

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Thursday, 12 May 2022 10:02:26 AM

Your details

Title Ms

First name Victoria

Last name Keesing

Email [REDACTED]

Postcode 2479

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

Background:

A small group of 5 Bangalow residents mobilised early in the flood to make a call out to other local residents less affected by the flood to offer accommodation to those who were rendered homeless by the floods. In order to do this, we initially utilised social media for a call out and had significant and immediate response. Within

12 hours 30 people had offered space in their homes and within 48 hours we had close to 100 people on our list. Our crucial work at that point was to connect people requiring accommodation with those who had it.

Our experience:

1. Early on we were overwhelmed by the volume of responses and looked for an app or other to organise the incoming requests and the incoming offers so that we could sort and match. The consequence of this was that we took time to build a spreadsheet and survey monkey to build two forms – one for offers and one for requests. This all took time away from doing the matching.

Learning: A developed app for times of emergency that all the community groups in the Northern Rivers shared for speed of access and response would aid regional co-ordination and more immediate response. Knowledge of this within the community so that pre-emptive offers could be made in the lead up to an emergency would also provide the ability to respond quickly.

2. Our contact list was negligible and relied on locals knowing other locals at the outset. This meant to reach out to groups in other parts of the Northern Rivers was difficult. The first people who reached out to us were volunteer community members and DCJ seemed to be disinterested in helping with the matching “its not our job”. At the same time we found residents in Bangalow, who were not seriously flood affected, really wanted to help and needed direction.

Learning: Established community groups in each Northern Rivers Location that are loosely linked and have the contacts to enable immediate interlinking in an emergency would be helpful. A local community co-ordinator/group, whose members are regularly refreshed, could direct

people into worthwhile and helpful activity. This would mean faster and more purposeful response. That group would need to be known as the place/people to go to and advertised in social media and the like in the lead up to an event if possible.

3. Location and equipment:

Initially there was no place to locate the group looking at accommodation. Early on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] reached out to the A&I Hall which had no wifi so then reached out to the Bangalow Show Office who did and were prepared to accommodate us. Critical in all of this was the phone lines, wifi and the like went down very early on in Bangalow and made ongoing communication with people either offering or needing help impossible. This required getting in a car and trying to traverse the area at a time when ATMs were down and fuel shortages abounded.

Learning: Bangalow needs a nominated central place that is equipped with reliable wifi, white boards, potentially computer and emergency phone and where the community knows to go in cases of emergency. A neighbourhood centre would be valuable both in terms of building community resilience and to link to other centres in the region for operation in times of emergency.

It appears it would be unwise to continue to rely on Telstra to ensure continuity of services during emergency. Perhaps two-way radio operating between the regional community centres and available for emergency services to receive information about locations of people requiring help might be appropriate together with pre – disaster training and plans. In this vein, learning from cyclone affected regions who utilise radio and transistors to keep locals informed might also be appropriate. This would mean encouraging locals and/or perhaps providing locals with small battery-operated, transistor

radios together with the number of the station that will be utilised.

4. In the actual matching and housing of people a range of difficulties were encountered. We had people offering homes and made good links with individuals who were volunteering at the shelters in order to match vulnerable people. Those people almost all expressed concern about leaving the shelters, even when it was clearly not a helpful place for them, because DCJ was advising them that they had to stay to receive support in the early days. In addition, we were advised/instructed/ordered to go to DCJ in order to progress the matching. When we did try to contact the name were given, we were advised to drive to the centre to discuss. When we drove to the Ocean Shores centre that person was not there and other staff tried to be helpful but basically had been on duty for 48 hours without sleep and “had had no advice or connection from their bosses”. They also indicated it was “not their job to try and do the matching and if we wanted to we were welcome to simply wander the centre and ask people”. We did send through some people and worked with the local chaplains and community volunteers who were on the ground to identify the most in need.

Those in need did come with complex problems – high anxiety and trauma layer on disability, mental illness and the like. There has been no support offered or available to the homes that took them by any state or local services. The housing has ranged from short term – 10 days ish to some people who are still accommodating nearly 3 months later as housing support services are slow and quite difficult to connect with. State and local services were slow to come online for flood affected people and were absent altogether for those trying to support.

Learning: People in this community are prepared to support and that showed up in an outpouring

of offers. The state and local government did not match that with sufficient resources or support to enable the community to care for itself. Saving people's lives is only the first step. Recovery of humans through trauma takes so much longer and the connection between the first disaster into the medium term support, which we were offering, is absent.

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	see our story
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1.2 Preparation and planning	see story
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1.3 Response to floods	see story
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1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery	story
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1.5 Recovery from floods	story
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1.6 Any other matters	story
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Supporting documents or images
