

**Submission  
No 61**

## **REVIEW OF THE NSW RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY ACT 2022**

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This submission process is problematic, because in reflecting on the Act as a member of the public dealing with government machinations we would need to be privy to the ways in which the three iterations of Resilient NSW, NRRC and NSWRA have themselves engaged with and interpreted the the Act. So I hope the committee can investigate more on that score.

If this is the legislation that has produced this deeply undesirable response and often perverse outcomes the question is, how it could be reworded to produce more desirable actions from the bodies delegated these vital responsibilities?

From my reading of the act the intent and outcomes are largely positive. My lament lies with the what ifs. Had the Act been interpreted holding central the values of urgency, compassion, decisiveness, transparency, communicativeness and preferably some bold imagination we could have arrived at a very different destination. My interpretation that the legislation holds much that could be positive. And had it been implemented with the spirit of the intent it would have been a net positive.

But one of the biggest issues not addressed anywhere much is the over use of contractors. And the fundamental difference between a public servant and a consultant or subcontractor. The former can work to an alternative bottom line, i.e they can follow the intent of the legislation and pivot policy, change regulations, provide incentive, bring stakeholders together and take action according to non financial outcome - in this instance, making the lives of flood affect in the NR safer and more stable. The latter, must fulfill the tasks outlined in a contract and can ONLY operate on a for profit basis. It's why the maps were so limited and literal (Rhelm proprietary limited), it's why the call centre staff weren't ultimately helpful (WSP KPIs), it's why the KPMG staff were so hell bent in 'not messing the market'.

The handling of 'risk' was truly bizarre, and damaging, with risk to reputation seemingly the top of the high/major matrix. When the real risk, to lives, of homelessness, of substandard housing, of crumbling communities, of breaking families, crushing finance and humiliating, isolating limbo - these real life risks were always on us. And the bodies ignored them and pushed us to the brink. Ultimately, I don't think anyone can argue that the NR region is safer and more resilient to disaster than pre-2022 as a result of anything NSWRA and co have done. Irony is their reputation is in tatters and if they'd focused on outcomes for the communities they were sent to help they'd still have much of the social capital they rode into town with. Now, clawing trust back is a tough ask, especially after the abysmal communications, to individuals and to the wider community.

The Act had potential to have been interpreted much more generously, even as it is. There was a lot more wiggle room to act more urgently and compassionately. Executives interpreted that so so narrowly and with grinding halting uncertainty and indecisiveness and without taking proper responsibility for their delegation. They didn't recognise the enormous chance they had to work with community to strengthen us and use their many powers to acquire approach land for housing before removing us from the floodplain. I won't even comment in detail on the delay in retrofits and rasing which have gone so haphazardly privately funded only by those who could without even a best practice factsheet, and zero attempt at promoting salvage. NSWRA could have worked to increase our interconnectedness and out disaster preparedness instead they have hampered our progress collective and individual and divided community.

The housing, business and infrastructure outcomes in the Act have not been acted upon in a coordinating fashion, instead wedging levels of govt and cutting community out. There was so much low hanging fruit that was left to rot.

The 'compassionate no' could have saved the day many times, allowing those not eligible to move on with agency, good communications should have been business as usual not requiring allocations, updating and improving local council regulations to push home owners in a desirable direction re materials and developments was not maximised, seemly avoided; financial signalling was deeply confused ie. Rental subsidy for short term, but no local short term options, back home grant to go home, but no guidelines how to floodproof, and not understanding how to leverage people private funds when spending government funds, then buybacks to move out, but no land to move to. And not one single media release program deadline met - talk about known goal.

Proper Monitoring and Evaluations has also not taken place, so tracking outcomes beyond number of properties settled via Buyback does inform government about where anyone ended up or who remains. Thus making this committees evaluation harder. The world was watching and we could have been a beacon of best practice. I'll never get over that we squandered this chance to be bold and impressive in the face of cataclysmic disaster.

The response was not trauma informed, the delays and barefaced lies and terrible communications (eg terrible maps and multiple phones dumpings and inaccessible offic) were deeply retraumatising, invalidating and divisive. This is not the Act, this is an organisational culture. The human toll was not considered, our capacity to deal weakening over time and with each rejection, we retreated. I'm writing this because I don't want this committee to think that only a few dozen of us care to comment - if you asked literally anyone in Lismore to comment on the ways the nswRA has impacted their community you'd get a diatribe. So please realise we are so so tired using our precious energies for submissions with little to no prospect of change. We tried to tell NRRC/nswRA - they could go to their inbox and find issues folders and act on those, they would have an abundance of pleas for change in attitude for a very start.

Consultations never took place and this was the original sin as it were. NRRC were unjustifiably terrified to interact with us and listen to us. This bodies actions removed our agency and our ability to utilise any private leverage we had in the form of finance or assistance effectively. Things like relocation and landswap and many other big and small things were not given timely consideration and are now almost impossible to revisit now the spaghetti is spilt all over the floor, even good changes now come too late for most to act on.

Perverse is the best word to describe the induced chaos.

The implementation was/is the primary problem here. The who/how & what. Process matters. Delegations weren't acted upon with compassion, decisiveness and urgency. I'm not sure how we get values like that back into a broken public service? Deeply incompetent.

Myself and no many others tried early and often to engage via correspondence and meetings and were viewed as an annoyance, instead of the help we could have been. Ignoring local community at their own peril, we should have been able to work positively together in the same direction. Instead we have been thwarted.

Please I beg you, don't let other communities go through this, disaster of recovery response.