

## **SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE RESPONSE TO MAJOR FLOODING ACROSS NEW SOUTH WALES IN 2022**

### **INQUIRY INTO THE RESPONSE TO MAJOR FLOODING ACROSS NEW SOUTH WALES IN 2022**

**Hearing – Wednesday, 15 JUNE 2021**

#### **Responses to Questions on Notice**

##### **Question 1. (page 7 of transcript)**

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: Yes. Local evac centre managers are predetermined and identified through the local planning instruments and are invariably DCJ personnel. We will have the DCJ in later, so we can talk about that in detail. They nominate them and then they have an ability to scale up and mobilise resources around the State. But we've got to remind ourselves that more than 80 evacuation centres were established over that period, with more than 8,000 people registered. We know registrations don't capture everybody, because there are a lot of people who don't want to be registered and caught and simply don't get captured. Resources—when I say resources, I mean people—and other logistical support were spread across a lot of different evacuation centres. The Lismore one particularly was escalated in the early days, with the volume and complexity, to what we designate a major evacuation centre, which comes under the leadership and control of the local police.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Perhaps on notice you could give us the spread of your staff across those centres.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: Say that again, sorry.

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Perhaps on notice, when you're giving us the total number, you could give us the geographical spread.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: Yes.

##### **ANSWER:**

From the beginning of March, 118 Resilience NSW staff members have been deployed to support flood recovery operations, across 311 separate deployments. This is in addition to 10 Resilience NSW staff members who are based on the North Coast as part of Resilience NSW's Local Coordination and Service Delivery Branch.

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##### **Question 2. (page 15 of transcript)**

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: I think this is where the failure was. And we were told by Telstrathat there's a protocol that's unique to New South Wales that requires them to only take their orders from these people, and no orders were being given during the crisis.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'm happy to take that on notice—

**ANSWER:**

Arrangements for coordinating with telecommunication carriers are managed by the NSW Telco Authority in its role as the Telecommunications Functional Area Coordinator. These arrangements are set out NSW Telecommunications Services Functional Area Supporting Plan which is available online [www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-04/Supporting-Plan-Telecommunications.PDF](http://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-04/Supporting-Plan-Telecommunications.PDF).

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**Question 3. (page 16 of transcript)**

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Who are the people with the access to the government network? Maybe take that on notice.

**ANSWER:**

This question was answered by Commissioner Fitzsimmons on the day of the hearing.

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**Question 4. (page 20 of transcript)**

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: They signalled that the one at Mullumbimby, the ex-services club, "DCJ staff attempted to access, but were all cut off due to the floodwater on the night of the twenty-seventh. The DCJ District WelfAC and team remotely managed the evacuation centre in constant engagement with Andrew Spice, the club manager"—I don't know if I'm supposed to say a name in this Committee, I'm sorry, so, the local club manager—"and as soon as the floodwaters receded that allowed the local DCJ staff to access, they were in there on the first of the third". So that was the particular note I got concerning that centre.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you. We were also made aware that the club had not been reimbursed for its costs, as of yet. Do you know whether that has occurred?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I don't know, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

**ANSWER:**

The Mullumbimby Ex-Serviceman's Club's invoice for the use of the venue as an Evacuation Centre was paid on 21 June 2022.

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**Question 5. (page 20-21 of transcript)**

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Thank you. Mr Fitzsimmons, it sounds to me like you've got a lot of things that are written down. The evidence, though, that we have heard is that these things did not work in the circumstances that were occurring. So just to go back to the evacuation centres, we heard evidence from the principal of Xavier College, an extraordinary story—if you have not read the transcript, I really encourage you to do so—of a school that just did it with their staff. They were told—I'm not sure by who—that they were not accredited and to go home. Literally, as the principal was driving home from the school that he was attempting to set up as an evacuation centre, he was told that "We're just going to accredit you now. Can you go back and please do it?" They ended up with over 800 people there. They actually hosted the entire evacuation of Ballina hospital and yet there was zero pre-planning that this school would be used in this way, and it only worked because of the extraordinary efforts of the staff and volunteers and some DCJ staff that worked there. How is it possible that such a critical

evacuation centre didn't even seem to be on the list?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I can't comment, one way or the other.

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: Who can?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I am happy to take it on notice as to whether the facility was on the list as a preidentified site.

**ANSWER:**

I am advised that Xavier Catholic College, Ballina has not been identified by the Ballina Local Emergency Management Committee as a possible evacuation centre in their Local Emergency Management Plan.

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**Question 6. (page 26 of transcript)**

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: Will this database management software that you are talking about be ready for the next natural disaster we have?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I will take that on notice and give you an update on when the timing of it is, but certainly an iteration will be up and running, I suspect, ahead of the next disaster season.

**Question 7. (page 28 of transcript)**

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: I have two questions—one quick one to you, Mr Fitzsimmons. You mentioned a minute ago that there was a database under construction at the moment. When did that commence?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: That was a body of work—the "tell your story once" project—that was government funded. I've just got an update now that we are expecting the beta version of that minimum viable product to be ready for September of this year. It has been a capture of the needs and requirements. It is about connecting with people, getting their details, getting their registration so that when they are interacting with other personnel—

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Sorry to interrupt you, Mr Fitzsimmons. We're on the clock here. That wasn't my question. The question was when did the work commence on this database?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: It would have been approved and commenced within the last 12 months, but I'll get an accurate time for you. It's a project in partnership with Service NSW.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: If you can on notice, that would be good.

**ANSWER (Q6-7):**

The Tell Your Story Once solution is being designed in partnership with Department of Customer Service. The project started in November 2021, and the 'discovery' and the 'alpha' phases have been completed. The project is currently in the 'beta' phase with a minimum viable product being built. The minimum viable product is proposed to be launched by the end of September 2022.

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**Question 8. (page 28 of transcript)**

The Hon. SCOTT BARRETT: Just one final question, if I can. I'm still confused about the Lake Ainsworth thing—what happened and when. Would it be possible to take on notice a bit of a time line of who went when and where, and why they were moved out? Is that something we can take on notice?

The CHAIR: And also there was the very first question put. The allegation was that Resilience NSW staff took those positions in preference to the community.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I can categorically say that we didn't take any positions in lieu of the community. As a matter of fact, one of the biggest challenges, apart from access, is making sure that any accommodation from any personnel from across government or supporting agencies coming into the area did not compromise personnel.

**ANSWER:**

I am advised that Lake Ainsworth Sport and Recreation Camp was opened on 1 March 2022 by the Office of Sport and used to provide temporary accommodation, particularly for disaster affected persons identified as vulnerable, high needs and elderly.

According to available records, 82 disaster affected persons were housed at the site until 31 March 2022 when they were relocated to the Lennox Cultural Centre due to the site being subjected to flooding during the second severe weather event.

From 1 to 30 March, seven rooms were made available to Resilience NSW staff who were supporting operations and recovery in the area. The total site capacity for the centre is approximately 220 beds.

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**Question 9. (page 31 of transcript)**

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Saturday 5 March, when it was declared a major evacuation centre—is that the language you use?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: It was—yes, the formal request to establish that as a major evacuation centre. Yes.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Was it made or granted then?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'll take that on notice.

**ANSWER:**

A request was made to establish Southern Cross University as a major evacuation centre on 5 March 2022.

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**Question 10. (page 35 of transcript)**

The CHAIR: Mr Fitzsimmons, how many times have you been up to the North Coast since the floods occurred?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I've probably been up three or four times in the last couple of months.

The CHAIR: Can you provide us with the exact dates and the duration—how long you were up there, the arrival time and the departure time?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: Yes, sure.

**ANSWER:**

Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons has travelled to the North Coast region four times since 1 March:

Arrived North Coast	Departed North Coast
5 March 2022	6 March 2022
19 March 2022	21 March 2022
12 April 2022	14 April 2022
21 May 2022	21 May 2022

**Question 11. (page 37-38 of transcript)**

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: But you're not registering them and case managing them from evac or from recovery. Now we've got doorknocking out there. We have to do outreach to try to find them because we know they're not getting help. At least in this investment by the Government to do the doorknocking—I'm glad it's being done. Are we maximising it by now at least registering the victims so that we can follow them up?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: Let me take that on notice. I don't know specifically about the registration details. I know we provide guidance and support and we point them in the direction of either the online or telephone services. There are a range of reasons why people don't visit centres or seek support at that stage, but they generally come down into broad categories of "I thought it was an evacuation centre. I didn't realise there was a difference between evac and recovery centres." So we're getting access to people to have options then to connect and register, and we also have them on a list of people that need food, support and other things that we provide as well.

**ANSWER:**

The Resilience NSW House Visit teams are in place to help inform community members of the assistance available to them. They are advising of the local recovery centres and local assistance points where people can visit to register to receive the support they need. It is at these centres and assistance points that information is captured about the person. The data captured by the house visits (as at 24 June) includes:

- 6,289 total visits
- 2,420 interactions with residents (those home)
- 128 food hampers provided
- 952 residents advised they had not yet visited a recovery centre or service.

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**Question 12. (page 49 of transcript)**

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'm trying to answer. About 50 per cent of those grants relate to seeking support for structural assistance—repair assistance—and we've paid out around about 470, 480 amounts at the moment, remembering this is a particular program that is without precedent across the country. The repairs and the rebuilding aspect is being closely aligned with public works and our property assessment program. We're looking at a way of getting repairs and making good on properties, particularly in flood-impacted areas, and we're looking at thresholds above one in 100. We're also very mindful of the longer term viability, of what is

the best arrangement when it comes to rebuilding and those options around relocation. So it's a very complex grant area. It's a very significant grant area. But it's got to be absolutely targeted and delivered to yield the desired benefit in terms of repair. You don't want to put a whole bunch of repairs in if they go back under water in a matter of weeks. It's a bit like some of the pod program.

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS: Further to that, on notice, can you break this down. These are the figures provided by the Minister in a question on notice in the *Notice Paper* to me. As of 20 May, of those 215 payments that had been made, how many were then for the essential household contents grants? Forget about the make good—

**ANSWER:**

Of the 215 approved Disaster Relief Grant applications referenced in the answer to the question on notice asked by the Hon Rod Roberts, 210 grants were for contents only, and 5 were for contents and structural repairs.

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**Question 13. (page 77 of transcript)**

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: I might ask some rounding-out final questions of you, Mr Fitzsimmons. In a previous session, you were talking about State plans, subplans, local plans. I went and did some lunchtime reading. The subplan for the North Coast hasn't been updated since 2019, so you're not recognised as an agency in it. The local Ballina flood plan hasn't been updated since 2013, Tweed shire not since 2014 and Lismore not since 2018. You have got three local plans that were impacted by the floods—no reference to Resilience NSW or their role. On your website it says you're leading disaster and emergency efforts, from prevention to recovery. What confidence can you give the Committee that you are able to actually prepare for floods, when it seems you can't even get plans and subplans and local plans up to date?

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: The State has got a comprehensive planning framework, and we—

The Hon. MARK BANASIAK: But it's not up to date.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: I'll have to take that on notice and have a look. I wasn't aware of those local EM subplans. But I do know, through the State register, that we've got all the key plans up to date and due for review at the moment. And the most recent meeting of the State Emergency Management Committee, which we chair and facilitate—all this preparation and coordination—are across those planning instruments. The particular local EM ones that you refer to, I'll have to take on notice and follow up out of session.

**ANSWER:**

The Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) are responsible for developing and updating Local Emergency Management Plans. Local Emergency Management Planning Guidelines suggest that plans should be reviewed and submitted to the Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) every three years. Local Emergency Management Plans do not expire and remain in force even if not formally reviewed by an LEMC.

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**Question 14. (page 49 of transcript)**

The CHAIR: I would like if you could take on notice, please, all 27 positions.

SHANE FITZSIMMONS: No problem.

The CHAIR: Don't name the individuals, just the titles of the positions.

**ANSWER:**

Resilience NSW has 27 Senior Executive Service positions, named as follows:

- Commissioner, Resilience NSW
- Executive Director, Strategy, Policy & Programs
- Executive Director, Local Coordination & Service Delivery
- Executive Director, Operational Management & Partnerships
- Executive Director, Finance & Investment Delivery
- Executive Director, People, Performance & Governance
- Director, Office of Commissioner
- Director, Strategy, Risk & Insights
- Director, Policy & Ministerial Coordination
- Director, Program Design & Coordination
- Director, Program Delivery
- Director, Metropolitan Sydney
- Director, New England, North West, Hunter & Central Coast
- Director, North Coast
- Director, Illawarra-Shoalhaven & South Coast
- Director, Central West Orana & Far West
- Director, Riverina Murray
- Director, Learning & Capability
- Director, Operational Coordination
- Director, Partnerships & Engagement
- Director, Corporate Finance
- Director, Information Technology & Shared Services
- Director, Investments & Grants
- Director, People & Culture
- Director, Communications & Engagement
- Director, Governance
- Director, Project Management Office