

**Submission
No 10**

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

Organisation: United Services Union

Date Received: 4 May 2022



Select Committee on the response to major flooding across NSW in 2022

4 May 2022

Terms of reference:

1. c. coordination between the NSW Government, NSW Govt departments and agencies, the Fed Govt, Fed Govt departments and agencies, local governments, private sector operators and the community, including requests or offers of assistance.
g. any other related matter

The United Services Union is the leading union for workers employed in local government across New South Wales. Our membership also includes workers employed in energy and utilities, airlines, and clerical and administration sectors. The majority of our members, however, are council workers. Every day our members support their local communities to ensure we all benefit from vitally important services and resources. The United Services Union is proud to represent the interests of our members in local government.

During the major flooding of NSW and Queensland from February 2022, local government workers have been at the forefront in supporting their communities through the unfolding devastation and continue to do so in the clean-up and rebuilding of effected communities.

From February 23 Eastern Australia was inundated by torrential rain. The first major rainfall lashed south-east Queensland before moving south into New South Wales until abating, temporarily, in early March.

Tens of thousands of people were evacuated from their homes and communities as flood waters rose. Only a few short weeks later, areas such as Lismore where residents were still processing the disaster, were hit by another deluge.

In all, 23 people lost their lives and the cost to individuals, communities and businesses is expected to reach over \$2bn. Entire towns have been severely damaged by the disaster and the ongoing recovery process is staggering.

We take this opportunity to share the experiences of our members and commend them for their tireless efforts. We encourage the Committee to support councils' autonomy in utilising their staff to rebuild communities and provide funding for the additional and ongoing staffing resources required to do so.

Throughout the floods councils were at the forefront of preparing and responding to the disaster.

Council workers tirelessly assisted their communities. What must not be forgotten is that those who were first to respond (and are continuing to do so) are local residents themselves. They remain in their communities leading the repair and reconstruction of community assets and infrastructure, supporting their towns with access to services, facilities and grants, all the while dealing with the damage suffered to them personally.



One United Services Union member attended for work without his uniform in the clothes he had slept in after the floods had destroyed everything he owned during the night. He attended work ready to assist his community despite his own hardship.

Many of our local Union members have lost their homes and possessions but have continued to attend work to do their jobs and ensure that council services are delivered. Many have worked ongoing excessive hours in an effort to restore services to their communities as soon as possible.

The extent of support and services offered by councils is extraordinary. Workers continue to assist their local communities in the rebuilding of their towns. Councils as employers require the financial support and flexibility to respond to this and future disasters.

While we acknowledge the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, councils must be recognised as the driving force of local reconstruction. Councils must have access to funding that enables them to deliver rebuild and preparation programs in the short and long term with ease of access to discretionary funding.

The ongoing costs of labour in response to the disaster is significant. In addition to the everyday services that councils provide, they must now direct and divert resources into the recovery process.

The United Services Union is committed to the ideal of councils as employers of choice in local communities. Councils offer secure employment underpinned by the Local Government (State) Award which is negotiated between the employer body and unions. Councils have access to a dedicated workforce made up from locals of their government area and surrounds.

By providing councils with adequate additional funding, flexibility and discretion to allocate funds as needed, councils are best placed to utilise their staff in the recovery process. Employing additional staff and offering overtime to workers to respond to the demands of clean-up and recovery allows councils to capitalise on the existing skills, knowledge, experience and dedication of their workforce.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to acknowledge the extraordinary effort of local government workers.

Regards,

Graeme Kelly OAM

GENERAL SECRETARY

Per: Daniel Papps, Manager Industrial, Rules, Governance & Compliance