

**From:** [NSW Government](#)  
**To:** [Flood Inquiry](#)  
**Subject:** Floods Inquiry  
**Date:** Monday, 11 April 2022 2:34:06 PM

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## Your details

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**Title** Ms

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**First name** Victoria

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**Last name** King

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**Email** [REDACTED]

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**Postcode** 2478

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as** A resident in a flood-affected area

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**Submission type** I am making a personal submission

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**Consent to make submission public** I give my consent for this submission to be made public

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## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story** I am a resident in a flood affected area. However, my place of residence was only minimally affected. I do though own two other properties in townships that were significantly flood affected. I feel as though I have

useful learnings to share as I have been very heavily affected in the two highly affected communities on a daily basis, while still being able to return to my own home which has remained dry and safe. I have volunteered in evacuation centres, community hubs, delivered meals, cleaned houses, visited affected communities to talk to people highly impacted, coordinated responses etc. Therefore I feel I have a very useful perspective to share.

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## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

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### **1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

1) Climate change - action is required by this government to address the causes of climate change. Notably land clearing laws in NSW are severely impacting the environment, causing more rain and less drainage. Communities need action from government to give them confidence to rebuild.

2) M1 freeway - insufficient drainage - there are many aerial photos to show the freeway held the river water to the West of the freeway, effectively damming it and holding water in affected communities such as Broadwater - eg see the attached video footage from 1:00 to 2:00: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2u8bMSw8yr0>

3) Planning laws - low-lying land is being released for development when it is not suitable and will run the risk of being flooded and also impact the ability of the natural environment to absorb rainwater. Government seems to be putting the onus on Councils to make decisions (<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Policy-and-Legislation/Resilience-and-natural-hazard-risk/Flooding>) whilst simultaneously pulling resources out of local Councils. Local Councils need more guidance and more resources (ie money) in order to protect local communities.

4) Funding allocations - more funds need to be cascaded to local communities to make decisions locally. Eg SES, Councils, Landcare etc. Pulling

resources out of local community organisations has been systematic by this Federal Government and has been disastrous, leading to lack of readiness or resources to build up mitigation strategies

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**1.2  
Preparation  
and  
planning**

1) SES resourcing - SES was warned in October 2021 that it looked likely a significant weather event would take place in Summary 2022, but no additional resources were allocated and a decision seems to have been made to continue without taking additional precautions. Resourcing SES is critical. An over-reliance on volunteers is not acceptable or sustainable.

2) BOM and SES interface - The impact of the second Lismore flood was so much greater due to the withdrawal of the evacuation order for Lismore CBD. BOM and SES need to work together much more effectively, and also need to take more precautionary measures.

3) Communications - it is unrealistic to rely on internet communications in an area impacted by natural disaster. Communications were practically non-existent, conflicting, confusing and uncoordinated. A coordinated comms plan is required

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**1.3  
Response  
to floods**

1) SES responsiveness - In the immediate hours following the first flood in Northern NSW, SES called on local citizens with boats to launch their boats and rescue people, then rescinded that call, then reinstated it. The decision to use local citizens' boats literally saved many dozens (if not 100s of lives) - there are countless stories of people being saved from their roofs and/or roof spaces by these local citizens. But the indecision around whether or not it was required may have cost lives. SES needs to have 1) more resources available at short notice, 2) better resources (eg the Broadwater SES is based on the river so was underwater and inoperable for weeks and still is), 3) contingency plans - eg after the first flood, internet was down for a week. SES had been told to throw out topographical maps and rely on Google maps, but this was not possible for that critical first week of response. Luckily, as I understand it, Ballina SES just happened to have retained their old paper maps so could use

these. Probably some areas were not so lucky.

2) ADF deployment - FAR FAR too late. Should have been immediate. This inaction has caused an indescribable amount of angst and trouble for people locally. ADF also need to be trained in this. Many personnel did not understand how to deal with flood impacted people and were seen as insensitive and self-serving in some instances.

3) Evacuation centres - the immediate establishment of evacuation centres seemed to be entirely run by volunteers. I worked in two and people were claiming that I was in charge. I kept saying that that is not true, but the truth is no one was in charge and so people were just deferring to the person with the best organisational skills and in some instances, this was me. I was making it up as I went along. This was true even by day 2 or 3 when Dept of Communities and Justice employees arrived. They were well-meaning but often ineffectual. They clearly had had no training on what to do and how to approach situations. This resulted in duplication of effort, gaps in resourcing and implementation, further anxiety for evacuees, volunteers being under-utilised.

4) Communications - it is unrealistic to rely on internet communications in an area impacted by natural disaster. Communications were practically non-existent, conflicting, confusing and uncoordinated. A coordinated comms plan is required

5) Visible and humane encouragement and support to those in need and condemnation of those thwarting the response - the fact that the National Recovery and Resilience Agency Coordinator-General Shane Stone reportedly told media: "You've got people who want to live among the gum trees – what do you think is going to happen? Their house falls in the river and they say it's the government's fault," is just unforgivable. There was no comment by Scott Morrison to address that.  
<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/labor-calls-on-flood-relief-boss-to-resign-over-grossly-insensitive->

remarks/video/95b22f4a232721c7509ea458463e210b

6) Increased police response - there was much more traffic on the roads after the floods, with people urgently carrying items to and from disaster areas. There was no visible police support. Instead, I personally witnessed many police vehicles doing speed checks. This is not helpful.

7) Service NSW and Services Australia presence at the community hubs in person - this is VERY helpful. Thank you. Please do more of this. People need this as many cannot navigate how to claim assistance.

8) Road closures - many roads had to be closed. Local councils seem to have done an amazing job in managing this and eg putting in place shuttle buses for highly impacted areas. Much appreciated. Thank you. This will be required again in the future, although obviously funding needs to be set aside for this

9) Rubbish collection - local Council skips in strategic sites have been helpful for people to shift rubbish quickly, as have Council pick ups. However, bins on many properties were washed away. Bin replacement services are required to help people establish more normality and get their rubbish collected

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**1.4  
Transition  
from  
incident  
response to  
recovery**

1) Scott Morrison's response - it was unforgivable for Scott Morrison to commit to emergency relief for some LGAs and not others. He knew exactly what he was doing. This government treats public money as political capital. Unforgivable and will not be forgotten here for a long long time to come. Also, of course, his decision to come to Lismore and not meet local people. A PM needs to be strong enough to come and face the music, especially when people feel his lack of climate policy is a direct driver of the current situation. The flood recovery has never been an opportunity for showcasing. It's an opportunity for listening, learning, taking action. Absolutely shameful

2) Dominic Perrottet's response - I have been told that Dominic Perrottet came to the Broadwater community

hub and listened and learnt, which is important. This is appreciated.

3) HUGE over-reliance on local volunteers - people in this area are exhausted, stressed and feel unsupported. The mental health impact is unfathomable. More government-funded resources are required. See above for examples.

4) Lack of coordinated communications - as above, there is an overreliance on Facebook groups and also individual MPs posting on Facebook. In contrast, Service NSW seems quite distant and unresponsive, except when Service NSW personnel are on the ground. People need visible, coordinated, one stop shop for TWO-WAY communication (not a website with lots of links on it) to understand how to gain support. Also, there needs to be much better coordination of offers of help/donations and requests for help. Many people, especially outside of this community, want to help and don't know how to

5) Support for schools - many schools are now combined (eg two schools on one campus). Immediate help is required to support kids stay in school and learn. Feedback suggests the current situation is chaotic, unstructured and demoralising for kids. School offers kids a safe place to be and gives parents and carers time to focus on rebuilding their homes.

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**1.5  
Recovery  
from floods**

1) Government role needs to enable coordination - There are many people locally who are helping where they can and broadly this is reliant on the community hubs, operations such as Resilient Lismore and Facebook community pages to coordinate recovery efforts (eg <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1439545452838938>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/370410466386795>, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/161370884384945>) . The government needs to take a lead role in coordinating this. There are countless stories of jobs being logged with eg ADF, the Service NSW Request for Assistance site and then nothing happening. So people are turning their backs on these and instead just asking for help directly via Facebook. Look at this -

incredibly helpful. Pulled together as a one stop shop reference point on all help available. This was developed by a member of the public, not by a government agency - <https://floodreliefdirectory.au/?fbclid=IwAR1U6JiOmKUjZ0GpFeAEOOXsCtssAN-8rM2Ah9Fhdo9k242OwiHtWHljvOc>).

2) On the ground assistance - the government response has primarily relied on internet-based applications. Many flood affected people a) don't have internet (NBN still down in some areas), b) can't use internet (think elderly, people with disabilities), c) are too shell-shocked to navigate these sites. (eg in particular, I had a go at trialling the small business grant application to help local businesses and I was struck by the fact that you had to complete the application in one go without an option to save and then resume later. People don't have the mental capacity to complete the application with all supporting documentation at the moment)

3) ADF deployment - ADF personnel were very helpful in some instances. However, not in all instances. I spoke to a flood impacted person yesterday who said she literally feels vulnerable now that our ADF personnel are so weak at taking initiative. Her words "We will lose a war if those guys are in charge because they could not make decisions or take action." ADF response was weak in terms of: 1) Not enough resources available, 2) Very limited scope of work - eg one lady told me she asked them to remove a dangerous wall and was told "We don't do demolition". As she said, "If the army don't do demolition, then who else is going to?" 3) ADF personnel pulled out FAR too soon. I drove through flood affected areas yesterday. There are mattresses lying alongside the river, water tanks lying on the side of the road, huge pieces of equipment lying in public areas. Who is going to clean this up? It can't be left to the local Council. ADF should have been tasked with this. In addition, the need locally for significant help in private properties is enormous. It seems now it's down to volunteers. I am volunteering as much as I possibly can but I am exhausted, stressed and feeling unsupported. It's not sustainable

4) More public housing - I understand that 14,000 people have been displaced in the Northern Rivers. There is just not enough public housing to meet even those critically in need. Elderly people are on the street, families are living in tents. It is a societal disaster with long-term repercussions. The government needs to take this seriously. Ideally, there at least needs to be a lever for government to requisition holiday homes when needed in natural disasters. There are countless stories of people having to move several times in the first few weeks and months just so that holidaymakers can be accommodated

5) Direct government support where needed - eg people are offering furniture who don't have transport, people are saying they want the furniture but can't transport it. Availability of eg trucks, trailers would be helpful. Also, laundry services, delivery of hot meals, loans of equipment eg gurneys

6) Changes in legislation for renters - eg people with animals are finding it practically impossible to find rental homes, either short term or long term. NSW State Govt seems to have dragged its heels on changing the law to make it illegal for landlords to discriminate against people with pets. This should have been changed immediately post floods to stop animals being dumped, rehoused etc. We are living next door to a family in short term accommodation who told me yesterday they're thinking they're going to have to rehome their dog. It's ridiculous and unnecessary. The question the government needs to ask itself is "How can we make this easier for people?" and make a raft of changes based on their response to that question

7) Direct and immediate funding for community org's on the ground delivering help - most notably Resilient Lismore and Koori Mail which seem to have been the anchor org's for Lismore. Also Orange Sky for laundry services

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**1.6 Any other matters**

1) Engagement with the insurance industry - there are so many stories of bad practices by insurance companies (as well - to be fair - of insurance



companies doing the right thing). I met a 73 year old man yesterday who has insured his home for 37 years with NRMA but they are refusing to pay out. He is homeless and his house is an uninhabitable, damp shell. It's not acceptable for insurance companies to leave their customers in such a state. There must be some form of claim made available to people in this position.

2) Political will - trust in government has plummeted over the last few years. I understand that this is a much wider issue, but please start establishing good practice so that people believe in what your politicians are saying. A federal ICAC for example would be a good thing to have in place and public admonition, or ideally sacking, of National Recovery and Resilience Agency Coordinator-General Shane Stone. Climate change action needs to be real, not political window dressing. A reliance on science when formulating policy. Without much bigger action by the government, public trust will break down further and the government will be unable to administer in the way it needs to in the future

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### **Supporting documents or images**

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