

Submission
No 20

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

Organisation: Community Broadcasting Association of Australia

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Select Committee on the response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022
Parliament of New South Wales
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Via Online Portal

Submission to the Inquiry into the response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) - the peak body and national representative organisation for over 450 community media organisations welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Inquiry into the response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022.

The recent floods have been extremely tough for many of our community radio stations, with staff and volunteers working hard to connect, inform, and comfort their communities through the disaster. Amidst the hardship, community media has remained a vital source of local emergency information, a space for community connection and continues to play an integral role in recovery efforts.

Our submission focuses on:

- The vital role played by local community broadcasters during the 2022 flooding and other emergencies;
- The Victorian emergency broadcasting model and how it could be adapted for NSW; and
- The need for involvement and integration of the community radio sector in the Government's recovery programs and natural disaster planning.



As the inquiry examines the response to the floods and makes recommendations for the future, we encourage the committee to consider how community media can be fully utilised and resourced to maximise its value as a hub of community information and support.

Throughout the flooding we have seen the important role that volunteers, neighbours and strangers have played in ensuring people have access to food and clean clothes, clearing out houses, fixing damaged appliances and furniture, donating everything from crow bars to clothesline, and in many cases, saving lives. As communities rally to face floods, fire and other emergencies, time and time again, we have seen community media organisations become a point of coordination for this enormous voluntary effort.

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements heard that “when the internet, mobile phones, and other technologies were not available, the ABC and community radio were

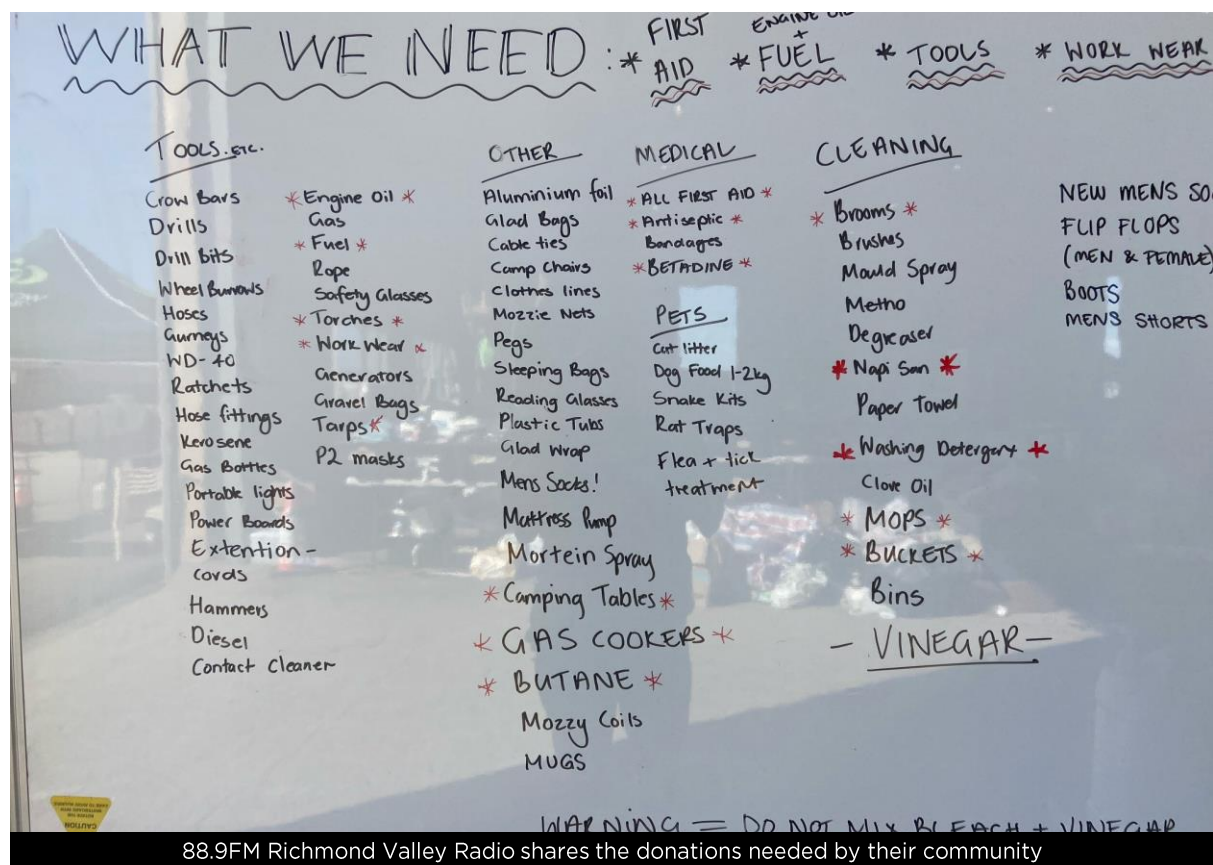
important sources of emergency information and warnings”.¹ However, community radio stations in NSW continue to carry out this work on an informal and ad hoc basis that is not well coordinated with the Government response. We encourage the Committee to consider what training, networking and resourcing might be needed to better equip community media organisations to utilise their existing understanding and connection with their communities to best support them through natural disasters.

About community broadcasting

Over 5 million listeners aged 15+ across Australia and 25% of Australians living outside of metropolitan areas – 1.63 million people – tune in to community radio each week. 1.6 million listeners in NSW tune in to community radio stations each week. 25% of the population of NSW listen to community radio. 284,000 people in NSW listen exclusively to community radio (that is, they listen to community radio but not commercial radio or ABC/SBS radio).²

In many areas, particularly in regional and remote Australia, community radio is the only local media source. For many non-English speaking communities, community radio is the only source of information and news available in their language and delivered in a culturally relevant way. First Nations community radio stations and media organisations are also the fastest and most responsive conduits for getting information through to First Nations communities in a way that is culturally appropriate, accessible, in-language and timely. In 89 regions across the country First Nations radio stations are the only radio services available.

The community broadcasting sector promotes the diverse identities of Australians that enrich the social, cultural and democratic fabric of Australian society. It plays a critical role in providing a voice



88.9FM Richmond Valley Radio shares the donations needed by their community

¹ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements – Report (2020)

<https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/royal-commission-national-natural-disaster-arrangements-report>

² Community Radio Listener Survey (2022) <https://www.cbaa.org.au/broadcasters/get-data-national-listener-survey-station-census/national-listener-survey-fact-sheets>

for Australian communities that are underserved by mainstream media – including communities in regional and remote Australia, First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, faith-based communities, youth and seniors’ communities, the LGBTIQ+ community, people with a disability, and diverse arts and music communities. It is Australia’s largest independent media sector, recognised internationally as one of the most successful examples of grassroots media.

The vital role played by local community broadcasters during the 2022 flooding and other emergencies

Community radio stations have been a lifeline for their communities through the 2022 flooding. Stations in flood affected areas have worked hard to keep their communities up to date with emergency warnings and information when internet and phone lines were down. They have been vital points of connection for their communities both through the disaster and recovery phase.

River FM in Lismore hosted 13 locals from their street who had spent hours in the dark on their roofs waiting for rescue. They fed them with their BBQ, and leftovers from the fridge, before the SES arrived.



Richmond Valley Radio in Coraki shared urgent calls for help from people and families needing to be evacuated by boat who couldn’t get through to emergency services. Sydney’s 2BACR broadcast emergency information to their Bankstown-Auburn community about the floods of the Georges River. Paradise FM in Ballina shared hourly updates from the SES and connected people with clean up, accommodation and mental health advice.

Byron’s Bay FM became the hub for relief efforts for Byron Shire and beyond. The station has helped to connect people with services and information - emergency medical care, legal aid, help with insurance claims and places to have a hot shower. They have coordinated relief efforts – explaining where to drop off hot meals and keeping the community informed of what donations are urgently needed. They have provided a point of contact where people in the community can ask for help or volunteer their time – chippies, sparkies and handymen helping to repair power tools, electronics, and furniture; locksmiths offering free help; music stores offering to clean instruments; and free vet consults for flood affected pets.

Bay FM also provided the latest flood recovery information on air. They broadcast content relevant to their community at this time – how to tackle mould, what to do with asbestos, not to start a flood affected car without getting a mechanic to check it first and getting appliances tagged and sockets checked. Bay FM’s newsroom hosted a huge number of guests, including the Byron Shire Mayor, Deputy Mayor Sarah Ndiaye, Member for Ballina Tamara Smith, MP, Tweed-Byron Police District Chief Inspector Matt Kehoe and Federal Member, Justine Elliot MP. The station also plays an important role in sharing the work of community heroes. They celebrated the work of people like the staff of the [Koori Mail, Lismore-based First Nations newspaper, who together with hundreds of volunteers worked tirelessly to coordinate a flood relief centre.](#)

This is not the first time that community radio stations have provided vital on the ground assistance to help their communities recover from floods. On the evening of Sunday, 3 February 2019, Townsville experienced one of the worst monsoonal events in its history, which resulted in flooding that affected over 20,000 homes in the Townsville community. 99.9 Live FM took a lead role in convening the city’s flood response. Partnering with YWAM and the Combined Churches of Townsville, they worked with Townsville City Council to recruit local volunteers to visit the homes of flood-affected people directly after the tragic weather event. The campaign engaged hundreds of volunteers to go door-to-door,

visiting 17,500 households and offering care, emotional support, and connection to vital services to assist in ongoing recovery from the flood.

Live FM turned the studio into a call centre where people could ring in for assistance, and a donation centre where people could drop off supplies and members of the community in need could come and pick them up. After weeks of 24/7 live broadcast to support communication to the thousands of homes without power, announcers conducted outside broadcasts daily at the Flood Recovery Hubs around town, bringing hope and cheer to those in need, and giving kids icy poles while they waited in long, hot lines with their parents. The teams endured some of the hottest days on record in Townsville to connect with local residents ensuring they were OK and help them access funding, wellbeing checks, furniture assistance, mould removal and much more.

The devastating bushfires that impacted New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria towards the end of 2019 and into 2020 saw over 80 community radio stations broadcasting in fire affected areas or to fire affected communities. In some areas, emergency broadcasting by community radio was the only source of local information.

About 60 km from Canberra, Braidwood's community radio station, Braidwood FM, had only just expanded its transmission range when fires threatened the town of about 1,600 people. In late November 2019, station volunteers broadcast 14 days of near continuous emergency coverage of the Tallaganda National Park fire. Volunteers put hourly updates to air from the Rural Fire Service, directly connecting listeners to the information source. Portable battery-powered radios sold out in town. The new transmission range meant that locals in more remote areas could now hear the station's information and updates.

During the bushfire threat, many stations faced severe pressure on their people - volunteer staff struggling with exhaustion and trauma - and damage and loss of power to broadcasting equipment and resources. For example, on 31 December 2019, fires destroyed the main transmitter and link tower at Mt Wandera for Eurobodalla's community radio station 2EAR FM - also taking out the ABC's transmitter. 2EAR FM was off air until the station technician and support team were able to temporarily install a transmitter at the station premises one week later, at a reduced output.

As communities worked to rebuild infrastructure and community spirit local community radio stations again played a critical role through fundraising efforts, acting as catalysts for community dialogue and building resilience, helping combat social isolation and, importantly, connecting people to the critical services they need.

The commitment, passion and local knowledge of volunteers and staff drawn from the local area around community radio stations, allows them to be of exponential value in times of emergency. Community radio stations are not only media outlets - they are a point of connection around which communities can rally to support and care for their communities.



Live FM announcers with the SES at the Recovery Hub

The Victorian emergency broadcasting model and how it could be adapted for NSW

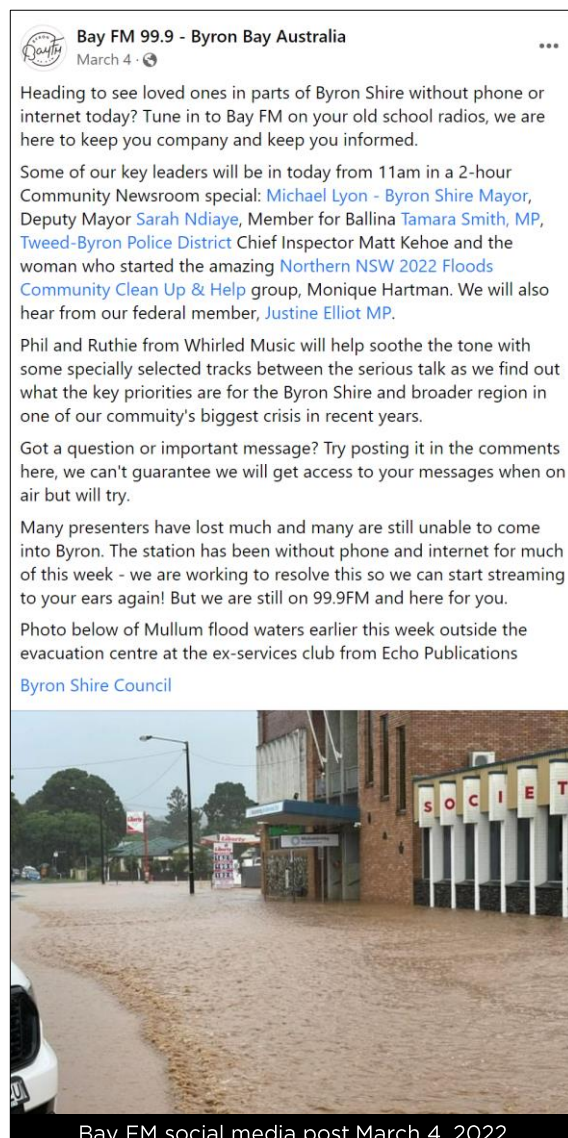
“Broadcast media, such as the ABC and community radio, provide information to isolated and rural communities when they are unable to receive landline or mobile phone communication, use the internet or watch television. We are encouraged by steps taken by some states to improve the delivery of critical information to broadcast media so that it can, in turn, be provided to the public in a timely manner.” —Report of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements³

Community radio is an important complimentary emergency broadcast option alongside the ABC and commercial radio, however in NSW there is currently no model as to how community radio stations are engaged for emergency broadcasting during natural disasters. We believe the Victorian model could be adapted to form part of a national approach.

In Victoria, community radio stations can be certified as official emergency broadcasters to run formal emergency broadcasting services. This is often because the station has the resources, knowledge and desire to play this role, and might be located in a region where the ABC and other broadcasters do not reach or cannot offer the hyperlocalised knowledge that community services can. In Victoria, community broadcasters can then secure a formal relationship with Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) by signing an MOU.

This MOU outlines the key obligations of emergency broadcasters. To become emergency broadcasters, Victorian community stations must demonstrate that they are able to, among other things, broadcast emergency warnings and information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week as directed; broadcast the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) when directed; and use best endeavours to make sure information that is broadcast during emergencies is accurate.

Because of this agreement, community radio stations in Victoria report that their working relationship with EMV is strong, information they receive timely, and the warnings and information are read and broadcast verbatim. This formal arrangement came out of a review of the 2009 Black Saturday fires.

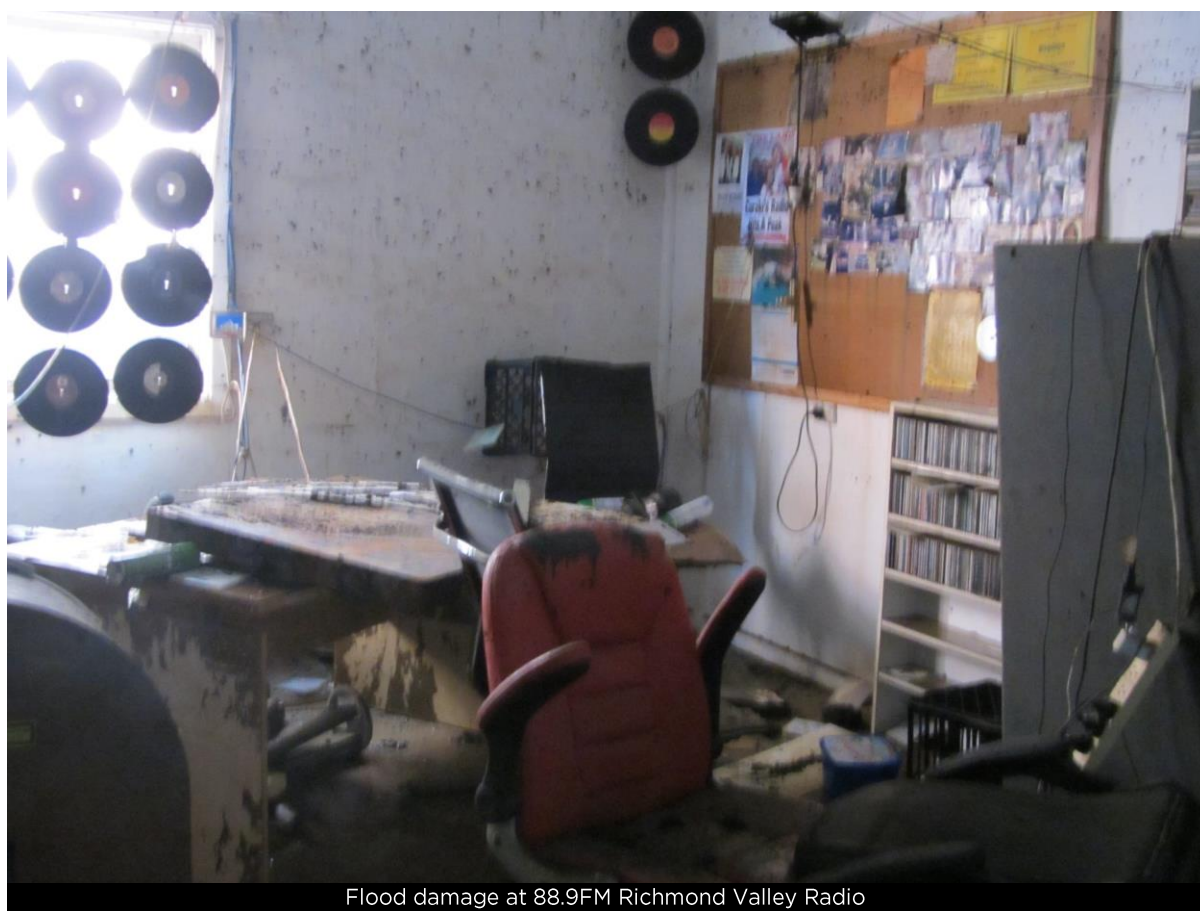


Bay FM social media post March 4, 2022

³ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements – Report (2020) <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/royal-commission-national-natural-disaster-arrangements-report>

There are at least ten community radio stations in Victoria that have formal arrangements with EMV. This is an effective system that allows community radio stations with the resources to opt in to be designated official emergency broadcasters. Those who do not want to or do not have the resources to opt in, can still broadcast and share emergency information. In many cases, the information these broadcasters receive is through their relationships with local emergency services – vital relationships which enables stations to still provide hyperlocal information.

In NSW, there is no formal arrangement between Resilience NSW and community broadcasters that we are aware of. As community broadcasters are increasingly taking on the responsibility of providing warnings and other information to their communities in times of emergency, it is vital that community broadcasters provide accurate information to listeners from official sources. Many stations broadcast emergency information obtained via their personal relationships with local emergency services. The establishment of a formalised partnerships with Resilience NSW would ensure stations get accurate and timely information and best understand their obligations.



Flood damage at 88.9FM Richmond Valley Radio

The need for involvement and integration of the community radio sector in the Government's recovery programs and natural disaster planning.

The small budgets that community radio stations operate within, and the difficulty of quickly mobilising 'community capital' to face funding shortfalls in the same way as financial capital, makes stations vulnerable to shifts in their existing income sources, especially where these are unforeseeable and outside of their control.

We consult regularly with our sector and know that many stations are struggling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic – volunteers need to be re-engaged, and fundraising/sponsorship personnel invested in to reinvigorate income streams. A major problem for the sector is ageing infrastructure

and equipment. This infrastructure is important for emergency broadcasting. For many stations this problem has been compounded recently by damage caused by floods, storms and lightning.

With the NSW Government examining its response to the flooding – the CBAA proposes a collaborative project that:

1. Identifies the challenges faced by community broadcasting stations whose operations have been impacted by recent natural disasters.
2. Identifies the risks and needs of regional community broadcasters to ensure critical services remain on-air during natural disasters, emergencies and in recovery.
3. Reviews the operating, funding and regulatory environment and how this can be improved to assist community radio stations perform their critical role both during and after natural disasters and emergencies.

Such a project would be an important step towards building the resilience and capacity of regional community broadcasters so that they can continue contributing to community safety and cohesion during and after local emergencies.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Committee recognises the valuable role community broadcasters play during natural disasters, in informing communities and contributing to community connection and resilience.

Recommendation 2: Given the important role community broadcasters play during natural disasters the CBAA recommends that Resilience NSW establish more formal relationships with community broadcasters, who want to and have the resources to be official emergency broadcasters.

Recommendation 3: The NSW Government should collaborate with our sector on a project to examine the future risks and needs of community broadcasters to ensure their critical services remain resilient and on-air during natural disasters, emergencies and in recovery.

As the peak body for the community broadcasting sector, and an active participant in research, policy and planning, the CBAA is committed to further sharing our ideas, experience and knowledge with the committee to ensure community radio stations across the country can best serve their communities both during and after natural disasters in the future.

Should you wish to discuss our submission further, please do not hesitate to contact Holly Friedlander Liddicoat, CBAA's Head of Advocacy and Communications

Best regards,

Jon Bisset
Chief Executive Officer