

Online questionnaire report: Inquiry into the Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022

As part of its inquiry, the Select Committee on the Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022 conducted an online questionnaire to encourage public participation in an efficient and accessible way.

The questionnaire was not intended as a statistically valid, random survey. Respondents self-selected in choosing to participate. This means that respondents were not a representative sample of the New South Wales population, but rather interested members of the public who volunteered their time to have a say.

The questionnaire was complementary to and did not replace the usual submission process. The submissions process was available to individuals and organisations who wished to provide a more detailed response to the inquiry's terms of reference. In this regard, some respondents may have completed the questionnaire and also made a submission.

This report summarises the responses expressed by participants and provides a sample of views on the response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022. These responses will inform the committee's views throughout the inquiry and may be used in the inquiry report.

Questions asked

The questionnaire comprised 16 questions. This included background information about the respondents including their contact details and location. Participants were also asked where they were living at the time of the floods and if and how they or someone they know was directly impacted by the floods.

A mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions then sought the views of respondents on:

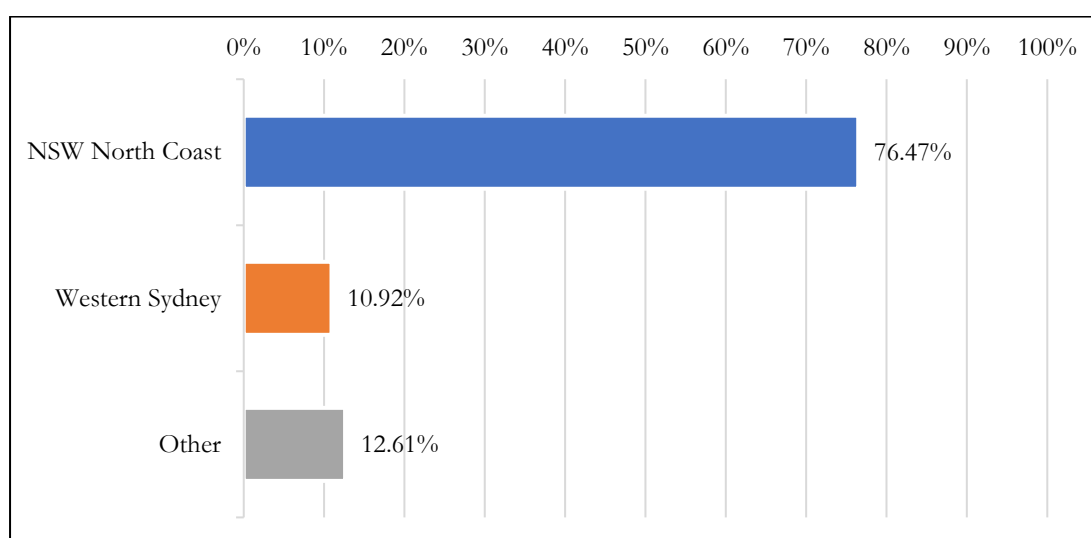
- the overall effectiveness of the flood response
- the preparation and coordination of the NSW Government to the floods
- the role, composition and resource allocation of Resilience NSW, the NSW State Emergency Service, and other relevant government agencies
- the public communication, systems and strategies involved in the response to the floods
- the coordination between NSW Government agencies, Federal Government agencies, local governments, private sector operators and the community
- the priorities to help communities affected by the floods

Responses to questions

The online questionnaire was open from 10 May 2022 to 30 June 2022 and received 119 responses. A sample of answers and a summary of responses are provided for each question below. The samples have been selected to represent the various viewpoints expressed in the responses.

Q4. Where were you living at the time of the floods?

Respondents were asked to select either the NSW North Coast, Western Sydney, or 'other'. The majority of respondents (76.47 per cent) responded that they were living in the NSW North Coast. 10.92 per cent of respondents responded that they were living in Western Sydney. The remaining 12.61 per cent selected 'Other'. These included respondents who were living in the Hawkesbury region, the Illawarra region, and the NSW South Coast.

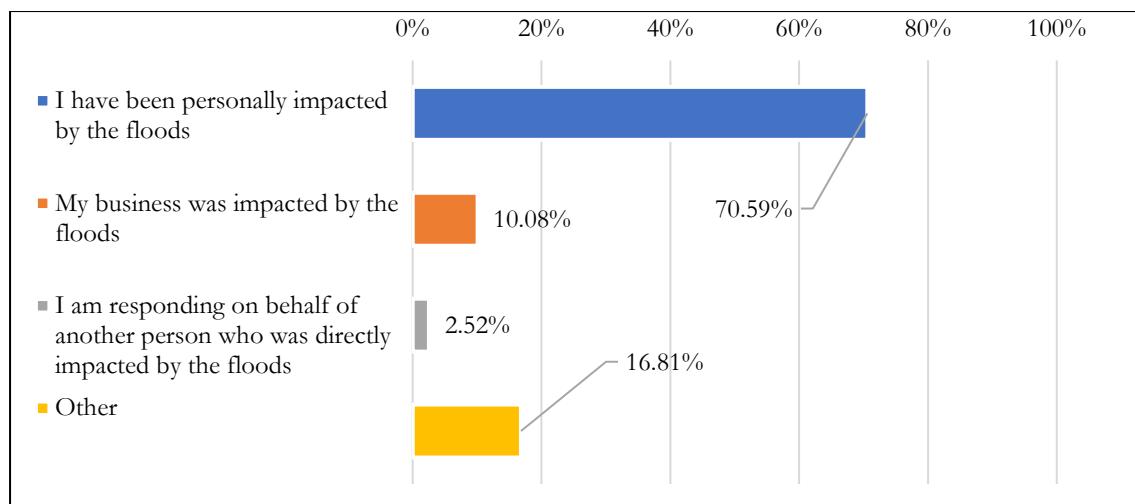


Q5. In what capacity are you responding to this questionnaire?

Respondents were asked to select either that they had been personally impacted by the floods; that their business was impacted by the floods; that they were responding on behalf of another person who was directly impacted by the floods; or 'other'.

The majority of respondents (70.59 per cent) answered that they had had been personally impacted by the floods. A further 10.08 per cent answered that their business had been impacted. 2.52 per cent of respondents were answering on behalf of another person.

16.81 per cent of respondents selected 'other'. Several of these responses indicated that they had been personally affected by the floods, such as their home being damaged, power or telecommunications being shut off, or losing road access. Others responded that they had participated in evacuation efforts or had supported the community through voluntary work or participation in local organisations or charities.



Q6. If you or someone you know has been directly impacted by the floods, please outline how.

104 of 119 respondents answered this question. Respondents identified a range of impacts. The most common impacts cited were being evacuated from home; damage or destruction to their home or possessions; loss of power and/or telecommunications; loss of road access; damage to business; loss of pets or livestock; loss of access to essential supplies or services; and physical or psychological harm.

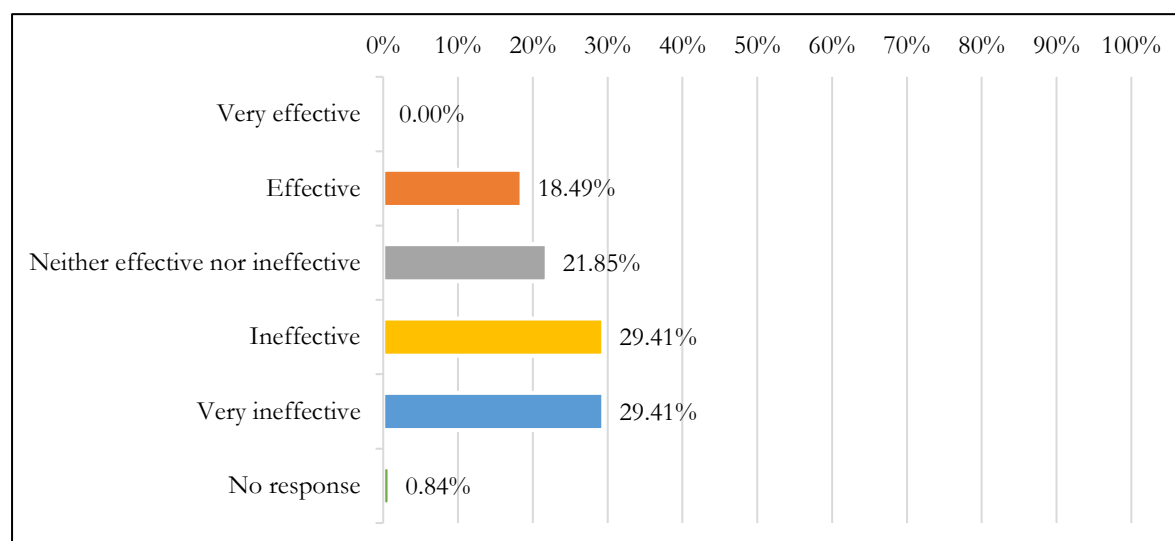
Many respondents explained that they in which were impacted by the floods:

- 'I evacuated my parents (one is in a wheelchair) whose house was flooded, my brother's house was flooded and severely damaged, my office was demolished, my boss needed rescuing from flood waters, and the town I live, worked and shopped in is gone.' (Respondent in Lismore)
- 'Both sons lost everything. Husband injured during flood rescues. Boat badly damaged during rescues.' (Respondent in Evans Head)
- 'Fields and infrastructure, buildings, sporting equipment damaged and lost to flood and storm damage, families displaced and children traumatised, supporting businesses heavily impacted. Personal loss to volunteers their homes and businesses.' (Respondent in Murwillumbah)
- 'My house and my car were completely inundated by floodwaters and the High School where I'm a teacher (Richmond River High School, Lismore) was also completely inundated above the second storey roof. I have lost everything except a few possessions. We lost everything at our school and the majority of my students lost everything at home and were rescued off their rooftops.' (Respondent in Ocean Shores)

Q7. How effective do you think the flood response has been overall?

118 of 119 respondents answered this question. The majority of respondents thought the flood response was ineffective (29.41 per cent) or very ineffective (29.41 per cent). 21.85 per cent of respondents thought the flood response was neither effective nor ineffective. 18.49 per cent of

respondents thought the flood response was effective. No respondents answered that they thought the flood response was very effective.



Q8. Please explain your reasons for response.

Of the 18.49 per cent of respondents who thought the flood response was effective, many cited the work of local volunteers and community groups. Others highlighted the assistance from the army as being particularly effective.

- 'The local community's response has been amazing and so was the massive clean-up from Defence ...' (Respondent in Rock Valley)
- 'Individual units that responded were effective but lacked coordination. The army was very effective as they brought much needed manpower to the problem.' (Respondent in Ballina)
- 'We were very lucky with family and volunteers, and the community groups who organised them. When they arrived, the army were sensational, both practically and helping morale ...' (Respondent in Tumbulgum)
- 'That fact that the majority of people's lives were saved is testament to the incredible community spirit we have in our local area, with many people being saved by volunteers taking risks to save them in their little tin boats, on surf skis and in other dinghies, in fact anything that would help collect people from dire situations, even though the official SES and other bodies were not adequately provided with the resources they needed.' (Respondent in Rosebank)

Of the 21.85 per cent of respondents who thought the flood response was neither effective nor ineffective, some answered that while the work of local volunteers and community groups was effective, the assistance from government agencies was lacking. Others said that the government assistance was helpful, but was not provided quickly enough, or appeared to be uncoordinated.

- 'Had to rely on locals initially because of slow response from NSW Government services. Too slow calling in the army to assist. Some gov. services e.g. Maritime, Communities and Justice were risk averse so failed to support traumatised people in a catastrophe. Councils were actively supporting flood victims and making communities liveable as quickly as possible as the threat receded.' (Respondent from Ballina)

- 'Slightly better this year than last, but there were still very slow and inadequate responses for mobilising emergency supplies and evacuation centres ...' (Respondent in Kurrajong Hills)
- 'Community action was amazingly effective. Government action was OK in March and April but has dwindled ...' (Respondent in Main Arm).

Of the 29.41 per cent of respondents who thought the flood response was ineffective and the 29.41 per cent who thought it was very ineffective, the most common reasons cited were that accurate and up-to-date information was not provided to residents; that it was difficult or impossible to contact emergency services; that the response was disorganised and uncoordinated; that the response was non-existent or too late; or that it was difficult to claim support payments or recovery assistance.

- 'The rescue was non-existent (couldn't get through to either SES or 000 the day of the flood); the recovery has been terrible, messy and too slow. It is as though the local, NSW and Federal Government has never experienced a flood and each policy is made up along the way. There has been no coordinated effort in recovery at all' (Respondent in Lismore)
- 'There was inadequate planning, the SES refused to listen to feedback even though there was ample advice provided by locals that areas leading into Lismore were filling with water, there has been no local leadership ...' (Respondent in Marom Creek)
- 'Response was reactionary, even in knowing the catastrophic weather was on its way. Then there was an uncoordinated response from emergency services and a lack of SES. We were without power, fuel, communication, money and food. BOM failed to accurately predict conditions or sat on the fence in fear of being wrong if people were evacuated earlier ...' (Respondent in Ocean Shores)

Q9. Do you have any comments on the preparation and coordination of the NSW Government to the Western Sydney and North Coast floods?

106 of 119 respondents answered this question. The majority of respondents provided negative comments about the preparedness and coordination of the NSW Government. Concerns identified included that there did not appear to be an overall strategy or plan for the assistance provided; that there was inadequate preparation prior to the floods despite weather forecasts; that correct information was not communicated to the community in time; that assistance was not provided fast enough; that emergency services personnel appeared unprepared or inadequately trained; that emergency services agencies had insufficient resources to provide assistance; and that effective communications technology was not available or utilised.

- 'There appeared to be no preparation and little coordination for the North Coast floods. The evacuation centre was not ready for the emergency, despite warnings that a flood was imminent (although the warnings underestimated the severity of the flooding).' (Respondent in Lismore)
- 'Govt help was way too slow coming. Army should have been called in much soon. People should have been warned of the enormity of the disaster much sooner.' (Respondent in Evans Head)
- 'A great deal of personnel were seen to be in positions of management when they were unable to be effective in their roles. Training may have been given but role suitability needs

to be taken into account when employing emergency response personnel. When requests for assistance were made repeatedly along the correct channels information was lost, distorted or dismissed due to the convoluted communication options.' (Respondent in Tenterden)

- 'The NSW Government response was barely adequate, but the glaring omission is planning and preparedness. There was no planning for communication, power, internet support - all the things required for people who are isolated by floodwater. The Government response, when it eventually came, turned out to be good, but was let down by its bureaucracy. Phone calls to Service NSW either went unanswered when the waiting time on hold had expired, or people were directed to 'lodge their claim on-line'. We had no internet, and the limited power meant precious phone battery time was wasted on hold.' (Respondent in Coraki)
- 'There was little preparation evident. There was at least 3 days lead time between when the warnings were issued from north of the border in QLD to when the system actually hit northern NSW, yet no agencies were on the ground, and no preparation was visible at all. There was also no warnings via text message until after the floods hit. After the surrounding towns were submerged, there was also no contact or coordination with any agencies other than the local Red Cross representative and the neighbourhood centre manager in Mullumbimby ...' (Respondent in Byron Bay)

Q10. Do you have any comments on the role, composition and resource allocation of Resilience NSW?

104 of 119 respondents answered this question. Several respondents answered that they had not heard of Resilience NSW, or were unaware of its role or function. Of those that were aware of it, respondents provided a mix of perspectives.

Some respondents were positive of Resilience NSW and commented that it provided valuable assistance during the floods:

- 'Generally they were great, helpful and well organised.' (Respondent in Lismore)
- 'Resilience NSW has been awesome in the flood recovery centres with resources and information. Pre flood communication is the next step.' (Respondent in Windsor)

On the other hand, some respondents said that Resilience NSW did not provide effective or timely assistance during the floods:

- 'Resilience NSW has played no immediate role in this event. They were not even visible until nearly 10 days after the event. They have provided very little by way of practical support and now that they are here what are they doing? ...' (Respondent in Marom Creek)
- 'We have seen very little of Resilience NSW during or after the flood. My understanding was that they were the peak body heading up post incident recovery from events such as fire and flood but we have seen or heard very little from them. I was disappointed as I believe they could be more proactive in their response.' (Respondent in Upper Colo)
- 'Resilience NSW was a failure and its purpose should be reviewed. It failed to undertake its assigned role. It was risk averse so support and resources were withheld at critical stages during and after the crisis ...' (Respondent in Ballina)

- 'It seems, from what I have heard on radio from people directly involved in the rescue operations and the recovery phase, that Resilience NSW was basically missing in action. Local individuals and groups took up the slack and performed amazingly well with virtually nothing to support them but their own strength and ingenuity and the generosity of many in the initial phases and beyond.' (Respondent in Rosebank)

Some respondents answered that Resilience NSW appeared to be under-funded or under-staffed, and required more resources:

- 'Resilience NSW had 2 staff members for the entire North Coast at the start of this event. During the first three weeks of the North Coast Floods the 1 staff member allocated to Richmond Valley shire was so over worked they spent time going from meeting to meeting with no support until the agency employed temporary staff from the RFS ...' (Respondent in Broadwater)
- 'I do not believe they have enough funding to make a real difference. Now or with the continued side effects of the floods.' (Respondent in Round Mountain)

Some respondents commented that Resilience NSW appeared to be too bureaucratic and there was a need for more localised assistance for flood-affected communities:

- 'I am not sure how Resilience NSW operates. A more localised approach to dealing with natural disasters may prove to be more effective.' (Respondent in Kingscliff)
- 'Resilience NSW is a great idea but it adds another level of red tape to an already bloated bureaucracy. Powers like that of the NRRC are required to cut through and get things done - especially in historically fraught LGAs like Byron Shire.' (Respondent in New Brighton)
- 'Poorly resourced and allocated. We need experts and locals who know the seasons and leaders who act on advice.' (Respondent in Clothiers Creek)

Q11. Do you have any comments on the role, composition and resource allocation of the NSW State Emergency Service?

107 of 119 respondents answered this question. Some respondents praised the NSW State Emergency Service, commenting that it provided valuable assistance in difficult circumstances:

- 'The SES go above and beyond their service to the community They are an invaluable resource to the whole country but they are only human and with regular catastrophic weather events occurring are they being stretched beyond their limits?' (Respondent in Rock Valley)
- 'SES was extremely helpful, they tried to help in any way they could possibly do. In need of much more resources!!' (Respondent in Murwillumbah)

On the other hand, some respondents were critical of the NSW State Emergency Service, citing concerns around inconsistent or absent communication; a lack of preparedness; or overly complex bureaucracy.

- 'On this occasion it was not good enough. I appreciate the many that volunteer to support people in emergencies. But the people who govern this organisation should have been doing more to prepare.' (Respondent in South Lismore)

- 'SES seemed to have no idea what they were doing. They seemed keener to get in the boats to go rescue, than they did getting people to evacuate so they didn't have to rescue them. One minute there was call out for help - then no people being turned around. Facebook groups documented the confusion of the community. I would not like my life to depend on a SES rescue. SES should never be in charge. There needs to be a team above them they report to.' (Respondent in West Ballina)
- 'SES were unable to respond effectively at the time of the emergency. When trying to get information about flood danger, it was not easy and the info was not accurate and I had to rely on local info about river rises.' (Respondent in Mallanganee)
- 'Response was non-existent, didn't see them for days and when we did see them they were telling people where to park... The whole SES (state and local) needs a shake up and needs to have trained professional experts running the regions that have rescue equipment suitable to the local area.' (Respondent in Tumbulgum)

Many respondents argued the NSW State Emergency Service was insufficiently resourced to provide effective assistance during the flooding:

- 'NSW SES is seriously underfunded and under resourced, they did as well as could be expected under the circumstances. Want a better response, then add resources, staff and better support for volunteers. Unit HQs are seriously lacking in resources and equipment. Run on the smell of an oily rag, then cop the blame when the response is limited.' (Respondent in Ballina)
- 'Not enough SES volunteers in Lismore, not enough equipment (only two boats) and the SES HQ was located in a flood prone location and was cut off during the flood.' (Respondent in Lismore Heights)
- 'Yes, I believe it is very under resourced as evidenced on the 28th February. More personnel, training and professional support is critically needed.' (Respondent in East Ballina)
- 'The SES did what they could with the limited resources they have. Responding to emergencies on the scale seen on the Northern Rivers will require a larger and better equipped SES. They need permanent staff, and resourcing and funding on par with other State and Federal agencies. Volunteers should not be the State's first response to disasters of this magnitude - they should supplement a permanently staffed agency.' (Respondent in Lennox Head)

Q12. Do you have any comments on the role, composition and resource allocation of other relevant government agencies?

96 of 119 respondents answered this question. Some respondents identified the army as being particularly effective in providing assistance and recovery:

- 'The Army was the first government agency to arrive in town and stayed for 8 weeks. They did everything required and more. They boosted morale as people returned to their homes and became the key agency in recovery until other agencies like Centrelink and Service NSW mobilised.' (Respondent in Broadwater)
- 'The ARMY and RFS were fantastic. They got in there and did the job. SES no appearance.' (Respondent in Tumbulgum)

Other respondents raised the role of Service NSW, with some expressing frustration at the process of applying for grants and financial assistance:

- '... Applying for funding through agencies such as Service NSW has been extremely hard for many people I would rather the State Government be honest and tell us there is no funding rather than tell the whole country there is financial support available but make access to that support almost impossible.' (Respondent in Rock Valley)
- '... As for Service NSW we really shouldn't have to sit for hours waiting to tell our story and not get support. A portal needs to be set up as government agencies know where we live, know the devastation we went through.' (Respondent in East Wardell)
- 'The lack of transparency on grant applications with Service NSW is sometimes overwhelming ... I understand that avoiding fraudulent claims is an issue, but surely someone can look at a map and see that we were affected!' (Respondent in Colo)

Q13. Do you have any comments on the public communication, systems and strategies involved in the response to the floods?

107 of 119 respondents answered this question. Some respondents commented that the communication systems and strategies were useful:

- 'The text message warnings were very valuable. In fact, the text flood warnings that I received strongly influenced my decision to evacuate on the afternoon of February 27.' (Respondent in Lismore)

However, some respondents were critical of the communications that were disseminated to the community, commenting that they were often late or incorrect:

- 'Completely inadequate. Wrong or late warnings, poor information dissemination; a lack of understanding about communication methods (most people had no power, no internet, no phone and therefore no access to information).' (Respondent in Lismore)
- 'Geodata text messages should have been sent earlier and more frequently with effective information - I have met with people who were told to prepare for evacuation in nearby suburbs and they tried to leave immediately but were already cut off by water ...' (Respondent in Tenterden)
- '... I appreciate that those working in the field are very busy but it these days of community engagement it seems more resources are needed to ensure information (that has rightly been verified and validated first) is available and updated hourly. Much public information we saw was either no longer relevant and in many cases had not been updated for several days in public sites.' (Respondent in Wilberforce)

Some respondents also indicated frustration that essential information was not communicated to residents:

- '...the communication of exactly what is happening in the head-waters of each River system: the quantity of rain falling, the rate of river rise, etc is NOT communicated via the ABC radio (our emergency broadcaster!!). Residents along the various arms / tributaries of each river system no longer have access to this vital information. In an emergency situation it is not possible to access this information via the BoM website. It needs to be

broadcast clearly and regularly via the radio so that preparations may be made as best as possible by each resident ...' (Respondent in Tyngah)

- 'The evacuation order for the Bungawalbin area was delivered days after people were already cut off by floodwaters. The lack of any flood data from the bulk of the subcatchment (the only flood gauge on the BoM's website is on Myrtle Creek at Rappville!) means that the authorities and locals were totally unprepared for the magnitude of the flood coming down Bungawalbin Creek.' (Respondent in Whiporie)
- 'There was no public communication ... All valuable information was from Facebook community groups no official channels. SES information was useless. ABC radio had very little info and we were desperate to know if safe to go home ...' (Respondent in West Ballina)

Several respondents commented that alternative methods of communication should have been available when internet and telecommunications services were lost:

- 'With mobile service non-existent when the floods started and for several days, there should be a better way of informing people on the progress of being able to return home and what is occurring with the floods. I'm sure some of this information could be transmitted by radio or television to evacuation centres or on billboards. Even if power is down portable radios can still receive information.' (Respondent in Kingscliff)
- 'There weren't any! It was left to the public to bridge these gaps. Police were even replying on internet systems to find and conducted safety checks ... Surely analog backups are available for these times instead of relying on communications to be up and running?' (Respondent in Ocean Shores)
- 'Our area has poor communications and after every event its identified that this needs to be resolved. Small cell phone towers do not work in undulating terrain as they very limited range. Large cell towers on high ground with battery backup would give the communities in places like this a much greater ability to communicate with emergency services and loved ones. Many residents in the community went dark (no comms) for days on end as they had minimal fuel left to run generators ...' (Respondent in Upper Colo)

Q14. Do you have any comments on the coordination between the NSW Government, NSW Government departments and agencies, the Federal Government, Federal Government departments and agencies, local governments, private sector operators and the community, including requests or offers of assistance?

104 of 119 respondents answered this question. Most respondents provided negative comments, citing concerns that the agencies involved in providing flooding assistance did not appear to be well coordinated or cooperate effectively:

- 'Everything appeared hap-hazard - on the go decisions to assist. Assistance at so many different levels that it confused multiple sectors of the community.' (Respondent in East Lismore)
- 'There appears to be little if any coordination between the Federal and State Governments. It seems strange that the Federal Government has no role in the Northern Rivers Flood Reconstruction Corporation. I believe that the reconstruction task requires the full cooperation and involvement of all tiers of government.' (Respondent in Lismore)

- 'Yes, there seem to be many agencies doing and redoing the same thing, asking the same questions, with few and untimely responses.' (Respondent in South Lismore)
- 'The coordination was poor and convoluted. Government supported agencies had too much red tape restricting the speed of their responses. The private supporting organisations were restricted from assistance and liaison as they were not recognised as support groups.' (Respondent in Tenterden)
- 'Again appalling. No one seemed to be communicating with each other, lack or no clear roles or responsibilities. No advice to community as to who was doing what and how to contact.' (Respondent in Ballina)

Some respondents commented that private sector organisations and community organisations appeared to cooperate and respond more effectively than government agencies:

- 'Private sector and volunteer organisations assisted us long before any government agency stepped in. If the governments can't react to emergencies in a decent time frame they need to ensure extra funding for local organisations who stepped up ...' (Respondent in Woodburn)
- '... there was an amazing community response (private citizens) initially and in the aftermath from organisations such as the Koori Mail. Coordination by Government agencies appears to be a key issue, however.' (Respondent in East Ballina)

Q15. What do you think the NSW Government's priorities should be now to help communities affected by the floods?

115 of 119 respondents answered this question. Shorter term priorities identified in responses included providing more temporary accommodation; assistance with rebuilding and/or repairing homes and businesses; repairing roads and other infrastructure; improving the rollout of grants and financial assistance; and improving access to mental health support.

Longer term priorities identified in responses included implementing flood mitigation measures; improving the accessibility and affordability of flood insurance; increasing the funding of emergency services; developing plans and strategies for future floods; and facilitating land buybacks and/or relocation grants.

Several respondents identified repairing or rebuilding homes and businesses as the most important priority:

- 'Housing, housing, housing. How can people rebuild their lives if they don't have somewhere to live. Business too needs support otherwise some of the smaller communities like Woodburn won't survive.' (Respondent in Mallanganee)
- 'Adequate housing and assistance and support to home owners to negotiate insurance grants and repairs. Help to access appropriate professionals.' (Respondent in Ballina)

Many respondents identified frustrations with insurance providers, and commented that further assistance was required:

- 'There needs to be more done in regards to insurance, in particular: 1) expediting the claims process, and 2) ensuring residential properties and businesses are able to access affordable

insurance in the future. Without access to insurance, there can be no investment in towns like Lismore, and these towns will simply die.' (Respondent in Lismore)

- 'Get the legislation changed so flood affected people can get affordable flood insurance similar to bushfire and cyclone insurance. This is not ok as is. Federal government and State government should be fighting for this...' (Respondent in Windsor)

Some responses argued the government should prioritise preparation for future floods:

- 'Set up a team to deal with future flood responses not the SES, they need to report to people who do this for a living not volunteers. Sort out flood free and fire proof buildings to be evacuation centres for each town and promote them so everyone knows that's the place to go to. Put consistent signage for these across the state. Have an emergency system of cameras at strategic locations for live feeds so people can self-monitor and evacuate then remove cameras when threat is over.' (Respondent in West Ballina)
- 'A huge and comprehensive natural disaster plan including making local knowledge and info available to all localities during the crisis. Maybe training for elderly citizens on what to do in the area as disasters unfold. Where elderly citizens don't have local family 'twin' them with citizens who can look out for them. Planning laws so no more building in flood or fire zones and follow-up for offenders. Moving buildings, homes and towns where possible to reflect the new 'normal'. I don't expect the govt to pay for it all but it needs to create the impetus to get the changes underway.' (Respondent in Tumbulgum)

Some respondents around the Lismore and Ballina areas commented that the government should prioritise buying back land in these areas and relocating homes and businesses:

- 'Immediate offers, buy backs! We do not want to be forced to stay in the flood zone for years waiting for answers. They are predicting another wet summer next year, it will flood again next February. Let us have the option to leave before next February.' (Respondent in South Lismore)
- 'Take the emotion out of it. To continually rebuild in flood prone areas is absurd. To continually pour in Government money (debt/increased taxes) to repair and rebuild just to get flooded again and again is absolute stupidity. Put your "big boy" pants on and make the tough decisions, if they are the right decisions. Relocate town centres that are on flood plains.' (Respondent in Ballina)
- 'Encourage businesses and residences in low lying areas to move to higher ground - this will save spending the recovery money every 5 years it just needs to be done and fast businesses cannot afford to move back into flood affected towns only then to have to move out again in a few years (or when the next flood hits).' (Respondent in Ballina)
- 'Funding land swaps, buy backs and house removals. Resettling affected Lismore suburbs street by street in the model of climate change resettlement, and please include East Lismore, Girards Hill and CBD residents.' (Respondent in East Lismore)
- 'There should be a minimum of \$3b put into the forward estimates to fund the rebuild and relocation of parts of Lismore over the next 10 years. The NSW Government must purchase the North Lismore Plateau and move people block by block. The area that remains can become a light industrial centre that is governed by rules that allow only flood prone businesses. The economic cost of this happening every 5 years does not make sense to ask the entire population of NSW to pay for, unless you are going to implement massive changes that allow this city to move forward.' (Respondent in Marom Creek)

Q16. Do you have any other comments you wish to share with the committee?

94 of 119 respondents answered this question. 18 respondents replied that they did not have further comments and/or expressed gratitude at having the opportunity to share their perspectives. Of the 76 respondents who made substantive comments, a range of responses were received.

Several respondents comments on the ongoing impacts of the floods on the community, and the need for sufficient mental health support for those affected:

- 'The recovery and reconstruction discussion has focussed largely on housing and rebuilding infrastructure, but not enough attention on social services e.g. counselling and family support. For example, it is well established that communities experiencing trauma from natural disasters also experience higher rates of domestic violence as the stress and pressure of the situation spills into the home and into personal relationships. Local service providers need to be given top-up resources, and an agency should be charged with single point of contact case management responsibility to ensure people directly affected by the floods can access the support services they need.' (Respondent in Lismore)
- 'This is an enormously distressing situation and the sooner clear decisions are made to assist people trapped in this nightmare ... people can try to move forward. NSW and federal government must back councils and individuals with real funding to provide resolution.' (Respondent in Kingscliff)
- 'I just hope that we can all recover from this and rebuild as quickly as possible. So many people are under enormous pressure at present. Three months after the first flood, our days are consumed cleaning up, filling in online forms, liaising with organisations, workers, insurance and trying to maintain normal life.' (Respondent in West Ballina)

Some respondents emphasised the need for preparation for future natural disasters:

- '... If the governments of Australia don't come up with policies and programs that prepare for these events, attempt to reduce the damage they cause and work out how to effectively deal with the aftermath of them, then we should all be looking to move to another country where our futures look less bleak. Australia will be one of the first countries to fall to the effects of climate change. We need to be one of the first to work out how to effectively deal with that or we'll all die or go broke trying to mop up after each catastrophic event.' (Respondent in Lismore)
- '... If we are to continue to help ourselves then flood insurance needs to be available and affordable. Adequate emergency services & resources need to be available for "call up" at short notice to deal with an avalanche of life-threatening emergencies. Surely we will not have to listen to "unprecedented" as an excuse for the lack of response to every future natural disaster ...' (Respondent in Tyngah)
- 'Please improve liaison and communication linkages. Where there are shortfalls in future allow them to be amended rapidly - emergencies are time critical. Have the right people in command who have experience, not just who has received a paper qualification - time on the front line in previous emergencies is invaluable. Sharing of air support resources, supply of maps if requested should be paramount, there could not have been too many

maps. Hardcopies work when the power and comms are down.' (Respondent in Tenterden)

Some respondents commented that the flooding demonstrated the need to reconsider development on affected areas:

- 'This is the opportunity to rethink further development on floodplains. All new development should consider the probable maximum flood level - the 1:100 ARI is no longer a valid planning benchmark. In particular, the appropriateness of the West Yamba Urban Release Area should be reconsidered.' (Respondent in Whiporie)
- 'I think the development of the Kingscliff, Chinderah and Cudgen areas should be revisited. There are approved developments consisting of 4500 home sites to be built on flood plain, so where is this flood meant to go when the land is filled? If government allow this to happen, it will be devastating for all surrounding areas. Maybe government can subsidize people raising their homes or building a second storey, if they are increasing the risks with development.' (Respondent in Chinderah)
- 'Yes infrastructure wise ... When building housing estates on known flood zones or marsh lands ... Build homes much higher off of ground ... Ballina has always had its low lying areas that would flood if heavy rains coincided with king tides .. e.g.: Tamar St. Also heavily built up recent developments /buildings that are much higher up than pre-existing residential homes is very bad infrastructure ... Look at west Ballina ... 2 floods in 4 weeks!! More constant cleaning of drains also essential and not done enough.' (Respondent in Ballina)