

**Submission
No 7**

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

Organisation: The Hills Shire Council

Date Received: 6 May 2022



THE HILLS
Sydney's Garden Shire

THE HILLS SHIRE COUNCIL
3 Columbia Court, Norwest NSW 2153
PO Box 7064, Norwest 2153
ABN 25 034 494 656 | DX 9966 Norwest

6 May 2022

Hon Walt Secord MLC
Chair
Select Committee On The Response To Major Flooding Across NSW In 2022
NSW Legislative Council
Floods@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Our Ref: 20081255
Your Ref: D22/17237

Dear Mr Secord,

Inquiry into the response to major flooding across NSW in 2022

Reference is made to the Select Committee's enquiry on the response into major flooding across NSW in 2022. Please accept this submission on behalf of The Hills Shire Council.

The Hills Shire has a direct frontage to the Hawkesbury River of approximately 60 km with the river forming much of the Shire's north-western boundary with the adjoining Hawkesbury City local government area. At The Hills Shire's most northerly point at Wisemans Ferry, the river actually forms the boundary between four local government areas being The Hills Shire, Hawkesbury City, Central Coast and Hornsby Shire Councils.

As the Committee is aware, significant weather events in February and March of 2022 resulted in moderate to major flooding of the Hawkesbury River as well as other tributaries within The Hills Shire such as Cattai Creek and Little Cattai Creek.

This flooding affected a large number of property owners along the river including private residences and leisure facilities, agriculture and aquaculture businesses, tourism and recreational businesses. It also resulted in significant damage to Council managed infrastructure and public recreation spaces.

Whilst not wishing to downplay the significance of the most recent flooding events and the impact that it has had on the community, moderate to major flooding of the Hawkesbury River had been recorded on many occasions since European settlement of the area first occurred in the late 18th century. Along with major storms and bushfires, such flood events feature prominently in the various elements of the comprehensive risk management model applied by State and Local Government emergency response and support agencies in north-west Sydney including Council's own EMPLAN and the associated Flood Emergency Sub Plan developed by the SES.

Until the March 2021 flood, The Hills Shire and its community had not experienced a significant flooding event on the Hawkesbury River since the early 1990's. There is no doubt that this resulted in a loss of both knowledge and lived experience of such an event by the community itself and the various emergency response and support agencies. However as a result of the experiences gained during the 2021 flood, the various lessons learnt and the stakeholder relationships that were developed, Council is of the view that it placed the various emergency service and other support agencies in a strong position to deal with the impacts of the 2022 flooding events on the Hawkesbury River system. This was particularly important given the fact that the severe east coast low pressure system that produced the 2022 flood event also impacted on other river systems and coastal areas across the wider Sydney basin resulting in significant challenges with regard to the availability of resources to respond to and recover from the flood.

Overall Council's view is that the response to and recovery from the recent flooding on the Hawkesbury River has been professionally and successfully managed by the various emergency response agencies including the Police, State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW Ambulance and Marine Rescue NSW. However the emergency response agencies were also ably supported by other agencies from both the government and non-government sectors. While not wishing to necessarily single out any particular agency or agencies, Council believes it important to give particular credit and thanks to the ADF, Resilience NSW, Public Works Advisory, Endeavour Energy, Local Land Services, the Department of Communities and Justice and the management and staff of Castle Hill RSL who were very quick to respond to a request to open up an evacuation centre within their premises at Castle Hill.

Perhaps equally importantly Council would also like to give credit to its own staff and contractors for the professional manner in which they dealt with the response to and recovery from the flood. That role for Council's staff and its contractors is continuing and will do so for some time until all infrastructure damaged by the flood is permanently restored.

Notwithstanding the above comments Council acknowledges that at times during the response to and recovery from the flood may not have always gone smoothly and there is no doubt that many lessons have been learnt and will be captured in separate After Action Reviews (AARs) that are currently being undertaken under the leadership of the Regional and Local Emergency Operations Controllers.

One request that the Council would ask the Select Committee to consider as part of its deliberations is the process for local government to claim for the reimbursement of costs incurred during the emergency response and recovery phases of emergency events under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA). The process can be complex and requires the submission of large quantities of information to justify a claim at a time when a Council's staff resources can be under extreme pressure to not only assist the community in recovering from the flood, but also maintaining a business as usual approach in the delivery of services to those areas of the local government area that may not have been directly impacted by an emergency event. There is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that government agencies responsible for the processing of these claims are not adequately resourced themselves resulting in significant delays in funds being returned to Councils.

Thank you for allowing Council to provide this submission to the Select Committee, given the time available it has not been able to be formally considered and adopted by Council and so represents officers' views only.

Yours faithfully

Michael Edgar
GENERAL MANAGER