



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

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

Upper House Committee releases report into major flooding with finding that the NSW SES and Resilience NSW failed as lead agencies

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

9 August 2022

An Upper House Select Committee on the Response to Major Flooding Across New South Wales in 2022 has just released its report with 21 findings and 37 recommendations, including a key finding that the NSW State Emergency Service (SES) and Resilience NSW failed as lead agencies to provide adequate leadership and effective coordination during the February-March 2022 floods.

The major flooding of February-March 2022 was a catastrophic disaster, causing widespread devastation and damage, particularly in the Northern Rivers and Hawkesbury regions. Tragically, lives were lost, thousands of homes were damaged or destroyed, and significant local infrastructure was damaged.

Five months later, families are homeless with some still living in tents, businesses are still waiting for long-promised assistance, and there are still unresolved policy matters involving buy-backs and land swaps – to name just a few of the myriad remaining pressing problems.

The committee found that Resilience NSW and the SES failed to provide leadership and effective coordination in the community's greatest time of need. Demarcation disputes and a lack of integration slowed the roll-out of support and assistance to flood-affected communities. The State Government's failure to implement a streamlined grants process meant that applicants were repeatedly interviewed and had to re-live their experiences, leading to frustration and trauma as part of the process.

With respect to the NSW SES, the centralisation of the organisation and a shortage of volunteers significantly hindered the ability of the agency to lead the emergency response. The SES's failures found many community members feeling that they had no choice but to conduct their own rescues in dangerous conditions as many calls for assistance to 000 and the NSW SES went answered.

The committee recommended that the NSW Government consider restructuring the SES to ensure that it better harnesses local knowledge and networks, coordinates more closely with other rescue agencies, and increases resources.

The committee found that Resilience NSW demonstrated some of the biggest failures of the NSW Government's response to the floods. Repeated witnesses expressed frustration and confusion about the role of Resilience NSW. The committee found that the NSW Government failed to comprehend the scale of the floods and treated the disaster response as a "nine to five" business operation. The committee recommended that the NSW Government consider abolishing Resilience NSW if it is unable to restructure the organisation so that it meets community needs.

Committee Chair and Shadow Minister for the North Coast, the Hon Walt Secord MLC said: “The stories we heard from local residents from the Northern Rivers and Hawkesbury regions made it clear that the NSW Government was woefully unprepared and lacked the required leadership and coordination to respond to a natural disaster of this magnitude.

“Of particular concern was the performance of Resilience NSW which left many residents frustrated with and confused about their role. The committee came to the view that Resilience NSW should be abolished if it could not be properly reformed.

“I would also note that the committee noted the vast improvement in recovery efforts following the appointment of NSW Police Force Deputy Commissioner Mal Lanyon to the role of Northern NSW Recovery Coordinator, and recommended that a senior police officer be tasked with leading recovery efforts following future natural disasters as a matter of policy.”

The committee made several other findings and recommendations about public communication and rescues during the floods, community led recovery, financial assistance, evacuation and recovery centres, clean up and restoration, and temporary and long-term housing.

Please note: The Select Committee on the Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022 was established by the NSW Legislative Council on 23 March 2022. Its inquiry and report are separate to that of the independent floods inquiry established by the NSW Government and led by former Police Commissioner Mick Fuller and Professor Mary O'Kane.

Report details

The report is available on the committee's website:

<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/listofcommittees/Pages/committee-details.aspx?pk=277>

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For media enquiries please contact Committee Chair the Hon Walt Secord MLC on 02 9230 2146.