

**Submission
No 41**

REVIEW OF THE NSW RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY ACT 2022

Name: Ms Victoria Pitel

Date Received: 13 June 2024

Dear Committee

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity for feedback during these challenging times.

My submission is of personnel engagement and timeliness of support provided, specifically to the Northern Rivers NSW region.

The catastrophic Natural Disaster decimating our region in February 2022 has been extremely challenging for our community; to those directly impacted and those indirectly impacted and able to offer support where needed.

First and foremost, it is my understanding that the responsibility falls to our Lismore Mayor to initiate recovery with funding coming from NSW Government, which did not happen. This left our community on the back foot with progress slow and faltering.

Initial applications for assistance through Resilient NSW were extremely stressful as we had lost everything and could not provide documentation required for the applications.

We had lost everything, including electricity, internet, gas, hot water.

For the first 3 weeks the region had extremely little fuel, as in petrol for generators (loaned by neighbours and friends) to pressure clean our homes.

Shops shelves laid bare as people panicked, we'd lost major supply chains.

Documentation for assistance required access to electricity, internet, computers, laptops, mobile phones, personal documentation, none of which we had.

We had lost our cars, our clothing, our entire lives had been washed down stream

We were totally stranded, picked up by strangers, lead to venues unknown.

We were refugees in our own town.

The NSWRA, formerly NRRRA, appeared clunky in their response; slow on the uptake with stop start promises to our community, then the blow of funding cut by half after elections, changeover of senior personnel and programs resulting in confusion and further distress to our community.

The fly in fly out personnel appeared to have little understanding of the impact and recovery process. Many seemed to view their positions as career moves which only added to the distress of our community.

Government personnel do not appear to be disaster reconstruction experts but existing government personnel or contractors brought in from interstate cities, seemingly inappropriate for our regional area.

The gap only widened as information required doubled, tripled and quadrupled, leaving our community fatigued and forlorn, many too exhausted to see processes through to fruition.

Long side the challenges with documentation was the delayed time response.

The process of bought back homes ad hoc and too slow, now sit empty and gaged with no vision for their future.

My son was one of the fortunate, to qualify for a buy back after many months of discussion, but has been forced to re purchase in the flood zone due to affordability.

Low set home owners still wait, over two years just to get raised.

NSWRA informed my low set 71-year-old single female neighbour, after two years, that she qualified for a raise. She was told that the application process would take 6 weeks. It's been over 12 weeks now. This seems extra ordinally cruel given what we have been through, mentally and emotionally torturous.

And then we have homes that were 'doubled up' on; first receiving the John Ling 'retrofits' and subsequently bought back months later whilst others received nothing?

Some now appear to have received a buy back and have the opportunity to relocate their homes to higher ground, again, whilst others receive nothing?

And, those of us left behind now need to find our own way out which personally at the age of 63, single and female I find more than overwhelming. On a tight budget and dependant on community assistance I am and doing much of the work of restoring my home alone, my body and mind buckling under the strain.

We now find ourselves surrounded by empty gaged bought back homes under threat of squatters, abandoned homes left to rot ... not psychologically healthy for those forced to remain.

I hope the NSWRA receives the funding required to achieve promised goals and process buy backs, house raises and house relocations to get the job of reconstruction completed asap.