

**Submission
No 39**

REVIEW OF THE NSW RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY ACT 2022

Name: Ms Megan James

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On the 27-28 February 2022 the community where I live received a massive amount of rainfall, which continued for several more days. Over 800mm was recorded in a 30 hour period at my house. My neighbours house was washed 30m downhill by a wall of water and rocks and a large landslide occurred on the other side of my home. Some damage occurred to my house.

I contacted Services Australia and after more than a year, received the \$20,000 Back Home Grant. As my home is solar powered and all water is piped from a spring on the property, my application did not fit the guidelines requiring power and water bills as proof of ownership. As well, my home is on multiple occupancy community where the land is shared in common. These factors meant I did not receive financial assistance in the first year after the disaster, making life and rebuilding very difficult.

I bought a small caravan to live in during this time. I was concerned about the ongoing risk to my home from the proximity of the landslides and asked repeatedly for geotechnical engineering assistance. The assessors for the grant arrived in a team of six, including structural engineers, electrical and plumbing assessors but no geotechnical assessors. The electrical and plumbing assessors were entirely superfluous due to my power, sewage system and water supply are all set up as standalone..Terrible waste of money and human resources. Towards the end of that year geotechnical assessors arrived, but without prior notice so I was not home that day and could not show them the areas I was concerned about. Another waste of resources. It did seem to me that the Johns Lyng Group was benefitting financially a good deal more than the victims of the disaster.

The situation of those of us in the hills dealing with landslides took such a long time to be address that I and many others lost hope that we would receive information and support. This added greatly to our stress and could easily be rectified in future disasters by addressing the diversity of living and landholding situations that occur in rural and regional areas, rather than adopting a 'one size fits all' approach to emergency assistance.

The army came out to assess my place but despite my having no waterline or supply due to the landslides they decided they were more urgently needed in Lismore. Which may well have been the case, but as a 69 year old woman, I needed physical help to restore my water supply that was not forthcoming. I was fortunate enough to be able to pay a neighbour to assist me eventually.

The most useful and immediate assistance I received was from our local Nimbin Neighbourhood and Information Centre, the Koori Mail in Lismore, Resilient Lismore and other small volunteer community groups. I would recommend that these and other such volunteer groups be recognised and financially supported to assist people following natural disasters.

The failure of telecommunications at the time of the disaster was another major blow. I made submissions to the Flood Inquiry and spoke with our local MP Janelle Saffin (who has worked tirelessly and effectively for her constituents) about that. Community members have since established a community CB radio network to facilitate communication in the event of another disaster. Likewise, the failure of river height monitoring systems in the hills has been addressed by community movers setting up their own flood watchmarkers and communication systems. I would recommend that these efforts be recognised and for emergency services to communicate, assist and use these resources in tandem with their own systems.

Some considerable citizen science efforts have been put into analysing the most effective flood mitigation strategies for the multitude of mountain streams that feed into the major rivers of our region. I would also recommend that greater efforts be put into communication with these groups and efforts made to assess their findings.

I have given up on receiving any housing, repair or relocation assistance from the Reconstruction Authority because none has ever been offered. I am still living in a caravan and still repairing my home using my income from the age pension. I still have no reliable report on the stability of the land slide next to my house (5m from the outhouse dunny).