

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

**Organisation:** Clarence Valley Council

**Date Received:** 10 May 2022

---

6 May 2022

The Hon Walt Secord MLC  
Committee Chair  
Parliament House, Macquarie Street,  
Sydney NSW 2000

### **Select Committee on The Response to Major Flooding Across New South Wales In 2022**

Dear the Hon Walt Secord MLC

In response to your letter dated 13 April 2022 (RefD22/17208), I provide the following submission in relation to major flooding across NSW in 2022.

#### **NSW Emergency Management Arrangements (Legislation)**

The [State Emergency and Rescue Management \(SERM\) Act 1989](#) (as Amended) is the Act that provides the legislative basis for co-ordination of emergency preparedness, response and recovery operations.

#### **The State Emergency Management Plan**

The key element of emergency management planning in NSW is the Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN). The objective of EMPLAN is to ensure a co-ordinated response by all agencies having responsibilities and functions in emergencies.

#### **EMPLAN**

- identifies the combat agency primarily responsible for responding to the emergency.
- specifies the tasks to be performed by all agencies in the event of an emergency.
- provides for the co-ordination of the activities of other agencies in support of the combat agencies; and
- specifies the responsibilities of the Minister and the State, Region, or Local Emergency Operations Controller.

Combat Agencies: A combat agency is the agency with the specific expertise and equipment to deal with the effects of designated hazards. The agency responsible for each major hazard is designated in the EMPLAN and in the case of a flood the designated combat agency is the NSW State Emergency Service (SES).



### **Council's Local Emergency Management Officer (LEMO)**

Clarence Valley Council's (CVC) Coordinator Emergency Management & Resilience performed the LEMO role throughout this incident performing duties as the Executive Officer to the Local Emergency Operations Controller (LEOCON). This included the activation and establishment of an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in order to coordinate a centralised multi agency response to the flood threat.

Council's primary role is to support (not control) combat agencies (such as the SES) during and immediately following an emergency. In terms of direct council support:

- the Local Emergency Management Committee's (LEMC) Emergency Response Operations
- affected residents with waste removal services, directly or through fee waivers provided at the Grafton Regional landfill.

Indirectly council provide ongoing assistance with the following activities:

- property protection (thousands of residents) construction and or repair to levees at Grafton, Ulmarra and Maclean.
- maintaining or restoring safe access across the local roads/bridges network
- provision of engineering advice regarding the integrity of damaged structures
- assisting the SES with damage assessments where required
- coordinating the restoration of critical public facilities including restoring water & sewage services following the flood event.
- providing timely communication updates to the community
- maintaining floodplain assets including drains and floodgates

Council's management of these activities ensure that damage to private property is significantly reduced.

Most Local Government authorities do not engage a full time LEMO to conduct, however to better support local government in its role during natural disaster, government funding allocated to the full time engagement of suitably qualified LEMOs across the State would significantly strengthen the network of support to the State.

In response to the direct points of the Inquiry from our experience in the Clarence Valley:

(a) the preparation, coordination and response to the Western Sydney and North Coast floods by the Government,

- Different data collection platforms across agencies hinders flow of important information that informs councils response during response & recovery
- Resilience NSW consistently wanted to introduce recovery discussions while the LGA and EOC was still in the response phase
- Some important documents such as the NSW Recovery Plan released in December 2021 had not been appropriately circulated or communicated to relevant agencies. Council only became aware of this document and their defined roles and responsibilities per the plan during initial recovery discussions

(b) the role, composition and resource allocations of Resilience NSW, the NSW State Emergency Service and other relevant Government agencies,

- Some local SES and F&RNSW members were acting independently of their chain of command hindering some response activities coordinated by the EOC.



- Due to insufficient resources, no SES Liaison Officer was appointed to the South Grafton EOC from 28 February – 3 March 2022, impacting the EOCs ability to make strategic decisions during this critical period.
- The command & control structure at SES Incident Command Centre (ICC) was unclear & difficult to access in the absence of an SES Liaison Officer in the Clarence Valley EOC
- Key SES decision makers in the SES ICC lacked local knowledge or were not familiar with the river catchment impacting their situational awareness.

(c) coordination between the New South Wales Government, New South Wales Government departments and agencies, the Federal Government, Federal Government departments and agencies, local governments, private sector operators and the community, including requests or offers of assistance,

- Escalation points into the Regional Emergency and Recovery Operations Centres were poorly communicated and difficult to navigate as a result.
- There needs to be better clarity for those involved in the assessment and allocation of workloads resulting from the incidents/events. It is essential that the combat and recovery agencies have a thorough understanding of who has responsibility for tasks to avoid them being handed to multiple agencies/services before action can be taken.
- See above comment re: data collection platforms across agencies/functional areas
- Council was under pressure from TfNSW via the EOC to reopen flooded roads despite council determining there were still safety issues
- Department of Education raised child safety issues when a public high school previously identified and used as an evacuation centre during multiple events in the Clarence Valley, was stood up twice during the flood event.

(d) public communication, systems and strategies,

- On 4 occasions during the flood events, SES disseminated incorrect information in evacuation orders including advertising centres that had already closed, had not been authorised for use during the flood event by the Clarence Valley LEOCON or that were inaccessible as the evacuation route was already inundated and closed.
- Push notifications, app updates and social media posts are insufficient for those located in areas with poor or no reception or during events that significantly impact telecommunications (similar to the experience of Ballina for much of our more remote area).
- Clearer centralised communication strategy regarding the transition from response to recovery to aid understanding of not only the community but agencies and functional areas supporting recovery efforts

(e) the implementation of recommendations from inquiries into previous natural disasters,

- Recommendation 11 of the final report into the NSW Bushfire Inquiry (31 July 2020) stated that, in order to strengthen the capability of local councils in future emergency events:
  - a) Resilience NSW, in consultation with local government, develop specific training that focuses on the role, responsibilities and expected functions of the Local Emergency Management Officer (LEMO), including regular 'refresher' components – specific training has yet to be developed and the basic face-to-face Emergency Management Training courses have only just resumed (the resources provided to participants are old and still refer to the OEM).
- Recommendation 69 states that, in order to ensure evacuation arrangements can be scaled up when needed, Resilience NSW:
  - b) train council and NSW government regional staff in evacuation centre establishment and management, supported by a one-page 'start up sheet' for opening an evacuation centre –



this training has not been made available. During a recent communication with Resilience NSW regarding their Evacuation Management course, they advised they were no longer running this as it is not cost effective but could not advise when an alternate would be made available.

- Recommendation 13.6 states that Australian, state and territory governments should continue to explore the feasibility of a national, all hazard emergency warning app.
  - a) In the absence of this Clarence Valley Council has sought funds to implement such an app for all natural disaster hazards. Communication with our residents and visitors would be greatly enhanced by implementation of the Clarence Valley Information Network (CVIN), a network of integrated intelligent real-time multi-sensors constructed throughout the LGA maintaining 24-hour fire and flood detection and continuous micro-climate weather, air quality, soil moisture and rainfall information. The accompanying Clarence Valley App details live conditions, warnings, notifications, tourism and event information enabling 24hr situational awareness for emergency services, local industry, residents and visitors. Access to this live localised information returns community confidence, enables resilience, mitigates against climate related risk and damage, provides health information, supports local agriculture, industry and future economic growth across the region.

(f) the overall effectiveness of the flood response, and

- the most significant issue was the centralised SES ICC at Goonellabah meant the focus of the response was the Lismore area. The lack of an SES Liaison Officer in the EOC during the most critical part of the flood event, impacted on the ability to make timely & strategic decisions for the community. The LEOCON highlighted this during the recent LEMC meeting and incident debrief.
- it is likely that our response to this item may have been very different if the levee had over topped at Grafton given the issues experience by the EOC as documented here.

(g) any other related matter

- Obtaining impact assessment information has proven challenging with the centralised SES ICC model and regional recovery centre both located outside the LGA, and no clear communication regarding the appropriate contacts to obtain such information.

I provide a comprehensive report tabled at Council's Ordinary Meeting, held 26 April 2022 as background to Clarence Valley Council's operations and impact during the February/March floods.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Select Committee Inquiry. I trust our submission is of assistance in forming some strong recommendations for Parliament's consideration.

Sincerely

**Dr Ian Tiley**  
Mayor