

## **NSW Government Response to the NSW Parliamentary Select Committee on the Response to Major Flooding across NSW in 2022**

The NSW Government welcomes the NSW Parliamentary Select Committee's Report on the 'Response to major flooding across NSW in 2022'. The unprecedented flood events of February and March this year caused significant damage for individuals, homes and business across the Northern Rivers, Mid North Coast, Central Coast and Sydney regions. For many, the impacts of these events continue to be felt. As NSW continues to face multiple, compounding disasters, we are committed to learning from the experience of the past to improve the management of future natural disasters.

Prior to the Select Committee releasing its Report, the NSW Government received the findings and recommendations of the Independent Flood Inquiry led by Professor Mary O'Kane AC and Mr Michael Fuller APM. This Inquiry was established in March to examine and report on the causes of, preparedness for, response to and recovery from the 2022 catastrophic flood event. The NSW Government has already accepted in full or in principle all 28 recommendations of the Independent Flood Inquiry. These recommendations address many of the same issues considered by the Parliamentary Select Committee, including opportunities to better mitigate against flood risk, strengthen and streamline emergency services management arrangements, and better support people impacted by floods.

Government has therefore considered the Select Committee's findings and recommendations in the context of work already underway to respond to the recommendations of the Independent Flood Inquiry Report. Of the Committee's 37 recommendations, the NSW Government:

- Supports 17 recommendations
- Supports in principle 20 recommendations, with further work required on implementation

Implementation of these recommendations will be overseen by the Project Management Office established in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to coordinate the implementation of Government's response to the Independent Flood Inquiry's recommendations.

Recommendation		Government Response
1	<p>That the NSW Government consider a restructure of the NSW State Emergency Service with consideration to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• realigning the focus of the organisation to harness local knowledge and networks</li> <li>• coordinating more closely with other rescue agencies to bolster its capacity to respond</li> <li>• increasing salaried staff and resources, and driving volunteer recruitment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b></p> <p>In response to Recommendation 12 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government has already committed to supporting efforts to improve frontline capability, including through the streamlining of functions across agencies. Work is underway to consider the most appropriate way of doing this.</p>
2	<p>That the NSW Government consider abolishing Resilience NSW if it is unable to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the organisation's role is clear after reviewing its policies, objectives and funding</li> <li>• the organisation and its policies are focused on meeting community needs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b></p> <p>In response to Recommendation 5 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government has already committed to streamlining disaster response and recovery arrangements to better support communities during disasters. Work is underway to consider the most appropriate way of doing this.</p> <p>Resilience NSW will continue to deliver to communities impacted by disasters until such time as new arrangements are in place and will be engaged in any future transition arrangements.</p>
3	<p>That the NSW Government embed into its emergency plans the appointment of a senior police officer with combat experience to lead recovery efforts following natural disasters.</p>	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b></p> <p>In response to Recommendation 3 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government has already committed to the establishment of a full time Deputy Commissioner of Police with responsibility for the State Emergency Operations Controller (SEOCN) role. Work is currently underway to determine the structural arrangements and functions of the role.</p>
4	<p>That the NSW Government ensure that all emergency and recovery plans, including state plans, local emergency management plans and functional area plans, are reviewed and updated regularly and provide clarity on the role of non-government partners.</p>	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>All emergency management plans, Sub-Plans and Supporting Plans are formally reviewed on a regular basis. This is outlined in the State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN).</p>
5	<p>That the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth to develop a national cross-agency app to integrate all community services and agencies into a single platform so that everyone can receive accurate and timely information from one source during emergencies.</p>	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>In response to Recommendation 8 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government noted it has already commenced the development of a single disaster app.</p>
6	<p>That the NSW State Emergency Service, in partnership with the Bureau of Meteorology, investigate ways in which local communities and local media with local knowledge can play a stronger role in flood predictions and warnings.</p>	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>The NSW Government is committed to improving flood threat identification, warning and modelling systems, and recognises the important contribution of local knowledge to this.</p> <p>The NSW State Emergency Service is already exploring research and collaboration opportunities with the Bureau of Meteorology and other agencies to improve flood predictions and warnings and better use local knowledge.</p>
7	<p>That the NSW Government advocate through the National Cabinet for the Bureau of Meteorology to review its rain data infrastructure and flood modelling tools, to ensure forecasting locations, rain and flood gauges and other infrastructure are appropriately placed, maintained and updated.</p>	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b></p> <p>The NSW Government will consider opportunities to work with the Commonwealth to help strengthen the Bureau of Meteorology's rain data infrastructure and flood modelling tools. This includes transferring rain gauges to the Commonwealth where appropriate, in response to Recommendation 1 of the Independent Flood Inquiry.</p>
8	<p>That the NSW Government, in consultation with telecommunication providers and satellite communication providers, investigate ways to minimise the complete loss of telecommunication services in natural disasters, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the distribution of satellite phones and satellite terminals to community hubs in flood prone areas</li> <li>• the prioritisation of services for communities that are highly likely to become isolated in a natural disaster</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>In response to Recommendation 9 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government has already committed to working with the Commonwealth Government and essential services providers to minimise disruption to essential services.</p> <p>As part of this, the NSW Government will explore opportunities to better support communities during disasters using equipment such as Cells on Wheels and Mobile Incident Command Centres.</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the establishment of appropriate protocols to ensure that this equipment is readily available and 'charged' for use with a battery supply.</li> </ul>	
9 That the NSW Government review its public awareness and communication strategies in relation to natural disasters.	<p><b>Supported</b> The NSW Government will consider opportunities to strengthen its public awareness and communications strategies in relation to natural disasters.</p>
10 That the NSW Government work with the community broadcasting sector to identify ways in which community broadcasters could be better supported to provide critical services during natural disasters, with a view to providing them adequate long term funding	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> In response to Recommendation 7 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government has already committed to enhancing the ability of the Public Information Functional Area Coordinator (PIFAC) to provide clear, reliable and consistent messaging during emergencies. As part of this work, consideration will be given to opportunities to better involve and engage with the community broadcasting sector in disaster response and recovery.</p>
11 That the NSW Government invest in the required personnel, training and vessels to ensure that all agencies involved in flood rescue can be mobilised to their fullest potential.	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> In response to Recommendation 4 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government has already committed to taking immediate action to enhance NSW's flood rescue capability. Work has commenced to identify appropriate opportunities to do this.</p>
12 That the NSW Government allocate funding to the improvement of the Pitt Town Evacuation Route and other key possible evacuation routes in Sydney's northwest.	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> The NSW Government has already commenced work to improve the Pitt Town evacuation route, as part of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Risk Management Strategy. This includes the installation of new flood evacuation signage.</p> <p>As part of the Road Resilience Program, Infrastructure NSW and Transport for NSW are working to improve flood resilience of the existing evacuation network.</p>
13 That the NSW Government work with local governments to identify alternative routes to vulnerable roads, and that the NSW and Australian Governments fund the construction of these important routes to improve evacuation and access options in times of disaster	<p><b>Supported In principle – further work required on implementation</b> In response to Recommendation 26 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government, through Transport for NSW, has committed to working with local councils and impacted communities as the initial step to improve the planning and protection of road infrastructure from all hazards.</p> <p>Transport for NSW will continue to partner with key agencies to deliver a consistent and coordinated approach to the maintenance of routes and prioritise upgrades where alternative evacuation points are limited.</p> <p>Transport for NSW will also scope a program of works for medium- and long-term resilience upgrades to support these key evacuation routes.</p>
14 That the NSW Government consider reimbursing Xavier Catholic College and other community groups and organisations that operated evacuation centres	<p><b>Supported</b> The NSW Government is committed to supporting community groups and organisations that operate evacuation centres. There is an existing process for seeking reimbursement for this.</p> <p>Resilience NSW is currently processing a reimbursement claim for damaged goods from Xavier College under this process. Xavier College is separately seeking reimbursement of evacuation centre expenses through a different process.</p>
15 That the NSW Government ensure that the current review of evacuation centres considers the role, accreditation and support of community evacuation centres, with the outcomes of this review to be made public and incorporated into the update of state emergency plans.	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> The NSW Government has received the review conducted by Mr Dave Owens. It is being considered as part of work underway to identify opportunities to better support communities during disasters in response to Recommendation 5 of the Flood Inquiry.</p>

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16	That the NSW Government develop a more proactive, rapid response to manage animal welfare following natural disasters which includes improved collaboration and communication with local veterinarians and animal welfare organisations.	<b>Supported</b> The NSW Government is committed to better managing animal welfare during disasters. Consideration will be given to opportunities to build on existing animal welfare initiatives, which include a public awareness campaign targeting animal owners and strengthened engagement with vets and animal welfare organisations.
17	That the NSW Government ensure that community groups, both existing and emerging, including First Nations groups, are well integrated into disaster recovery, by incorporating them into state recovery plans and engaging with them in between and in the lead up to natural disasters.	<b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> The NSW Government will work with First Nations communities to determine the best way to ensure they are well integrated into disaster preparation and recovery arrangements.
18	That the NSW Government, in partnership with community groups, including First Nations groups, develop initiatives to build community resilience, particularly in regions at high risk of future natural disaster events.	<b>Supported</b> The NSW Government recognises the importance of preparing communities, including First Nations groups, for the impacts of all hazards. Work is underway to build community resilience, including implementation of the NSW Government’s Emergency Management Community Engagement Strategy, and additional opportunities will be considered.
19	That the NSW Government establish a standing workforce from within the public service to staff evacuation and recovery centres, with this workforce to be trained ahead of time and mobilised as soon as a natural disaster occurs.	<b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> The NSW Government will examine opportunities to enhance the existing surge framework for NSW Government staff to ensure it is well placed to support the delivery of evacuation and recovery centres.
20	That the NSW Government overhaul the way in which it conducts its grants process as it frustrated applicants and further traumatised them by repeatedly re-interviewing them and making them prove that they were flooded.	<b>Supported</b> In response to Recommendation 10 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government noted work is already underway on a solution aimed at enhancing the disaster registration and recovery assistance process to reduce the difficulty associated with applying for government assistance.
21	That the NSW Government ensure that flood affected individuals can continue to access financial assistance for as long as there is demonstrated need.	<b>Supported</b> The NSW Government will continue to work with the Commonwealth to extend the closure dates of financial assistance programs where there is a demonstrated need.  NSW have and will continue to work with the Commonwealth to ensure the closure date of assistance programs are extended to meet the needs of the communities.
22	That Service NSW establish teams of assessors that can be on the ground to assess and approve grant applications.	<b>Supported</b> The NSW Government, via Service NSW, will continue to ensure that appropriately skilled staff, including assessors, are available to support customers make grant applications.
23	That the NSW Government consider entering into a service agreement with an organisation that has the resources and capacity to manage donations and activate quickly during natural disasters.	<b>Supported</b> The NSW Government already engages with donations management provider, GIVIT, to ensure donations of goods and funds are managed to support all impacted communities across the state.
24	That the NSW Government address the mental health needs of local communities following the February-March 2022 floods by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• embedding within state emergency and recovery plans a strategy that provides surge capacity for mental health and social workers</li> <li>• prioritising funding for community groups that are currently providing social and mental health support to their local communities</li> <li>• ensuring all flood-impacted communities receive the mental health support they need to fully recover</li> </ul>	<b>Supported in principle – further work is required on implementation</b> The NSW Government is committed to improving the mental health support provided to impacted communities during and after a disaster. The Government has launched the \$5 million Community Wellbeing and Resilience Grants to assist non-government organisations deliver local trauma and recovery programs tailored to the needs of local communities.  Further opportunities to address the mental health needs of flood impacted communities will be considered as part of the current review of the Health Services Supporting Plan established under the State Emergency Management Plan.

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25	That the NSW Government accelerate its caravan program and ensure it is made available as an option to all displaced residents from the February-March 2022 floods.	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>The NSW Government is committed to delivering a range of housing solutions for people impacted by flooding. Following the successful launch of the at-home caravan program in Woodburn, the program has been expanded to more communities across the Ballina, Byron, Lismore and Tweed Local Government Areas to provide additional medium-term housing relief. As at 28 October 2022, 210 caravans have been delivered.</p>
26	That the NSW Government consider investing in supporting relocations, land swaps and providing fair and adequate compensation for landowners who wish to relocate from severely flood-impacted areas.	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b></p> <p>As noted in response to Recommendation 22 of the independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government supports the objective of empowering vulnerable communities who are most at risk of future disasters to relocate. However, this is a long-term objective and requires significant further work and community consultation.</p> <p>Given the immediate needs of flood impacted areas in the Northern Rivers, the NSW Government, through the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation has commenced a process to support the relocation of people most at risk in certain areas. An Expression of Interest process was launched on 31 August 2022 as an essential first step to identifying suitable land for future residential development to re-home affected communities.</p> <p>Subsequently, on the 28 October, a \$800 million Northern Rivers Resilient Home Fund package was launched to support eligible homeowners in flood-prone areas to raise, retrofit or have their home voluntarily bought back.</p> <p>The lessons learned from this process, and consultation with communities most likely to be impacted, will inform any future relocation initiatives.</p>
27	That the NSW Government review the provision of temporary and long term housing options provided to those affected by the February-March 2022 floods, with a view to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring a range of options are identified and embedded within emergency and recovery plans, so that solutions can be implemented as soon as possible after a natural disaster</li> <li>ensuring that housing options meet individual and community needs</li> <li>removing planning impediments that prevent those from accessing more safe and secure housing in times of crisis.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b></p> <p>As noted in response to Recommendation 24 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government is committed to a sustainable housing sector and is investing significant funding to address end-to-end housing across the state.</p> <p>The NSW Government is exploring financing options to support the delivery of increased social and affordable housing across the State. This includes the ability to leverage the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation and the Housing Australia Future Fund.</p>
28	That the NSW Government work with First Nations peoples to support Aboriginal organisations in their capacity to operate and respond in times of natural disasters.	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>In response to Recommendation 6 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government noted the important role community plays in responding to natural disasters. It will consider opportunities to build on existing initiatives to better support, empower and invest in communities' ability to do this, with a particular focus on opportunities to support Aboriginal organisations to do this.</p>
29	That the NSW Government work in partnership with key Aboriginal stakeholders, including the Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council, to prioritise the rebuild of Cabbage Tree Island, and ensure a safe and resourced evacuation plan is in place.	<p><b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b></p> <p>The NSW Government is already working with relevant agencies and Aboriginal stakeholders, including the Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council, to support the rebuild of Cabbage Tree Island. This will be supported by the \$70 million allocated to the repair and replacement of Aboriginal housing damaged by the February-March 2022 flood event.</p> <p>Engagement with key Aboriginal stakeholders is underway to determine the best way to assist the recovery of the local community.</p>
30	That the NSW Government prioritise support for the full restoration of sewage treatment facilities on the Richmond River, for the benefit of communities in the Northern Rivers region.	<p><b>Supported</b></p> <p>The NSW Government, through the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation and Public Works Advisory, is delivering a \$145 million program to repair, rebuild and enhance impacted water and sewerage treatment facilities impacted in the Northern Rivers region.</p>

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31	That the NSW Government provide an increased level of targeted support to flood affected communities contending with widespread mould.	<b>Supported</b> The NSW Government is committed to a sustainable housing sector. The NSW Government will explore mitigation options to reduce the recurrence of mould with alternative construction materials and supporting the repair of homes with flood-resistant materials.
32	That the NSW Government advocate through the National Cabinet to widen eligibility under the Disaster Funding Recovery Arrangements to allow local councils to build back better.	<b>Supported</b> The NSW Government is already leading work through the Council for the Australian Federation to drive changes to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. This includes a strengthened focus on betterment.
33	That the NSW Government invest in the restoration of the Wilsons and Richmond Rivers to include riparian restoration, water quality and river health improvement.	<b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> Financial assistance to support the repair and restoration of riparian sites and landscapes impacted from the February-March 2022 flood event is being provided through the jointly funded Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.  Further consideration and consultation is required to consider the implications of additional assistance to the specified sites as outlined in this recommendation.
34	That the NSW Government provide immediate support to the Hawkesbury City Council to remediate the riverbank erosion affecting Cornwallis Road, Cornwallis without any further delay.	<b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> The NSW Government has established a Riverbank Erosion Taskforce to help address a request from Hawkesbury Shire Council to remediate riverbank erosion, including that affecting Cornwallis Road. The Taskforce is currently considering the best way to achieve this.
35	That the NSW Government significantly increase its investment in flood mitigation and preparation, including its support of local governments to do the same, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing ongoing, long-term funding and access to technical guidance and assistance for local councils</li> <li>• ensuring that land-use planning and development takes a risk-based approach.</li> </ul>	<b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> In response to Recommendation 18 of the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Government supports improved flood planning, in particular in high-risk catchments. Consideration is being given to how the Government can support a consistent approach to flood planning via pilots.
36	That the NSW Government work with local government, industry and sustainable planning experts, including the Government Architect, on policy initiatives in the New South Wales planning system that will help deliver more resilient and sustainable homes, buildings and places.	<b>Supported in principle – further work required on implementation</b> The NSW Government is working towards implementing a range a land use planning relating responses with respect to flooding and natural disasters. These include simplifying the planning system natural disaster provisions, ensuring a risk-based approach to flood planning levels, preparing disaster adaptation plans for towns, and relocating communities most at risk.
37	That the NSW Government work with relevant agencies and local landowners to find ways to improve the management of drainage channels including looking for recommendations to reduce red and green tape	<b>Supported in principle – further work is required on implementation</b> The NSW Government, through the Department of Planning and Environment, will work with all relevant agencies to explore options to simplify processes and streamline current management of drainage channels.