materials and evacuation plans, funds are needed to assist with repair and flood preparedness. Staged retreat and rebuild may take years but setting a direction and working toward it will give vulnerable people hope.

2. relocate government services

Lismore is the Service Centre for the Northern Rivers Region with: 5 high schools, Tafe and University; law courts, legal and financial businesses; hospitals and associated medical facilities; emergency services SES, Police, Centrelink, Ambulance, RFS and prior to the flood 35 thousand vehicles driving into Lismore every day from surrounding LGAs to access these services.

It is critical that Government Services stay in Lismore but they need to be relocated on flood free locations in Goonellabah. NRRC can facilitate and fund the master planning and construction of new facilities which will stimulate economic activity and the businesses that support these agencies and workforce will follow. We can create a new climate ready city centre that will continue to service the region.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

regional approach to infrastructure
Road networks were destroyed in the floods but were already a maintenance burden to local Councils. Councils have skilled design and construction teams but lack adequate funding to deal with roads built in high rainfall, steep slope and pug soil environments. The planning and reconstruction of this critical infrastructure needs a regional approach instead of each LGA dealing with their networks in isolation. With coordination

and significant funding from the NRRC and utilising skilled Council staff, a cost effective and prioritised road reconstruction program can begin.

Housing supply and affordability is a major issue in the region. Rather than rezoning farmland and spreading housing throughout the rural area with an increasing demand for infrastructure, construction of well designed medium density housing close to services will meet the regions needs. Lismore Councils Housing Strategy identifies the lack of affordable housing and the demand for medium density to suit our ageing population and single person households, the NRRC can drive this investment.

Sewerage systems located in the floodplain pollute our rivers and downstream environments. Instead of wasting millions rebuilding the flood damaged east Lismore sewerage treatment plant, the NRRC can implement the Rous County Council plan for a purified recycled waste water treatment plant that will meet the future water needs of the region. Even during the worst drought on record, the water passing through the sewerage treatment plants at Lismore and Ballina exceeded the estimated future demand in 2060. Now is the time to invest in this technology close to the population that will use the water, instead of replacing out of date sewerage systems.

Stormwater from intense rainfall events is an increasing problem in urban Lismore and the flood levee around the CBD creates a dam effect preventing this water reaching the river which floods the CBD from the inside. A single rain event caused traffic chaos and closed businesses in December 2021. The damaged flood levee should be removed because there are no funds allocated for its maintenance or replacement and overtopping causes catastrophic damage and a false sense of security for businesses. The levee also traps flood waters inside the levee for many days after each flood event, damaging building foundations

and making cleanup difficult

1.5 Recovery from floods

respect the river

Improving river health and slowing the flow of water in the upper catchment has flood mitigation effects and other benefits. Regional investment by NRRC and job creation opportunities through programs like Green Corps and Landcare to revegetate the Wilsons River catchment will improve water quality, prevent erosion, increase farm productivity, capture carbon and create habitat. Forming 20metre easements on creek and riverbanks for weed removal and tree planting will support farmers and reduce flood levels and velocities downstream. The LCC Floodplain Management Committee recommends including Nature Based Solutions in flood mitigation strategies because of the many co benefits.

The NRRC has the authority to progress a catchment wide approach to river health. The fertile floodplains and deep rivers are the reason Lismore was built here and why the Bundjalung people have visited this place for feasting and ceremony for thousands of years. We need to respect and understand the river and how water moves through this country. Recognising the river as a legal entity with a Riverkeeper seat at NRRC Advisory Board will ensure all decisions made by NRRC and other agencies will consider and respect the river.

1.6 Any other matters

The State Government and NRRC have a responsibility to act now so people can sleep at night without fear of the rain. They have the resources and authority to relocate vulnerable people out of the floodplain, ensure adequate and affordable homes, rebuild accessible government services, invest in sustainable infrastructure and repair our river catchments. Local Government has done the groundwork and identified many of the strategies, we need support with coordination and funding. The 4 responses outlined in this submission are economically viable, socially worthwhile,

ecologically sensible and will generate jobs and hope. I look forward to your response.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [submission flood inquiry.docx](#)
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CAN WE FLOOD PROOF LISMORE? SUBMISSION TO NSW FLOOD INQUIRY

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3. Regional approach to Infrastructure

Road networks were destroyed in the floods but were already a maintenance burden to local Councils. Councils have skilled design and construction teams but lack adequate funding to deal with roads built in high rainfall, steep slope and pug soil environments. The planning and reconstruction of this critical infrastructure needs a regional approach instead of each LGA dealing with their networks in isolation. With coordination and significant funding from the NRRC and utilising skilled Council staff, a cost effective and prioritised road reconstruction program can begin.

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5. Resilient Community

The State Government and NRRC have a responsibility to act now so people can sleep at night without fear of the rain. They have the resources and authority to relocate vulnerable people out of the floodplain, ensure adequate and affordable homes, rebuild accessible government services, invest in sustainable infrastructure and repair our river catchments. Local Government has done the groundwork and identified many of the strategies, we need support with coordination and funding. The 4 responses outlined in this submission are economically viable, socially worthwhile, ecologically sensible and will generate jobs and hope. I look forward to your response.

Vanessa Ekins Former Mayor and current Lismore City Councillor (2004-2022)

Chair LCC Floodplain Management Committee (2017-2022)

LCC Delegate at Rous County Council (2008-2021)