

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

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My name is Gordon Bebb and I am currently a sugar cane grower with a property located near Wardell on the Richmond river.

I have lived and farmed on several sections of the Richmond and Wilson River catchments for nearly all of my 67yrs of life, and my mother also lived all of her life on these river systems. So collectively I have over 100 yrs of knowledge of flooding events. My comments are in reference to communications, systems and strategies

This flood that occurred 28/2/2022 and into March 2022 was by far the biggest flood on record using the data that the weather bureau uses for reference but is not the biggest on record using information on past rainfall recorded at the old Lismore post office and local verbal knowledge. in fact, it is probably a one in one hundred year event. I fear that major flooding disasters like this will continue to happen, when policy makers are using such limited data.

I strongly believe that much of the loss of life, property and livestock would have been significantly reduced if the flood warning systems that were used in the 1960's and 70's were still in place. ie

River heights were read manually by volunteers from many gauges placed along the river catchments. This information was collated locally at a SES equivalent center on each major catchment. For the Richmond/Wilson Catchment it was Lismore.

Expected flooding timetables and heights were then predicted and a timetable of flooding to occur was continually announced on radio stations. The accuracy of these predictions of flood heights was often within the inch. Lismore normally had 6 -10 hrs notice before expected peak, Coraki would get 24 hrs and the lower river 2-3 days notice.

During the 1990's I was an industry representative to the Richmond River Catchment Management Committee, established by the Carr Government. It was during this period that most of the locally based emergency services were replaced with centralised systems. The river heights were to be read by tellymetric systems that were supposed to be more reliable than a volunteer manual system. I remember the question being asked, what if these meters fail. I have been told, since the flood, that 75% of the meters were not operational before the flood.

To emphasize the lack of accurate information given out during this flood, at 9.45pm on the 28/2/2022 the weather bureau web page for expected river heights stated the Wilsons was expected to peak at Lismore the following morning with minor to moderate flooding occurring. Knowing the river system that meant no flooding for the lower river areas of Woodburn and Wardell. That predictions was at least 5 meters out. On the 1/3/22 when I new a big flood was coming down the river system and after shifting and lifting equipment at Wardell to 1 meter above predicted peak, there was a revised height prediction published, but then it was not possible to safely access my farm again. This revised height prediction was 2.5 meters below actual height.

Big floods will occur again, but if the accuracy of river heights predictions, the timetabling of events and the dissemination of information does not dramatically improve, this event will be repeated. I believe the loss of human life would have been much greater except for locals taking matters into their own hands and ignoring centralised information