

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 24 April 2022

Partially
Confidential

SUBMISSION TO THE COMMITTEE ON THE RESPONSE TO MAJOR FLOODING ACROSS THE NORTHERN RIVERS

Dear Mr Secord

I wish to submit observations and concerns highlighted by the two recent flood events in West Ballina and Northern Rivers.

PREPARATION - weather predications on 26/2/22 and 27/2/22 forecast that the extreme rain event impacting on SE Queensland would move towards Ballina and would bring torrential, prolonged rain. It was time for Ballina to prepare but no one seemed to be concerned.

- 26/2/22 - I went to Ballina SES to get sandbags.(Reference 0033-2589) They had half a pallet for the whole of Ballina. There were 2 SES personnel on the site. Usually, we would fill our own at the Ballina Council depot, but SES informed us that there was no sand left and not being replaced until Monday. We checked and the gates were locked. After some discussion and pleading, they loaded 12 sandbags onto my trailer. I told them I needed to protect approximately 20 metres of doorways and windows to the floor level and that we usually filled 200-250 bags and placed around our home.. The officer, whose name I do not know, said, "the water will get in anyway." This was not very reassuring. We have not been flooded in 40 years in our home, but we have sandbagged every time flooding has been predicted. Now in our 70's, this task is becoming harder.

- 27/2/22 - I bought 150 sandbags at Bunnings in Ballina, leaving only one pack in stock. A neighbour got a trailer load of sand from his work and we filled the bags plus another 100 that the neighbour had. We then sandbagged four homes, one a 91yo man who had rung SES for bags but he was concerned they would not come. After dark, they brought 5 bags, which was totally inadequate to protect his home.

- 28/2/22 - no SES presence as in previous flood predictions. Low loader trailers have come along checking if we needed sandbags in the past. SES had a \$WD and a box trailer. Many elderly people in our street had little knowledge of the impending dangers, nor could they do anything to prevent it. I drove to the Council depot which was open and volunteers filled some bags for me, as we ran out.

RESPONSE - 1/3/22 we received an evacuation order via SMS at 2.00 am and evacuation order at 6am. Two evacuation centres were named 1. Richmond Room - located on the river bank in the CBD and very likely to be cut off by flood waters, if indeed not flooded and 2. Cherry Street Sports Club in Cherry Street, a street which flooded in 1974 flood, so Cherry Street was certain to be cut off. Both of these evacuation centres subsequently had to be evacuated due to flood risk. These two sites made no sense to those who have lived in Ballina for years. We choose to evacuate to higher ground on foot, as the road was already too deep to drive a car at 6am. We decided not to go to the evacuation centres, as we felt they were more at risk than staying in our own home.

- as we waded our way to higher ground a further problem became apparent causing water to inundate homes from flooded roadways, as vehicles created a wave as they sped through flood water. When roads are flooded, the speed limit should drop to 5kph. DEAD slow.

- residents living in Alstonville on the plateau also received the flood warning SMS. This created confusion and angst, especially among the elderly.

- we have a wharf at the rear of our property. A large tree, branches through to the root bole, was wedged under the wharf and a commercial fishing net was entangled in the tree and around the wharf. The stench from the dead fish caught in the net was dreadful and the weight of the tree against the torrent concerned us that potentially there was a safety hazard downstream if the wharf gave way. We rang several government departments and then SES. SES sent out 3 officers and deemed it was not in their scope. Following our phone call to SES, we received 4 follow up calls, one from SES in Broken Hill asking whether the problem had been resolved. There must have been a lack of communication as none of the callers knew the team had been to assess. After much backbreaking work, we managed to free a lot of the fishnet from the tree and get the tree moving. We then rang fisheries and within half an hour a worker came and spent several hours freeing the net and releasing the fish caught. He removed the net from the site. I raise this as a response item because it was difficult for us to find out who to contact as the internet was down, mobile phone service patchy and landlines none existent.

- in addition, a dead horse became entangled in the tree and debris. Six volunteers appeared and managed to free the horse. We are not sure who we could have contacted in relation to this animal.

- once the first flood receded, we were busy cleaning up. Many volunteer groups helped. Ballina Council had a team of workers led by Ben Robinson, did a marvellous job of coordinating the tip trucks, loaders, excavators and workers on foot helping residents lift heavy awkward items. Defence Force personnel also responded to our requests for help, which are extremely grateful for. The response from Council in the cleanup was exceptional in our view.

- 4 or 5 days after the highest period of flooding, two SES workers from Taree came along our street. They basically wanted to chat but we were all flat out cleaning up.. I am not sure what their role was. They had backpacks, brand new uniforms. I asked whether they had a first aid kit in their backpack, as a volunteer had a serious cut and the mud was contaminated. All they had was hand sanitiser. I felt these volunteers could have been assisting in the cleanup rather than just wandering around and should have had access to first aid supplies and clean water.

ISSUES - in the second flood, which was clear stormwater, 283mm fell from midnight in West Ballina. The storm water drains were all blocked, bar one, in our street causing flooding through homes again. The storm water at one stage was one metre higher than the

muddy swollen river water. Residents walked along through the floodwater trying to free the storm water drains to no avail.

- after 283mm there was more water in our property, coming from the road due to the blocked drains, than in the first flood. People woke to deeper water flowing through their homes than in the first flood. The only reprieve was that the water was clear, not muddy. Many residents had cleaned out their homes, dried a lot of things out only to be inundated by storm water. In this event, although the water was deeper, no evacuation warning nor evacuation order was issued by SMS. Does this mean that warnings are based on the river levels only, not rainfall, runoff and observations?

- in October last year, I contacted Ballina Shire Council with concerns about a stormwater basin approved with a new estate on land filled 1.4m above flood level. In a 0.71m tide in October 2021, with less than 50 mm of rain, the basin was overflowing and flooding down towards the homes in Riverside Drive in a wall of water. My concern was, what would happen when we had a rain event and King tides coinciding, which often occurs in summer. After several months the engineer rang me and said, yes the storm water basin is totally inadequate and they had employed a storm water hydrological engineer to investigate. I subsequently sent photos to the engineer when flooding occurred. No changes have been made to the basin and water from this estate inundated surrounding homes.

- residents who live near the river height /rain monitors along the Richmond River can calculate how high the water will be. We used the data from the Burns Point Ferry station and could calculate almost exactly how much water would be likely to be flowing past our home, and indeed if it was likely to flood. I strongly recommend to the Committee that monitors be added at Broadwater and Wardell so that they can calculate heights. Woodburn is the next monitor station upstream, so it leaves residents and response teams to a lot of guessing. Similarly, I have not found anyone who actually knew that you could access this data.

- a retirement village is planned for the western side of Ferry Boat Road in West Ballina. The research mounds sit 2m plus above the floor level of the homes opposite. In 1978, floodwaters broke through Emigrant Creek banks at Teven and flooded through Burns Point Ferry Road and towards the river. The canal estate was not there in 1978, but homes this time had up to 1.5m of water through. If this estate were to be approved, the flooding this time will be multiplied exponentially by this huge development up on a massive mound.

- during the worst of the flooding, it appeared that one of the car ferry cables snapped as a bunch of marker buoys which had jammed up against it, all of a sudden they broke loose and headed downstream. This concerned residents as to whether Council had adequate plans in place to secure the ferry against the volume and velocity of water that was moving downstream. If the ferry broke off the cables, potentially many homes and lives would have been lost. Does the Council have a failsafe method of locking the ferry to it's mooring?

- there is a large body of water permanently on the west side of the M1 between Bruxner Highway and Teven Road, since the highway was completed. This area was always low lying, but rarely had water on it for more than a week after flooding. In fact, the late Lance

Ferros(Pelican Man)lived in a house where this water now has formed a lake. The house was removed by NSW Transport when the road was built. My recommendation is that the level of water in this basin needs to be closely monitored and pumped out when a flood is imminent. The M1 appears to be damming this water. The heavy rain in the Teven catchment would have put a lot of water into this area and I believe may have contributed to the excessive height of flood water in Ferry Boat Road and Ballina Quays.

- sewerage contaminated water continues to pollute the Wilson River, Richmond River and Ballina Shire waterways, estuary and beaches. This is due to the failure of the Lismore sewerage plant. There must be some way that the contaminant could be contained and pumped into tankers. The impact on the flora and fauna will be immense for years and who knows the impact on humans. When Ballina Shire dredged the trawler harbour a few years ago, they lined a man made dam with plastic and pumped the material into the 'dam.' The contaminated remains were trucked out and did not enter the river. I know this problem is a much bigger scale but plans should have been in place in the event that a sewerage treatment plant was inundated in a future flood.

In cleaning up, I found a copy of the SES Ballina Shire Local Flood Plan which was endorsed in February 2008 and to be reviewed no later than February 2013. I wonder whether that has happened, and if so, who has received a copy.

I thank you for reading my submission. I have taken lots of photos throughout this flooding event which I am happy to provide, if required.