

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

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Partially  
Confidential

Flood Diaries:

A citizen response  
to NSW Floods  
through  
community storytelling

# Purpose of Flood Diaries

Our hometowns have just been hit with the worst flood event recorded in our area, it is raw, everyone is exhausted, the adrenaline is wearing off and we are starting to reflect on what just happened. Whilst we long for the day we can move on and forget it is important to take time to acknowledge and preserve what the community has endured.

Researchers talk about disaster amnesia, or “flood memory”, describing how people who have experienced disasters have little advice to pass on that knowledge and it disappears. Accounts of what floods were like from those with lived experience are crucial the more our community remembers and understands past disasters, the more able we are to work toward preventing future ones, whether through their own actions or via the policymakers.

Our goal is to collate the experiences and perspectives of our community. The Flood Diaries is a passion project to document this difficult time, to preserve the experiences, and use them to help facilitate change in our systems. It will cover the community's perspectives and experiences in Northern NSW Floods. The Flood Diaries Project aims to capture as many stories as we can from the community to arm ourselves in the fight to Prevent, Prepare, Protect our beautiful community.

Dannielle Pickford and Sarah Moran  
Publishers – 2022

## Initial Flood Diaries Interview Questions

- Name
- Email
- Postcode
- Phone number
- Where were you when it started?
- How were you affected?
- How did people in your community respond?
- What is your situation like now?
- What are your feelings about what happened?
- What is the memory you think you will hold in 10 years?
- Is there anything important you would like to add?



## FLOOD DIARIES

# A citizen-led response to storytelling: Who we are and why we care.

## Dannielle Pickford and Sarah Moran

On the morning of the 28 February Dannielle Pickford was inundated with pleas for help from family and friends to send addresses through to her partner Chris. Chris was on the frontline in a boat, and was a volunteer “boatie”.

Dannielle realised there was no order on the Facebook page (Resilience Lismore), and people’s cries for help were getting missed, making it difficult for people to be identified as in need of rescue.

She started organising the posts, and posted to make sure people put the “rescue needed” into an appropriate thread, then made separate threads for separate areas South, North and East Lismore.

She then coordinated to get these addresses to boats in each area, including the boat her husband was in.

Dannielle was then alerted to a post by a local Sally Flannery asking for help on a comprehensive list in “ClickUp” and she quickly worked to coordinate to be able to pull these addresses into a live list.

By Monday night Dannielle took on the role as digital coordinator, and continued to update and organize the list and onboard new volunteers overnight and as needed.

Over the coming days Dannielle worked to get the addresses to boats in each area moving her focus to Coraki, Bungawalbin and Ballina as the emergency progressed. Dannielle continued to work with the community clearing the outside Lismore list until handing it over to the police to collate with missing persons.

The list was started by Sally Flannery and coordinated by Dannielle Pickford & Sarah Moran, along with a number of (mostly interstate) volunteers who worked together to maintain the list over the initial rescue phase of the floods.

Overall, approximately 1500 jobs were logged, 1000 were marked rescued with documented evidence to mark complete, a further 100 were logged by volunteers digitally registering people at evacuation centers. The remaining 400 were handed over one by one with RFS and Police.

Sarah Moran had family stranded on a roof in South Lismore, and she began checking social media and realised people were using multiple lists and Facebook threads to direct the citizen boats to check on houses. Sarah chatted to the others editing the spreadsheets and suggested they shut down the spreadsheet and use the ClickUp in order to remove the risk of information being either lost or duplicated.

Sarah and Dannielle saw that very little of this process of handover between citizens and the official emergency and resilience systems was being documented.

So they continued what they were already doing: writing things down.



This is how Flood Diaries started, as a process to ensure things that were observed were documented.

Dannielle and Sarah also realised once people got talking, they had a lot to say. With their collective experience with mental health and physical health, and noting that the frontline volunteers were mostly men, they started requesting people to share their stories.

They also recruited the assistance of Stephanie Cordery to go around Lismore and Coraki speaking to people willing to tell their story.

We have since been running a website, flooddiaries.com, and have run three major surveys:

- a broad survey with interview questions prompting people to share their flood experience more broadly
- a “Boatie Survey” where we surveyed 43 boaties and asked for their feedback on their experience as flood volunteers (see separate document)
- And we also asked the community what questions they would like to see answered by the flood inquiry.

We have included our observations and recommendations as publishers of FloodDiaries.com, having heard literally 100s of stories so far since 28 February, 2022.

**NOTE: We have plenty more insights with regards to the online response in the first 48 hours of the emergency, but as we are volunteering with this submission we have unfortunately ran out of time to go into detail on that specifically.**



IMAGE: Dannielle Pickford at the Evacuation Centre at Southern Cross University managing the citizen-led list of those in need of rescue and those who had been found.

From lived experience

## Key Observations

- The SES put a call out for boats to respond before rescinding the call due to 'insurance issues'
- The digital coordination efforts by all the community was acting to fill gaps in the government services that were not afforded to them including 000, SES call centers.
- There has been very little reimbursement of costs to volunteers
- Pro-active online coordination on social media platforms such as Facebook Groups and WhatsApp acted to recognise rescues needed, comfort & calm the community, and allow people to find out that their family was safe
- The evacuation centre registration was not digitised and Red cross required people to digitally identify themselves to be linked with family, the community-managed list also evolved to fill this gap.
- There was no record of those involved in the citizen rescue effort
- No mental health offboarding process for the community
- No handover into official systems, including to NSW Emergency Services or Resilience teams. No-one seems to have debriefed with volunteers (boaties, online, cleanup) nor people rescued to check-in on their mental health, physical health or wellbeing after this traumatic event.
- Telling the volunteers not to get in the water leaves people with a lot of guilt and people are quite upset that this happened.



## Solutions we'd like to see:

- Retrospectively collect and record volunteers of the 2022 floods
- Mental health debrief with volunteers, encouraged from an "everybody's doing it, mate" inclusion-by-default approach. We are seeing that when it is seen as a part of the process to debrief, people are more willing to do it. If you ask people "Are you OK? Do you need mental health support?", people seem unclear how to get that support. It should simply be given, not something these people need to seek out: they are obviously not OK!
- Create system where people can join the emergency response when manpower is needed to manage risks
- Emergency systems predictably need to scale and have backups
- Government systems need to be where the people already are, not siloed, preparedly available
- Proactively on twitter, instagram, tiktok and snapchat
- Humans need to know how to engage in the systems before they have to
- Develop community outreach programs that can be implemented into areas post disaster
- Volunteers should be eligible for reimbursement of expenses
- There is a point at which people seem to feel obligated to continue volunteering: the volunteer response became the ACTUAL response. What should have been short-term became relied upon for longer term support, at the personal expense of citizen volunteers. But these volunteers were often also flood victims, so are forced to either feel guilty for stopping their volunteering or continue volunteering at the expense of their own post-flood needs.
- No assembly points
- No fuel supply
- Access to right rescue boats, jetskis important.

The community has been left to heal themselves

Flood diaries was our initial mental health response to the stories we were hearing that needed to be told.

We tapped into storytelling and the role it plays in the resilience and recovery of the community.

#### PUBLISHERS NOTE:

Those who couldn't help were left in shock to digitally witness their loved ones begging for their lives and wondering how is this happening.

On the 9th of March Prime Minister Scott Morrison held a press conference in the privacy of the council chamber to which he stated, ““That's what Australians do, and I think always there will be a community response in disasters such as this because the community is already there, and the resources move and they come in, as you're seeing now, but they're not available on a moment's notice. And I think it's unrealistic to have that set as an expectation.”

Is it unrealistic for Australia to expect their emergency systems to be adequate in an emergency, that the service we have given power to be our 'disaster response' could respond, that our calls are answered, that they are there at a moments notice? Is that too much to expect or was the response so inadequate on multiple levels that the community HAD to respond or be left for dead?

The community did not aid in the rescue effort they lead it, forced into emergency response roles and then left to deal with the trauma it has caused.

CITIZEN RESPONSE AND STORYTELLING

Difficulty accessing  
mental health support

6 month waiting  
list for help

No Debrief for those  
involved in rescue  
efforts

“That's what Australians do, and I think always there will be a community response in disasters such as this because the community is already there, and the resources move and they come in, as you're seeing now, but they're not available on a moment's notice. And I think it's unrealistic to have that set as an expectation.”

Scott Morrison

# Mental Health Services hard to come by in Northern Rivers

April 28, 2022

by Stephanie Cordery

A Northern Rivers resident Karla Brown was struggling with mental health issues prior to the floods. With a special needs child, having lost her home and being moved into temporary accommodation, and then facing having to leave to make room for holiday goers who had pre-booked accommodation for the Blues festival and Easter holidays. Alternative arrangements were made in similar cases as far away as Toowoomba to cater for the huge number of displaced residents. This moves her away from all family, all support with her child, day care, her child's therapy and her doctors. Her message is simple:

**“It’s not as easy as just getting up and moving away.”**

There is no amount of money that can fill the void of her child being separated from her father and family. The toll of caring full time for her special needs child after losing her home and all their belongings is a load that she admits is too heavy to carry alone. Her home has been completely gutted and moving forward she is unable to decide what step to take next. She admits to suicidal moments and is weighed down by the constant pressure of trying to fix her house, find somewhere to live and provide her daughter with the care that she needs.

Karla has always struggled with the relationship between her partner who suffers from mental illness and her child who constantly questions when she is going to see her family. With a history of domestic violence, living in her partner's family's home has become unmanageable. It is a daily struggle to keep the relationship between her daughter and her partner and partner's family connected. The stress of the distance of every support network and having a mortgage that needs to be paid despite Karla being unable to live in the home due to flood damage causes constant stress. There are limited options for people in Lismore like Karla.

There is no mental health team here after a natural disaster asking people if they are okay or providing support groups or counselling. The entire community has been affected and it is still their responsibility to reach out to ask for help or go on a six month waiting list to talk about their trauma. The volunteers who have come from far and wide to help, the community love and support, the donations and being a part of the community that saved each other is one thing that is keeping people together. People lost family members, some made phone calls to loved ones saying they weren't going to get out before being rescued, rescuers battle with the memories of people they didn't collect.

The survivors of the first flood shared their feelings of anxiety on social media when the second flood came through Lismore. Even the sound of the rain left people terrified. With limited support and no available mental health specialists or support groups in the region this anxiety and fear can escalate. It will take more than just money to rebuild the lives of the people in the Lismore community.

Health services in the Northern rivers have always been quite limited with many patients who require specialists needing to travel to the Gold Coast or Brisbane to access treatment. During the COVID 19 epidemic this separated families. The closure of the Queensland border meant the children's hospital, John Flynn and Gold Coast hospital were on one side of the border and the Northern Rivers on the other.

With limited housing in the Northern rivers there is an increasing need for emergency mental health services. There are a huge number of people who have been through the trauma of being rescued during the Lismore floods, the stress from hundreds of residents trying to rebuild their homes after losing everything and the trauma of the community members who spent days in their boats trying to save residents screaming for help and having to pick and choose who was the most in need.

Perry Mcpherson is a local Lismore business owner who said:

“The worst thing was going out there and not knowing, without any tools to get into roof cavities we were only able to save the people on top of their houses and when we stopped hearing screams from inside...it was pretty horrible,”

There were a hundred boats in the water with community members saving lives with similar stories to Perry. There has been no support to relieve the trauma they experienced, spending their day unsure whether people were alive or dead.

It has had a dramatic impact on the community of Lismore and surrounding areas and although there are mental health plans and free services available for people who have experienced trauma, these services are not easily accessible with one resident of Lismore finding 9 out of 10 psychiatrists they called had closed books, large gap payments or long waiting periods.

The World Health Organization states:

**‘Any event that involves exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence has the potential to be traumatic.’**

The experience for people waiting to be saved as water continued to rise along with the people who were trying to save them will have a lifelong impact on their lives and needs to be addressed as close to the event as possible to reduce the impact of PTSD and other mental health disorders.

WHO states:

**‘in some cases individuals remain symptomatic for 3 years or longer and can cause significant impairment in personal, family social, educational , occupational or other important areas of functioning. This trauma also increases chances of secondary problems such as substance abuse.’**

It's the victims of the 2022 floods that understand that it wasn't possible for people to move out of flood area with only 1 percent of available rentals. Flood insurance was out of the question for many homeowners due to incredibly high premiums after the 2017 floods. Having a savings plan to prepare for the total loss that so many people incurred was not possible for a lot of residents of Lismore with huge rates bills and due to the incredibly high price of rentals. Houses have been raised, people are prepared for flooding but not for the unprecedented natural disaster that occurred in March 2022.

While people suffer, some almost losing their lives as well as their houses, they are asked:

**“why didn’t you move out of flood zone?” or “how could you return to your homes?”**

With mortgages, no available housing and their support networks in the Northern Rivers there is really no other choice for many people. The views from some people outside the flood zone has created even more stress for some Lismore residents.

With solutions being temporarily being offered for housing and funding there is no 'on the ground' help with mental health. Specialists are harder to come by than they were prior to the floods. People are suffering after waiting all night on their roof to be rescued or being saved from their roof cavities with water rising, thinking they were about to die. It's not a memory that leaves people quickly and thousands of Lismore residents are still affected by that trauma and require counselling or treatment for post traumatic stress. There are even less services available in an area that was crying out for help prior to the floods and there is a huge increase in demand after much of the Northern Rivers population experienced such a traumatic event.

“The number of lives at serious risk in this disaster is of a magnitude I have never seen before.”

Story by Dannielle Pickford

Chris didn't grow up in Lismore, but his wife is a local, the two of them have deep roots in the area they have many family members and friends there, bought their first home there and celebrated many wonderful family times in the area.

Watching the flood predictions rapidly evolve overnight, starting off feeling safe at less than 10m, upgrading to over the levee, then above the 1974 level and beyond. They both knew many in the sleeping town would be caught off guard and unprepared. He knew it was going to be bad, but nothing could have prepared him for the harsh reality.

He packed his gear and set off to do whatever he could to help, when Chris had arrived in Lismore found 2 then strangers who welcomed him into their boat and responding to rescues immediately.

“One of the most heart-breaking things was coming to land and having people begging us to save their loved ones and handing us addresses, their despair was evident in their eyes.

I had to look them in the eyes and be honest that we might not make it to their loved ones without being diverted to another rescue. That was really difficult. I wonder if we could have helped these people more.”

Later that morning as they arrived at the Ballina Street bridge, the entrance to South Lismore Chris spotted his old mate Beau, the two hugged each other with both excitement and relief to see a familiar face. They had previously worked in emergency services together. Beau was back in Lismore on holidays and found himself on the frontline of the SES's response as one of the first SES boats into the now consumed South Lismore. Chris Asked Beau where he needs him, he replied:

“There are people everywhere, just go down a street and grab them.”

They continued to the streets surrounding South Lismore Public School where 46 people were trapped surrounded by the rising flood waters. They then transported many of these people back to the bridge alerting other boats along the way to help with the mammoth task.

By this time the Boatie Brigade was in full force. The locals had somehow organised themselves with an ad-hoc system, those with boats able to cross to South Lismore were performing rescues and off boarding those to the bridge, the people then crossed the bridge to again board in boats who could then transport them to safety. There were then more civilians on the bridge choosing to stay to help people on and off, turn boats and direct the flow of the boat highway and again others helping them out on arrival to land.

The systematic, coordinated efforts by locals and civilians was heroic, dynamic, and effective in saving hundreds of lives. This is the responsiveness, flexibility and cohesion that rescue agencies would dream of.

“It was then for a moment my emotions got the better of me we were transferring 3 flood victims to the Ballina Street bridge.

I witnessed approximately 100 victims and an additional 50 civilian rescuers, strangers working with strangers to save the lives of other strangers.

They hugged, cried, and supported each other in the greatest display of Aussie spirit.

Pulling your boat up to this sight it was hard not to feel overwhelmed by the strange mix of deep sorrow and great pride for the Boaties who placed their lives at risk for their community.”

The crew Chris had jumped aboard with were exhausted and decided to go in.

“We were so cold and busy that day with rescues that all I ate was a blue dinosaur bar, it tasted amazing.”

Chris soon found another Boatie, Adam, about to launch and he was more than happy for company. They navigated down Junction Street where they rescued an elderly lady who was frozen with fear, stuck still clinging to a pole, she was too weak to speak, they almost went straight past.

Shortly after they were faced with a rescue Chris will never forget.

“We saved a family stuck in their roof cavity with the water still rising. I had to enter the home through a window while Adam manned the boat. It was dark inside with about 40-60cm until the water reached the ceiling, furniture was floating obstructing the path. I had to convince the single mother and her autistic son to get in the water with me to escape their home.”

“They were very brave, especially the boy, he was extremely distressed, and I had to be forceful with him to get him to safety. It’s something I regret but I hope he will understand I was helping him. I hope he is doing OK.”

The pair continued rescues until low light, their fuel was low, however, their moral was high.

The following morning, he returned to the chaos with a good friend as his skipper.

“Across 3 boats for 3 days then continuing on dry land, we achieved close to 50 rescues, delivered food, water and medical supplies, responded to urgent concerns for welfare and retrieved 4 urns for families, many other Boaties did more than that.

The amount doesn’t matter, 1 or 100. the civilian response did an amazing job, and each person should be proud of the collective contribution.”

Chris worked tirelessly for days and on the eve of returning to work the water had receded enough to return home for a night in his own bed before being tasked to help in Ballina the next day, for the first time as an official part of the emergency response.

When asked what his experience was like he reports:

“The number of lives at serious risk in this disaster is of a magnitude I have never seen before. To put it into context I have deployed to Lismore in the 2017 floods, the 19-20 bushfires and the war in Afghanistan. This disaster, our community spirit and the boaties actions will go down in history, and rightfully so.”

Chris is someone who typically shy’s away from the spotlight, however, is deeply concerned for the mental health of other rescuers after what they experienced during this event.

“I worry about the mental health of the community but particularly the Boaties that risked their lives, heard the screams, and couldn't help everyone.

I often wonder how they are going, I know a few that are really struggling. Who is supporting these civilian rescuers?”

# My uncle was trapped on his roof in South Lismore. So I got online and begged for help.

Sarah Moran

On Monday 28/2 I woke up to realise my uncle was stranded on a rooftop in Centre Street, South Lismore. I texted my best friend whose husband was out with a boat but she told me they couldn't get over to South Lismore.

So I turned to social media and somehow came across the Facebook groups where people had been posting either that they needed rescuing directly or their relatives did.

When I realised people were using these lists to direct the citizen boats to check on houses, and someone pulled these together in a spreadsheet, I jumped in to the spreadsheet to make it more user-friendly.

## "If I was in a boat, what would I need to have immediate visibility of?"

Suburb, street name, how many people / animals, has the rescue already been done so I don't waste my time going somewhere with no-one there.

I cleaned up the data and wasn't sure if it was still being used, but I had to pretend it was: just in case.

Then someone claiming to represent Lismore small business owners started posting "here's the Clickup list". It immediately occurred to me that this would be a data duplication: if there's different information across 2 spreadsheets, that's bad!

So I chatted to the others editing the spreadsheet and suggested we shut down the spreadsheet and use the ClickUp as the single source of truth.

In the background I had been tweeting about what I was working on because it was crazy and felt "inappropriate" - am I putting people in danger by giving them addresses to visit when I can't verify if people have already been rescued from there? Are we suggesting people will get rescued, even though this list is simply a bunch of randoms on the internet?

## This needed to be integrated with the official systems: so if people had "reported" something on Facebook it would land in an official process to ensure that person was rescued.

Lucy Turnbull told me to make Dominic Perrottet's Chief of Staff and Minister for Emergency Services and Resilience Stephanie Cooke's Chief of Staff aware of the citizen effort.

So I emailed through the Facebook Groups, the original spreadsheet and the Clickup so that all information and how it was being collected could be transparent and available to whoever needed it.

From here I teamed up with Dannielle Pickford to continue to update the Clickup, adding new names and also "closing out" those that had definitely been rescued.

## I don't wish anyone to ever have to update their own relatives on a rescue list, and I did it 3 times.

I felt an immense guilt as the rescues needed to occur further than Lismore as I knew the boats couldn't make it that far, especially at night. I am grateful Dannielle pushed us to keep going as the water spread to Coraki. I had to add my aunt and uncle to the list: my aunt was due for rescue but the helicopters stopped, and my uncle in Coraki had stayed with the house after my aunt and cousins were rescued.

## There was then the point at which I felt like the list became a missing persons list: and I personally didn't know what that meant.

We never received feedback if the list was in use from anyone official, and we weren't sure if we still needed to request boats to continue citizen rescues.

I have plenty of feedback I'd like to offer in terms of how the "first responder" citizen efforts can integrate with official systems, especially as it is guaranteed to occur this way again for other emergencies in the future.

We began Flood Diaries to document our experience because no-one else seemed to be doing that.

As a citizen, I am unimpressed with the effort to integrate citizen responses with official procedures, which should be a normal part of emergency response.



IMAGES: Sarah's cousins being rescued from Coraki by the ADF (top) and from South Lismore by citizen volunteers (below)

# Vincent Marychurch's story

As told to Stephanie Cordery

Vincent Marychurch is a South Lismore local and now a Lismore local hero. He knew that when the water kept rising after the rain had stopped that the flood was going to be worse than the 2017 devastating flood in Lismore.

Vincent who resides in South Lismore could see the rate that the water was rising and said to his father in law Jeff "Stop trying to raise your belongings, put your wallet in a snap lock bag and think about us leaving now." Him and his father in law left in their 3.1 m savage boat with a 15hp Yamaha motor. This quickly became the vessel in South Lismore that would save from 50-100 people and animals.

Many Boats could not make it across the powerful, rushing water that was engulfing Ballina st Bridge and separated the local boats from the central, South and North parts of Lismore. Residents had been desperately ringing the SES and triple 000 and the situation had become critical after the lack of response. Because of this separation and the demand for people to be rescued in the Eastern and central parts of Lismore there were very few community members able to collect residents of South and North Lismore who were quickly becoming stranded in roof cavities or at the highest points they could find.

Katie Matthew's father was clinging to a ladder inside his house while she frantically called for critical help "Vincent saved my father's life. I called 000 7 times and the SES 3 times and nobody turned up. With water almost up to my father's neck Vincent rescued my dad from under a front window awning. He could hear him yelling for help. I will never forget this man's courage, selflessness and determination. He definitely saved my dad's life that morning."


Vincent and Jeff's initial plan when they saw the amount of people in danger was to get them to the highest point in the street. There were so many people in desperate need of saving and he knew it was impossible to get each one to the bridge. When the higher points started going under Vincent found a safe place at a local school to drop each boat load of people off so that the SES could collect them and take them to the bridge. South Lismore public school became a safe haven for many South Lismore residents. Vincent even delegated people to manage the group which at one point grew to 27 people who were frantic and awaiting pick up from the SES or other local boats.

Vincent rang his partner and said "Ring the SES, tell them I am dropping people at South Lismore public. talk to the police"

Vincent's quick thinking and leadership skills saved many lives. "I needed to get the people out, who couldn't get out. Everyone was screaming. It broke my heart to keep passing people. The main thing I did was use the school as a higher point" Vincent concentrated on disabled residents and the elderly first. Making trips to and from the school. Vincent said "At one point we couldn't get an elderly woman in the boat. Her son Steve Higgins was holding up her head and we were dragging her along next to the boat. If the debris had have hit her she would have gone under."

Vincent said in total there were 2-3 SES boats. He said "The order of response was civilians first, then the police came, then the SES and then the army. It should have been the other way around" In the flood along with many South Lismore residents Vincent, his partner and children lost their home and all their belongings. Vincent has now been nominated by many residents from Lismore for a bravery award after being named as the person who saved their lives.

To make a donation to Vincent's family please visit <https://gofund.me/37f35549>




**Leah Vinnie Angus and Fynn**

**\$4,175** raised of \$20,000 goal • 48 donors

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 Steve Thompson is organising this fundraising appeal on behalf of Leah Harris.

Leah Vinnie and their two little boys have lost everything in the Lismore floods, their house went under to the roof, vinnie personally helped save +50 people in his tinnie at the peak of the flood.  
Leah and Vinnie are amazing people dedicated parents and hard working Aussies who could use a hand right now, please ♥

“Vincent saved my father's life. He was clinging to a ladder inside his house while I frantically called for help for him. I called 000 7 times and the SES 3 times and nobody turned up. With water almost up to my father's neck Vincent rescued my dad from under a front window awning. He could hear him yelling for help. I will never forget this man's courage, selflessness and determination. He definitely saved my dad's life that morning.”

Vincent Marychurch



# Ron Graham's Story

## As told to Stephanie Cordery

Ron Graham's home is just on the outskirts of Lismore in close vicinity to the Lismore Lakeside caravan park. Some of the cabins at the caravan park are on their sides, some caravans have been thrown around by the flood water and are propped against each other. Some have been totally destroyed by the two floods that have hit Lismore and surrounds. The familiar piles of ruined belongings, broken furniture and mattresses that have appeared in front of each house throughout Lismore are surprisingly absent in front of the caravan park that was home to a hundred people.

Many are without transport, are living with friends, in emergency, temporary accommodation or homeless. Many of the residents had moved to higher ground before the first flood but 20-30 residents remained and found themselves in a dire situation as waters rose and trapped them on top of their vans and cabins.

Ron's property has two damaged planes next to the driveway. They were washed down from the airport during the first flood and had been partially salvaged by the TV show 'salvage squad' which visited the property with the private plane owners earlier in the week. There is the peak of a shed sticking out of the middle of the property's dam. Ron's father Barry has amazingly revived one of the six cars that were damaged on the property after being inundated by flood water.

Ron had awoken at 3:30AM with calls from a friend desperate for a boat to save his parents who were stuck in rising flood water in South Lismore. Ron had his own property surrounded by water and had no intention of needing his boat which was pulled apart in his garage behind two cars. He was receiving desperate messages from a friend Todd Usher whose parents were unable to get out of the house and onto their roof due to age and health restrictions. As he backed his eldest son's car out of the shed he realized there was nowhere to move it to. They were engulfed by water.

Ron was worried about the lifetime of belongings that he knew he was currently losing but approaching Lismore was easily distracted by the people on their roofs, or in their homes screaming for his help. He had to ignore the screams of the people begging him to be saved to get to Todd's parents house because he knew that they were in an incredibly dangerous situation after already saying goodbye to their son over the phone. Ron got to Burt and Dianne Usher's house to find them trapped with doors shut, with water up to their waists. Deegan, Ron's eldest son who had jumped in the boat to assist him had removed his own life vest to keep Bert above the water but they were still unable to get him out of the house. They saw a friend waiting to be rescued on another roof and collected him to help with the rescue. The three of them managed to get Bert out of the water which was rising and nearly impossible to navigate through.

Ron and Deegan spent the day collecting the other people from homes and dropping them at the bridge to be collected by the SES. The current was incredibly strong and as one of the only boats on the South side there were many people desperate for help and Deegan and Ron saved 20 from the Lakeside caravan park alone. Unable to fight the current and get a large group of people back to the bridge he dropped them all to safety on the verandah of his own home where his wife and other children waited. He did not expect to get a frantic call from his wife later in the day telling him that water was coming into the house. At this point Ron had to recruit three boats to collect the people he had already saved and his own family and take them down the river as he was still unable to fight the current and get the group to the bridge.

He had to make choices throughout the day that a lot of the heroes in boats made during the flood of who to save first and who could survive longer. This is a choice that the many locals had to make and one that has affected many of them after this tragedy.

The lakeside caravan park is one of three that housed permanent residents in Lismore during a rental crisis. It is inhabitable and residents are unable to move back into their sites. The evacuation center's which were unsafe and overcrowded have been shut down and Lismore residents have been moved as far as Brisbane as housing in the local area is unavailable.

Ron and his family suffered almost a total loss on their own property. 6 cars, two sheds, farm equipment and water through even the top level of his house. His father's home, the granny flat underneath, was totally destroyed. He is one of the many heroes of the community that chose to save people's lives over rescuing his belongings. If it wasn't for his selflessness and commitment to the community there are many residents of South Lismore that would not be here to tell their stories today.

# Leon's Story

## As told to Stephanie Cordery

Leon has been living on the Northern Rivers for most of his life. He lost almost all of his possessions and there was significant damage to the home he rented long term with his late wife Julie during the 2017 floods.

In the 2022 floods the flood waters went over the roof of his house and again he suffered a total loss. Due to being immunocompromised he was unable to flee to the evacuation center and was lucky enough to have friends to stay with short term until one of the 45 motor homes that was brought to the Lismore area after the floods was made available for him. He was a flood victim who was in desperate need for accommodation as he needed to be close to the hospital. He has no transport and needs to be able to walk or catch public transport to health appointments.

The motor home that was temporarily provided to Leon is a small space. It is temporary emergency accommodation and in the second flood of 2022 it too had to be evacuated to higher ground in Alstonville. The motorhomes came stocked with blankets, a toaster, kettle, hotplate, sink and a toilet area that has a shower nozzle coming from the sink. He is happy to have somewhere safe and dry to sleep but due to the size of the area this is not a long term option.

Unfortunately Leon's rental property was affected for the second time in a month when the second flood hit Lismore. He is now in limbo with his motorhome being provided for a one month term only and his rental property waiting on inspection and instructions from the owners. He is better off than other residents who have moved back into their homes in similar condition due to lack of rentals and accommodation in the area.

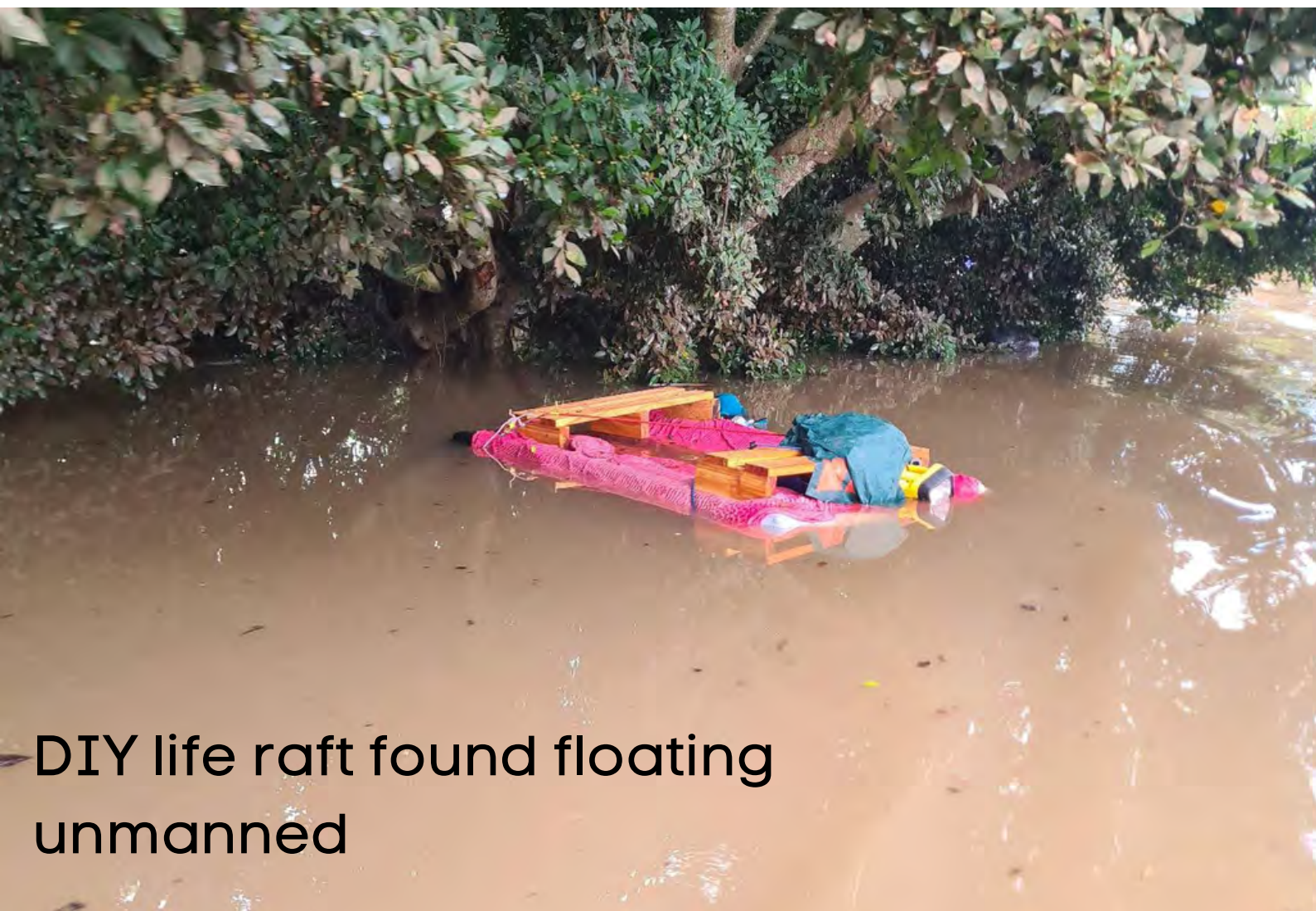
The floor of his rental property is buckled and unstable. It is still wet in parts from the second flood. Walls are unable to be cleaned down until repairs are made to the property because paint is flaking off the walls and ceiling in sheets as the flood waters rose over his ceiling. His personal possessions which were stacked outside the house in a pile have now been washed into the long driveway cutting off entry to the house.

The motorhomes that were evacuated when the second flood hit have been moved to the showgrounds just out of Lismore. Public transport is not running regularly, there are limited facilities and although facilities for washing are available there is no laundromat to wash blankets or larger items.

Leon is facing the stress of wondering whether he will be made to move out in a week when his one month temporary accommodation is up. He is still suffering from the trauma of losing all of his possessions for the third time in just 5 years. With other Lismore residents being moved to accommodation as far as Toowoomba he is worried about his vicinity to his doctors, friends and only remaining community support.







DIY life raft found floating  
unmanned



# Fiona’s Story

## As told to Stephanie Cordery

Fiona Wade of East Lismore has 3 houses and two flats that for the first time were inundated by flood waters in the 2022 floods. Her deed states that the most water that ever entered her premises was in 1974 and was 600ml. Friends and family thought Fiona’s property was a safe place to store fridges, vehicles, commercial equipment from shops and mechanical equipment. Much to her surprise during the 2022 floods the flood waters ran through all her properties and 1.5 meters into her own home. Her tenants now have lost all their belongings, have nowhere to go and needed to be rescued from the loft in their landlord’s home by boat. This area had never flooded before and 22 people, children and animals huddled in Fiona’s loft, one tenant was heavily pregnant. They were Rescued by Dylan Sandilands, one of the local heroes who spent the day saving people in his boat.

With the flood waters receded the Lismore community with the help of volunteers are starting to rebuild after 2 floods in a month. Walls and floors have been removed from houses, piles of personal belongings still remain out the front of houses and businesses and army vehicles are still a regular sight rolling through the CBD.

Homeowners in Lismore were advised to remove all insulation from walls to avoid mold as most houses were inundated by water, many up to the roof. Wet floor boards had to be removed due to buckling, water pooling underneath or due to mold and decay.

Not all flood effected residents are capable of carrying out the necessary repairs and in the midst of a housing crisis people are being forced to move back into their homes unsafely. Long term exposure to mold can lead to serious, long-term effects like insomnia, memory loss, trouble concentrating and confusion. Mold exposure contributes to depression and anxiety. It can even lead to muscle cramps, numbness in extremities, weight gain, light sensitivity and hair loss.

The most at risk Northern Rivers residents are those who are physically unable to complete repairs or renters who have not had adequate repairs performed by owners before getting the go ahead to move back into properties. The elderly, sick or disabled residents in some cases have not been able to get their damaged belongings removed from their houses or have their houses thoroughly cleaned.

With a housing shortage Fiona Wade’s tenants continue to live in homes that are covered in mould with 1 powerpoint, walls partially removed, no carpets, buckled flooring and with limited belongings. Rodney Parkes is one of Fiona’s tenants and said he simply has “nowhere else to go.” The uncertainty of how long it will take to get all properties back up to a habitable standard is uncertain. Fiona has a mortgage but no current rental income as she is allowing the tenants to live in her units and houses for free until they are fixed. Her first priority is to have the house her grandchildren and son live in be safe enough to have them move back in as they are currently staying with other family. It is a familiar story for many tenants with many in limbo unsure of how long it will take to have their homes repaired or if they will be able to move back in at all.

The displaced residents who were lucky enough to get emergency accommodation in the area have now been asked to vacate their emergency, temporary accommodation in Ballina, Byron Bay, Evans Head and Lennox Head to make way for holiday goers who had pre-booked available accommodation for the blues festival and the Easter holidays.

Up to a hundred people have been asked to leave their current emergency accommodation to be sent as far away as Toowoomba, separating them from their loved ones, jobs, families and support network. One Lismore resident is traveling from the Gold Coast back to Lismore each day for school and work adding 2 and a half hours to their daily commute.

The available housing rate prior to the 2022 floods was 0.3 percent. After the floods North coast community housing estimates over 3,800 homes have been deemed unlivable with an increase in homeless residents and less available properties It’s not surprising with no available accommodation that people are moving back into condemned or unsafe premises. There are no other options for displaced people who need to stay local.

The Lismore Soup kitchen which served as a haven for homeless residents was heavily effected by both floods and has not been able to continue to provide food for the homeless. Fortunately some amazing volunteers have consistently been providing warm meals for people who have no fixed address or are still without power. Food and coffee is also available at the Koori Mail which has been distributing donations and has been a hub for volunteers and tradies since the first flood.

Fiona and her friends and tenants have been working everyday for 7 weeks to get her properties back to a livable standard. Her and her tenants lost 7 vehicles and almost all of their belongings. Without an income and with the level of loss she has sustained the grants that have been made available don’t go close to covering the huge bills she has incurred. Her tenants are grateful to have a roof over their heads but with tradespeople run off their feet, limited incomes and only friends left to volunteer it is just not possible physically and financially to get each unit completely repaired all at once.

Fiona’s late father was responsible for the construction and donation of Wade park. The compassion and generosity is something that Fiona has inherited. Fiona is working tirelessly with her family to make repairs so that her tenants are safe in their homes and at the same time trying to repair her own home so she and her family are living in a safe environment. Walls and floors need to be washed down daily due to a recurring mold problem and beams have been placed throughout the house to try to flatten the buckled floor boards.

Amy Wylie, another tenant of Fiona’s said she woke up in the middle of the night after receiving a phone call from a neighbor saying that the water was up to her deck about to enter the house. Her and her partner had to swim through the water to get to Fiona’s house 25 meters away. They and all Fiona’s other tenants, their children and their pets waited in the upstairs loft as the water rose up the stairs. Fiona’s son had to wade through the water with a baby and a pregnant partner. Amy said as she was waiting in the loft and totally surrounded by water “I was panicking it was going to come further up the stairs” She is eternally grateful to her rescuer Dylan.

Amy scrubs down the walls and cupboards in her rented property daily as mold reappears each day while repairs are being made by Fiona on all of her properties. With no sure time frame for repairs and no other accommodation options the only option is for her to stay.

It is a similar story across Lismore with residents still in temporary accommodation or staying with family and friends. With no permanent housing on the horizon the future of tenants out of their homes, or in unsafe homes is leaving a feeling of uncertainty amongst much of the Northern Rivers. With 1 percent of rentals available countrywide even relocation is not a solution. Motorhomes, pods and hotels are a temporary solution to a problem that existed before the 2022 floods. There is nowhere for the people of Lismore to go, rental prices have skyrocketed and temporary accommodation is a bandaid for a permanent housing problem which is not being addressed. It is the most vulnerable who were already struggling to find affordable housing in the area that are most at risk.

# They spent the night there, watching the cattle get swept away, powerless to help them.

Barney Lund

I'm not so much survivor of the floods, but a bystander, so I have been trying to decide if I should post.

This might provide a different perspective. On the day of the big flood, we saw endless rain in the upper catchment. I would later learn that we had 775 mm in 24 hours here in Dunoon. Unfathomable.

I had been texting my mum who lives in Swan Bay, asking what their plan was because I knew it was going to flood. She told me my sister, brother in law and stepfather were rounding up the cattle to move them to high ground. In my head, I thought she meant the hill up the road that was used as a flood reserve for cattle. I replied by text to remember

"you first, cattle second", thinking they could drive to high ground if needed.

It turned out that none of the farmers along the road moved their cattle. Nobody was prepared for the magnitude of the flood.

Luckily I had been shopping the day before so we were well stocked and ready to play the waiting game as we knew we would be cut off from Lismore. We watched things unfold on Facebook.

We saw friends posting that they were trapped in their homes or up on their roofs. I was looking at BOMs rainfall and river height data and realised this was going to be a bigger flood than anything we had seen before. The hardest thing was waiting as we couldn't do anything. Around this time our phone and internet reception cut, but we still had power. I had all our devices charged up so we could still send texts and get info.

I was very worried about my family on the farm when I found out they were stuck there, as the roads had gone under. This was crazy, we had always seen floods growing up, but those roads only usually got a bit of inundation. I used to easily ride my bike along them during the floods as a kid.

That evening we started hearing of people from Lismore being taken to Modanville school and Dunoon Sports Club. People were opening their houses to survivors and we gave some clothes to some of them who my wife knew through her work. We went to bed that evening dreading what we would hear the next day. I knew the farm was most likely fully submerged but hoped for the best.

The next day we learnt that Woodburn and Coraki were completely inundated with people sheltering at Woodburn school and the hill behind it. I checked in on various friends in the area who were fortunately ok, despite losing houses and dealing with being cut off and low on supplies.

Mum posted to Facebook, and I saw the houses submerged. I couldn't believe it, we had never had water in them even in 74 and 54.

Fortunately my folks had a sailing boat so they all hopped in it as the water rose. They spent the night there, watching the cattle get swept away, powerless to help them. Later that day they were rescued by my other brother in law who took his boat from Evans Head, right up the roads and across paddocks to the farm. Being stuck in Dunoon with no way to get to them, this was a massive relief for us too.

Since then, we have been down to the farm stripping the houses and talking about the flood, trying to understand why it was so big. Interestingly my stepfather thinks they could have avoided the houses going under if the water was only from the Richmond and Wilson. It seems the straw that broke the camels back was the wall of water coming from Bungawalbin creek that breached the high banks. The sheer magnitude of the rainfall is something I still struggle to comprehend even now.

I have learnt that vicarious trauma is real. My wife lost her office in Lismore and her work at the gallery, which has certainly been difficult for her. But I've been lucky enough to keep working from home so I've had something to focus on. But the heartache is there, because so many of our friends have lost so much.

Our community is shattered and we are all doing the best we can to deal with it. Explaining to the kids why the gallery and other favourite places are closed is the most difficult thing. And worrying about how my folks are going to get through this is also heartbreaking. But we will get there. Step by step. Big love to you all. ❤️



# Things were going great then the flood hit.

## Belinda Philp

Hi I am Belinda, Me and my 14year old niece Jasmine lost our home and everything we owned in the Lismore floods we have no home and we are motel jumping which is really hard and stressful.

I took my niece on full-time just before the floods things where going great then the flood hit we lost out home and everything we owned we where in the evacuation place and there where people everywhere so many of us lost everything my niece has handled it all this really well some days she is sad cos what she lost.

I have held it together for her but she went to her mates place and I finally broke down realising everything.

We would really love some support to help get us back on our feet we really appreciate the help love from all.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/grbt9-help-us-please>



PLEASE HELP US WE LOST EVERYTHING every bit helps

\$465 raised of \$4,000 goal • 10 donors

Share

Donate now



Belinda Philp is organising this fundraiser.

Hi I am belinda me and my 14year old neice jasmine lost our home and everything we owned in the lismore floods we have no home and we are motel jumping which is really hard and stressful we would really appreciate the help to get back on our feet nothing is to small



# It will be a miracle if we find it!

Lu Dean

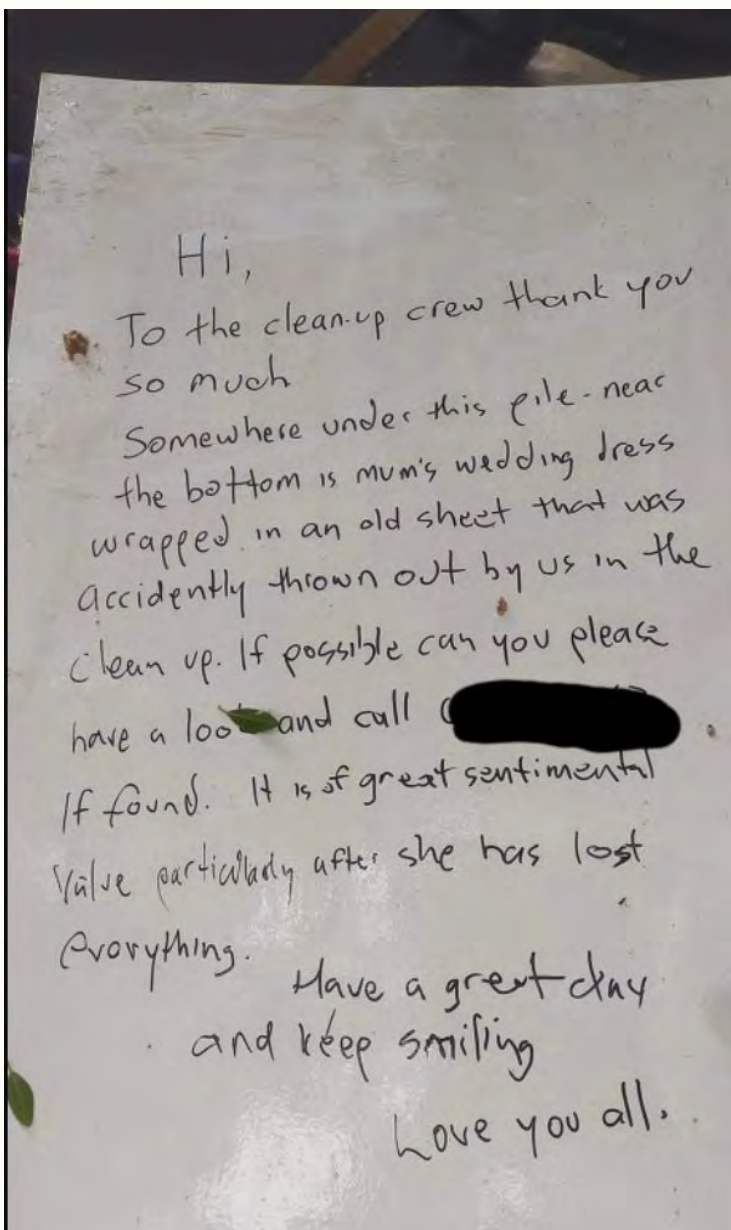
We were lucky to live on a slope in Leycester St and had enough warning after seeing the backyard fill with water at 5am on Monday the 28th to get the children and pets out before it got too deep in the front yard.

We lost everything, just like most of us here, but we were very lucky we still had our cars and were able to drive to high ground. But that's a different story

I just wanted to post this one good news story about what happened during the clean up. My neighbour is in her 80's and lived in her home for 62 years. Had her marriage, children, became a widow, had her whole life in that house and never once, not even during the floods in the 70's, has the water come into her front yard before, so like most of us, she wasn't prepared and has lost everything.

During the clean out of her home someone had accidentally thrown out her 60 year old wedding dress she had made herself, wrapped in an old sheet no one had realised her wedding dress, which her sons wife also wore at their wedding, was inside.

We saw the sign on the pile and decided when the clean up crew arrived we would help.



Hi,

To the clean up crew thank you so much.

Somewhere under this pile - near the bottom is my mums wedding dress wrapped up in an old sheet that was accidentally thrown out by us in the clean up.

If possible can you please have a look and call 04\*\*\*\* if found. It is of great sentimental value particularly after she lost everything. Have a great day and keep smiling. Love you all

When we saw they were in our street we called the number on the sign and her son came to help look for it too.

Looking at the massive pile and knowing it was at the bottom of it somewhere wasn't filling us with much hope.

"It will be a miracle if we find it,"  
said her son, "she can't remember what  
colour the sheet was."

As the crew came closer we let them know what we were looking for and how important it was we looked for it and they were so amazing. Carefully moving a mattress as gentle as they could with those machines and stopping and pointing if he saw any bed linen.

We would scramble over and pull apart every sheet, doona, blanket.. she had a lot of bed linen. It was beginning to feel like a lost cause when my partner spotted a piece of lace poking out of a muddy pale blue flannelette sheet.

"I think I've found it!"  
"I don't believe it!"

Shouted her son and broke down in tears of joy and relief, we all did, there wasn't a dry eye even amongst the clean up crew, who are bloody legends!

The dress was in surprisingly good condition, just a bit muddy at the bottom but I'm sure that can be fixed.

Was great to have that moment.

# Soul connecting on a deep trauma that you know you unfortunately both share.

Rose Dadon

So I bought and renovated a house in north Lismore late last year and had been living in my beautiful new home for only 4mths with my 12yr old twins. (This is my story reflecting after the fact).

Im laying on the floor of a kind strangers spare bedroom with my babies. I'm in shock and I needed to start processing what happened to us.

I feel like I'm in some weird Armageddon movie where the zombies start to walk out of the water, people with eyes that look deeply into your soul connecting on a deep trauma that you know you unfortunately both share.

People keep saying how resilient I am and calm.. well that's shock..

You are emotionally holding on by your fingernails praying hard AF that the rain would stop, that the water wouldn't come thru the floor, that it would just be on the floor, that it would stop rising up my legs faster than I'd liked, get the kids on the benchtops, keep them dry,

watch shows on their phones, sing songs,

tell stories of the nice new things I'll get them for their rooms,

keep reminding them ses promised to come at daylight,

show them how to do S.O.S with a torch as we hear a boat in the distance,

make a joke about stealing the neighbours overturned boat as it floats past the house but how would we steer it with no oars?

Call police as SES hasn't called after 2 calls in the night, police suggest finding something that floats , or get them on the roof, I tell them my children are frightened and one has autism and refusing to get on the roof, my babies were so brave, they found it fun sloshing thru our loungeroom and funny that our big heavy lounge was floating in our lounge/river..

when the massive fridge creaked and groaned and came crashing down with doors being pushed open by the force of the water that's when the panic set in,

we go to the deck and thank god my friends tall ladder was inside,

I explain its time we get on the roof or the higher the water goes this ladder may float and not help us get up.

I'm worrying our little belongings we have will get wet, or we have no phones to call people for help, S was first up and then me to help E come up to the roof, once up we can first start to see the devastation we were facing, it's surreal, it doesn't touch us emotionally it's like we are in a bubble, a fun acid trip gone wrong, a nightmare we cant wait wake from, we hear sweet Cleo thru the roof crying to us as shes frightened, we'd put the 2 kitties in the attic praying they'd be ok.

We hear a boat and yell loudly for help, we feel hope, and see someone coming our way, he's worried about the power lines and asks what's next to the roof, oh thats my driveway I say or it used to be, as I look down into a sea of brown,

what's happening, what the actual is going on?

I look over at the house across the road and seriously think they've drowned, the neighbours next to him are waving at me from their attic roof but we can't make out his words,

## “It's all a blur and I want to this to be over.”

The boat comes close to the house and I'm wondering if we have to jump from a great height but we luckily got in without being too dangerous,

I broke down as soon as my feet hit the floor of the boat and S consoles me, the horror of the last 10hrs starts to unwind and let go of the deep grip of anxiety,

fear and panic my body was in, feeling like I couldn't breathe a lot of the time and taking moments away from the children to slow down my breathing and get myself together,

I look around thinking where are the houses, what is actually happening here it's so fkn surreal, it's a Charlie and the chocolate factory river of f'd up nightmares.

We drive around to my next door neighbour who is sat shivering in a nook on top of his roof, we've never met before, only give each other a wave when he's out having a ciggie,

I make a joke about how this is a great way for us to first meet, as he climbs on board I see that he has been through this nightmare too, this is not just our nightmare.

I reach over and hug this wet stranger tight and cry, he tells me he's lost his cat who drowned in the water, his whole house is lost and no insurance, and thank god his wife and small son weren't there.

## 'He is white and distant and says he thought this was it, this was the way he would die, that no one would come for him, that he would end up grasping onto a tree branch'.

This was a common story throughout the day of people thinking they wouldn't be saved.

The reality sets in of how incredibly lucky we were that this man had a tinny and saved us, his name was Sandro and he lived a street away and was out looking for his dog Diesel. We start looking for other people to rescue, I can't even find the meaning in that, I'm on a boat in a river having fun on the river right?.. No

We have been saved from imminent death and trying to save others from a similar horror we've been thru.

We hear stories of the elderly stuck up on roofs, a man with one leg, people holding onto pets for dear life, this is a virtual real life horror story unfolding.

Flood level marked on Rose's house

We get taken to Macauley st where it's high and I remembered happily Oh my car and caravan are there we can sit in the van and get dry somehow, as I realise we are all completely soaked to our skin in our clothes and starting to shiver. I remember oh there's a doona in my car .. the kids would end up in a bad way being wet and cold for too long...

We get out of the boat and I gaze into people's eyes as I walk past them, you can tell the rescuers from the victims, of this unfathomable situation, there was just this energy..

We walk around the corner excitedly expecting to see part of our beloved home intact ready to provide refuge, but then seeing the devastating sight of my car roof and half the caravan submersed in the cold brown waters of this rapidly rising river.

Hopes are dashed so I look around and ask is there someone here in these houses where we can shelter?

It's early in the morning it's cold and we are soaked to the bone and in shock. Im surprising myself of how I'm managing, Yes I'll help you says this kind older man with sunshine in his eyes wearing a rubber ducky yellow raincoat and big bushy grey brows,

I ask him does he have a deck where I can take my kids to shelter. Yes follow me, I'm starting to worry about food, clothes, how long will we be here etc.

Basic needs kick in. Shelter first as the rain hasn't stopped, it feels like mother earth is very angry she's trying hard to wash away the pain we've done to her, and hard.. she is pushing back and we are praying hard to live and that everything will be ok.

I ask nicely if they would have towels, I feel like I'm imposing, they give us a seat and offer tea or coffee, I quickly take in my surroundings, those of you that know me well would be giggling at my inner thoughts about what I had stepped into lol..sweet little cottage inhabited by sweet sparkly eyed man and little lady who I assumed was his wife but later told was just his flatmate haha I'm still not sure if it was tongue in cheek..

The lady collects dolls you know the old kind with the curly locks and the frilly dresses like hundreds of them, I could feel them all staring at me. I ask to use their bathroom and have a chuckle to myself about the placard on the back of this old clunky Queenslander door of a frog talking about farts, I wish I could remember it now, had I been in my right mind I would have Facebooked it haha, then my mind comes screaming back to my horror story my skin tight wet clothes the fact I haven't slept a wink.

More people arrive with stories to tell, all wet and in shock, an awful feeling starts to set in of 'every man for himself' as I cling to our blankets and warm clothes we've been given by our kind hosts, mama bear mode kicks in to protect my cubs..

I remember this house had a budgies for sale sign out the front as I'd driven past it before and spoke to our hosts about my father being a budgie breeder for years and a Rabbitohs fan, as their walls were adorned with hats and scarves.

I feel like they've been sent to us from my dear old daddy to be angels in this part of our journey.. the flood waters were rising quickly up the street, meant to be one of the highest streets in the area, panic starts to slowly creep in amongst massive sleep deprivation and cold and pure disbelief of the situation.

More refugees start to arrive, I think in the end there were 15 of us.. all with similar stories..

I called the SES again as we needed to get out and fast they were given a serve by me even though I realise now the enormous job they had encountered,

we were still mad,

we all were, every single person I spoke to was.

**They looked me up in the system and said “Oh we see the 4am call you booked a pickup it wasn't noted there was any floodwaters entering your property”**

**?? WTAF.**

I wasn't going to take my babies out in the rain again and be soaked to the bone and not know how or when wed be rescued.. the horrors were setting in.. the kids got given blankets, the old fashioned orange checked kind that were scratchy on your skin, but we took what we could and tried to rest.

After what seemed like days we finally hear a yell out, the front Boats are here!!

We rushed and collected our belongings and hustled out with the others to head back into the pouring rain to head to the river.,

Which is funnily enough my walking track and a road..

a walk that will never be the same again.

We eye 2 boats and there is our hero that saved us, he feels like family, we move towards him and get in with no idea where our next destination is.

**We are told we are going inland to a school in a place we've never been.**

**We drive past rooftops with the tin cut out where people have been rescued,**

**we see cows stop their own little islands in the middle of the water crying for help,**

**we are dumbfounded, trapped in a nightmare of epic proportions,**

**it's like a movie and you are praying for it to end as it's not a good one..**

We arrive to a street with many cars and more rescuers waiting to take their share of refugees, a lady and teen daughter take us, I cry again as I feel blessed another human cares for our wellbeing.

I tell them of our ordeal and feel the kids are in overwhelm from hearing it again so I just ask them about how they are helping, where the live and were they affected by floodwaters?

We arrive to a small church the lady says this place is safer as the school down the road is near a damn that may burst.. f that!

We chose to stay here.

We were greeted by our first person in a yellow coat, a firie, a Santa look alike with a big smile and a cheeky glint in his eye. We gave our details and went in to go through the piles of donated clothes to find some clothes to fit us, a towel and some food.

We get a sense of excitement like woo hoo new clothes, we find some items and head up to a small room to get changed.

I notice thru a back door a beautiful peaceful yard looking onto a hill and an old tractor and rustic fence.. it's idyllic and quaint .. I turn to the kids and say It's like we're on vacation isn't it..

but we're kinda trapped in hell.. lucky they get my humour.

We get our new threads and head to check out the food.. there's soup!!

Hot soup woo hoo.. the kids spot cake and find some soft drink, happy days!

We head back to a lounge, one that had wet patches left on them from the last flood survivors..

The normal everyday stuff like eating and op shopping mixes in with the nightmare it's so surreal such a mind F!

E spots a boy his age sitting quietly on his own obviously a victim, he reeks of trauma, my darling boy asks Mum is he ok he's all alone..

I'm too scattered to even worry I just look over and my heart goes out to him..

I've only got capacity for my own children , I suddenly feel awful for thinking that.

I turn around to go talk to him and see what looks like his mum by his side.

I look in her eyes and immediately see the same forlorn lost scared but grateful eyes that I must have mirroring back to her. I go over and ask how she is, her eyes well up as do mine.

She tells me how they were on the roof for 7hrs and her son fell in the water as she struggled to keep hold of him on the slanted roof and her husband was in the water treading water with their dogs.

This mother and son get called away by Mr Santa in his yellow raincoat and I say where are you going and the mum says we've been billeted out.. I think well that's what we need.. a home and safety with a shower and a bed.

I go and speak to Santa about the sitch and there is this long bearded cat weazel dude poking his head around the corner.

Santa says This guy will take you and I say Sold! And go to gather up the kids.

We have a saviour and his name is Matt. He explains he lives with his small dog and he has a humble home but we are more than welcome to take refuge there.

The kids think I'm bonkers that were going with a stranger but I know the universe is providing angels for us .. and I was so right.

We get loaded into a fire truck . Yet another surreal experience that would in another dimension feel like a joy ride but the sleep deprivation is kicking in and I just want a hot shower and lie down.

We drive down a hectic dirt road and have conversations about how one of them went to uni in my home town and how they got called to become vollies with the RFS..

I look at the scenery around me and feel like we are in Fiji and say so, our host says Around the corner is Vanuatu.. lol I know we are gonna get along fabulously..

We arrive at a little cottage and pile out of the truck..

I realise Ive left my only shoes that I own on the boat, the thought slowly dawning on me that I've lost everything.. so in we go to this very small cottage and we are shown to a room where we'll spend the next 2 nights huddled together, even bond more as a family as it turns out.

The little gifts, surprises and gold coming from this catastrophe is becoming evident as the hours pass.

Days have passed since this night occurred now so the information in my mind has almost become a past life, something that happened to us that we don't want to remember again so here's the short version so I can finish up.

Matt was a true gift, he fed us and sang to us and played the banjo, he and I talked long into the night about all of the things and I class him as part of my family now.

Kids were happy and found it all a bit amusing except the part where they didn't have internet.

The best part was being away from the chaos and sitting atop a mountain with incredible views and someone to be there holding us tight.

I spoke to Matt about how it felt like a mini vacay, a holiday of sorts and a nice reprieve before I walk back into the nightmare that my mind thankfully had put aside for a while.



Rose Dadon









# I was being induced to have my baby 2 weeks early due to the stress.

Jahnaya Mumford

Born and raised in Lismore, my parents bought in south 26 years ago so I have spent most of my life there, last January I bought my first home in south..

Having grown up around I knew about floods but had only experienced 1 flood come in my parents home in 2017 but only under the house just over knee deep..

On the Sunday after seeing on facebook and the news that we were in for another 2017 flood we moved everything from under my house up high (2 story home).

My house has the 2017 flood marked so we made sure to lift above that line.

By the afternoon and how much rain we were having we thought to move as much as we could higher so filled up our back deck with what we thought we could save.

I noticed SES tape on my mail box just on dark so I called my neighbour and asked him about it and he mentioned they put it there so they know they came and spoke to you about evacuating.

No SES or anyone had come and knocked and spoke to us at all.

At midnight I had the neighbour come over, walking through knee high deep water already, to come remove my gas bottles and place them on the back deck so they wouldn't rip off the walls.

Everyone had gone to bed and I stayed up keeping check on facebook and news pages and all I was finding was it was going to be as big as the 74 flood and that the levee would break at 5am.. Then 3am..

I must have fallen asleep and woke at 2:55am and looked out my back deck and the water was rushing and half way up my stairs,

I ran inside woke my partner and mum who was staying with at the time and next thing we know we have a shipping container smashing through the backyards taking out the fences then hitting our neighbours back deck,

I put my 2 staffys inside and woke my 13yo daughter and 8 yo son up and put them into the kitchen along with our cat.

I made my first call to SES at 3:30am followed by 000, within half an hour the water was inside my house, we started to run around the house placing what we thought we could save up high.

While the water kept rising fast I was still making the SES and 000 phone calls, every time I got through to someone they kept telling me they weren't doing any rescues til daylight.

We found our 2 kids kayaks on our back deck and bought them inside, tied the 2 together placed a dog in each with my son and cat and some dry towels to keep my son warm, by this stage the water was up to our waists,

We then went up into the man hole where my partner tried to remove the roof but had no luck and family was calling us telling us to get out of there so we then got back out and into chest high water where we hanging onto the kayaks.

This was now after 6am my partner found a way onto our roof, he slipped and fell in the water but managed to get back into the house and found another way to get back onto the roof where he then put both our kids up there,

While he was doing this I was still making phone calls to SES and 000 still getting told they weren't coming out til daylight and that I had to get onto the roof..

I was 38 weeks pregnant with my daughters ashes who passed away in October 2020 in garbage bags tied to my body as well as our phones and wallets, there was no way I could possibly get myself up there but I knew I had to, I had to get up there to keep my kids safe.

It was pissing down with rain, the roof was slippery but I managed to get up there, my mum and partner hung onto the kayaks with the 2 dogs and cat.

What felt like forever, having the thought that we aren't going to make it in the back of our heads but also trying to stay calm for the kids we seen a boat come.

Our neighbours screamed out to them to come get us first, our miracle couple who came from Broadwater in there own boat to rescue people (who then lost everything themselves the next day) put us all in the boat along with our elderly neighbour,

I can still hear the screams of people needing to be saved while going along Casino street.

The current of the water was so strong that we couldn't get across the river so we were dropped off at the pub until we were picked up from a bigger boat a few hours later and taken to safely on Ballina Street.

After 35 phone calls to SES and 000 we had finally been rescued and we were safe all in the hands of strangers who risked their own lives to save others!!

4 days later on the Friday, I received a phone call from the hospital asking me to come in and to bring my hospital bag.

I was then being induced to have my baby 2 weeks early due to the stress as my placenta was no longer working how it should be.

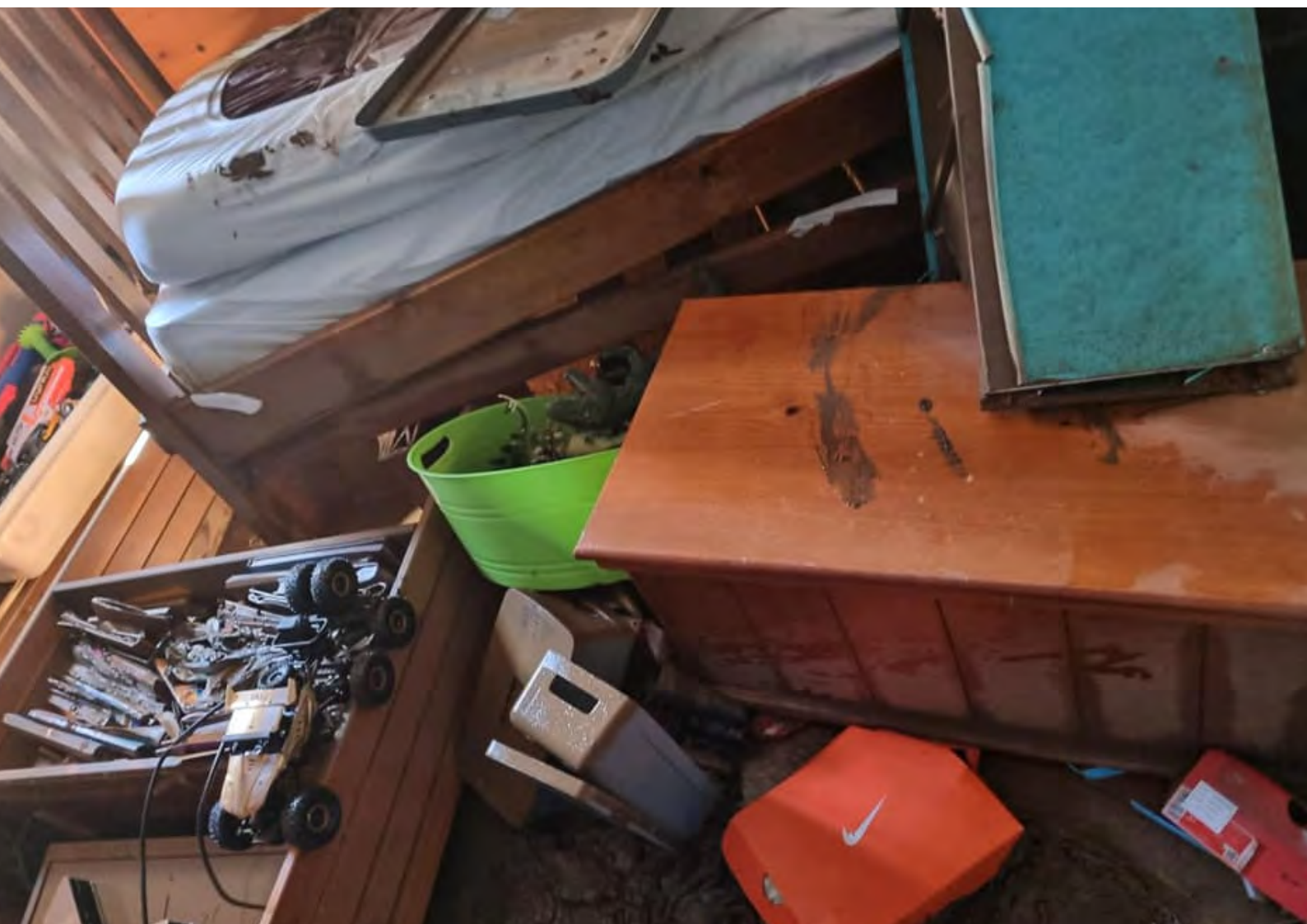
Babies nursery left overturned and in ruins.

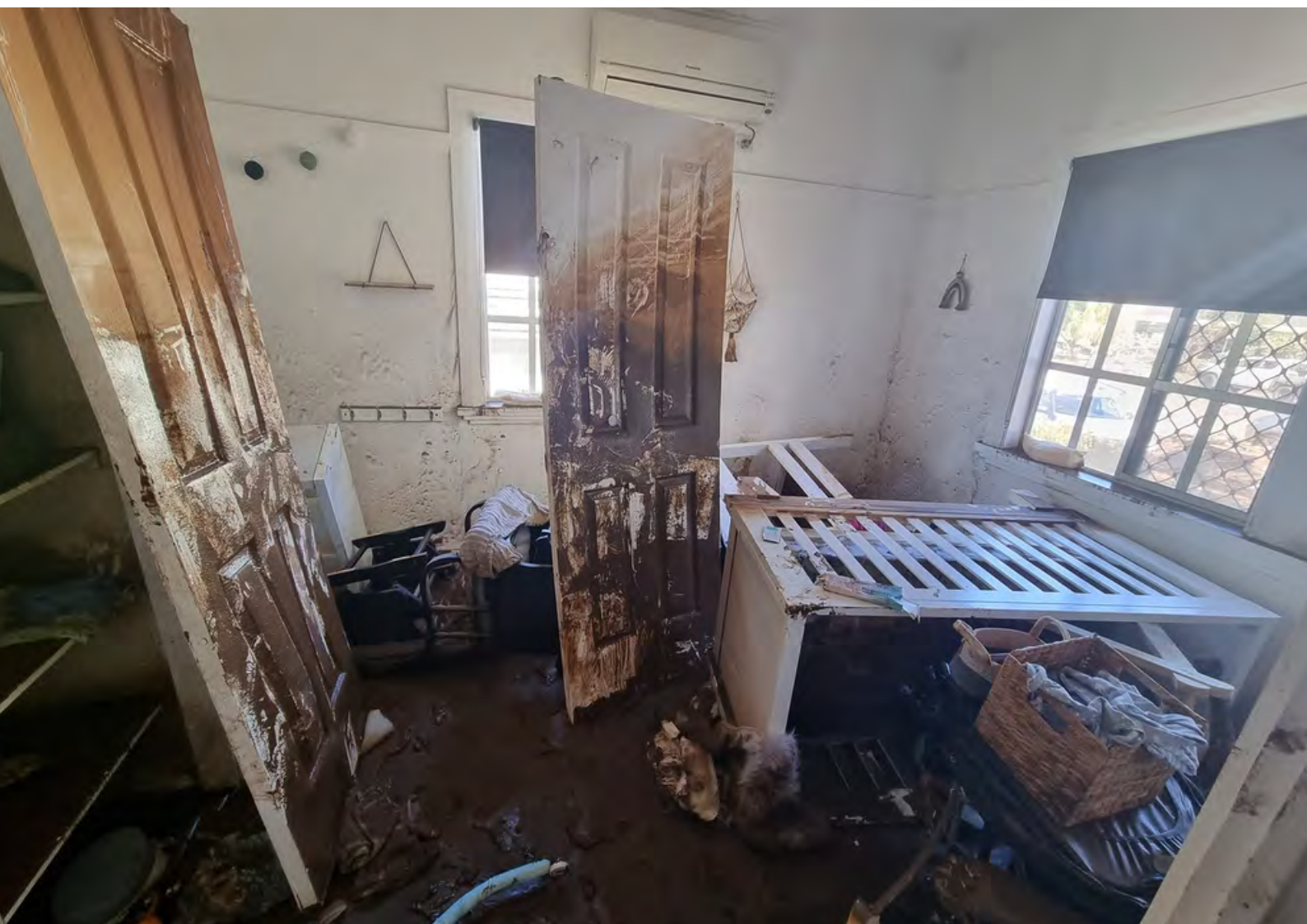
Sunday morning the 6th my rainbow baby boy was born healthy and well..

We lost everything on that Monday but we are alive and that's all that matters.

Janaya Mumford













# The building moved about 10m and got dumped up against a tree.

Emma and Anthony Lang

So it was Thursday morning, 4 days before the event.

I woke at my normal time around 6am, i checked my phone to see many missed calls from a friend of mine named Kyle. I called him back straight away to see what was going on. Kyle continued to tell me his story of his event, he lives up on the sunshine coast, he woke up in his caravan literally floating around inside on his mattress, his car got washed down the driveway and of course he was in shock and awe of the amount of rain they had overnight. Before the phone disconnected Kyle told me

'Dude get ready it's heading your way.'

So that was how my Thursday started. I was mentally all over the shop, thinking about how best to prepare, will the rains actually make it to the northern rivers etc etc.

I sent out a few messages to friends in Lismore warning of Kyles story and that i think we should prepare, all responses were very calm and casual as if nothing to worry about. So i stopped worrying and slowly started raising items on ground level to the 2017 water level.

Surely this was over kill, but id rather do it now than in the middle of the night.

a few days go on, some say the flood might be a major flood, others were saying it would most likely be a moderate flood.

We are new to Lismore so we have never experienced the hype around flood time, its crazy, scary and sobering all at once!

Sunday midday; we were putting items higher on ground level and kept thinking we are going over the top with all this prep work, like how bad can it be!

I decided to move the cars to higher ground 'just in case', I was one of the first to put our cars up high which made me feel even more like i was being over cautious.

## Sunday 11:30pm;

I am checking under the house to make sure everything is okay as i was ready to get some shut eye for the estimated peak at 6am. At the time we had maybe 10cm of storm water under the house which unfortunately is common for some areas of south Lismore.

We had SES visit us and explain we could evacuate now, but almost everyone is staying put as they think it might only be a 10-11m flood.

## Monday 4am:

I wake up to realising the power is out and I could hear our neighbours/friends making noise, I come out to the deck with headlamp to check out how my stacks are holding up.

# This is the moment I realised "holy shit".

We had roughly 1m of water under and around the house. I went back inside and woke up my wife Emma to tell her this shit is getting really hectic.

Once Emma was up I wanted to explore a little more so went down into the water to try and save some items from under the house, at this point the water was at the 1974 height roughly.

At this time, one of my small red toolboxes floated past me, I grabbed it and put it up on the deck, just incase I might need it later.

## 6am:

Water coming into the house was a surreal feeling, carpet bubbling and bulging, bagging and thuds from below the floor boards of floating items becoming trapped. we decided to let the kids sleep until the water was above our ankles.

## 7am:

We decided to go up in the ceiling space when the water reached our knees, I luckily had a ladder handy so I put cushions, pillows, food, water, laptop and phones up in the ceiling.

I helped Emma get up first, I then passed Leo and Lulu up into the ceiling. they were safe, warm and dry!

My plan was to now get my little red tool box and see what was inside, I needed some sort of tool so I could remove the roof screws to ensure we had an escape incase the water kept coming.

I managed to have a pair of multigrips and climbed up onto the roof with my ladder via the submerged carport/laundry roof. I managed to undo roughly 40 screws to create an opening for the family.

Now my mission was to wave down a boat.

I needed to climb to the peak of our roof holding my umbrella and a torch. It was a massive overload on the senses, a helicopter circled our house from no more than 30m away, the wind, the water, the emotions was above max.

I focused on listening for boats and yelled louder and louder, no one seemed to hear me.

I thought I better check on the family and see how the dog was going, I needed a solution for our doggy as his island was slowly going under water.

I went back into the house and moved our mattress into the room with the man hole and I built him a floating pontoon with a mattress, bed frame and the laundry door which was floating around.

Floating pontoon built from a bed and laundry door.

## 9am ish:

ok so entire family all good, now to get back onto the roof to wave down a boat.

I come out to the deck to once again put my ladder on the roof of the laundry/carport roof and there is this young cow standing there looking at me.

I needed the roof to get up higher onto the other roof, so I set up ladder next to the cow, but then she panicked and ran back into the torrent of water, most likely never to be seen again

I went up and was about to get on the peak again for big stint of waving and yelling when I heard some cracking and banging.

A large water tank had come down our driveway and was wedged under the carport... the pressure from the tanks floating ability and the water movement was the perfect combo to literally rip the building from its footings.

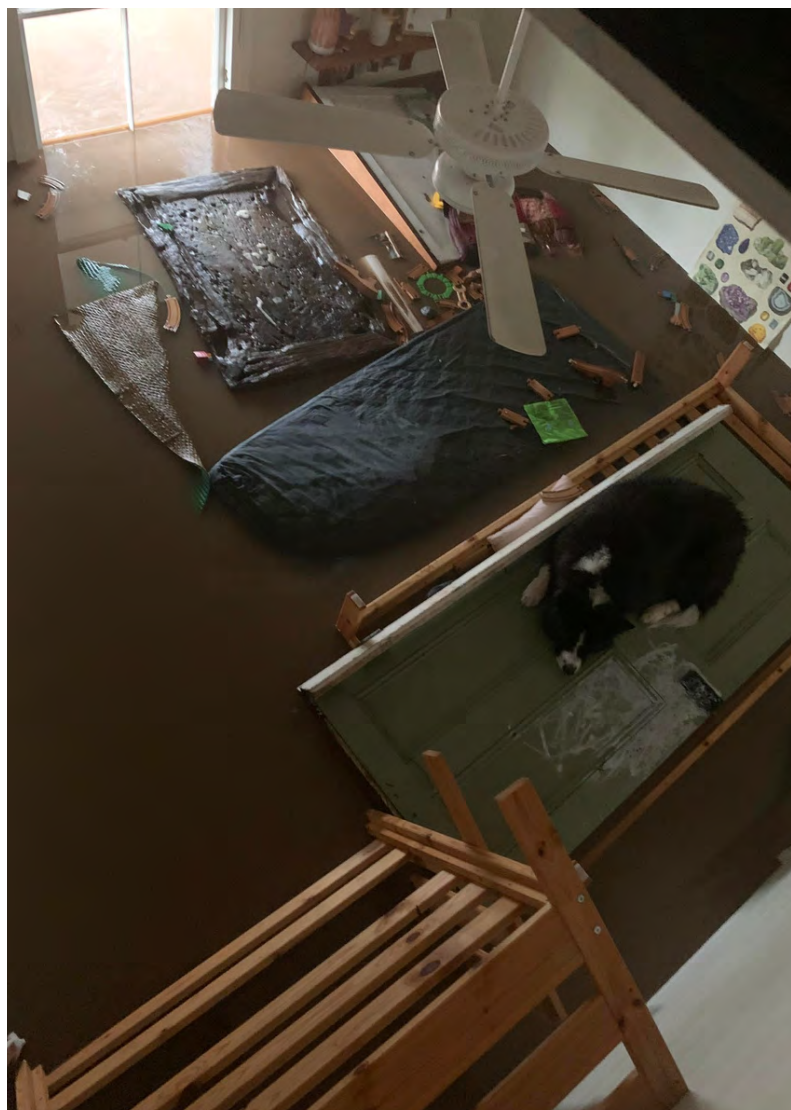
The building moved about 10m and got dumped up against a tree.

All I could think about was that was my easy access up and down the roof, I started using a tree to make the journey, not entirely sure why I went up and down so many times.

Mind was racing, difficult to stick to a task, waves of panic and fear, but also waves of great strength and adrenaline.

## 12pm:

A pair of young guys on a boat finally saw me and came and rescued us, entire family including doggy and 1 bag of clothes made it on the boat!





# \$1m to replace stock and rebuild for New Camera House

Elise Derwin

Jono Paterson is the owner of New Camera House in Lismore .

In the 23 years he has owned the business he's been through many floods.

Despite moving all the stock and equipment to the specifically built mezzanine level this recent flood exceeded everyone's expectations and rose 2 meters higher than predicted.

This natural disaster has completely devastated his business costing over \$1m to replace stock and rebuild.

Jono is like family to so many of us in Lismore.

He is generous and kind and will always help you out.



He has given me a roof when I needed one, work when I've needed it, endless support and encouragement towards my work.


I can't imagine a Lismore without Jono or the Camera House as well as so many other businesses.

Please help Jono rebuild.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-ion-rebuild>

Photo supplied by Elise Derwin






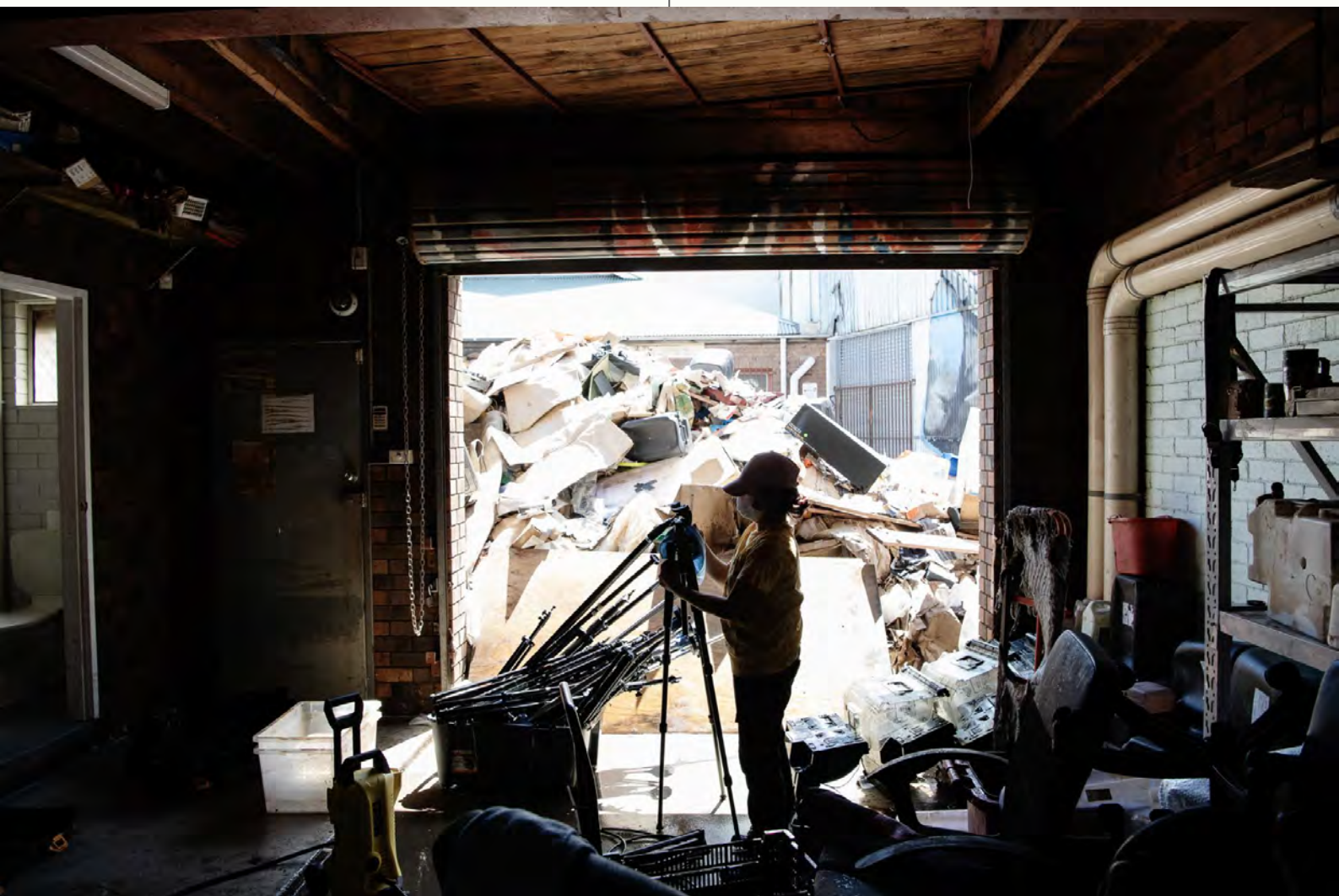
### Help Jon Re-Build His Business

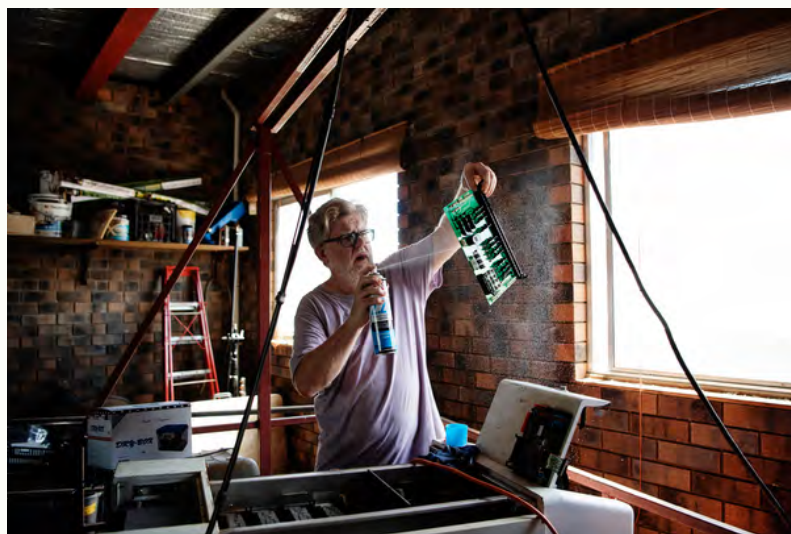
**\$83,970** raised of \$250,000 goal • 81 donors

[Donate now](#)

 **Team fundraiser**  
CameraHouse . and Stewart Pickersgill are organising this fundraiser.

The recent floods on the east coast have been well-publicised. However, the epicentre of the devastating damage has been in the Lismore area. Over the last 23 years, Jon Paterson has developed a successful business, only to have it all taken away by the flood. Despite his best efforts in relocating stock and equipment to a specially built mezzanine level, this flood exceeded all previous records and inundated Jon's premises by an additional 2 meters. As a result, all stock and equipment were lost.





# If it wasn't for these people stepping in, so so many would have died.

Zoe McKenzie-Seager

My story isn't anything like those who have been directly impacted by the floods, but I wanted to share it.

My family & I are very lucky to have moved onto the hill at the end of last year, so our home is safe and we are all safe.

My partner & I are both born and bred in Lismore. We've grown up with the floods.

On Sunday we spent our day helping some friends businesses prepare for the flood. We had a lot of people asking us how big we thought it would get.

Honestly, our guts were telling us it would be big, we just couldn't comprehend it being bigger than 2017.

At the time it felt more like a fear of history repeating itself, rather than our instinct. So we just told them to prepare for 2017, because surely it couldn't happen again.

But Sunday night it just kept raining.

We barely slept.

We just kept feeling it was going to be bigger than we'd seen.

We could tell when we were downtown, the way the town was already flooding inside before Sunday afternoon.

We've never seen it come up so easily in the parts it was flooding already before the levee was even close.

We watched the posts on Facebook that night, all the other locals sharing their concerns of the size of it. People estimating the same as us - over 13m, levee to break at 3am.

I woke at 5am.

## The first thing I saw when I opened my Facebook was posts from friends and family begging for boats because they or their loved ones were trapped.

We knew it was really bad then.

At 6am we got a call from a family member asking if we knew someone with a boat because her parents were stuck with their elderly neighbour in her house in East Lismore.

We called around but didn't know anyone, so we left our kids with my mum and headed down to Spring Street to see what help we could be.

We expected it to be knee-waist deep and maybe my partner could just help walk or carry them out.

When we got there at 6:30am, the water was already almost halfway up the second storey of their own house, and now reaching the second storey of the house they were staying in up the road.

We have several friends in that street, some who hadn't been rescued yet. So we stayed there all day.

## We helped people in and out of boats, my partner even jumping on a man's kayak to search for elderly residents who neighbours had concerns for.

I'm a tiny person, so I'm not much help with the physical tasks, so I spent my day providing hugs, towels, getting people to cars and making sure they had somewhere to go.

I'll never forget hugging an elderly woman after she got out of the boat as she broke down, thanking us, calling us angels and saying she really believed she would die .

## I spent a large part of my day desperately calling emergency services trying to get through to someone, because my sister in-laws friend and family were trapped in their roof and couldn't get out and she had lost contact with them.

My heart broke for the police officers on the phone as I knew they couldn't do anything to help except just pass the message on. I kept pleading with them,

"Please there are children in that roof, they have to be priority"

and all they could say was "I'm sorry, there are thousands of calls for assistance, we will try to get someone there shortly".

I have never felt so helpless in my life. We didn't hear until that night that thankfully the family had been rescued just in time

We were there until the sun was down, in the rain and flood water. By the time we left the water was almost all the way up the second storeys of those houses.

Cars that we could see parked in that street were now well under water. It looked like an ocean had swallowed our town. The current was so strong and the water was freezing.

We didn't see a single SES boat go through these streets, as we assumed they were conducting rescues from further in town.

These people were all completely saved by their neighbours and strangers in their own boats, and if it wasn't for these people stepping in, so so many would have died.

My story isn't anything like the devastating stories of loss and trauma like most other people. I wasn't a brave person jumping in a boat and rescuing people, and I wasn't a person in need of rescuing. But I was there for it, and my heart breaks for our town and it's people.

Every one of you who has suffered with the loss of their homes, their belongings, their memories, their pets & even loved ones, I want you to know that I am so sorry, that you are loved, I admire your strength & I am so so glad that you survived.

It's devastating to see our town like this, so much worse than we could have imagined. But it's been so inspiring seeing the bravery of the people who rescued hundreds of people, the strength of those who have suffered with tremendous loss but continue to survive, and the energy and commitment that our fellow locals have to rebuild their homes & businesses despite their personal losses & the amount of volunteers who are helping to recover the town every single day.

# Even the best rules break down when people you love will die if they’re obeyed.

Candy Lawrence

*(Names have been changed for privacy reasons)*

Early on the morning of February 28<sup>th</sup> 2022 I get a call from Dan, a neighbour I’ve only met via text and Messenger. He lives on the banks of Bungawalbin Creek, deep in the tall forest trees.

The water’s in his house. He’s about to turn off his power supply, which means no more phone calls, and get on his roof.

The level is rising fast. He rang the SES but they can’t come to get him yet; conditions are too dangerous for a helicopter rescue and they’re stretched way too thin with other emergency calls.

He wants someone else to know where he is. *Or where he disappeared from*, I think chillingly.

I do what I can to comfort him, put a message about his dire position in our road group on Facebook so plenty of others know he’s there, then take my dogs for a walk to our gully to check the height of the water there. We are way higher up than Dan. We’re also nearly 2km from the creek.

It’s a very deep gully. When the rains come like this, which they tend to do every February, the Richmond and Wilson’s Rivers join up with Bungawalbin Creek at nearby Coraki.

Eventually the water has nowhere to go and backs up into the forest gullies of Bungawalbin and Gibberagee, cutting off the hundred or so residents of our road from the rest of civilisation. Those living in the middle of Bungawalbin-Whiporie Rd are usually the first in the area to be cut off, and the last to get out, sometimes still being trapped while everyone else is in post-flood mode and getting on with their lives; but this gully hasn’t been full since 2009 – not in 2013 when we got flooded in three times in a row, and I had to be helicoptered out for chemotherapy by the SES – not even when Lismore went under so badly in 2017.

Yeah, we’re all used to floods out here. As people in touch with Mother Nature, many of us kind of like them. It’s peaceful; no traffic on our road, lots of birds, frogs galore. We get flooded in almost every year – or we used to. The drought that culminated in the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires had been devastating for the natural wetland that is our home, so we’d rejoiced at first on seeing the lagoons fill up again, knowing this meant the water table was coming back up.

**We’re used to floods, so we know the routine for flood self-preservation.** Check the BOM warnings and forecast maps, check the radar, check the river heights upstream in the catchment, watch the sky, have your dry box of supplies sorted in advance, remember that it doesn’t take much flowing water to float a car and drown the occupants.

So we knew we were in for it. The rain had been so intense the day before, when I’d gone out to stock up on supplies, that I’d turned around and come home; I’d felt my Forester starting to lose traction in the water flowing over the road. It was the first time I’d changed my mind about driving the road in 14 years of living in the Bungy in flood, and I had to fight the thought that I was getting old, and being a wimp.

*No is also an acceptable answer*, I reminded myself. *You’re dead a long time.*

*Anyway*, I’d thought, *we’ll get by with what supplies we have.*

Back at our dog walk, I’ve barely entered the track down to the gully when I find myself walking in water – not puddles, but a pool with no end. The realisation dawns that I’m already in the gully. It’s never overflowed this much before.

Still I’m not worried. Silly me.

We go back to the house and my partner, Bear, tells me he’s driving over to a neighbour’s house to get some fuel for our generator, one of the supplies we missed getting the day before. Our solar system is wonderful, but we’ve had almost no sunshine for a very long time.

He gets as far as our gate in the ute before realising the puddle there is a bit too deep to drive through. Normal in a flood; the council road crew created this problem at our gate years ago and never got round to fixing it.

‘I’m going to walk down,’ he calls. Normal for him too. Barefoot, Driza-Bone and Akubra in place, always on the move to solve a problem.

Back at the house I’ve started to feel that things are getting a bit crazy, as the rain keeps pouring down. I think of Dan being caught by surprise, and bring a few things upstairs to our treehouse bedroom; it’s overkill, but I’m renowned for erring on the side of caution. My computer and portable hard drive. The paper characters I use to create my picture books.

It’s definitely overkill. After all, before I bought this house I carefully checked the 100 year flood projections and saw that this house was still on an island – a substantial island – at the maximum heights expected.

AND we have the second storey room and veranda now. *We’ll be okay*, I think, but I’m still compulsively cautious.

And maybe this really is the 100-year flood.

And a projection is just a theory.

I’m up on that veranda when the fear strikes. I look over the railings and see our small lagoon start to overflow across the lawn towards our dam. The water’s running in the opposite direction from usual, from south to north. It’s never run across our lawn like this, and the speed of that water is terrifying. The rate it’s rising is nothing like I’ve ever seen before.

A massive amount of water from the catchments upstream has arrived, with nowhere to go but up. It’s creating a flash flood, something I’ve only ever observed on videos online.

This is not normal. And that’s when my legs start to shake. I know that Bear is somewhere on the road still, walking over a kilometre to get a drum of fuel so we’ll still have power.

**He’s already been gone too long.** Our neighbours are very, very slightly downhill from us, in the direction that the water is now gushing down the road. I messaged them half an hour ago to say he was on his way, and the reply had struck me as peculiar then – ‘He’s *walking??*’

It’s a bad half hour more till I find out what’s happened further down the road. I hear a muffled rumble, gradually getting closer.

The two men arrive back in John’s huge tractor, water spraying up from the wheels, Bear perched in the bucket surrounded by fuel drums and bags of clothes and supplies.

‘The house is going under,’ yells John, throwing everything onto our veranda and turning the tractor around. ‘We’ve got to get out. We’re going back for Lee and the kids.’ The water there has quickly gone from ankle height to knee height, and now it’s lapping up the steps of their single storey bungalow.

And so Bear disappears again into the torrent to help them evacuate, and I wait trembling, watching the water rise, grabbing anything I think we'll need upstairs, not knowing if he and John will get back or be washed away, if I'll be facing this alone now, if my dear friend Lee and the two children I think of as substitute grandchildren will make it out alive.

Do not drive through flowing water. **DO NOT DRIVE THROUGH FLOWING WATER.**

But drive they do, because even the best rules break down when people you love will die if they're obeyed.

By the time they arrive back at John's gate, the water is threatening to rise over the gateposts. Lee, the two little boys and three anxious dogs bundle into the bucket, along with a few backpacks of essentials.

The massive John Deere can barely stay on the driveway on the return journey, can barely see where the driveway *is*. The gate's disappeared.

Back on the road at last, they come past a property where two more neighbours, Sue and Bill, are struggling to reach their front gate – Bill waist deep, on foot and dragging his kayak, with Sue sitting in it clutching their dog and whatever else they could save. Their home is already under water. The current is so strong now. They're battling it and losing.

No room for them in the bucket.

John and Bear continue to our place, unload and immediately turn round to help Sue and Bill. I can't believe they're going out again, yet yes, yes I can. This is what we do in the Bungy. My knees shake so much I can barely continue as I work with Lee bringing food and cooking equipment and dry clothes and a ladder to get on the roof and anything else we think might be useful up to our top room, keep an eye on the children, tie up all the dogs, lift furniture in the main rooms downstairs.

## Will we both end up widowed? I slam my mind closed on that thought.

But we don't try to stop them going. We don't even think about doing that. We are a community. We help each other. It's one of the things we love about being here. Bear and I have never met Sue and Bill in our lives, but this is how rural community works.

And we don't talk about how scared we are, because then we'd be admitting how justified we are to be scared.

I suddenly realise we'll need drinking water. The moment the house pump goes under, that'll be it, and judging by the levels right now it'll be any moment.

I run around finding every container I have. I drop a bottle in my study and it shatters all over my desk and the floor. I don't stop to clean up the mess, there's no time. At any minute all the taps will stop working.

Our men finally make it back. The water is dangerously high on the tractor wheels. Bill is exhausted. Sue lights up a smoke, her hands trembling. Their little dog yaps, confused.

John and Bear disappear again and I don't know where they've gone. Everything's a rush, communications are breaking down because we're all realising little emergencies and just dealing with them as fast as we can. I don't panic, I never panic; yet I start trying to walk to the gate because someone said they knocked our bin over with the tractor and Bear went to retrieve it and he WILL get swept away in this current, and –

What on earth am I thinking, going out there myself? The others call me back. Bear isn't at the gate at all; he and John are using the tractor bucket to lift our main generator into the loft of the shed. They can't save much in there by now, but they can save that.

The vehicles. My car, parked in the shed that's now a metre high with water. The RTV, our most expensive and most useful possession, and the ride-on mower are in there too. They're going under one by one as the water rises. We watch the level rise on the ute at the front gate; it's sitting on one of the highest spots on our property.

We get everyone upstairs. My rescue dog, a beautiful Kelpie x, is spooked by the brown surge of water which is now rushing fast across our lower deck, between the main house and our spiral stairs to the top room. I'm terrified of losing him if he wriggles away from me. I lost my beloved dog Jack in the bushfire evacuation, hit by a car on a busy road he didn't understand after living in the bush all his life. I can't bear to lose this sweet boy too. It would finish me.

I cajole him, drag him, lift him, finally get him across onto the steps. *Lovely dog*. Our hunting dog follows obediently, the water less daunting for such a long legged beast. I tie them inside the bedroom, leaving the veranda for the other four dogs. The last thing we need is a dogfight, someone's pet falling down the stairs or over the edge into the torrent below. Lee and John's tiny Jack Russell pup could easily slip under the wire and we'd never get to her in time; she'd be swept away.

So would the children. So would the children.

I'm putting regular updates on Facebook from my iPad upstairs. Trying not to panic my friends, but needing them to know this is serious, we're all alive still but this is serious. I suspect that things are much, much worse downstream and they're all worried about us.

I'm right.

I get a call from Jo Shoebridge at ABC radio while I'm downstairs, still trying to grab anything we'll need to live upstairs for who knows how long. Plates. Utensils. A bucket to use as a toilet. She wants to interview me about what's going down here. I try to make sense, my whole body shaking now. Later I have no memory of what I've said.

The pump goes under. The circuit trips out and I lose internet. The mobile signal booster goes out too; we're down to the occasional one bar of reception.

## We're on our own but for a radio, and we can hardly bear to listen to that as Lismore goes under, Coraki goes under, Woodburn where our SES is based goes under too.

We watch the children closely, warn them not to be boisterous, try not to lose our tempers, try not to convey our fear.

The water keeps rising. It's over the second step to the treehouse, storage freezers full of grain and fertiliser are floating out of our shed, it's in Bear's office next to the shed ruining his clothes and photos and mementos, turning the chipboard furniture into mush.

In the pantry now. We unplug the fridge and freezer. *Where's the induction cooking plate?* I've already moved the portable generator upstairs so we can cook. Bear's forgotten the induction plate in the confusion. He wades out to the shed waist deep, and finds it on a high shelf. It slips out of his wet hand and shatters in the back of the RTV.

The empty gas bottle attached to our house starts to float, twisting the connection pipe. Even if we can get downstairs, we won't be able to cook. *John, can you grab the microwave*. I rarely use it. I have no idea how to use a microwave to cook the sausages that I've stored in the Esky upstairs. Such a stupid thing to be worrying about. Nobody feels like eating. We feed the kids biscuits, chips, anything they'll eat that we have.

Most of my posts are edited with the exception of the first and last which are

My heart freezes over as I realise the water has risen around our shipping container. My entire stock of original children's picture books is in there, my life's work since cancer destroyed my teaching career.

Logic tells me that nothing can be watertight in this torrent.

Lee knows she's lost everything at home. She knows her house is being destroyed. She's being strong for the children. My heart hurts so much for her. The children are screaming and squabbling, unable to process what's happening. I understand. I still snap at them.

We have eight people and six dogs on a veranda above Bungawalbin Creek. We are IN Bungawalbin Creek. We've made joke after joke about our house being 'the houseboat that doesn't move'. The joke has become reality.

The water keeps rising. It's still raining.

The front veranda goes under. Water laps at our battery box. Another 600ml and it's in the whole house downstairs. Another metre and our power system is toast.

I couldn't raise my 1820 Richard Lipp piano, iron framed, beautiful, heavy as hell. I tell myself it's just stuff. My books, my piano. It's just stuff.

We are all still safe. We have the ladder, we can get on the roof if the water keeps coming up. We have red things to wave. I try not to think about keeping six dogs and two small children safe on our roof in the rain. Did I bring rope? I didn't bring rope.

We have Sue and Bill's kayak. John and Bear have rescued our dinghy from the lagoon; it's bobbing in the shed next to my car. Roof, or boat? Choices we don't want to have to make.

I'm worried about another neighbour, Mark. He's a good friend. I've had a message from his girlfriend before the phone signal dropped; he was about to get on the roof of his donga, he had six inches of water inside and rising. His power's gone out. He's only about 700 metres away but he may as well be in New Zealand for all the help we can give him.

**There are no helicopters. Help is not on its way. The weather's too bad, the resources are stretched too thin, there's too much trouble and too few contingency plans, there's been no organisation or preparation by our leaders to combat a disaster of this magnitude.**

We stand and stare at the rising water. I watch one of our free range turkeys being washed away on the current. It looks bewildered. I see six more clinging desperately to their perch on a dead tree, others in another tree further on. If they fall, they're carried away. Doomed. There's nothing I can do to help them. Mother Nature has spoken.

I have no idea how many we'll lose. Within days the horrific smells from the bush will tell us where the missing ones are. Wildlife that miraculously escaped the bushfires two years ago will drown, rot, stink alongside them.

Around 5pm the rain starts to ease. The water stops rising. We dare to breathe.

Nobody sleeps much. The sound of running water is all around us. I make ironic Titanic references as I lie awake with Bear in the spare room downstairs. We're desperately grateful to be alive, warm, under a roof still. I pat the dogs to try to calm myself, trying not to think of what could have happened to them.

My Kelpie has panicked again as Bear carried him across the water so we could give the others some space; he's collapsed into a deep slumber, exhausted by the day's events. I envy him. Upstairs John and his family crowd onto the king sized bed while Sue and Bill try to rest in the beanbags on the veranda.

Every so often the rain starts again, and we hold our breath.

Bear gives up on sleep. He's reporting back on the water level every hour or so. He's on the midnight to dawn watch, he says. He's a sailor from way back. He'll be awake for over 48 hours before his body gives up and lets him grab a few hours of rest.

The water drops during the night. In the morning we wade around calf deep, then ankle deep, retrieving things, telling the children not to get in. The current pulling that shallow water down the catchment is still strong.

Bear unplugs the pump, the circuit stops tripping, I get internet back. We all get a little phone signal.

The news out there is fearful.

A kilometre and a half down the road, past John and Lee's house, two older people have been on the roof in the rain for over 24 hours with no food or water. Bear and John get into Bill's one-man kayak, John leaning way back while Bear crouches forward in front. They paddle all the way there with water, food, warm clothes. He's nearly 70, my Bear, and he doesn't paddle a kayak regularly. He'll suffer for days with the pain in his shoulders.

It will still be many hours before a helicopter gets those people off that roof. We hear of others in the same position, all down our road for miles. Some of them are our friends. We can't help them at all, they're too far away, we don't have a way to get them out of the elements to safety. The men are exhausted, and they've tempted fate already. John doesn't dare start the tractor again. The water's risen high around it, but too high? Don't know. Have to let it dry out. No use to anyone if they bugger it completely.

**Facebook is full of desperate pleas for help. The rescue helicopters, when they come, are insisting some people leave their pets behind. I can't bear it. The very thought traumatises me.**

I don't know where Dan is. I know he has a dog. I worry about the dog too. Is Mark still on his roof?

Our local SES is flooded, the hospitals are flooded, there's talk of this being a one in 1000 year flood but that makes us furious; this is climate change, it could happen again next year or the one after, and next time it might be worse. Call it unprecedented, like the 2019 bushfires. This is our future on Planet Earth. We're just the canaries in the coal mine, the first piece of evidence that our environment is no longer safe. Mother Nature's had enough. She's trying to kill us.

Lismore has been decimated again. Coraki, our most local supply point, is devastated. Lee and John and the boys are suddenly homeless. There were no rentals out there before the flood. Now there will be a new flood, this time of displaced residents. Where will they all live?

We have no idea how normal life will ever resume.

Gradually we realise the cost of what has happened. Lee and John go home to check the damage there while we look after the boys; they come back shattered.

The next day they'll take the boys to see the shambles with their own eyes, so they can start to process it. Lee shows me a video of the inside of her house. It's as though a whirlpool's formed in there, swirling and hurling furniture, mementos, whitegoods everywhere.

Afterwards their five-year-old plays with his dinosaurs in the mud puddles of our driveway. 'Everything's ruined,' he says, when we ask him is he okay, was it bad when he went home? 'Everything's ruined.' He puts his dinosaurs into the mud, or under the water. He overturns cars and trucks and tractors. He rescues them all, over and over.

'This one is you. This one is Bear.'

We open the container. My books are ruined too, the piles of boxes tumbled over and saturated. I rescue a few dry copies from the very top of the chaos. I have no idea where I'll find the money to reprint them. I know it's nothing, nothing in comparison to others' losses of family, pets, homes. But it's *my* loss, *my* hard work, all gone.

We sit on the lower deck, drying out now, resorting to black humour.

'Hope we don't run out of toilet paper,' offers one wit.

'Plenty of paper we can use in the container,' replies another.

We laugh. We cry. We laugh again.

'I've lost my shoes.'

'Look out, there are Crocs in the water.'

We just breathe, trying to feel gratitude just for being alive, staring over the brown wasteland of our garden.

*\*Mark and Dan survived, and Dan's dog was found. Dan's house also looked like the inside of a runaway washing machine, and his water tanks were washed away.*

*We had no running water for 11 days, and the stench of dead animals was fearful, but Bear and I got off lightly. Our scars are mostly mental. Our neighbours? Not so lucky.*

*The south end of Bungawalbin-Whiporie Road was destroyed by the flood to the point of being impassable to anything but troop carriers and high wheel base 4WDs, which had to be prepared to drive anywhere but on the road; this was irrelevant to the residents at first, given that nobody's vehicles worked any more and we started getting some helicopter drops of food and other necessities, but we were incensed to discover that a secondary escape/supply route along Elliotts Rd and Summerland Way had been blocked by a 'beaver dam' of scrap softwood belonging to State Forests, who'd failed to deal with their mess after the bushfires. Systemic failure strikes yet again.*

*Remember this, if nothing else: we are the canaries in your coal mine. Are you ready?*

# I lost count of how many we pulled out of the water that day.

## Darren Slattery

The morning started early around 3am ish, still pouring rain.

Now knowing downtown, Lismore was in serious trouble.

My partners dad was talking to her saying water is in house and rising.

As daylight came I had made the decision to hook boat up and was in line to fuel up. Knowing that he and my daughter were in South Lismore.

Boat was in water around 6:30-7.

I headed straight down Ballina Rd first time ever in a boat.

Reaching the Bridge and seeing all buildings with water up to roof lines was mind blowing.

Thinking to myself which way to cross river. Decision was made to go around the old butter churn and straight through Norco's yard.

After that I headed up Casino St to my partners dads house, yelling out to him and his neighbour. I heard nothing so proceeded to Centre St to grab my daughter, after getting stuck on a submerged car.

Daughter on board with her two neighbours. 5 people in boat I headed back the same way.

The flow of the river was fast, I know me and my boats capabilities I didn't hesitate. Dropping two off at Wyrallah Rd roundabout.

Drop my daughter off know they were all safe I proceeded to go back over river, but the water had risen too high and I felt it way to dangerous to cross again.

I headed back and going to calls and yelling of people in houses and units Several trips I made this horrendous day.

Pulling people from their roofs, even ripping tin off roofs to pull them out from the roof cavity. People dogs cats chickens, yep got them all.

I lost count of how many we pulled out of the water that day .

So many locals like me put their boats and lives on the line to help others.

Yes my boat suffered damage but I didn't care as lives were saved.

## I did all of this with a condition known as Frozen Shoulder in my left arm.

## I guess the adrenaline was very high that day.

Just a short story of my events that day.

Yes I will do it all again if it come to happen again, as would most if the boat owners I talked to.

Stay safe, everyone.

# 000/SES weren't there to take our call when we needed them but the community was.

## Alex & Sarah - Off the Grid City Couple

Bungawalbin/Gibberagee

We woke up at 6:30am 28th February 2022, looked out the window and we were surrounded by water, water was already coming in through the caravan door.

We called SES/000 and got an automated message saying they couldn't take our call... we then walked 1km to our neighbours who took us in and gave us a place to stay.

The water ended up coming 2.7m high, our caravan, car etc were all completely under water.

The experience was very scary as we didn't know when the water would stop rising or when help would come and we had very limited reception, so we relied on the ABC radio for updates.

Most people in our community spent 24-48 hours on their roofs before they got rescued and after the flood waters went down the community really came together and everyone did everything they could to help each other.

We are staying with family while getting back on our feet, figuring out what to do next, as we were just about to build a house there.

I think we learnt a lot from what happened, how to be better prepared next time and it showed what a great community we have (we had only moved there 6 months ago), which we are really grateful for.

000/SES weren't there to take our call when we needed them but the community was, it's always good to get to know your neighbours/community, we are grateful we did before the flood happened otherwise who knows what would have happened.

After several days of heavy rain our roads were fully underwater and we were isolated from the rest of the world on a small island shared by only a small number of other neighbours.

We had previously discussed the flooding with various neighbours who had been there for 40+ years, who told us what to expect - you're normally stuck on an island for a week or two and the highest the waters ever get is below knee deep (this is very rare).

We thought our only challenge would be to ration our supplies, and were excited to take some beautiful footage of the water. But just as we thought the roads would clear, the situation got a lot worse.

One week after the initial floods, we had a night of heavy rainfall and woke up to water pouring in through the front door of our caravan and had to evacuate as fast as we could to a neighbour's workshop.

Thankfully, we had our most important belongings already packed the night before, and we knew a neighbour who was happy to take us in when we were in trouble.

Another miracle was that by this point our solar power system was still above water, which meant that our phone signal booster allowed us to make the call to let them know we were in trouble.



## 2022 NSW Flood - Help Alex & Sarah Recover

**\$1,500** raised of \$5,000 goal

[Donate now](#)



What we can learn from this video is that real superheroes don't wear capes. They're just normal people going about their lives, until a situation arises where someone is in need. The other important thing to stress here is that our situation was way too close for comfort.

At any point there is a chance of a natural disaster it is a **MUST** to expect the best, but to still be prepared for the worst.

We're Alex & Sarah, a young couple on the North Coast of New South Wales, Australia, who decided to move off grid and leave the city life behind in search of more peace and simplicity, building our Fully Off Grid Home & restoring our Overgrown Organic Tea Tree Plantation.

# I just needed her to know one last time that I loved her...

Karen (Kaz)

Initial flood conversations with my daughter started on Saturday 26th February, we were already experiencing localised flooding in SE QLD, she was checking in that her younger sister and myself were safe.

We were fine, our estate had become an Island with no way in or out but it was not impacting our home.

By Sunday 27th February locals had completely emptied our supermarket shelves, our only source of food now gone but what mattered most was we were safe.

Little did I know, within 24 hours my daughter & 4 yr old grandson in Lismore would not be....

Sunday 27th February @ 10:25pm (11:25pm NSW) I receive a fb message from Tameika saying parts of Lismore were being evacuated but they were ok, I didn't see this until 20 minutes later.

I was scared for them!

I remember telling her to pack a bag for her & Kaiden, get ready to leave but like many others as I've now come to realise, they were going off what happened in the 2017 floods & they were ok then... they weren't expecting 2022 flood to be this big, so ferocious and devastating.

I didn't get any sleep that night, I remember joining every Lismore fb page I could find to keep up to date with what was happening, feeling helpless here in QLD.

I was scared & had this horrible feeling... a feeling I can only describe as impending doom & I couldn't shake it.

3:10am (4:10am NSW) on Monday 28th February more messages were coming in from Tameika water was rising fast; by 3:44am they were frantically calling SES & Police for help with limited phone battery and power already lost in South Lismore.

By this stage I couldn't control my tears... tears that wouldn't stop for days to come.

I had tried contacting Kaiden's Dad who also lives in Lismore to make sure he was ok & alert him that they were in trouble, finally waking him I got Steve to also contact authorities to help Tameika, Kaiden and their housemates just incase they lose battery power before getting through.

They were told SES were on the way!

4:26am my ex husband rings to make sure I'm ok, to try and calm me down knowing our daughter & grandson were in trouble... our conversation is a blur to be honest, I just remember feeling so sick to my stomach knowing I could not help by baby girl. She was in trouble and I couldn't protect her.

Our fb messages continued... time felt like it had stopped.

4:40am and I'm told the water is knee deep in their 2 storey house, a photo sent to me shows it's almost up to the internal door handle.

Her messages are short and I remember Tameika trying to cheer me up... I was thinking WTF... it should be the other way round.

She now tells me she was trying to remain calm for Kaiden, trying not to freak him out. Her instincts were to do what she could to protect her son. By this time she had him sitting on the highest, driest point in the house... the kitchen bench.

6:45am no sign of SES, no sign of any help at all.  
Water has continued to quickly rise with no end to the rain in sight.

These would be the last messages I received from Tameika; telling her to get to the roof... I'm yelling it in my house... just please get to the roof.  
I never got a reply... I had completely lost contact with my daughter.

My phone was constantly ringing or dinging on my end, messages coming in fast from friends and family... I couldn't tell them anything; I didn't know anything. I just kept saying I've lost contact with my girl, she must be so so scared.

I was constantly checking Lismore fb pages for updates, that's when I saw a video someone had posted of Casino Street, Tameika's street. I can only describe it as a fast flowing river with barely the roof's of these 2 storey houses showing.... my feeling of doom was growing.

8:46am I messaged her  
'I love you so so much'

I knew she wouldn't see it, I just needed her to know one last time that I loved her... I needed to tell my baby girl how much she meant to me. I couldn't handle the silence of no more replies from her, I honestly felt like I was dying inside.

9:54am my phone rings and I instantly thought the worst... all my fears have come true, I was shaking so much I had trouble picking up my phone. I hear a voice on the other end, a voice telling me my daughter and grandson were on a boat heading to the evacuation centre.

Thank you Reuben, you put them on a boat before yourself and your housemates. You sent them to safety while you wait and hope that someone is coming back to rescue you and the others. I honestly can not imagine what you were feeling or thinking at that moment; if I was this scared here, you must have been absolutely terrified there.

I don't know how your phone worked after being submerged in the water for so long but I am forever grateful that it did.

I will never forget your words!

10:36am I finally hear Tameika's voice telling me she had been rescued by a civilians boat and was at SCU

I could barely make out her words through her tears... she was safe! Rescuers... to me they are Angels, true heroes for doing what they did. Not only for Tameika and Kaiden but for so many thousands of Lismore residents that were inundated by this tragic flood. Residents that were caught unaware of the intensity of it all... a flood worse than any they have ever had to deal with.

I am slowly coming to terms with knowing I'll probably never find out who these rescuers are; I would dearly love to but there was so many out there that day helping how are they meant to remember everyone they saved (???)

3 weeks has now passed and our daily conversations are still the same, all about or around the tragedy we call the 2022 Lismore flood or 'ground zero'.

From the clean up to tragically losing a friend, to how are they going to move forward from here.

I'm sure this will continue to be in our daily conversations for such a long time.

I still cry daily, my feeling of doom still lingers and I've come to realise it's because I'm not there... I haven't physically wrapped my arms around my daughter or my grandson yet.

Due to a work injury over a month ago I'm still unable to drive... barely walk to be honest so I haven't seen them yet.

I will though, I will get there as soon as I possibly can.

I need to hug my girl, I need to see her face, I need to tell her how much I love her.

I just want to hold them both and not let go!

I know this is something that will haunt me for such a long time; never really knowing how hard this is for each and every one that lived through this tragedy. I commend you all for coming together as a community and looking out for each other.



♥ Please be kind to yourselves, allow yourself to grieve but also know you're not alone ♥

Thank you for allowing me to tell my story, a story from 189 kms away.

As he was pulling her  
aboard the boat sank  
**Victoria Pitel**



**Where were you when it started?**

At home

**How were you affected?**

After preparing for the flood, we went to bed at 1am debating our options but we were exhausted ... we woke at 3am to see water rising fast. We frantically began lifting our belongings off the floor and by sunrise water had entered into our home, rising to 14.2m

**What was your experience like?**

It was terrifying ... the water continued to rise and I was standing ankle deep on our one remaining un-lifted bed with my dog.

My son had lifted our cat into the ceiling cavity and was frantically shoving documents we could locate, laptop and computer into the ceiling .... I called the SES and was told to expect 16m and to get into our ceiling or onto the roof. Our ceiling wasn't an option and I didn't want to go out onto the roof in the rain but my son insisted. Eventually I had to accept that we would have to go .... we waded through water and out onto our deck and my son managed to get us up and onto the roof. I sat frozen in one spot for 7 hours whilst my son called and called for help .... we smelled a house burning a couple of street away, we heard people crying out for help over and over, and the sound of machinery cutting through tin.



I was worried about my elderly neighbour who we hadn't seen for hours and then suddenly, she appeared at her window shouting frantically for help. I called the police for help telling them that she was going to drown if they didn't get to her quickly, water was up to her shoulders. My son called and called for help and eventually a boat heard him and the solo boatsman approached her but as he was pulling her aboard the boat sank ..... just then he spotted two blokes on a jet ski and shouted to them for help and they sped over and scooped the boatsman and my neighbour up and jetted off with them. Suddenly we were alone .... all our neighbours had been rescued and we were left alone.

My son kept calling and calling but the boats couldn't hear us. I put a post on FB to tell people we had been left behind, I msged a friend to ask her to call the police every half hour until she heard from us again ....

My son was beginning to think of us having to climb higher on the steep area of our roof but we were slipping on the flat area so couldn't think how we were going to manage the steep section?

A helicopter flew over, really really low and we had to hold on for fear of being blown off the roof ....I told my son I'm not going anywhere without my dog .. and then suddenly there were two boats approaching us. One boat began attempting to get to us, the difficulty being that we were at the back of the house with big trees and electrical wires surrounding us. Eventually they came up along side the gutter and we were able to get into the boat .... I have never felt such relief in all my life ...

**How did people in your community respond?** Our community was absolutely amazing, without them we would have spent the night on our roof in the rain, perhaps several nights ... the blokes in the first boat were from Ballina and the blokes in the second boat were from Alstonville. They had been rescuing people ALL day, driving back and forth with no breaks.

### **What is your situation like now?**

We were lucky ... as we arrived at the evacuation centre I saw a sign saying 'Hot Showers' and began fighting tears .... and then a woman approached me and offered me a hug .... we hugged and I burst into tears, sobbing uncontrollably. The gravity of what had happened and what was happening hit me!!! She offered to take us home ... and without much thought I accepted and followed her. We have been at her place for nearly 3 weeks now and every night I feel extremely grateful for my own room, my dry and comfortable bed. I feel incredibly blessed to taken in by complete strangers .....

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

Absolute disbelief, deep sorrow, bouts of anger, grief, loss and incredible gratitude for the extreme generosity of my community.

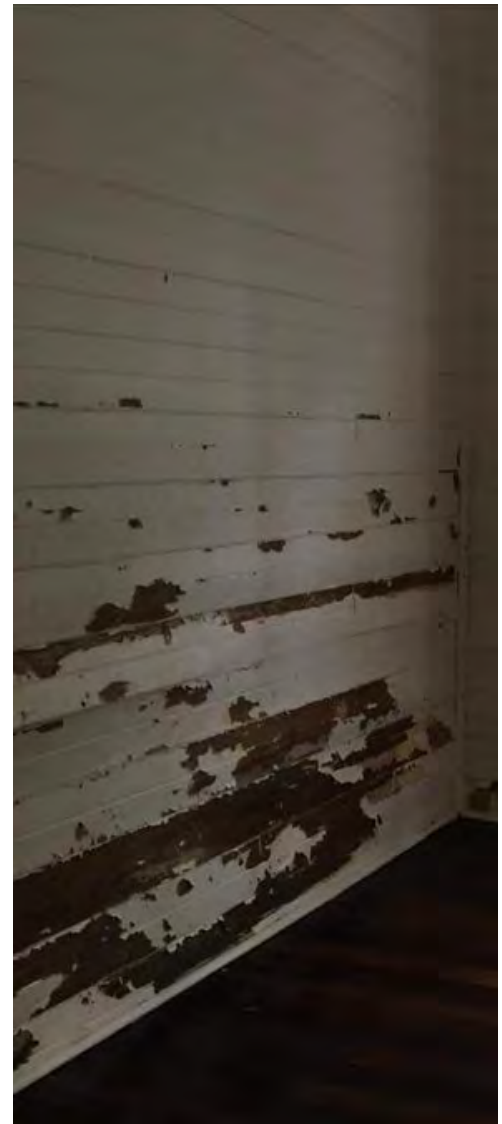
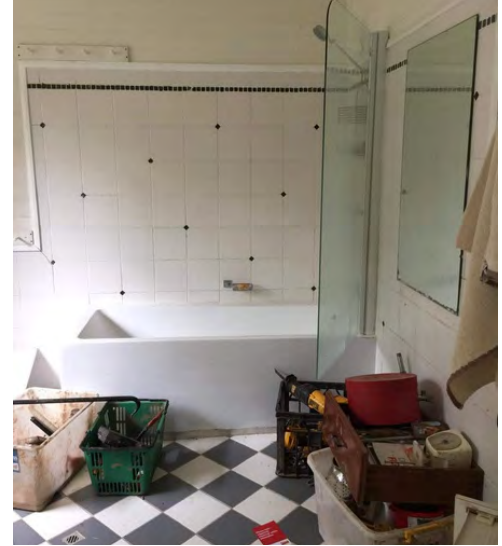
**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

I have absolutely no idea ... right now its hard to even think about tomorrow ... but the desperation in my sons voice, the wail of wail of a baby crying, the absolute terror for

my neighbour ... offers of hugs and the boatsman will all be with me till death.

**Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?**

The confusion of just wanting to go home yet not wanting to go back to the devastation, the chaos and threat of floods in the future .... feeling like home is a safe haven yet such danger lurks .... how to reconcile these thoughts and feelings?



We were not going to be rescued until the next day—if we were still alive.

Anonymous



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***We were not going to be rescued until the next day—if we were still alive***

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Around 11 am on Sunday 27 Feb I received a message from my friend where my household items were being stored that a minor to moderate flood was impending and we needed to move as many of my things as we could to the second story of his Ewing Street unit out of the garage, which was done.

My daughter contacted me and told me to return home immediately as it was unsafe where I was in Lismore, and I did

so, returning to Coraki NSW 2470.

I got home and we (my daughter and I) quickly went to the local shop in Coraki (Spar supermarket) and grabbed enough supplies for a week in case we were flooded in, as only a few years before we had been through the 2017 floods and prepared on the knowledge of that experience, not realising the devastation that was just around the corner, then headed home.

Within hours of being home we were completely flooded in by surrounding roads, while in the house trying to put everything up as high as we could in our 2-storey home.



Having an extremely restless night with the water getting higher and higher, by 3 pm the next day (28th Feb 2022) the water had risen to the second story and was lapping into the house.

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***At this stage we had 3 couples, a 2yr old and myself, taking refuge, as this was the safe house and had never flooded into the second story in the history of the house.***

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By 4pm that same day (28/2/22) we had to quickly run around the house trying to gather 2 cats, 2 kittens, 2 dogs, the baby, 7 adults and essentials we would need and put them on the kitchen table, trying not to panic as the water was up to our knees inside our home at this point.

Realising the water was rising extremely quickly and we could not stay inside the

house for much longer our only option was the roof. We looked for access to the roof as the front and back doors could not be opened with the water levels at that time.

Luckily, we found a window that gave us access to the carport, from there we would be able to climb up on the roof of the house.

With the clothes we were wearing, through the window we passed the baby, 2 dogs, 2 cats, 2 kittens, 7 adults, and climbed onto the carport roof then up onto a very angled corrugated iron roof one at a time.

We had to take our shoes off as they were very slippery and the roof being so steep and angled, we could not hang on.



We needed to climb to the back of the house where there was a small, corrugated veranda roof that was flatter and much safer.

Unfortunately, several of us slid and cutting ourselves on the corrugated iron in the ordeal.

All the while in the heavy rains and flood waters surrounded us, but we managed to get all including pets to the back. Scared, wet, hearts pumping; the men risking their lives went back into the house full of water and pulled from it a tarp, a couple of camp chairs, a small esky and milk for the baby. We desperately needed some sort of shelter especially for the baby from the weather. We had no idea how long we would be up on the roof.

From 4 pm 28th Feb 2022 we started calling 000 and emergency SES lines for someone to save us to no avail, they were too congested with calls, continuing to call for hours.

With our phones running flat, we had to contact friends on social media to keep fighting for us, as we had to preserve the last of our batteries.

At this stage it was sheer panic no one would find us and the waters would engulf us.

Finally, and sadly getting a message 5hrs later around 9pm that unfortunately the 1 helicopter and 1 boat had stopped at 6pm for the night as it was too dangerous at night to continue, and we were not going to be rescued until the next day if we were still alive.

The waters were much too dangerous for the little tinnie boats to come out of locals. As I was told later there was only one SES boat trying to save hundreds. Even though friends wanted to risk their lives to get to us and as I believe did try but violent moving flood waters stopped them in fear of losing their own lives.

Cold, wet, scared, huddled together and hanging on the roof the boys stood watch all night as we had several snakes crawl onto the roof trying to get out of flood waters, along with every creepy crawly known to mankind, we had 100s of mosquito bites. Cuts, bruises and most probably hypothermia.





We could not see anything as it was pitch black through the night although as we huddled in the rain, cold and darkness we could hear cows screaming and drowning throughout the night... along with other animals all around us.

After a couple of days altogether and 16hrs of that on a roof, with flood waters rushing past at scary speeds, not knowing if we were going to be saved approx. 8.30 am on Tues 1st March 2022, we were so happy to see an SES boat pull straight up on our roof, we thought we were saved.

They took us to the nearest island at Coraki, only to realise we were not saved, there we had no medical attention, no blankets, no water, no food, no shelter, no electricity, no phone service, dropped in just the wet flood-soaked clothes we had on our backs with no shoes... and no one to guide us.

The church was doing the best they could as an evac centre, although we were all cut off from everything still, we were in the exact same position, just not on a roof. The elderly, children and young families filled the church. There was nowhere for us to go except to sit on the concrete foot path and try to dry out in the sun, we went from hyperthermia to being burnt as there was no shade either.

After a couple days of being on the island, we still had not eaten, there was just not enough food, water, blankets, shelter to go around, despite local community trying their best.

A local young couple offered myself my daughter and another 3 people shelter in their home, however, to get to their home we had to walk through waist high flood water for approx. 300metres the current was incredibly strong, on the first attempt I had to retreat, the second attempt I had



Unfortunately, I became ill and had to be taken to Newcastle having to leave my daughter behind, to seek medical treatment as there was no way of getting through to Gold Coast hospital, Lismore was still underwater and overwhelmed and I was just one of thousands needing to see a doctor but not acute enough to be seen in our local area, so I was driven to Newcastle 570kms away where I was seen by a doctor. I had blisters, cuts, breathing difficulties and my skin was peeling which I received medication and creams for. Arriving back to the area on the 19th March 2022.

two people on either side of me helping me walk across successfully, pulling me against the current, and finally that night had a small meal with what little food they had. At this stage we had not eaten for nearly 3 days.

Fighting to survive ourselves and helping as many as we could, with no electricity, phone or internet, no food or little food and water, no blankets, no shelter, no medical, no showers or clothes or shoes.

It was not until the following Sunday 6th March that supplies started to roll in: not enough for everyone.

This was not the end, as soon as the water receded enough, even with the overwhelming amount of trauma, malnourished, in desperate need of medical attention and the rest it was straight into days of clean up trying to salvage and clean out our home, helping others with their homes and businesses as our home still after a week was inaccessible with no or little help from the outside world.

When my daughter could finally access the house on the 10th March 2022, I discovered nothing could be salvaged losing all my household appliances, furnishings, electrical, clothes, business equipment (as I had an entertainment business/mobile DJ), tools, camping, sentimental items, photos, documents, my dentures, glasses, medical aides and equipment. My car after being in 15ft of flood water with a pole speared through the front into the radiator right through and damaging the alternator and engine as well. More than \$100,000 lost.



Currently, I have no home as the rental property at East Coraki is condemned and permanently unliveable. I have no temporary accommodation as there is nothing available under the great demand and stress on the current accommodation situation and the current rental crisis.

I have used all my savings and I have lost everything. The beautiful donations from around Australia are amazing however I

The only funds I have been given is \$1000 from Centrelink which I had to use on a hire car to get me back home and to live in for the week as there is simply no accommodation.

I just turned 50yrs old and have no way to rebuild my life now that I have been diagnosed with extensive white matter brain disease and advanced multiple sclerosis and can at best only now work

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***I have no transport.  
I have rung the red cross and was told that  
all of the funds allocated had been used up.***

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cannot accept anything for e.g. white goods, beds, blankets, clothes as I have no home and have nowhere to store nor put them. So only people that still have homes can take advantage of these lovely gifts leaving the most severely affected like myself unable to take advantage of these amazing opportunities to rebuild lives.

So far, I have received no help as I believe there is just no help left as we were stranded for so long. First in best dressed I suppose?

part time, working hard all my life to acquire what I have, now it is all gone, and I just don't know where to go from here.

At this stage I don't know what is worse, the trauma I have been through... or surviving it!

# We were all starting to think that dirty was normal.

## Katrina Sky

I'm a fifth generation Lismore local and i've always heard about and experienced floods growing up.

Lismore knows floods, we know what happens with them and how to get back on our feet after them.

But this was more than a flood.

On Saturday (26th feb) after being on the Gold coast that night and experiencing the torrential rain I asked one of my best friends if she needed helping packing up her house in North Lismore.

Their house has been lifted above 12 meters so we all thought they would be fine because at the time Lismore had a minor to moderate flood watch.

Then the rain arrived on Sunday. The new home I recently purchased in Pound street near Lismore Public School which has a surge storm water drain running across it, that was just pumping. This persisted for hours making me feel an awful sense of foreboding.

I remember messaging my other best friend in East Lismore with a video of the flash flooding in my outdoor area and thinking how bad it was not realising what was to come. The anxiety would not let me sleep so instead I watched the radar, river heights and BOM updates. It astounded me that the BOM's predictions for when the levee would top reduced from 6am to 3am in two hours!!!

From 10pm until 2am BOM released more frequent updates for when they thought the levee would top but that was too late for the many locals who went to bed before 10pm unaware of what was coming.

The first siren I heard was at 02:30 followed by one at 3am.

I finally went to sleep at 3:45am Monday morning.

At 7:30 my husband woke me to tell me the power was off. I received a phone call a minute later from my twin who lives in Queensland asking how the river was going. I was horrified when my husband told me it was already over 13m.

We scrambled to get some ice for the esky from Woolies and looking off the Bruxner highway near rotary drive, the image of water as far as the eye can see will stick with me forever.

I called my friend in North Lismore as we drove, to see how she was and was blown away when she said its waist high in the house. I asked her how she was getting out, she told me she was on hold to SES.

I called my other friends in East Lismore (who own a boat) to see if they could help.

I was shocked when she told me her house was almost flooding and that they needed the boat to go and rescue a family of seven near wade park.

I called SES next and proceeded to wait on hold for 9 minutes until the phone network cut out for a minute and I lost all reception and had to call back. I never actually got through to them in the end.

My North Lismore friend was rescued sometime after 10am, they had been in water for hours.

Being one street away from the Bruxner highway we could hear the boats and see the jetski's going past at the end of the street.

Blackhawks, Queensland fire service, Westpac helicopters, private helicopters, I've never seen Lismore's air space so congested. By the afternoon both of my best friends were safe.

Then the flood clean up began.

Tuesday morning we started in East Lismore because the water had receded enough to get in and get started. It was total destruction when we walked into the house with no idea where to start.

Room by room we pulled the house apart and watched as the pile grew bigger and bigger. Mattresses, furniture, clothes, kids toys down to the carpet, was pulled out and put on the kerb.

By the afternoon we had finished removing most of the destroyed stuff from the house and had salvaged what we could.

Wednesday we went back to finish the last couple of bits and then went into the CBD to help a business.

The CBD had been smashed, every shop, every building had the ceilings fall down. The mud was like glue sticking the gyprock to the floor. So we shovelled it all into wheelbarrows and put it on the curb. Up until that point it was the dirtiest I had been.

Thursday it was North Lismores turn.

I met my friend at her house at 8am to help clean up and it was horrifying. There was very little that was salvageable.

It was amazing to see random strangers come by to ask if they could help. Starting the day as strangers and ending as friends is an amazing experience.

We cleaned and cleaned and after 9 hours were finished.

Sunday 6 days after the flood we decided to help Autobarn. God what a mission. The building was designed for a flood situation. Concrete walls and floors and built up on the second storey. Everything was carted down the stairs, so much money lost from damaged stock.

The smell was overpowering. We were all starting to think that dirty was normal.

My friend and her family from East Lismore are my new room mates. We don't know when they can return home but they are always welcome in my home for as long as they need. It's the least I can do.

Overall my story is not about being rescued or losing my home. My story is about those locals who are not flood affected who have been heart broken just as much as everyone else.

I have helped clean two homes and four businesses since the flood which I believe has been the same story for many other non flood affected locals.

I feel for everyone who lost their home, business and belongings but i'm honoured to be apart of such a resilient community.

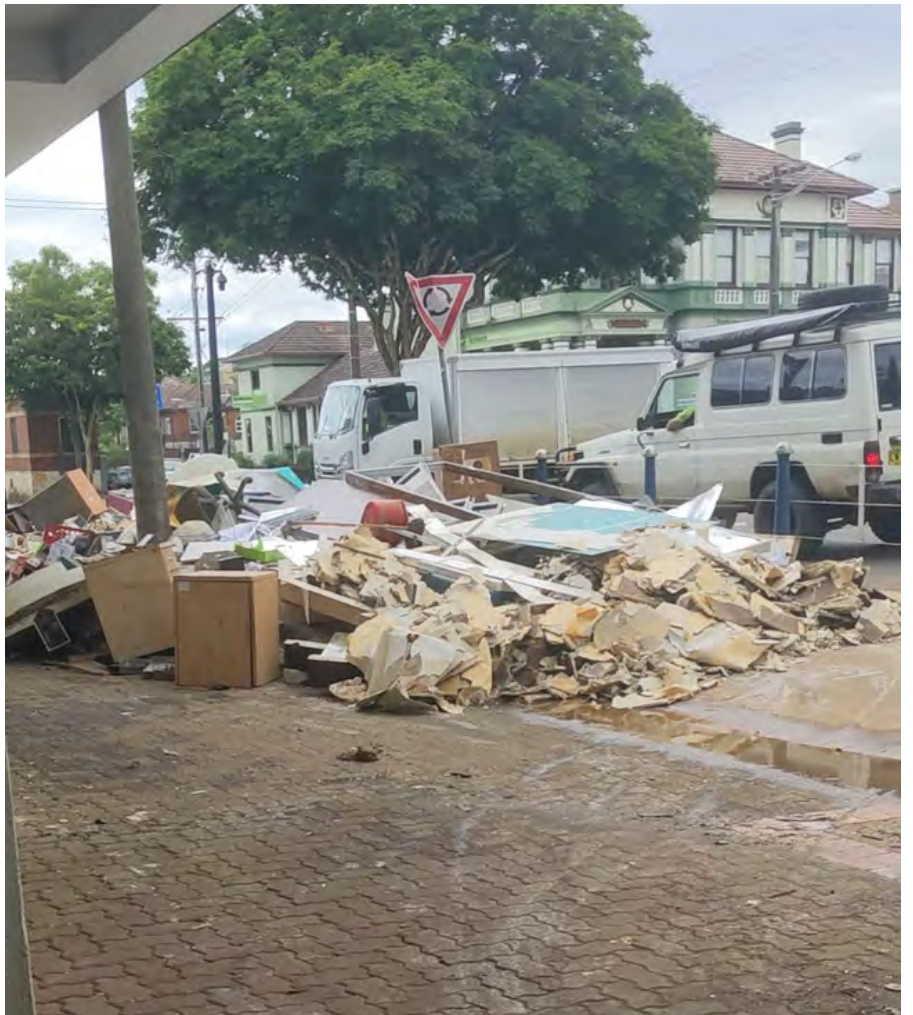


Katrina Sky















# It was a frightening and traumatic experience that no one foreseen coming.

Name Nathan Aaron Godfrey  
Postcode 2469

## Where were you when it started?

At home in Rappville

## How were you affected?

We were not as badly affected as some others but we had carpet damages, wall and flooring structure damage, fencing down and leaks from the roofs but over all our house was a lucky one. I have been dealing with a lot of the flood affected community areas eg. Doing mental health and welfare checks, delivering supplies, referring people to the correct care and assistance lines, compiled and edited lists to be handed to Sally and a few other groups for dispatch, distribution and discussion of rescues & assistance. I also responded to further rescues in our town.

## What was your experience like?

It was a frightening and traumatic experience that no one foreseen coming. I feel heartbroken and sympathetic of everyone who lost their house and belongings in all of this.

## How did people in your community respond?

We all pulled our heads together and worked together as a team getting the school open as a emergency accommodation, medical care and food hub for those in need also getting the public toilets cleaned and unlocked for use.

## What is your situation like now?

I am now in process of helping people repair, clean out there houses, gernie houses, deliver supplies including food and much more.

## What are your feelings about what happened?

There is a lot of work that needs to be worked on by the government but we also need an evac hub/communications hub in Rappville.

## What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?

All the devastated and frightened faces and the incomprehensible damage.

## Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?

I would love for the opportunity to be able to speak to someone as to whether I can get permission to open a Evac/Comms hub in Rappville

## This entry was written prior to the second flood.

As of yesterday the town was again at risk, torrential rain and strong winds lashing the homes they were desperately trying to repair post floods.

Some properties inundated, others without power, the high winds leaving residents worried about the risk of trees coming down, the roads out completely submerged. Our thoughts are with the residents of Rappville and the entire community affected by this second excruciating event.

# I rescued my mum, twice, thanks to the local people.

Name Annie

Postcode 2471

## Where were you when it started?

At home, Baxter Lane Tuckurimba, 10 min outside Coraki.

How were you affected?

"My mum has lived in Coraki and surrounds for over 20 years. Her house was built in the one of the lowest lying parts of Coraki. Built up on stilts we are used to flooding and aware of the highest levels according to history. Myself and some other local friends helped my mum move things upstairs(washing machine etc), everything else put up as high as possible. I waved goodbye to mum, knowing she would probably be stuck there for a few days, but she was actually looking forward to some quiet time to herself. Then when I saw what happened in Lismore we began to panic. I called mum. The water went over the power points downstairs and the power was out. This had never happened. I got onto the Coraki community facebook page and people were evacuating. My mum was alone and no social media. I put a call out for someone with a boat to please get my mum out. Someone did. I'm still yet to meet them and thank them. They boated my mum and everything she could carry up to Adam St, but the Other island, not where the evacuation centre was. The Highest street in town had been shoved in two by a raging torrent of flood water. She stayed with friends of friends. 8 people 7 dogs and 3 birds. They were in the highest part of the town, cut off in every direction, could not get to evacuation centre. Water filled the basement room, then the shop front, then up into the lounge, kitchen room where everyone was. They went up to the last floor. Mum sent me a photo, looking down the stairs to the lounge room, dark, thigh high in water, things floating around. She said she was fine and was going to sleep now. I was terrified.

After a recent separation, I have lost my three step daughters and they were living with their mother in South Lismore. I had no idea what had happened to them. Plus so many others, including the girls grandmother who also lived in south Lismore, both homes are now condemned. So scary.

After two days of being in the island of Coraki I knew I had to get mum out. People would start getting... stressed, no cigarettes, alcohol, other Needs... there's some pretty, ummm, let's say rough around the edges kind of people around here...

The water was at the bottom of my property but did not come near my house. I had no idea what I was sitting on the edge of. My power was gone and I had no data or reception now.

The water was 100m from my house, I went down the road to the edge of the water. Two men were there with a boat, they had just bought back an elderly couple off the island. I've never atm someone so stunned, the poor old couple were wet and dirty, with an old school small suitcase each that you knew was everything they had left. After a couple of minutes she was able to talk and told me she'd been sleeping on a church pew for, i dint know how many nights by then.

I asked the fellas with the boat (Matt and Kirk) if they could get my mum. The water was starting to recede now, plus tide going out. But they thought they could make one more trip. I jumped in the boat, clinging to my keys and phone. Next things I'm burning across the paddock in front of my house... in a boat...

They wound through the paddocks of water and through some tree tops and we were on the river. A dead cow. Massive branches sticking out that could be whole trees. Water tanks, boats, cars, wardrobes, mattresses, all sorts of things to wind through like an obstacle course.

I ask where these guys are from, Coorabell... I know that's a long way from here so they don't know the river. And no one is wearing life jackets, but I didn't even think of this to later.

Running out of time for the boat to be able to clear fences and things in the way back, I strut through the water into coraki. It's like...I don't know... lost people, cars, tents sirens, list people walking like zombies, people running,... I realise I'm in the wrong island need to get to the second island. Luckily water was down enough, only that day, that I could wade through to the other side. I scream out for mum no idea where she is exactly. I find her in that house. I have to hurry her. But don't want her to forget anything. Our arms full of everything she could carry, we wade back through, I smell sewerage, there's a camping toilet floating right next to us... it's splashing up onto our nickels... you just don't think about it...

Then through the next lot of water and I get her and her stuff into the boat and before you know it were Parking the boat on the road just next to my house. I did it. I rescued my mum, twice, thanks to The local people.

Now we deal with the aftermath "

### **What was your experience like?**

"Scary. Terrifying. A kick up the arse. Put things in perspective. Witnessing the BEST in people. And some of the worst.

After failed ivf, partner had an affair, my dad died, I took partner back, buy house with him, he abused me, I take antidepressants, the pharmacist accidentally overdosed me, I was poisoned, lost work, friends, income, health, mental health...I was just starting to get better, now this. I have my mum and another friend of hers living with me, a 77 year old woman who has lost absolutely everything. She has no home. She will try to go to Perth and live with her son now. So my mum will lose a best friend too.

So much loss.

I feel selfish talking about my own experience. We all know someone worse off.

My young brothers father and my step brother were stuck in a house in the river, the day out flooded I was trying to help them get out too. But they stayed to try and save music equipment from one house, up to the other. One house lost. No insurance. Cane farmer, lost all tractors, everything, crop, everything.

I heard they had a tinny and they would get out of needed. But they stayed. I was terrified for then. Did the tiny have a motor? Did they have fuel? I know this man and he's a bit of a walking disaster... did they know where they would go?? There weren't many daylight hours left... but they stayed. And then u couldn't contact them for days. Another friend organised a boat to go out and check in people out there. They were ok, but very little food. "

How did people in your community respond?

"After 15 years of being in the town of coraki itself, my mum and I now know people we never would have. People were people. Everyone was the same that day, that week, this time...

People helped people. Didn't matter what else may have been an issue the day before, everyone was levelled, we were all the SAME.

Homes, front yards, cars, streets, we're open to people, no where else to go. We heard stories that people were being taken by boat to Evans Head... that is a fantasy, impossible! But it was true, the first dry land was Evans Head. Sailed

right over the top of Woodburn. This was the stuff of legends, generations will hear of these impossible things that actually happened.

But...I did feel the absence of the Box Ridge aboriginal community... I'm still yet to hear what really happened. People up and down the river, up and down the streets of coraki were reaching each other, but just out of town is the old mission, Box Ridge... they are used to being their own community, generations bought up on land that once separated them. It's still quiet about what happened or there.

People, boats, animals, food, toilet paper. People organised and people helped, people cried out for help and whoever could, did. People checked in on people , whoever, wherever, whenever, all hours of the day and night. "

### **What is your situation like now?**

"My mum and her friend live with me.

My mums house was one of the last to be able to clean out as it sits in water for so long, no footpath to throw anything on to. So the carpet sat, rotting floorboards, creating mould. We had managed to get help to boat in and at least open windows to stop the mould. I've seen signs of someone tried to break into mums house. We now worry about that. She cannot live there. We don't really know what to do next. Mum has contact with an electrician. But he had list everything he owns and most tools and is trying to help add much add he can. I am unemployed and recovering from illness and abusive relationship, but doing my best to stay strong for mum.

Volunteers have been amazing.

The did not have a good experience with the army.

The HUB that became in coraki was running well with locals. You'd put your name down in the shit board, needing a boat, or help removing things whatever. It worked. 45 minutes and we had s boat.

Then when the army took over, they couldn't even find my mums friends house because it wasn't on their paper map. Her road was of the map and they were confused what to do.

They ended up sending two blokes out, volunteers from the Gold Coast and Brisbane (Ricardo and forgot the others name). The two of them had to lift the full fridge that was entirely submerged in flood water and full of rotten food. Anyway they were great.

To get help for my mums house, I put my name down with the army who are running the hub now. I need help to move everything out the front for rubbish collection, that means furniture, fridges etc...

For hours later no one had turned up. Then two blokes just drove by and ask if we need help.

3pm the NEXT day, after the dozens already come to collect the hard rubbish, 4 army personnel walk in and ask if we need help clearing everything out. I said, yesterday. But I found a few things for them to do. There was a dead animal in mums back yard, we could not deal with it, they helped with that. I asked if they could stand the stand bottles up that were toppled over. They all looked at each other, not sure. I walked them over to at least look. One instructed another one with Lefty Loosey... then when one lifted the bottles, the other three applauded him.

Seriously, if we stood around applauding each other for every little thing, we'd have nothing done.

I'm sure others have had more positive experiences with the army, but everything was working well here until they arrived, now it seems impossible to get help when you need it.

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

"Dumbfounded

Blessed

Uncertain

Overwhelmed

Heartbroken

Full of empathy

Hopeful"

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

Survival

Chaos

Community

.....I do not know

**Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?**

I'm sure I'll think of 100 things after submitting.

# The water was up to my mums waist in the top level!

Name Anonymous

Postcode 2480

## Where were you when it started?

"I spent most of Sunday until 10pm helping my parents raise items above the 2017 flood level.

I then drove one of my dads cars to my house (his other car we had moved with my grandparents caravan to the tender center as in 2017 the cars here were safe) and my brother packed a few days worth of clothes into his bag, drove his car to my house and expected to have to stay 1 or 2 nights.

Left at my childhood home was my mum, dad and youngest brother.

I got into bed, and couldn't sleep. I kept checking the river levels and reading everyone's posts on Facebook.

My mum and dad had continued to move things upstairs until midnight. The house has a floor level of 13.86. At midnight mum said she was exhausted and heading to bed. I continued to monitor the situation. It was at approximately 2am that I read a Facebook comment about the amount of water fallen in two areas outside of Lismore and that no one had ever seen that before and Lismore is going to "cop" it.

At 2.34am the water broke the levee and the prediction of 14m was announced. At this point, my family were all asleep. I didn't know what to do. I spoke to an old neighbour who I had been checking in with throughout the night. She told me to ring and wake my parents NOW. I rang and my mums first response was "why are you calling me, you've woken me up. I am tired". I told her about the current situation, she walked out our front door and all she said was "it is at 2017 level already". This was approximately 3am.

So from 3am they began to prep and lift things on the top level.

Mum would send me updates of how many stairs the water had risen in so many minutes. It was rising SO quickly. It then got inside the top level - 13.86 floor level.... My mum was hysterical.

They had made access to the roof and placed tools up there so if they could cut their way out if it got to that point.

The rain was not stopping.

At about 630 I had phoned 000 to have them rescued and at 1130 they were still there. I had friends with boats try to get to them and they weren't able to cross from town side over to south. I had made multiple pleas for help all over Facebook.

At 1230, I rang and said to my mum "if you can still stand in the water in the house, please get down from the roof and go out the front and yell and scream" To hear your mum crying saying she is scared and to wonder what your 15 year old brother is going through, broke me. Here I was sitting in my dry, comfortable home while they were in a life threatening position. They had lost everything. The water was up to my mums waist in the top level!!!

It was only 20 minutes later that my mum called "a boat! A boat has come. We are in the boat" the relief I felt I cannot explain.

I was straight down to the pick up point and couldn't wait to hug them so tight.

### **How were you affected?**

My family home has been destroyed. My family have lost all their possessions. My mum has worked so hard to build a home and life for us kids and to see that all disappear is devastating.

### **What was your experience like?**

"I have never felt so helpless and guilty.

Guilty because I wasn't there with them and helpless because there was nothing I could do but try get word out that they were in their home and needed to be rescued. "

How did people in your community respond?

The community has been amazing. I am proud to call Lismore home.

### **What is your situation like now?**

"My family are living with me. My mum, dad, two brothers and my Nan and pop. My other Nan and uncle also lost everything so they have been here too.

The most important thing is that they got out alive. "

### **What are your feelings about what happened?**

"Sad. Devastated. Heart broken.

How does everyone start over and rebuild their lives?"

### **What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

Seeing my mum at the pick up point getting out of the boat.

### **Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?**

"My brother has nightmares calling out for me and asking if I am coming.

It breaks me 😭"

Name Susan Cartwright

Postcode 2472

Where were you when it started?

Broadwater

How were you affected?

Yes

What was your experience like?

Overwhelming

How did people in your community respond?

Amazing

What is your situation like now?

Ok

What are your feelings about what happened?

Unsure

What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?

Hell yes

Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?

We can't not have phone service in a situation like that

**Name** Tarryn Durbidge

**Postcode** 4223

**Where were you when it started?**

Tweed boat ramp

**How were you affected?**

My husband and I started rescue and recovery with jet skis and boats. Our home was safe.

**What was your experience like?**

Horrific

How did people in your community respond?

With compassion and kindness and generosity

**What is your situation like now?**

Still involved with recovery

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

Let down by our government

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

Trauma of distress calls

**Name**                Jessica

**Postcode**        2480

**Where were you when it started?**

Lismore heights

**How were you affected?**

Lost my family house. My sister lost her house. My best friend lost his house. I lost my business

**What was your experience like?**

My experience was extremely scary. I rang the police about 10 times in 3 hours trying to get them to save my mum who has a disability and was sitting on the kitchen bench

**How did people in your community respond?**

The community saved my family and are also belong to rebuild our town

**What is your situation like now?**

The future is scary and emotional but we will get through it. I don't have a job or a income and my family is trying to rebuild and my friend is trying to find stable accommodation from him and his daughter

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

I still struggle to sleep and constantly worrying about the future

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

My sisters boyfriend calling me at 6am from the roof of their house telling me they flagged down a boat and my sister jumped in it to go rescue my mum whilst I was in the Lismore heights bowling club screaming and crying to the police and ses to do something

# My two baby grandsons in a half shell blue plastic sandpit floating on flood water

Name Jane Laidlaw

Postcode 2480

Where were you when it started?

Girards hill

How were you affected?

My daughters live next door to each other at the bottom of Esmonde street. Each and a partner and a baby. The eldest daughter lived in my house 13 m above sea level. They thought they were safe all being there, and my studio was rented by an older woman who had been through many floods..

What was your experience like?

"Around 5ish in the morning my phone rang. I'd been asleep 2 hours. Worried about my kids & grandkids (babies aged 3 months & 13 months). It was my eldest daughter. 'Mum the water is going to come into the house' I was confused, I said 'not my house?' She said 'YES'

I got up and raced around the corner with my partner. The water was at the top of my 6ft fence. I could not believe my eyes.

I paced at the junction of Esmonde & Parade streets. The water kept rising. I kept asking where was the SES? The Police boats? One man said his family were being rescued from the end of the street. I could see a boat. I waved at it. Nothing. I kept asking people if they had a boat? A kayak? No one did.

A young man turned up soaked to the skin and I told him why I needed a boat. He said 'I just swam my kid out, they need to get out now. I will swim in and tell them.' He started swimming. I saw a half shell blue plastic sandpit floating and ran in and got it. Tipped the sand out and yelled to him to come back. He came back. 'Take this in and put the babies in it, they cannot go in that water' it was toxic. He took it with him. Minutes later the dads of the babies swam out over my fence pushing the shell. I could see 13 month old Arlo sitting up. As they got closer I spied the big eyes of Oakley (3 months) under his beanie lying behind Arlo. My friend Terry had arrived and I was about to send her to get her kayak when I saw the babies. I stopped her car, got the babies and got in the car with them to the safety of Elton st. My sons in law swam back and rescued their two cats with the blue shell. Then my daughters and studio tenant swam out to safety. My sons in law took that shell plus Oakley's baby pool that I also found floating and rescued other children and a woman who was in a wheelchair. The sight of my baby grandsons in that shell floating towards me is burned in my brain. They were safe & dry! "

How did people in your community respond?

"They were like me stunned, confused and afraid on the day. Since then they have been amazing. My two daughters lost everything. I lost a lot of furniture. One daughter and I had our houses destroyed.

We were given clothes, fresh water, baby stuff, and lamps when the power went out for five days- all given by community! "

**What is your situation like now?**

There are 6 adults, 2 babies, 2 cats and my partners puppy all living in a 2 bed house with a garden studio. We have clean water, power and food. But we are gutted, traumatised and exhausted. I had no flood insurance as my house was above flood. My daughter had insurance. We are all displaced.

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

"We should have been warned

There should have been local, state and federal help on the night and day it happened. There should have been leadership. The community saved each other. I was lucky. Others not so much "

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

"My two baby grandsons in a floating shell on flood water, Arlo sitting up

Looking around, Oakley's big eyes wondering what was going on. "

**Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?**

We need better coordination of disasters like this. We were not prepared. Climate change is to blame. The Australian government has blood on its hands

# Life will not be normal for a long time, if ever.

Name            Anonymous

Postcode       2480

Where were you when it started?

Home

How were you affected?

We lost everything

What was your experience like?

Horrific

How did people in your community respond?

"With great kindness., Have been blown away with help fr complete strangers. Then there are a

Small segment who have stolen from us."

What is your situation like now?

Life will not be normal for a long time if ever. I have lost years of handcrafted items. Lost nearly all my photos. It doesn't need thinking about. The govt has failed us. I am a liberal voter but not next election. We are still trying to find a caravan so we can live at home while our house is fixed. We will move.

What are your feelings about what happened?

Traumatized. Not the SES fault but there wasn,'t enough of them. If civilians hadn't stepped up I shudder to think how many would have lost their lives.We prepared for a 2017 flood! We could have drowned.

What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?

That so many could have drowned. Throwing away family treasures. Throwing away photos. That smell and a town that looks like a war zone.

Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?

Lismore is a beautiful town with a beautiful community. They do not deserve this. People should not be allowed to live in our area. It simply is too dangerous sadly it will happen again. This is what we have been warned about Global Warming.

**Name** Sarah Tuck

**Postcode** 2469

**Where were you when it started?**

Bungawalbin/Gibberagee

**How were you affected?**

We woke up at 6:30am 28th February 2022, looked out the window and we were surrounded by water, water was already coming in through the caravan door, we called SES/000 and got an automated message saying they couldn't take our call.. we then walked 1km to our neighbours who took us in and gave us a place to stay. The water ended up coming 2.7m high, our caravan, car etc were all completely under water.

**What was your experience like?**

The experience was very scary as we didn't know when the water would stop rising or when help would come and we had very limited reception, so we relied on the ABC radio for updates.

How did people in your community respond?

Most people in our community spent 24-48 hours on their roofs before they got rescued and after the flood waters went down the community really came together and everyone did everything they could to help each other

**What is your situation like now?**

We are staying with family while getting back on our feet, figuring out what to do next, as we were just about to build a house there

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

I think we learnt a lot from what happened, how to be better prepared next time and it showed what a great community we have (we had only moved there 6 months ago), which we are really grateful for.

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

How 000/SES weren't there to take our call when we needed them but the community was, it's always good to get to know your neighbours/community, we are grateful we did before the flood happened otherwise who knows what would have happened

**Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?**

<https://youtu.be/ktAOHXPEXyY> a youtube video of our experience

# There he was our knight in shining wetsuit.

Name

Postcode 2483

Where were you when it started?

How were you affected?

lost all my white goods, beds, carpets, shoes, painting, winter stuff, so much STUFF!!!

What was your experience like?

"A humble account of one persons experience of Monday 28th of February 2022 ...

Days and days, and the rain kept coming, flooding front and back gardens till it began seeping into the houses all around us. No matter how hard we tried to block the flow, it kept coming, finally spitting us out of the house.

With bags packed we ventured out into the flowing water, wading our way up Argyle street in the pouring rain. Lots of people out checking damage, stopping to chat with those passing by in the same position and those in their homes watching while their places were still dry. And, the rain kept coming.

We made our way down the middle of the street where the water was the shallowest, turning into the Main Street of Mullumbimby to the balcony of the pub.

Relieved to be out of the rain along with young and old, babies, cats, dogs, children running about and solitary people reading books and snoozing under tables on wet wooden floors.

A couple had laid out pastries, pies for all to eat. However there was no where to get comfy. We stood watching the water gush down the Main Street of Mullumbimby as we dripped, completely soaked through. Standing dazed, overwhelmed even, curiosity rising, next steps, what would they be? No were to lay our heads or sit down for that matter. Internal shaking began. Discomfort of being wet through. Yearning to stop, to rest.

Finally grabbing our bags, once again we ventured into the rain thigh deep in gushing water, the three Amigo's my daughter Lexi, her husband Stevie and me. The RSL was the destination, Lexi and I had checked it out, yes that was the evacuation centre.

Here there was carpet to lay on, comfy chairs to sit in, and hot food coming from the kitchen. Tea and coffee station for all to help themselves freely. A beautiful soul from the RSL manning the post helping in any way he could.

More and more volunteers arrived who had also been flooded helping all to be as comfortable as they could. We were 400 there, young families with multiple children, breast feeding mothers, young and old, people in wheel chairs, and others gathered together keeping each other company all equal in this watery life challenge. Bands of children running about inventing new games for the new circumstance. Pets had been gathered up and brought along too, including blue tongue lizards, chickens, rabbits, cats and dogs.

We found a spot to spread out to dry our wet things, sit down and stop, to pause and collect up the energies that felt frazzled. Water, food, breathing in and breathing out.

Not knowing what would come next, when or where? Just here and now and... breathe in and breathe out. Close my eyes and feel the sensations coursing through the body. Only here and now. Watching the faces all around, the scene of strangers helping strangers.

A bit of a timeline... I awoke at 8.30 with water gushing in the house we packed bags and left by 10.30, arrived at the RSL by 1ish by the afternoon the water had subsided however was due to rise again by 8. I was standing out the front outside watching the water. Fire trucks dropping people off. A sick and pain filled person being carried in out of the wet by two people. His carer close behind. Rescuers came with people in their arms, in wet suits dripping from being in the pouring rain all day helping those escape their homes. Standing there a friendly face smiled, smiling back I was not sure if I knew him or not, then he approached to say hello, pulled his hood off and I recognised him. "have you got somewhere to stay?" he asks. "Yes, there is carpet on the floor and space to lay down." "I will check with my wife and be back to get you if she has not promised it to anyone else." "we are three, my daughter her husband and me" "yes, that will be fine, we have sofa's and camping mattresses, I'll be back" He took my phone number to call and let me know. Going back inside I told and what had transpired????

A couple hours passed, coming back from the toilet there he was our night in shinning wet suit. He had walked home to check if his place was available and tried to call, however there was no internet, no mobile service, no ability to use ATM cards. Most challenging that is for sure. And here he was, "I have organised a truck to help, he will drive us through the deep water and we will walk the rest of the way home." Grateful, shaky and nerves frazzled we gathered up our belongings put soaking wet sox and sneakers back on. The water out the front of the RSL had started to rise again, navigating the water with Stevie and Lexi either side of me. We crossed the deepest part and the truck arrived. I got to sit in the front cabin with the sweet couple who where helping people everywhere. , and climbed up on the back of the flat truck ... and the rain poured on. I have never experienced anything like this. SES guys where on the side of the road waiting to be picked up they just had one more of their party to arrive with the boat. They all climbed onto the flat top too. Driving super slow the water was quite deep and gushing past us we made our way to our cross road and jumped out, thanking everybody we set out walking the rest of the way.

At 7ish we arrived...

Leilani had the fire going...their home was welcoming and arms and hearts open, it was as if we had landed in paradise. Luca offered us water, this sweet family took us in out of the storm and provided us with sanctuary, a place and space to stop, take a breath, relax. She made us pumpkin soup and toast, we sat eating around their big wooden table sharing our stories while being held, out of the rain, safe and sound.

Luca gave up his bed for me, a teenager with compassion and generosity like his mum and dad. They helped us at the house the next days. Packing, cleaning, chucking out. So much love and care. I will never forget the grace filled generosity. People came from every where offering help washing the mud from the front and back, bringing food, water, lifting, carrying... angels everywhere, with smiles and big open hearts chipping in where ever they could. This whole experience has been such a gift in amongst all its many, many, challenges.

It's been 19 days now since so many of us have been touched by the gushing flood waters of February 28th.

I am ever grateful for all the amazing beings that have stepped up to help, give comfort and support.

Thank you to you all!♥"

How did people in your community respond?  
They where Angels in human form!

**What is your situation like now?**

I am renting a room in Ocean Shores. I have some things that did not get soiled and am luckier than a lot of people who lost everything. And of course searching high and low for storage for what was not flooded. Also am without a car which is a challenge in itself.

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

It has been a huge learning curve for me.

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

My memory is of the open arms and hearts that came to the rescue with a big... "yes lets" attitudes and got so much done for us.

**Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?**

For me it has been a huge lesson in letting go and letting flow. My heart is full, even though from time to time there is a tightening about where to put what I have left and, how I will get a car again. Blessed that I have the capacity to see with gratitude rather than feeling like a victim.

**Name** Danielle

**Postcode** 2480

**Where were you when it started?**

Home in lismore

**How were you affected?**

Lost home and belongings

**What was your experience like?**

Horrible

**How did people in your community respond?**

With love and compassion

**What is your situation like now?**

Struggling

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

"It was Sunday night. And I was suppose to be at work but I took it off to finish flood prep and get my kids home early from their grandfathers as I knew they would be cut off from lismore for some time if we had any kind of major flood, My husband was away in Sydney for a week so it was just myself at home with our three kids, my two sons 12 and 10 years old. My 4 year old daughter and our pets, two dogs, one large masstiff/woolfound X and one medium sized mixed breed, and our four handraised birds (parrots), three conures and a lorikeet.

The night of the floods I became very anxious, reading all the talk online about the size of the flood prediction from locals living in rural areas outside lismore, and all the rain we were getting, at times I felt like I was on a ship with waves hitting the windows it was so torrential. I knew how high the flood came in 2017 which was below our second level elevated house so surely it couldn't be worse then that I thought. The official prediction was still the same at 2017 so although not good, figured we would be ok. I was tired and with the SMS from the ses saying it would be safe to evac early the next morning by 6 I decided to get some sleep at around 11pm and set an alarm for 3am to get up and prepare to leave if we got evacuated or looked like it was to going to be bigger then predicted.

I got up at 3am and looked out my front windows, I couldn't leave my house due to the flash flooding being so bad even if I wanted to, there was a torrent of water about waste deep rising up from the gutters, there was no way I was getting the kids and pets through that safely without risking them washing away down to browns creek drains. Being only small and having a little one with two other kids and pets I decided it be best to wait it out. I called SES and told them I wanted to leave but couldn't, they told me it was to late to leave and to just get as high as I can even if I could get onto my roof to do it. They are not doing rescues until daylight they said.

I got a ladder ready just incase but couldn't see a way to get it to the roof as our awning was in the way and I couldn't rip it off. I woke up my older boys and we watched the water quickly start rising, it was clear the levee had broken hours before predicted.

I gathered the birds into smaller travel cages and a cat crate and gathered the dogs and kids and put a pair of floaties on my daughter and waited by the front door. I felt this was the best place to be, because if anyone was going to save us it would probably be from here, and I didn't want to become trapped inside the house.

Soon the lights went out and the water got higher and higher, pouring into the house like a bathtub filling up. My sons became scared and anxious and I told them I needed them to be brave for me, and listen to everything I said, and to all stay together. and we all stood and looked out the front door, trying to think of what we would do. I knew I didn't want to go into the house and become trapped so the front door felt like the best place incase we needed to go somehow.

My daughter's room is near the front door and I had my daughter on her bed with the dogs until the water started coming above her bed so I picked her up and held her. The dogs were becoming anxious as the water started to rise higher. We could hear furniture banging and falling over in the house, large shipping containers and giant freezers floated down the road like they were weightless, then the overwhelming smell of fuel choked us, soon the water reached hip height and the dogs started howling and yelping as they struggled to keep above water, my daughter screamed and cried asking if she could just go into my bed (which would of been under water) I grabbed a wooden pallet that floated over and sat our youngest conure (parrot) and our lorikeet (who isn't the best flyer) in two cages on the pallet, then instructed my son's to let out our bonded pair of conures as I could not hold any more above water with my daughter on one hip and keeping the pallet with the other birds from floating away, the cage they had was to big to carry now and no one would be able to take it if we had to swim, they are both hand tame and excellent flyers and had each other to rely on so we open their cage and just hoped for the best and that they would take care of each other until we could hopefully find them again. They hung in their cage with the door open. I wasn't sure if they left.

Soon the water was up to my chest and one of my dogs was just swimming to survive and kept swimming out my two story front windows looking for something to climb onto and I was having to keep calling her back into the house through the window. Yells for help came from the darkness and After a while We could hear boats coming and along with everyone else screamed into the night for help. Begging for my children's lives to be saved. My other large dog I couldn't see anymore but I was starting to think the worst for my children's safety so couldn't look for her. At that point I seen my neighbours climb onto their roof, boats continued up and down Ballina road which was now a river. but none would stop for our cries for help, then one man yelled back to us ""I'll be back I have to save my family"" minutes felt like hours and soon he arrived and took my neighbours young daughter and another of their family members. The water was getting higher and higher and my neighbours offered to swim over to get my kids onto their roof, after getting my 10 year old son up onto their roof they were halfway swimming over to their roof with my 12 year old when the man in a boat came back to our rescue, I handed him my 4 year old daughter and the birds from the pallet and pushed the pallet away, my eldest son came back from halfway to the neighbours roof and we got him in, I heaved in our medium sized dog but couldn't see my big girl, I quickly turned back into the house swimming down the hallway calling for her, I couldn't leave her, she's always protected me and I needed to protect her, then I caught sight of her silhouette standing on my art desk which was now also under water, she was frozen scared and wouldn't move so I grabbed her and pulled her out, chest deep or more back down the hallway and heaved her into the boat with the man's help, I got in and we picked up my other son waiting from the neighbours roof before being driven to safety of land near Prema house.

I stayed with friends all day just out of flood zone they gave us dry clothes and food and offered us am safe haven. My mother from Ballina came and picked us all up that night and we went back to my parents place in West Ballina.

After a good hot shower and some food we went to bed thinking all was well, when I woke up at 4am to an SMS telling us to evacuate!

Again we packed everyone up including pets, with my parents and went off to the Cherry St evac centre and spent all day there.

After five flight cancellations my husband soon joined us in Ballina, and we made the choice to borrow my dad's car and drive back to Lismore and wait until the waters went down so we could get to my father in laws place out near casino which was unaffected, but cut off. As my parents house was now unreachable.

The following day our conure pair we let go in last attempts to save was found and we have all been reunited again.

In the end my parents house in Ballina, plus our house in Lismore which they also own and rent to us, was destroyed.

We crashed with some friends for a few nights until we could finally get through to father in laws where we have been staying since. Now like many others trying to work out how to slowly rebuild life to something that resembles normal.

**Name** Kate Schumacher

**Postcode** 2480

### **Where were you when it started?**

at home in South Lismore

### **How were you affected?**

We lost all our belongings and our house needs to be rebuilt

### **What was your experience like?**

"Flood Stories submission

Ten years ago, we bought a house in South Lismore. Yes, we knew it was a flood zone, but we couldn't really afford anything else and we also did our research – we spoke extensively to the owner of the property about the flood history, we checked the floor height. We knew the 1974 flood did not enter the top storey.

In 2017, the water had 60cm to go before it breached the floor. Then, I took the kids and evacuated because they were young, and I didn't want them to be scared. My partner stayed. All was good (muddy, but okay).

This time we elected to stay. We moved the cars to higher ground. We had food, bottled water, a plan for sewerage, gas for cooking, emergency power – we'd moved everything upstairs that couldn't get wet, and we were ready.

So we thought.

At 3am I woke and looked outside. The water was slowly creeping up the street at ground level. Then the text messages from the SES came thick and fast. Going to be 2017 level. No, higher. 1974 level. Higher.

That was the 'oh crap' moment. So at 4am, I woke the kids, tossed them a bag and told them to pack clothes and their special things. We moved everything from low shelves as high as we could, then from middle shelves. Then high shelves.

And in it came.

And it didn't stop.

Once it reached my calves, I knew we were in trouble.

By 6am we were up to our waists in the kitchen.

My 9-year-old daughter can't really swim. She was on the lounge as it was floating around the room. My son, my incredible 12-year-old, was so brave and calm and collected. He grabbed our three cats and put them on my bed as it was starting to float. He made snap decisions for all of us, like collecting phones and battery chargers. He comforted his sister, who was now on the kitchen bench as the water continued to rise. He sliced his toe as the kitchen started to fall apart and didn't complain.

We had to get out. It would have to be the roof. But the power had gone out and it was still too dark to climb.

Then the pets – we couldn't take them. What if someone dropped them out the window or off the roof? They'd be swept away and drowned. So my partner, with my son following him with a torch through waist deep water, brought me each cat one at a time and I shoved them through the manhole, left them food and water and prayed they would be okay. The ceilings are high, the roof is high. They can climb the rafters.

As dawn broke, we had to get out. The water was higher now – chest height – and not stopping. My partner went to step from the window onto the tank, but it had washed away.

What happened next was a blur. He threw our bags onto the roof. Then he lifted our son, who weighs as much as an adult, out the window so he could climb onto the roof. Then my partner passed our daughter up to her brother, who pulled her up. Then it was my turn.

I couldn't do it. I was exhausted and there was nothing to hang on to. I went in the drink and my partner pulled me back. The water was cold, and it was moving quick. My partner then tried to swim around the back of the house to climb onto the roof, but the water wasn't high enough yet.

In the end, I held a dining room chair out the window and my partner, who weighs 95kg, used it to climb onto the roof. Then he and my son pulled me up.

We spent four hours on the roof until being rescued. I shoved the kids under the solar hot water panels because the rain kept coming and it was cold. My son had sliced his toe badly and my daughter was freezing. A boat eventually came after I yelled out that we had kids with us. I sent my children to safety with strangers and my partner and I waited.

We eventually crossed the raging, swollen river on a jet ski.

Reunited with the kids but terribly worried about my kitties, we sought safety with friends.

Now, my kids are with their grandparents living a relatively normal life, my cats are being fostered by the most amazing family and my partner and I are sleeping on a mate's lounge.

We are fortunate. We have a rental to fall home while ours is being rebuilt.

What the future holds we don't know. There are many, many possible paths.

But we are alive.

How did people in your community respond?

Community were amazing, from those who rescued us, to those who took us in and all those who have offered support and provided us with what we need to begin to rebuild our lives.

### **What is your situation like now?**

We are preparing to move into a rental property while our house is being rebuilt

### **What are your feelings about what happened?**

I don't know. I'm not sure I have processed this yet to be honest. I have been in survival mode.

### **What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

My children's resilience and my partner's quick thinking.

When you ask where the Police, SES and Army were when it all hit the fan, have a look around..

When you ask why they didn't help the community....we are part of the community and we lost it all.

Name Anonymous

Postcode 2480

Where were you when it started?

North lismore and evacuated to Gbah on the 27th

How were you affected?

Our family was displaced, we lost our cat, my first pet, we lost everything we own, I am medicating with valium to keep calm.

What was your experience like?

"I have been a member of Lismore SES since October of 2017, seeing the devastation of that year's flood compelled me to help my community at a greater more skilled level.

On the Saturday with the warnings current and watching the weather situation worsen in Brisbane I did not want to be isolated in North Lismore not having lived there for a flood before, I Evacced my family and my dog with my partner, we reasoned if the water only came up to the predicted 10.6-10.8 we could go back and get our cat as he was high and dry and had plenty of food and water.

We stayed up all night listening to the rain that we have never heard in either of our lives terrified of what was happening in our house and watching countless flood updates and warnings and orders flow in.

I was classed as INACTIVE in December due to not being vaccinated before the mandate came in for SES members, I was not against the vaccine I just hadn't found time to do ot by the time the mandate rolled around, as a result I was on a bit of a hiatus until the morning of the 28th .

I awoke at 5am and took in everything I could from Facebook and messages from people and called a friend who was on his roof in south and tried to provide him with the best info to save him and his family.

By 8am I contacted my unit commander who told me to come and help evacuate our UNIT , it was going to go under

By 8:30 I did what alot of us do, I told my partner I loved her, kissed her and the kids, put on the little gear I had (ses jacket and a pair of trackies and the timberlands) and walked out leaving my family behind

By 9:30 I had helped evacuate the unit , moving vital equipment and records to higher ground including the personal possessions of the flood rescue techs already in boats and in the water.

By 9:30 I had travelled to ballina road launching area where we had been telling locals to launch their boats from.

I am not allowed in the flood water or boats etc as I am not adequately trained, this is important to note as it is a requirement that saves lives.

4 of us went to ballina road and I jumped in a boat with two big Fijians and a local boat operator and we went to grab a lady from Ewing Street. We removed the tin sheeting and removed the lady and two dogs and a chicken

10:30 we had ""docked"" at Ballina Road and I switched into another boat , transported people from Wyrallah road to ballina road

The next boat I jumped in had a fellow SES boat tech in it and we went across the river, the water was moving tremendously fast and strong. Now having an SES radio to take calls we removed 4 people from the station hotel, circles back to a call for someone trapped in hurfords building who was already being rescued by another SES member in a public boat.

We travelled through south and rescued a family from their house I'm not sure of the address there.

I was shivering head to toe all my clothes were soaked through. I called my day to go and get rest and confer with other members who were still going what I needed to do moving forward."

How did people in your community respond?

"The community response was unlike anything I have seen, they banded together from all areas to converge and help the other community members. Then when I got home the ses were the ones to blame for the devastation and suffering. It is what it is we have had members spat on and told to kill themselves, we take it in our stride, our job is to help and we always will. I don't like it but criticism is part and parcel in the social media age. The boat rescuers both emergency services and particularly the community are legends and the community owes them a debt of gratitude and respect.

### **What is your situation like now?**

We have lost our house and all our possessions and our kitty cat which is horrible but we are one of many, we are moving away we aren't prepared to do this again, as I write this I have already left the ses in lismore and am watching another major flood event take place.

### **What are your feelings about what happened?**

I don't really have words for that, I am just anxious all the time, my temper is through the roof. My partner and children are suffering. They aren't used to seeing or hearing about the things that I do

### **What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

Walking across North Lismore Bridge and just getting an eyeful of what was happening under our boats as we travelled through areas. The amazing community spirit. The generosity that was shown by our loved ones in our time of need.

### **Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?**

When you ask where the police and SES and army were when it all hit the fan, have a look around, it's not hard to find photos of us in the carnage, we are always there, we start days before and don't ever finish. When you ask why they didn't help the community....we are part of the community and we lost it all.

**Name** Christopher Sherring

**Postcode** 2486

**How were you affected?**

multiple friends and family affected

**What was your experience like?**

mix between dead and Mateship. dread of the magnitude of dangers & destruction. Mateship of strangers working with strangers to save the lives of other strangers.

How did people in your community respond?

relief and overwhelmed with emotion.

**What is your situation like now?**

I worry about the mental health of the community but particularly the boaties that risked their lives, heard the screams and couldn't help everyone.

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

Working with strangers to save the lives of other strangers was one of the most beautiful things I have ever witnessed. that aussie spirit of mateship, helping each other during adversity. was and is the silver lining in lismore's darkest days.

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

The eyes of a old lady who was too weak to speak or wave us down. She just looked at stared at us. We almost went past and thought she was flood debris

**Is there anything else you think is important you would like to add?**

I have served 15 years in the Military (Afghanistan) and emergency services. The extent of lives at risk and damage was far greater than anything I have witnessed. combined.

**Name** Michelle Lohse

**Postcode** 2472

**Where were you when it started?**

Home

**How were you affected?**

It come up really quick we got rescued by members of the community

**What was your experience like?**

Pretty scary .very hard a evacuation centre as they didnt have enough food

**How did people in your community respond?**

Some people were angry

**What is your situation like now?**

Renting a unit in Evanshead

**What are your feelings about what happened?**

Nervous with 2 floods. We felt pretty forgotten in the second flood

**What is the memory you think you will hold with you in 10 years?**

Evacuation centre pretty crazy

# “BOATIES” & BEYOND



## A citizen-led response to the North Coast floods

Prepared by: Dannielle Pickford & Sarah Moran

We listened to the stories of both rescuers and the rescued. This is what we heard.

We have gathered a list of over 200 citizens who entered dangerous flood waters as part of a citizen-led response to Lismore floods. We wanted to ensure these stories were captured not only to recognise the contribution made by “the boaties” but also to assist with formal inquiries and future planning. We surveyed 43 citizen rescuers and asked them to share their experiences before, during and after the Far North Coast Floods.

We created flooddiaries.com as a mental health response to the floods, as it was immediately apparent to us that there is a lot of trauma being experienced by the community - people needed to talk about what happened.

What is glaringly obvious to us is **there has been absolutely no mental health follow-up** with any of the citizen volunteers who entered the water as “boaties”. It is an oversight and neglectful to not follow-up with those in a volunteer capacity: **they need to debrief with professionals** and this should be built into the processes of emergency response, **not left to individuals to seek help**.

This research has been created for flooddiaries.com: a project led by Dannielle Pickford and Sarah Moran, two women deeply connected to Lismore. While our families were on rooftops and in flood waters, we were coordinating citizen volunteers on the ground with online requests for help. You can read the full story in our other submission: “Flood Diaries: A citizen response to NSW Floods through community storytelling” and our other submission “Flood Diaries: Community Questions”.

# Boatie Honour Roll

Recognising the bravery of  
citizen volunteers

## NEW SOUTH WALES FLOODS 2022

## Volunteer Honour Roll

This is a list we have gathered for flooddiaries.com, we are continuing to add more names as more people come forward with their stories. If you name has been left off, please email [flooddiaries@gmail.com](mailto:flooddiaries@gmail.com)

- Sophie Adams
- Clark Aleckson
- Troy Aleckson
- Henry Allan
- Todd Andrews
- Jason Archer
- Mark Armfield
- Tony Armstrong
- John Baily
- Col Baker
- Trenton Baillie
- Sarah Bale
- Travis Bale
- Lennon Bartlett
- Rosie Bartlett
- Brady Battese
- Damien Bebb
- Kym Bebb
- Craig Beck
- Phill Benfeild
- Benny Berry
- Anthony Bolland
- Robert Bolland
- Hayden Briggs
- Jason Britt
- Justin Burns
- Darren Butler
- Bryce Cameron
- Wal Cameron
- Eli Car
- Simon Ceglinski
- Jordy Chapman
- Daniel Clark
- Peter Clarke-Williams
- Rama Clinto
- Matt Codner
- Eli Colby
- Lachie Conlan
- Jackson Connellan
- Shane Costello
- Michael Crumpton
- Sam Curruthers
- Chris Daley
- Harry Daley
- Russell Dent
- Ethan Donnelly
- Steve Donovan
- Mitchell Dowse
- Ross Dowse
- Mitch Dunstan
- Jason Eastment
- Bradley Ellis
- Nick Elvish
- Craig Faulkner
- Luke Ferwerda
- Harry Fetell
- Jesse Field
- Laura Field
- Jarrah Fitz
- Mark Fowler
- Keith Francis
- Mark Frost
- Marley Galpin
- Derek Gellanty
- Reid Gosper
- Mark Goulding
- Corrina Grace
- Ian Graham
- Kev Graham
- Matthew Graham
- Ron Graham
- Jake Grey
- Peter Grobler
- Jackson Gwynne
- Graham Hancock
- Marcus Hannaway
- Cori Hardi
- Jeff Harris
- Mark Haselsberger
- Matt Hatch
- Ben Hawkins
- Jeff Herman
- Jake Hiscock
- Peter Hood
- Clarke Howat
- Josh Hunt
- Mitchell Hurford
- Joel Jensen
- Lachlan Jones
- Taama Jones
- Jacob Laurie
- Michael Lavis
- Stuart Lawrence
- Tom Leahy
- David Lewis
- Paul Lloyd
- Danny Lickiss
- Tom Lippett
- Daniel Macdonald
- Lachlan Macdonald

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- |                         |                    |                      |                        |                     |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| • Jason MacIntosh       | • Perry McPherson  | • Nick Organ         | • Adam Rodd            | • Callum Sivewright |
| • Rama Manzart          | • Sam McRae        | • Carl Paola         | • Nathan Rose          | • Mark Sivewright   |
| • Andrew Marshall       | • Adrian Melchior  | • Fletcher Patterson | • Ar Russell           | • Darren Slattery   |
| • Joe Martin            | • John Michell     | • Troy Pearce        | • John Russell         | • Craig Sloane      |
| • Vincent Marychurch    | • Torben Mikkelsen | • Ben Perry          | • Josh Russell         | • Luke Smith        |
| • Terry Masters         | • Ben Miller       | • Luke Pignat        | • Ryan Salter          | • Tom Snellgrove    |
| • Nigel Mateus Marshall | • Jonty Miller     | • Nick Pignat        | • Luke Sawtell         | • Gary Snow         |
| • Troy Mathews          | • Tom Moore        | • Sandro Pines       | • Bronson Schofield    | • Tim Somerville    |
| • Adam Mazzarella       | • Dee Mould        | • John Quinnell      | • Joe Scofield         | • Beau Squires      |
| • Robert Mazzer         | • Sam Morgan       | • Ben Rambo          | • Wade Scofield        | • Matt St-Laurent   |
| • Rick McCarthy         | • Melissa Morgan   | • Kurt Rayner        | • Brett Scotchmer      | • Jai Stafford      |
| • Ros McElligott        | • Brendan Morison  | • Jenni Richards     | • Paul Scotchmer       | • Dylan Steele      |
| • Christopher McEwen    | • Shaun Moss       | • Phil Richards      | • Nathan Seoddeb       | • Angus Steels      |
| • Ben McGregor          | • Brett Newton     | • Shane Richards     | • Josh Sharpe          | • Gay Steintal      |
| • Daryl McIntosh        | • Joseph Nicholls  | • Tom Richards       | • Andy Shaw            | • Kurt Stephens     |
| • Katelyn McKenzie      | • Jordan Nind      | • Aidan Ricketts     | • Pete Shephard        | • Daniel Stott      |
| • Lauren McKenzie       | • Scott Noble      | • Kudra Ricketts     | • Luke Sheridan        | • Jaala Stott       |
| • Connor McNamara       | • Rhyece O'Neill   | • Djerome Roberts    | • Christopher Sherring | • Zac Sullivan      |
| • Cameron McPherson     | • Mark O'Toole     | • Peter Robertson    | • Taylor Sidney        | • Nick Sutton       |
| • Clinton McPherson     | • Peter O'Sullivan | • Andrew Robinson    | • Luke Simeoni         | • James Thurgate    |

## NEW SOUTH WALES FLOODS 2022

## Volunteer Honour Roll

This is a list we have gathered for flooddiaries.com, we are continuing to add more names as more people come forward with their stories. If your name has been left off, please email [flooddiaries@gmail.com](mailto:flooddiaries@gmail.com)

- James Todd
- John Trapp
- Toran Underwood
- Tim Vakaahi
- Shaun Veitch
- Grace Wade
- Ben Walder
- Jordan Walsh
- Theo Walters
- Daniel Watt
- Josh Wellman
- Riley Wellman
- Tony Westbrook
- Maitland Whalan-Devine
- Nathan White
- Thomas White
- Jeff Wilkes
- Marshall Williams
- Michael Williams
- Joel Wilson
- Jayson Winmill
- Andrew Witchard
- Simon Witchard
- Shaun York

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

# Flood Boatie Survey

- Email Address
- Name
- Phone number
- What day/days were you involved with rescue efforts?
- What area/locations did you respond? e.g. East Lismore, South Lismore, Coraki, Ballina
- What type of boat/watercraft were you in? please describe size, capacity, motor size etc
- Was the boat yours? if not how did you access it?
- How much experience do you have as a boatie?
- Did you have available/use any safety equipment e.g. life jackets, radios. If so what?
- What means of communication were you using?
- Where did you launch your boat/watercraft?
- How many hours were you on the water?
- How did you find/ know where people needed rescuing?
- Could you estimate how many rescues you participated in?
- Did you participate in other essential things? e.g. food, water, fuel, medication drops, pet rescues, welfare checks, item recoveries etc
- Did you feel like your lives and those you were rescuing were at risk?
- What factors did you feel placed you most at risk?
- Did you come across any life critical situations?
- Can you describe how the day unfolded? or any situations you were in worth noting.
- Did you receive damage to your boat, home or any other property during the floods?
- What were your experiences with the emergency services personnel? SES, Police, FRNSW, ADF
- Have you received any help, counselling, or follow up after your experience?
- Is there anything else you would like to express to the inquiry?

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

# Our alignment of survey questions to the inquiry criteria:

- c. responses to floods, particularly measures to protect life, property and the environment, including:
  - i. immediate management, including the issuing and response to public warnings;
    - What day/days were you involved with rescue efforts?
    - Could you estimate how many rescues you participated in?
    - How many hours were you on the water?
    - What area/locations did you respond? e.g. East Lismore, South Lismore, Coraki, Ballina
    - Where did you launch your boat/watercraft?
    - Did you receive damage to your boat, home or any other property during the floods?
  - ii. resourcing, coordination and deployment, including with respect to the Australian Defence Force; and iii. equipment and communication systems;
    - What were your experiences with the emergency services personnel? SES, Police, FRNSW, ADF
- d. the transition from incident response to recovery, including the roles, structure and procedures of agencies, government, other entities and the community;
  - Did you participate in other essential things? e.g. food, water, fuel, medication drops, pet rescues, welfare checks, item recoveries etc
- f. any other matters that the inquiry deems appropriate in relation to floods.
  - Is there anything else you would like to express to the inquiry?
  - Have you received any help, counselling, or follow up after your experience?
- 2. And to make recommendations arising from the Inquiry as considered appropriate, including on:
  - a. safety of all emergency service personnel and community first responders;
    - What type of boat/watercraft were you in? please describe size, capacity, motor size etc
    - How much experience do you have as a boatie?
    - Did you have available/use any safety equipment e.g. life jackets, radios. If so what?
    - What factors did you feel placed you most at risk?
    - Did you come across any life critical situations?
    - Can you describe how the day unfolded? or any situations you were in worth noting.
    - Was the boat yours? if not how did you access it?
    - Did you feel like your lives and those you were rescuing were at risk?
  - i. public communication and advice systems and strategies.
    - What means of communication were you using?
    - How did you find/ know where people needed rescuing?

It is likely our questions align to multiple criteria, this is to be used as a guide only. We are not professionals at inquiry submissions, we are citizens connected to Lismore. We began this documentation immediately after the floods which was well in advance of the announcement of the inquiry and its criteria.

## How many hours were you on the water?

We approximate over 500 volunteer hours were donated from the 43 boaties, with an approximate breakdown of:

10 hours or less = 24 people	10-20 hours = 11 people
20-40 hours = 6 people	200+ hours = 2 people (over 2 floods)

## Could you estimate how many rescues you participated in?

Approximately 1079 human rescues were identified by the 43 boaties. There were some who said “too many to count”, and for some responses it’s not clear if they answered with a rescue as being an individual or an entire household.

Dogs, cats, livestock and many other animals were also rescued alongside humans. 6 medical needs patients were also relocated to Evans head to receive medication or treatment.

## How did you find/ know where people needed rescuing?

Guidance by those needing rescue, including people rescuing people they know (friends and family).

“A guy came to me at my home when he spotted my boat and desperately asked me to go save his family.”

## How did you find/ know where people needed rescuing? (cont.)

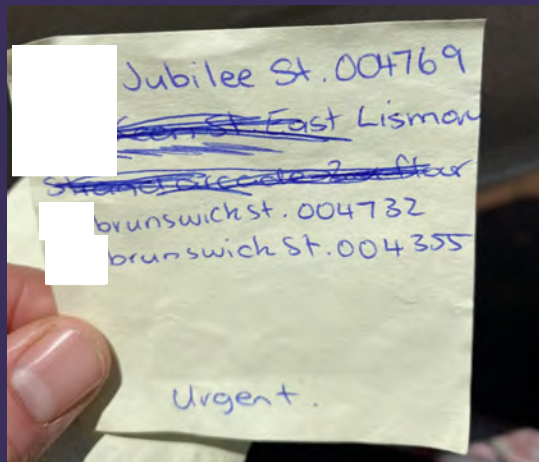
Phone calls  
SES beacon  
Local knowledge  
Forward command point / community coordinators

Line of sight:  
Listen for people screaming and crying  
SCREAMS FOR HELP  
People were flashing torches  
Driving around after crossing the river  
Word of mouth, on the water, from other boaties  
Jetskis were valuable in directing boats to people requiring assistance

“Lismore Heights Bowling Club SES said they were not liable for us going out. Two other guys at the bowls club came with me.”

When available, social media was used by the boaties, their wives and the rescued to coordinate rescues including but not limited to:  
Facebook,  
Whatsapp,  
“Boaty Boys” group chat,  
Facebook Community exchange

“I found people in need of rescue through Facebook posts and phone calls from my wife who was helping coordinate civilians.”



“Wife used social media.”

“My wife and Joe's wife (driver of the boat) were on Facebook then calling us with addresses to go to, or we just drove yelled out and listened.”

### How did you find/ know where people needed rescuing? (cont.)

“I was focused on rescuing my parents and Auntie but rescued at least 12 other people and 1 dog and 1 cat.”

“The work boat was saving around 10 ppl min at a time and the other ski boat I saved 5 people.”

“We had a forward command point coordinating efforts and local knowledge.”

“Obviously seen Neighbour's calling/waving for help from windows, roofs etc.”

“People were on their verandah flagging us down.”

“Spoke to my friend @ 2:30am who lives right near where I launched my Boat. We went house to house, street to street.”

“They were on roofs, and through Facebook.”

“Went to the first house asking for help. Then repeat.”

“By phone during the early hours of Monday, by people yelling out for us to save them and some people were flashing torches.”

### What day/days were you involved with rescue efforts?

Most boat volunteers responded the first day of the floods, many volunteered more than one day and some continued to volunteer until as late as the 7th March.

### What area/locations did you respond?

Locations included Ballina, Broadwater, Brunswick Heads, Bungawallbin, Coraki, Doonbah, Dungarubba, East Lismore, Gundurimba, Lismore, Monaltrie, New Brighton, North Lismore, Patches Beach, South Ballina, South Golden Beach, South Lismore, Wardell, Woodburn.

### Was the boat yours? if not how did you access it?

25 people owned their own boats used in rescue.  
 6 people borrowed boats  
 5 people were in a friend's boat  
 2 people purchased boats to go and rescue people  
 3 boats coordinated through SES, Brunswick SLSC & Evans Head SLSC  
 1 boat donated Brisbane Yamaha boat Marina.

### How much experience do you have as a boatie?

Only one volunteer said they had no experience. All boaties identified many years of boating experience, some with qualifications and certifications, others largely identifying they had "been around boats my whole life".

### Did you have available/use any safety equipment?

All 43 respondents had life jackets on board, most with enough for rescued passengers though not all. In these cases the rescuers gave their jackets to the rescued. Some had different sizes for children. Other equipment included bilge pump, E-pirb Flares, first aid kits, food, gas, hand held UHF radio, personal beacon, flares, red v sheet, helmets, mobile phone, paddles, oars, radio, rescue flotation devices, tow rope, knife, whistle, satellite phone, shoes, sunscreen, water, wetsuits, rope and pulleys and "trusty old ice cream containers to bail out the water every run".

### What means of communication were you using?

Despite most boaties having a mobile phone, most could not use them either due to no coverage or the phone being wet. When in use, mobile phones were used both for phone calls and social media communication, including Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.

Other means included radios, Surf Life Saving radio, listening on UHF radio and communication with sea supervisor.

Had to call out.

On the day just verbally.

AUDIBLE SCREAMS FOR HELP

Voice mainly

Talking to the other boat owners that were on the water

Yelling if people stranded in homes.

Verbal sight hand signals

Word of mouth from other boaties.

Yelling...waving...

# Where did you launch your boat/watercraft?

## FROM MY HOUSE

- It was tied up too my house when the water was rising, had bail out the water 3/4 times early morning to stay afloat
- It floated off its trailer in my front yard
- Of trailer in my driveway
- Driveway - 2 Stocks Street

## BROADWATER, BRUNSWICK HEADS, EVANS HEAD

- Broadwater outskirts
- Firstly at Broadwater then Wyrallah then Coraki
- Brunswick Heads
- 550 Woodburn-Evans Head Road, Evans Head
- About 4kms out of Evans head on the Woodburn road. Where the water started.

## LISMORE

- avondale ave
- Avondale ave, East Lismore
- Avondale Avenue
- B60 highway in Lismore. Roundabout off highway in Broadwater on Tuesday
- Ballina rd
- Ballina Rd
- Ballina road
- Ballina road first day then that got too busy so we launched beside Lismore Public School after that
- Ballina street traffic lights
- Ballina Street. Bruxner Hwy
- Beside My Car/Kmart Lismore Square
- Boat ramps and roads anywhere I could.
- Bright Street
- Corner Short St and Bright St East Lismore
- Diadem Street
- Diadem St
- Diadem street lismore
- Dunoon Rd north Lismore
- East lismore
- East Lismore,
- Lismore Square
- Lismore street's and south Ballina
- Mackenzie St, Lismore, Richmond St, Wardell, Fisheries Creek, Ballina and North Creek Rd, Lennox Head
- Nimbin rd.
- On Ballina road near the traffic lights
- Outside Lismore Square down from the Hospital
- Pound st and McKenzie st
- Top of Ballina rd Lismore
- Underpass on Ballina rd
- Waste management Lismore on Monday, Broadwater on tues
- Wyrallah Rd East lismore
- Wyrallah Rd near golf course and then high st for the 2nd event
- WYRALLAH ROAD

# Did you participate in other essential things? e.g. food, water, fuel, medication drops, pet rescues, welfare checks, item recoveries etc

- A large number of survey respondents said they did all of the above and more
- Delivering Fuel / carrying passengers from Woodburn to safety at Evans Head
- Pet rescue with owners
- Dropping people to evacuation centres after rescuing them.
- Pet rescues, rescued a lady in home palliative care and got her to hospital, done welfare checks for services, dropped business owners to their buildings and drove the T.V. news crew around to help get the story out
- Fuel and water couple of pets
- I was asked to take out a NBN camera man. The footage he took was broadcast many times after the flood on National TV.
- Rescued 2 cats
- Had 3 dogs one cat in boat
- We supplied food. A few pets saved. Welfare checks and Medicare and item recoveries
- 2 dogs
- Welfare checks
- Pet rescues and house checks
- After the water receded, I helped with clean up in Lismore Area CBD, Sth Lismore and Coraki
- Animal rescue
- Door knocking and welfare checks
- Food and Water drops, hay runs, item recoveries, pet rescues
- Fuel for boats, life jackets for people pet rescues
- I housed and feed 2 people and their 2 dogs for 2 days before the water receded enough for them to go to relatives.
- LOTS OF PETS
- We had people stay with us
- 2 water and food drops, 1 medicine drop and about 15 welfare checks.
- Plenty of pets even a blue tongue lizard
- I went and checked houses for people went and got generators, tents, food, supplies and bedding from houses, went to the IGA and filled my boat and took back to the evac centre
- Pet Rescues. Medication/Food drops to Coraki & Broadwater
- I took SES and Defence force to make checks potential injuries at houses
- Pet rescues x 10 dogs from animal holiday park and 2 horses. Lost a couple of cattle and x1 horse
- Yes welfare checks
- Food, water, fuel, medication drops, pet rescues welfare checks, item recoveries, recon.
- Did welfare check the next day for a previous Neighbour's relative, police were already there
- Pet rescues, supply drops of fuel, food, water, medical supplies
- A few pet rescues and item recoveries

# What type of boat/ watercraft were you in?



## BOATIE SURVEY

- 4.1 fibreglass boat with 25hp motor
- Quintrex renegade 420TS with F50 yamaha outboard
- 4.5 Mtr 30 hp 5-6 capacity
- Surf Lifesaving IRB. 3.7m inflatable rescue boat with 25hp outboard motor
- 4m quintrex 30 hp
- 6m, 50hp
- 12ft Punt with a electric motor and my brother/mate had my other boat 14ft V nose punt with a 25hp
- Stessi. 25 horse power
- 5m tinnie with 50 horsepower outboard
- 4.95tinny 60 Hp
- "Two boat. A 17 foot ski boat 5 person boat. 200hp
- And a work punt Ballina slipway 90 hp 15 ppl boat."
- 5m half cabin fibreglass boat, 85hp mercury
- Flood 1- Flood punt, bow loader. Small V hull tiller steer.
- Jet ski
- 3.6mt tinnie, 15hp Johnson, 3 person capacity
- 3.9m aluminium tinnie 25hp motor
- 3 person tinny, no motor, we used 1 kayak ore
- 4.6
- Fiberglass ski boat with 2.5 lit outboard
- Boat. 3.85 Quintrex Explorer. 25HP Yamaha 4 Stroke.
- 3.7m tinny with 15hp
- 60hp, 5meter high side, seats 6,
- Tinnie 3.5m /30hp motor
- 5.2 centre console quintex/ 60yamaha 4stroke
- 5m boat, 5ppl, 60hp
- Stacer 519 Seamaster. Aluminium tin is, 90 Horsepower, 5.19 meters.
- Pwc
- 15 foot high side tinny with a 40hp front steer
- Jetski
- Yamaha VXR 1800cc JetSki
- 12ft aluminium 4-5 people 18hp
- 4m tinny
- Tinny, 25hp, capacity 4-5 people. Second day I used a sit on top kayak
- 15 HP QUINTREX
- Inflatable rescue boat IRB. Around 30 hpr
- 4.3 aluminium boat - 60hp
- Fibreglass 4.5m runabout. 140hp Suzuki, capacity 5
- 18ft flat bottom crabbing boat. 40hp
- 4.5 m tinnie, 50hp outboard
- 14 foot tinnie with 40hsp motor
- "Day one 18ph mercury tinny, then a 30hp big tinny. Worked great.
- Day 2-3 15ph tinny. Too small engine and boat. "
- 3.5m tinny with 15hp motor
- 30 horsepower tinny

# Did you feel like your lives and those you were rescuing were at risk?



## BOATIE SURVEY

# What factors did you feel placed you most at risk?

- Power lines
- Rising water
- Hidden hazards
- The Current/unknown
- Trees and powerlines
- Underwater obstacles...
- The currents and the debris
- The river was so scary to cross
- strong currents, debris in water
- CURRENTS AND FLOW. FLOATING DEBRIS
- eddies and currents in floodwater
- The speed and force of the water.
- Conditions with rapids and debris
- The people we were rescuing panicking.
- Lack of communication from any authority
- Not knowing what was submerged and how deep
- Rising flood water at a fast increasing rate
- Young kids in boats and the speed of the water
- Water currents, debris in the water, power wires etc.
- Fast rising and running water. Submerged cars and objects
- The flow of water and not knowing what was under the water

- Overhead power lines, signs on sides of road, debris in water
- I was scared the whole time. There were no rules and no authorities but I also think that's why it was successful. Had authorities taken over it would have been deemed too dangerous and many more would have died.
- We hit 3 cars that were submerged as we were the first boat in Casino Street.
- Lack of fuel accessibility, we ran out, lack of communication lines
- Inherently dangerous environment, risks were managed as best as possible
- Strong currents in the CBD & River. Objects floating. Gas cylinders leaking.
- High current flow attempting to get close to the houses and other boats wakes
- Unable to see the dangers under the surface and boat motor was damaged as a result
- Rising flood waters, rapid moving water, unknown what was in water or under water surface
- Raging water. Cold (Hypothermia). Medical risk of old age lifting into the boat. Power lines.
- Unseen Debris, emotional people, rising waters, dangerous objects that had been moved by floodwaters

**“Most people requiring assistance had no or little boating experience, while they all followed directions it would have only taken 1 to panic and the outcome could have been different.”**

- Fast flowing water, items in the water both floating and submerged, electricity cables and gas bottles
- We hit 3 cars that were submerged as we were the first boat in casino st , all the debris, gas bottles

- Fuel and chemicals on top of the water. Gas bottles floating spewing out gas.
- Fast running water made rescues hard. I had a person who needed assistance to walk ,had to pull out a window while keeping the boat in position
- The debris and force of the water was unpredictable. Gas bottles venting down the street was pretty risky.
- Water rushing over levee walls, livestock, trees, underwater hazards such as concrete fence posts, snakes, large whirlpools, fast flowing creeks and rivers. Humans...
- The speed of the water moving around the buildings and trees and all the obstacles in the water. There was lots of debris in the water so we were constantly on look out
- Raging Flood waters, Debris and floating objects and animals, Live LPG cylinders extinguishing, Climbing into roof spaces and swimming in peoples houses looking for survivors
- Fast running water / lifting heavy wet animals & old people into boat / damage to throttle/ submerged cars & signs
- Definitely the speed of how quick the water was rising/running and the unknown of what was under the water when boating around.
- We had the boat overloaded as most households had 3 or more people and we didn't want to leave any behind so we took them all plus pets, the current was extreme and the objects under water with the water level always changing was an issue. Also when bigger boats started coming on the water that put out a huge bow wave they nearly sunk us.
- We were overloaded many times in strong current. Power lines were close and while shut off there was no way of being 100% sure.
- Lots of debris in the water. Much of it not visible or submerged. Navigation the streets full of water is nothing like driving the car through town finding 30 Caniaba St in a torrent of water while it's bucketing down rain isn't easy.

# Did you come across any life critical situations?



## SUMMARY OF LIFE CRITICAL SITUATIONS - BOATIES & CIVILIAN RESCUES

- 2 family houses completely ruined.
- Lost my home, had minor damage to my boats
- Yes all of the above boat broken & lost everything pretty much
- Boat is damaged
- Lost everything - got us and our friends out at 4 am then at 7 am they asked for boats so we went back and got the boat going and did what we could for 6 odd hours
- Motor damage on the propeller from hitting obstacles in the water and the motor was sucking in a lot of oil and petrol water
- My boat
- Some marks on my hull and bit of scrape on the motor
- We received major damage to our boat & also smashed my shoulder very bad.
- Propeller and prop shaft broken and bent from hitting submerged cars
- I hit a car or street sign in the boat, busted the drive shaft
- Boat damage from submerged objects. I lost around \$25k of personal tools
- "We hit a submerged truck (it floated up after we struck it) and the gearbox of the outboard started slipping for the rest of the day. The prop also sustained significant damage. My mate Sully has had to do his best whilst fishing since as the local outboard mechanics are either recovering from flood damage or booked out. The engine is barely serviceable.
- My home also had storm damage (not flooded). Water inundated the roof space. We have had part of the ceiling removed. We are still living with only 1 PowerPoint working in the house. We have no hot water or lights.
- A couple of dings and gouges...
- Boat still seaworthy though...
- Lost 3 houses to the flood plus 40 years of hard work renovating our home all our family history pictures all my tools welders air compressor and more
- We hit multiple items in water, ended up damaging engine and needing to be towed back.
- Damage to jetski, some minor cuts and abrasions, possible mental stress
- Damage to the prop from hitting stuff under the water, we also lost our business and vehicles
- Fair bit of damage to the boat and bent the prop
- I damaged my mates motor and required extensive parts
- LOTS
- Minor damage to the ski
- Millions of dollars lost in the Business
- Minor Prop damage.
- Minor water damage at home
- My workshop/business flooded I lost over \$200 000 and counting
- My work place went under twice at Beaufort.
- Prop damage
- Propeller damage only.
- Props damaged and replaced on service boats also the target bar was bent and the wheels fell off the trailer. The stopping and starting damaged the key ports.
- Very minor prop damage

# Did you receive damage to your boat, home or any other property?



## DAMAGE REPORT

- We saved 3 people whose boat turned over in the water
- My 1st Rescue was 5 ppl in a motel all those people had medical conditions
- All of them
- We got another elderly man off the hill near the cinemas where he has been swept from his home
- We rescued a lady in home palliative care and took her to hospital.
- Everyone you saved, people were up to their necks in 2 story homes
- 8 out of the 46 were life critical.
- We rescued a quadriplegic man & his wife from their home. The water was lapping the mattress he was laying on
- Entering houses that were full of water to look for survivors
- People were hanging onto gutters of houses roofs of buildings at one stage I had 7 people and blue healer dog in the boat
- A boat rolled in front of us in the current.
- Pulled a lady out of a house who was floating with about another foot of room until she was underwater and drowning
- I have no doubt that if we weren't there. Those people would have died.
- Casino Rd had a person stuck in the roof space with a dog! The person was floating face down in there flooded home when I eventually gained access through a removed roof sheet! I later found out it was Marge Graham!
- Most of the first 2 days were life critical 80% of the first day were dire. (70 people)
- We rescued a family from a roof cavity when we heard them banging on the colourbond and screaming for help water was at the gutter and still rising we kicked the gable end of house in and dragged out grandmother who was diabetic, daughter and young granddaughter.
- All day
- People stuck in their roofs. Live power lines.
- Anxious, hysterical stranded people on roofs in rising floodwaters
- We were helping the crew who were being directed by the helicopter, to where people needed rescuing from inside roof cavities. Eg. Removing home roof sheets to get people and animals out.
- Everyone I rescued
- I had an accident in the boat i hit a submerged log the boat and I got flung into the bank I was knocked out woke up in a fork in the tree and broke all my right side of my ribs had to be hospitalised
- We saved 3 people who's boat turned over in the water
- We got an elderly man from inside the Gollan Hotel where he was trapped as furniture had washed around and trapped him in his room.
- Frank St was at the crossroads convergence of two rivers and the amount of water flowing and moving was incredible! Inside the house were two elderly people in there 80's trapped! Had to disembark off the ski to save them!
- We rescued a quadriplegic man & his wife from their home. The water was lapping the mattress he was laying on
- Person holding two dogs with water to his chest. 17 Neighbours alerted us of him.

BOATIE SURVEY

Have you  
received any  
help, counselling,  
or follow up after  
your experience?

Yes  
16.3%



No  
83.7%

## BOATIE SURVEY

# Is there anything else you would like to express to the inquiry?

“8 weeks later still receiving treatment.”

“In a town that floods so often, there needs to be more rescue boats and higher places build for people to go to. The BOM was hopeless. Weather stations in catchment areas to read correct rain fall so we have time to evacuate people. A better warning system.”

“Communication between emergency services was hindered by a breakdown in the radio network.”

“SES and police response times.”

“The health of our Wilson/Richmond river and surrounding waters is the worst I’ve seen it and I’ve traveled up/down it my whole life.”

“Without community action on Monday the 28th this would have been without doubt a mass casualty event.”

## If it wasn't for locals and their boats many more people would have died.

Why I had to rescue my family and a dozen other community members? Why my and son and I had to risk our lives to rescue those stranded and trapped by rising flood water? Why the members of the Broadwater community weren't informed to evacuate? Why a reputable weather source like Higgins was not a priority source of local information relative to warnings issued? Why my family thought they were safe because of the levee banks in Lismore supposedly kept everyone safe? Why my mother and father and Auntie across the road had water up to their rooftops which they have never experienced before when they have lived in Broadwater for over 50 years? Why are my mother and father and Auntie now homeless and waiting for insurance to validate any sort of claim? Why hasn't there been greater government support for flood affected people? My mother and father are currently living in the shed on the property with no electricity and no hot water 10 weeks after the first flood destroyed their lives and everything they owned. Why I and my siblings are giving financial support to my mum and dad?

Had lots of people in waste deep water  
calling for help in South Lismore that  
I could not help  
- still see faces in windows.

"In my opinion there are some very difficult people in Coraki and comments made to the media are not necessarily true. A large amount of misinformation and anti-vax people created a lot of issues. The isolation that was created made people very unsettled, also people did not listen until it was too late when asked to leave. This compounded my response efforts.

It felt like people wanted to prove the emergency services wrong and then panicked when they realised there was no way out.

This was when the media broadcast out false and misleading statements stating that there was no emergency response at all. I personally was emotionally disconnected from the community and miss trust formed within the community. Channel 9 (the project) should be fined for a breach of community standards.

This news story below divided our community and has fractured the entire relationship within our town.

<https://youtu.be/ryKyr9HKfl>

They then returned and made this story,

<https://youtu.be/gMNAOI00q2A>

These destroyed the positive sentiment left in the town."

"SES more large boats. Or alternatively a team of properly trained boaties with adequate boats and safety equipment that are coordinated by rescue services.

Some of the people conducting rescues on the day did not have any consideration of the effect of their bow waves where having on other rescuers conducting rescues.

I seen one large boat driving around sight seeing while people sat on their roofs. "

"How was the born and ses so far out with the flood height we all went to bed at 1 am with 10.5 meters of water prediction 5 am it was at 13.8 wtf

Did Rocky Creek Dam break?

What is the real number of deaths?

So sick of all the lies

We the people just want the truth."

"The biggest issue was the lack of alarm for people when we were expecting it to breach at 5am... not 3am. A lot needs to be looked at in regards to this. All it would have taken would have been a car driving around honking its horn or a megaphone, and a lot more people wouldn't have needed rescuing and putting the rescuers lives at risk. A lot more lives would have been lost without civilians and their big hearts."

"With the Houses that can be still lived in. With Tin roofs they need to have a mandatory manhole which can be opened from the inside if people are in their roofs."

"I believe the SES need more equipment and more helpers."

"The community were very helpful & all banded together the best we could, there were a couple of thieves & a few heated moments between some people but in general banded together well."

"Houses needed to be checked properly before people were marked off as rescued as I pulled an elderly lady from her house after we smashed our way in after we seen her in more than neck deep water she had been marked off as rescued."

I watched the BOM river conditions during time of flooding, which gave a more precise time when levee bank overtopped. This information was probably not seen by community or communicated vigorously by Police, SES and emergency services and official media and flood officials. When levee bank topped during late night, early morning hours, people, especially the frail, old and uninformed did not know or move to higher ground before hand.

Unfortunately, this will be the case for all floods as most do not want to leave all they know. However, Emergency boats including Army, should be prepared to move and act on both sides of the river bank. In other words there needs to be an emergency assemble and departure point set up in Sth Lismore, including a secure high rise landing base for a helicopter. Conditions became dangerous for the initial inundation due to fast moving waters carry debris, but also electrical power lines, causing unknown problems, but also obstacles.

Therefore, a number of Emergency assembly points are needed. If this is not possible, then Emergency Services including Police and Army should station themselves at those departure places for rescuers, together and give advice, check for responsibility, insurance of further communication and assistance to rescuers and victims.

"Where was all the help from Government emergency services! It was way too limited!"

"Lots to learn... I'm sure there will be heaps of great suggestions..."

"I don't like being called a cowboy by Steph Cooke for helping out our community, I believe she was just trying to cover her own backside for failing Lismore

Next time I feel the majority of us will ignore State SES (not local) particularly in view of their uninformed derogatory remarks and get out and help sooner.

It's obvious that without the community's response the death toll would have been disastrous."

"We had a significant civilian response in action from Mon 28 onward. ADF and FRNSW operators were frustrated with not being engaged by the combat agency SES and some of them joined our civilian efforts in plain clothes on their days off and we very much appreciated that.

NSW Emergency Services Minister's attitude to volunteers in boats, overall the state and federal government response was dismal.

There needs to be mental health assistance and government recognition for the boaties actions."

"The lack of support and help since the flood to local businesses such as ourselves is shit house, we are now 9 or 10 weeks on (I've lost count) and still I have not received a cent from the government for our business.

We are still trying to keep our 22 staff employed and help locals in our community rebuild. It's not good enough. It has been locals helping locals from the start, but we are all getting worn out and the government needs to stop talking and announcing new grants if they can't even come good on the first ones they have announced."

"I have no issue with SES volunteers or members from agencies on the ground that were helping.

My issue is with paid bureaucrats in SES that prevented assistance at the time of flood. After the flood, responsibility lies with the 'Resilience' sector which seems equally ill-equipped to handle the situation. (Another level of bureaucracy).

I have no faith that things would be any better if they happened again. Too many bureaucratic levels are involved which prevents action."

"With the public did amazing things."

"Do not allow residential development in flood plains."

"I pray to god this situation NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN!!!!!! It was the most traumatic thing I've done in my life."

"How was the BOM and SES so far out with the flood height we all went to bed at 1am with 10.5 meters of water prediction 5 am it was at 13.8 wtf?

Did Rocky Creek Dam break?

What is the real number of deaths?

So sick of all the lies. We the people just want the truth"





Can you  
describe how  
the day  
unfolded?

or any situations you were in  
worth noting...

“Madness”

“RATHER NOT”

“Lack of emergency services.”

“Very eye opening. Was a crazy day didn’t stop.”

“No fuel/ 2 stroke available to do what we needed to do.”

“My boat & my mates rescued around 100 people & delivered heaps of supplies.”

“Police and SES told us not to go across the river to South and North Lismore.”

“It gradually got worse as the day progressed! A frightening day I’ll Never forget.”

“Words do not describe the efforts of the boaties, saved the day from total disaster.”

“Horrendous, scary, frantic, disturbing and dangerous with limited outside communication.”

“When it was over I felt like I had been to war,  
the screams and hurt in people is something I  
will never forget.”

“I rang the police to see if we could go and help people at 6.30 and were in the water by 7.00am.”

“First thing Monday morning we had Mixed reports of SES putting a call out for assistance with boats, so I loaded my boat up, picked up some mates who had some local knowledge and went to check it out. The next 2 weeks were spent with long days, lots of mud and sweat, helping strangers go through their homes and possessions throwing the majority of everything they own away!”

“Cold and wet. Quite busy on the water too with Lots of other boats helping especially on Ballina Road.”

“Awoke at 3 am. Conditions were getting bad. Luckily one of the 3 plans we had in place was my 2 4x4s parked high in KFC car park at 4 am a small vehicle drove through the flood waters on Ballina Road so I used that as a calculated. And we got the 4x4s and got us all out Yes lost everything got us and our friends out at 4 am then at 7 am they asked for boats so we went back and got the boat going and did what we could for 6 odd hours.”

“It was all just a frantic race to save as many people as I could. Nothing else mattered that horrific day.”

"I had had surgery on my hand about a week ago a mate called me up and said people need help he came over and helped me get the boat ready and we went out looking."

"We were at an evacuation centre we felt inadequate so we called friends they were only too happy to take us in and my daughter son-in-law 3 boys under 10 then they rescued son x 3 dogs 1 cat."

"Got everything packed up at home the day before preparing including getting my punt ready, Basically didn't sleep all night watching the torrential rains come down, already had the boat tied up to the house that I prepared during the night, got too about 3 or 4 o'clock and started packing the families essentials, the water was rising at incredibly fast rate compared to 17 flood and from about 5/5:30 started getting my family out and then continued to about 12/1 o'clock getting various people/pets out throughout my general area."

"We had a plan most days which changed frequently during the day as emergencies with most priority overran our plan."

"There was no one like SES, the army, police, anyone to assist the residents in Broadwater where flood water rise in a phenomenal rate.

I had to drive the back roads to access Broadwater to save my family and other community members that were left stranded."

"It's worth noting that I had to pull a single mum and her children out of a roof cavity after the SES had told her to get in.

It was a tin roof with no way out and water 400mm from the manhole. If the water was just a little more higher we would have found a lot of people drown in their roof space."

"After receiving a call for help from a friend I rallied with a friend and we launch the boat and started getting people."

"The water came up so fast and with no warning. No siren, no alarms, no one going around and alarming anyone to wake up and evacuate. We had just evacuated our own house, and could hear many calls for help. We got our parents evacuated, and then couldn't not go back and help."

"Constant unrelenting rain, the desperation of people yelling out for help, the community response by all involved was inspiring."

"Went to Lismore Heights Bowls Club for direction as heard on radio, met two guys who said they would come with me to help. While hooking boat up a guy pulled up at my driveway and desperately asked please can you go save my Family, he gave us coordinates as to where they were (Gundurimba), so we put boat in at Diadem St and started to head out but twice "cry's for help" at Station Hotel, South Lismore, so we rescued 2 lots of 5 people and then we saw more boats in the area so we then headed to Gundurimba where the water was horrendous/ like rapids flowing sooo fast very difficult to navigate with safety.

Got to Gundurimba saw helicopter pulling people out, I gave helicopter pilot thumbs up and he returned thumbs up back and pointed down the river, where we headed more further down and saw a house with a kayak on top of the roof, with people waving for assistance, so made our way over to them and attached boat to house 15 people boarded the boat plus 3 dogs and 2 cats (already overloaded ) had to leave two people behind. Made trip up the river which was very difficult with flow of water saw farmers on other side of Gundurimba waving I waved back headed towards them dropped off with them saw two boats coming down river told them they were still two people at this house and one of the boats headed to get them.

Then I headed to the house with the coordinations from the guy who pulled up at my driveway to help his family, when we got there there was 10 people and 1 large dog which boarded with difficulty ( to dangerous to leave anyone behind).

Had trouble with boat getting back with current and debris under the water, but got back eventually with everyone safe ( thank god ) never want to do that again!"

"We were boarded by 2 Police Rescue operators who had no brief from their superior - just get in and help. Pol radio and their intel was proving fruitless, so they ended up agreeing to continue with following leads from my wife via social media and phone calls which is when we found the lady who was nearly drowning."

"We had a quadriplegic man on his mattress in our boat heading towards Evans Head. The rain was still pouring down, the lights of the motor vehicles coming to pick up the people that had been rescued was reflecting on the water which made it very hard to see anything at all. As we came past the entrance to the sand quarry which had very high fences along the road, it funnelled the water and caused quite a big cross current that we couldn't see. We hit a telegraph pole & straining wire that nearly tipped the boat at about 4:30am on the 1st March."

"28.2.22 Started with recon 6:30am then realised how bad the situation was and launched the boat, stayed on the boat until 21:30 at night, up again and on the river at 6:30 and stayed on the boat until 20:30. Back on the boat the next morning at 9:30 stayed on the boat traveled Bungawalbin Creek 6 hours return to yellow crossing with food and water. Again the next day with 2 boats to push past the crossing for medical drop. Then again with the army the next day to ensure all houses along the river were cleared and found person requiring assistance. It goes on and on for 13 days. And for another week in the second flood all the while my house was 2.5m underwater I have a wife and 3 kids. But that was the bulk of the emergency rescues."

Can you describe how the day unfolded?

“We started off getting yelled at by a police officer then finally got the boat in the water and just didn’t stop till we had motor trouble.”



"I had been talking to a good friend in Caniaba St since 2am. Not long after 7.30 an urgent message had me launching the boat heading to pick him and his partner up. We didn't make it far.

Our 1st rescue of the morning was actually our most challenging. We had launched at the roundabout just down from Lismore Golf Club on Wyrallah Rd.

We motored past the East Lismore shops heading for Caniaba St. We had travelled barely 100m from our launch point when an elderly chap waived us down from his front porch at Esmond st.

Vic, a lovely chap in his 70s. He wasn't worried about himself but moreso for his special needs neighbour. She was trapped in her unit behind the house next door, Esmond St.

We loaded Vic into the boat and motored around the side of the house next door. The water was a meter below the gutters on the little granny flat.

I left my partner, (Nicole) at the controls of the boat and jumped in the water.

Luckily I landed directly on top of the colourbond fence which gave me some footing. After getting over the shock of the freezing water, I swam around to the side door but it was under water.

The only way in was through a window in a back room near where I had entered the water. I had grabbed some tools before launching so smashed the window with a hammer, cleared out the glass and gingerly swam in through the window.

I found Jo Johnson floating on some lounge cushions holding her phone to the ceiling. She had been calling for help since 6am.

It was 8:30am when we found her. I wrapped a life jacket around her and floated her out through the same window I had entered.

Her eyes lit up as she cleared the house and grabbed Vic and Nic's hands.

Jo insisted she couldn't leave without her cats so I went back into the house twice to grab her cats.

We couldn't get Jo into the boat and had no option but to slowly tow her to safety.

We left Jo and Vic in capable hands and continued our trek to Canaiba St.

I followed an SES boat across the main river from the Eastern side of the Ballina Rd bridge to the railway station.

We made it to the first house in Kyogle St and picked up 5 people from 2 houses plus dogs cats and chickens.

We were overloaded in strong current...I turned and looked across the road to Engine St and could see a family bashing on the window screaming for help.

I had to drive away. I will remember that feeling for ever. I just couldn't save them.

By the time we dropped off our boatload they had been picked up which made me feel a little better. It took us a further hour to get to Caniaba St.

Our friends had been picked up thankfully. The rest of the day is a bit of a blur.

I don't remember all the people or houses, I do remember a family of 8 who lent me a jumper as I was freezing, and their boy wouldn't leave without his block of cheese to snack on.

I don't really want to ever have to do the day again, but if needed I would do it in a heartbeat."

"Went to SES HQ but they were evacuating to Lismore Heights bowlo.  
I went there as they were trying to set up...  
I helped getting power leads etc.  
Then the power went off...

Decided to go home and re assemble my tinny which I had been repainting...  
Ran engine for about 5min.  
Hitched up and drove downtown along Ballina Road...  
Was waved off left into Dibbs St.and turned down Bright st.  
Waited for 3 other boats to launch.

A fellow named Jimmy volunteered to help me...I would not have been able to do what I did without him... forever grateful...

Launched without knowing where we were heading...

While cutting across yards towards Ballina Rd. the fuel hose pinched and we lost power...  
Thankfully was a quick fix...

Got to Ballina road and turned left...  
Followed other boats to the Ballina St bridge but as I approached we were swept over the guardrail on the southern side .

Somehow untangled the boat and lined up for pick up...

Quite a few waiting so we took three adults and a couple of bags of belongings.

Realised as we were dropping them off that the boat had been quite low in the water and only picked up two on the second trip.

Ran over a submerged street sign just past the roundabout on Wyrallah road.  
Somehow prop stayed on !

There were so many boats waiting that we manoeuvred up to a tree growing in Heritage Park and hung onto branches until there were fewer boats on the bridge.

Third pick up was a larger lady, quite a big dog and a couple of bags...

As we departed I hooked us up on what I think was another street sign...  
As this happened the cable steering snapped and I lost control of the boat...

Thankfully a large punt (coming back from South Lismore I think), saw me waving and came to our aid.

We tied up short on our 'Parramatta rope' painter and I guided our boat by sitting on the bow and fended off their outboard with my feet... Very experienced crew on the other boat got us safely back to the Second Ave. drop off.

The Fijian crew helped unload our passengers and another boatie towed us back to Bright Street.

I thanked Jimmy for his brave and skillful assistance and headed home.

"As earlier mentioned, the lack of 'rules' on the first 2 days is what made it successful. We did not have to wait for clearance or permission.

Family and friends were sending messages locations to rescue people who had there calls to SES/police ignored. At the same time people were setting up evacuation centres and collecting donations. All happening without government or official approval.

The whole episode restored my faith in humanity and community!!

Unfortunately, I now have distrust of government. Without going into detail, there were multiple fatalities witnessed but for some reason, the death count is at 6. All involved know this is not true but I don't understand how this can be covered up the way it has. I don't understand why no one speaks about it or journalists have not looked into it....

Later in the week (Thursday) we had finished a day cleaning Wardell when a huge flat-bottomed Police boat showed up on a truck with police in wetsuits ready to go. They didn't even get it off the trailer because there was no need for a boat at this time - all efforts were dedicated to cleaning on land. The officers walked around in their wetsuits just looking embarrassed.

Earlier in the week everyone was asking who could get access to a boat like this as there were areas that were only accessible by jetski because of shallow water combined with strong currents which our boats could not get through. Maritime services had a similar boat (which my colleague has access to as a Maritime services volunteer). He was told that boat was only to be used for ocean rescues and was not to be deployed 'up river'. Both days we had to drive past that boat tied in the river being un-utilised.

On this same day in Wardell, there were 2 truck loads of army personnel that only got out of their trucks to stretch their legs. Not their faults - someone above had not yet given them orders, even though they could see work that needed doing....This inactivity of ADF continued in the following days."

Launched Boat @ 4am &  
just did what I had to do.  
Didn't let anything  
bother me. Trying to rip  
open Tin roofs with Boat  
anchor & Yabbie Pump.

I went into work on the ski to see how bad it was

I turned the ski off to cry  
and heard people screaming for help

Not even thinking people were stuck on and in roofs  
The next 2 days went on from there  
Families with young kids stuck on roofs  
Fear and relief in their faces

# What were your experiences with the emergency services personnel?

SES, Police, FRNSW, ADF etc



Poor  
 AMAZING  
 I had nil  
 None really  
 Had no issues  
 Nothing really  
 Completely professional  
 A hindrance no help at all  
 They were wanting us to help  
 Everyone was just doing there best  
 The ones I spoke with were helpful  
 Frustrating, no leadership from anyone  
 Only contacts were police at evac center  
 No real interaction with any of these groups...  
 They were doing what they could in an organised manner.  
 Ses were helpful. Police were not and didn't see anyone else  
 Didn't really engage, took initial directions to launch boat  
 No experiences. No emergency services were obviously available  
 Seen 1 SES tinnie with 2 operators on board and 2 police boats.  
 The police were very helpful and accepted the help of the public  
 We didn't see one SES member rescuing in our area. Only civilians.

“Unorganised, no leadership, no communication, minimum boats, people and experience. However, heroic and unselfish.”

“Police & Army were great. Had a couple of minor problems with SES.”

“SES helped us refuel the boat. And the police were Nice on the second day.”

“SES just said they had no responsibilities with us going out to rescue people.”

"There was no ses they had one boat and no people told to stay at home because they had not been double jabbed. No police seen except for blocking access to roads"

"The emergency services were no help what so ever. They just did their own thing and left the boaties to organise refueling of boats, triage victims, medical and food drops. Any time we did see the SES they were cruising around with an empty boat. Crazy."

"The first 2 days on the water they were severely out-numbered by civilians and were very grateful..

Most of the time they were looking to us for advice which was a good thing that they were honest about not knowing the area, chain of command, priorities etc.

They had been shipped in from other places with little guidance as well. A few times I asked advice on how best to approach situations and they just said do what I thought was best which was a great approach (no rules).

One police told me 'Don't ask for permission, just beg for forgiveness' Which meant smash windows, rip off rooves, do whatever it takes to rescue people. I appreciated the advice and support.

The following days were very slack from those agencies (except fire) who we did see helping in South Lismore in first days of cleanup.

Lots of animosity from community towards the paid SES hierarchy and army for not helping sooner. This was apparently because they needed to assess the risks before sending in help.

Army can enter a war zone but not a flood????T

his was not the armies fault, SES had to give them clearance to enter.

Civilians did all the heavy lifting in those first few days. To see the Premier on the news saying he was advised that it was too dangerous to send the ADF in sooner was embarrassing.

Both days on the boat were raining but there was no wind. Calm and eerie. No reason why helicopters/boats could not have been deployed."

“Police told us not to enter water as we would be hindering the situation. I didn't see them jump in a boat and save any anyone.”

"I spoke to 2 of them, both I personally know from being with Fire Rescue NSW."

"They were on hand to help and did everything they could with the limited numbers they had."

"My father is in the SES and had great dealing with them police were very hard to deal with."

"After the flood only the ADF were fantastic helping me clean some rubbish in front of my house."

"Personal contact with SES and Police was great, we were all there to do a job and we got on with it."

"I felt supported as much as possible from SES police and FRNSW, ADF were supportive and well received. It was a very stressful situation with limited access, equipment and staff."

"During the main few days of rescues we did not see any SES, police or anyone of authority until a couple of days later when SES/police were trying to stop boats from entering the water to check on their properties."

"Police were great/army were slow at start but then ended up doing heaps very helpful/fire dept were great/ yes we're not very well organised & very under staffed but did the best they could in s very difficult situation."

"I only seen two SES boats and one was busy taking photos instead of saving people. So they copped a good mouthful from me. Police were doing what they could. Some SES personal on ground were helping us get people out of boats to safety."

"SES tried their very best and they are just volunteering like we were, the police were great the first day then got a bit frustrating as the days went on, I did not see any ADF on the water where I was in Lismore and did not come across them until we were in the clean up days later. Not the ADFs fault they couldn't have known or been prepared for what happened."

"The police made my job hard as I launched in Diadem Street but ended up at Ballina Road with the boat and need to put it back on my trailer to drain all the rainwater out so i got a lift to the car and trailer and went to Ballina Road to drain the hull only to be stopped by police no amount of explaining helped so had to go behind St Vincents and re launch there."

"Police were helpful, SES seemed a little out of their comfort zones, but I can't blame them they are volunteers. I've volunteered for over 10 years in Western Australia's Fire & Rescue. Totally understand."

We ignored SES throughout the day after they criticised us for following social media intel.

Not long after we saved the lady who was nearly drowning.

Police Rescue boarded our boat and after they realised Police Radio was reporting on jobs that civilians had already actioned, they agreed to follow our intel and we worked really well together.

# Flood Diaries: Boatie Stories



Nick Elvish

## Friends were paddling to me on surfboards

I woke up on Monday around 7am via a phone call from my brother saying it was flooding, we were all expecting it to flood but it was already worse than predicted and the power was out.

I live on James St, we got up and walked around outside to Dawson St to look where the water was, the water was already higher than last flood 2017, and the one previous to that...

There was a lot of people panicking on the street, a lady approached me and asked if we had a boat because people were trapped in their houses and needed help.

My friends who live on Dawson St had already gone under and were paddling over to me on surfboards with a few of their possessions.

Knowing that they were okay I went back around the corner to home to talk to my housemate about using his boat.

We both have boats mine is a larger fibreglass boat and my housemates is a smaller aluminium boat around 5m that was already parked on the street. On the way home another person actually approached us and asked about the boat on the street.

We deliberated a little about whether we should go or not and which boat to use and then after seeing a post on facebook about SES requesting people with boats to help we decided to go.

They said to go to the SES centre and a SES person would accompany us in the boat with rescues. The SES centre is all the way on the other side of town towards Bangalow. My housemate and I are both experienced boaties so we didn't bother trying to make it all the way there, we just launched the boat on the street around the corner from my house because Dawson St was not accessible as it was full of cars and caravans parked in the middle of the street.

We started on Dawson St and it straight away it was apparent that there was many people that needed help, on Dawson St alone we rescued probably 15 people.

It was difficult to know where to begin so we just started at the first house we saw that was yelling for a help. It was a group of about 5 teenagers on a roof. At this point it was still raining so we told them to be careful about slipping off the roof because the water level was not up to the roof it was quite a drop down to the boat level.

We helped them down, we basically had to catch them as they sat on the edge of the roof and jumped off into the boat.

We dropped them at the end of Dawson st at high ground. We spent the next couple of hours just driving up and down each street in our neighbourhood ferrying people to higher ground that were asking for help. There were several people who were still in their houses but didn't want to leave.

There was another elderly lady on Dawson St that was particularly difficult to get into the boat because she wasn't easily able to climb into the side of the boat, it took all three of us to help lift her in.

After a couple of hours of doing this we were both saturated and cold so went home for a break and some food and I swapped positions with my other friend (whose house was flooded) and then they went out doing more rescues. We took turns doing this so someone could have a break for most of Monday.

After all the obvious people that needed rescuing were taken to higher ground we spent a while at the bridge near the skatepark. By this point there was a lot of other boats. The bigger boats who were able to go over the main river were dropping people onto the bridge from houses in North and South lismore and a lot of smaller boats where ferrying them from the bridge to the hill above the traffic lights.

We did a lot of trips of people here. At one point the SES refuelled our boat for us at the drop off point.

All the time on a facebook group I was on there was constant messages about can someone check this address or whatever.

After the majority of the people yelling out for help it wasn't as easy to find people so I posted my number on facebook and just said anyone needing a rescue message me your address.

Even so it was difficult to find the right houses because all the street signs were under water so I was trying to use google maps to navigate to the houses but was hard to do in the rain.

We eventually decided to cross the main river which was okay and afterwards went to a lot of houses in North and South.

On Facebook we were hearing a lot of posts about people trapped inside their roofs and unable to get out so we got some tools from home incase we needed to take a roof sheet off so 12v impact drivers and some sockets and a hammer.

I got one message from my Facebook post, a lady was particularly worried about her uncle and auntie in the roof at a house on Union St and hadn't heard from them for hours so, at this point I was home but I rang my housemate who was out on the water and told them the address they went to it and banged on the roof to see if someone was in there but they must have already got out because no one responded I let the lady know so she was relieved.

I guess to summarise we were out for the majority of Monday and some of Tuesday on and off, Monday at least 6 hours in the rain rescuing people. The most dangerous aspect was helping them off the roof down to the boat and dodging obstacles in the street with the boat.



Several times we had to go under powerlines. My housemate hit several things and did a bit of damage to his boat but nothing major.

I was shocked how many people were still in the houses... As soon as we launched the boat in the morning the first street we went down Dawson Street it was obvious it was going to be a long day

At least 30 people from individual houses, a few cats and dogs and then another 15-20 from the bridge to the traffic lights.

Mark Armfield

I was lost I  
couldn't get the  
screams out of  
my head.

No one could get hold of SES or 000  
through the rescue stage.



I spent 14 hours on the water Monday, Tuesday. Then Wednesday, Thursday Friday I started helping people with generators and gennies in North and South Lismore, then Saturday and Sunday in Coraki.

They didn't have a boat.  
So they bought this one  
from Gumtree.



“The worst thing was going out there and not knowing, without any tools to get into roof cavities we were only able to save the people on top of their houses.”



Boaties:

Michael Williams from East Lismore Automotive  
Cameron McPherson from South Lismore Automotive  
Perry McPherson from McPherson Mobile Mechanics

As told to: Stephanie Cordery

Just before 5am, their phones blew up with desperate messages from a friend with family stuck in flood waters. They didn't have a boat, so they turned to Gumtree to find one.

Dropping \$3500 on a trusty tinny, Michael Williams from East Lismore Automotive, Cameron McPherson from South Lismore Automotive and Perry McPherson from McPherson Mobile Mechanics were "driving" through flooded Lismore at 6:15am.

The local business owners set off to save their friend Chris Churchill and his family. On the way they found a 75 year old woman on top of her campervan who they returned to safety. These men were not part of the SES or rescue services and entered the flood zone in a boat they'd bought 30 minutes before.

They faced a choice nobody should have to make: who to rescue first and who to leave behind.

**"Going down Clarice street we could see people banging on their windows screaming for help but I purchased the boat to save Chris and his family so we had to get to them," Williams said.**

**"Chris had to save our neighbours from the home next door first as the house was lower and they couldn't swim. So he chunked an electrical cord over to them and bought them over to the house," Aimee Churchill shared.**

It was close to 8am when they arrived to find Chris, Aimee and their child. When the boat arrived Michael, Cameron and Chris remained on the roof so that Perry was able to get the women and children in the boat and to safety before returning to collect the men.

"I don't want to think about what would have happened if they hadn't showed up. They pretty much saved our lives," she said.

Their own business underwater, they didn't think twice before purchasing a boat and risking the flood waters to collect people desperate for help holding onto gutters or stuck on their roofs with the water still rising.

Up to 50 people and animals were rescued by Cameron, Michael and Perry. They were one of the first citizen boats to arrive and only had half a tank of petrol when they got in the water. They continued rescues throughout the day, filling up a litre of fuel at a time shared from other boats as others started to appear to help with the rescue.

The McPhersons are local to the area and the family suffered massive loss during the flood. This family and their leadership are longstanding assets to the Lismore community.

Cameron was former school captain of Lismore High School, and he still plays a leadership role within the town. He organised huge speakers on Anzac Day during the COVID-19 pandemic to play the last post from the highest point in Lismore that could be heard for kilometres so that our veterans would not be forgotten.

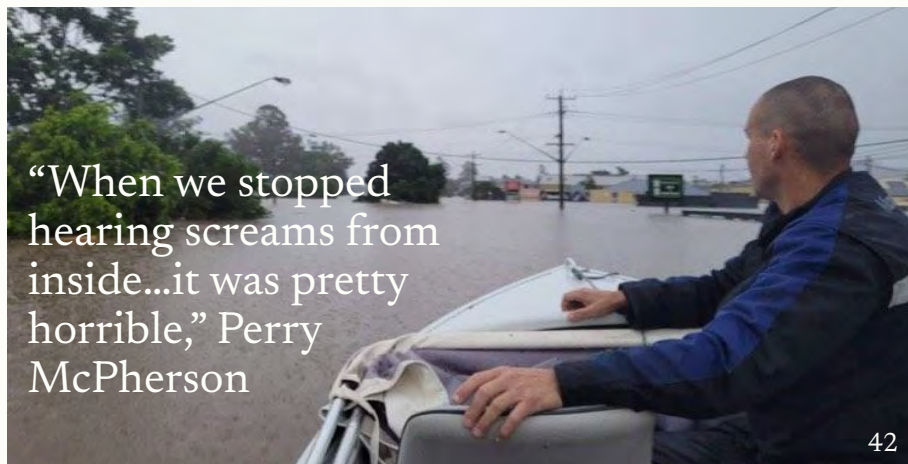
Not only do Cameron, Mel and their son Curt need to totally rebuild their workshop at Southside Automotive, his brother Grant at Maccas Mechanical (on the corner of Ballina Road and Diadem Street, near where the boats famously entered the water) had his business underwater to the roof after new renovations. Their parents lost their 3 rental properties in Union St, Cook St and on Wyrallah Rd. This is a terrible blow to the family after the 2017 floods had already impacted them and after so many years of hard work.

Michael Williams, locally known as “yobbo”, and his wife Leah and 3 children were also impacted by the 2017 flood and had to totally rebuild. He was proud to have 8 customers turn up to assist with the clean up of his business. He is actively involved in the community after 12 years in business at East side Automotive and being heavily involved in Mixed Martial Arts.

Carolyn Coulter had handed her own children Patrick and Isaac and their neighbours child over to Cameron, Michael and Perry in the “Gumtree boat”.

“I handed my children over to total strangers, when else would you do that? We didn’t know how long we would be on the roof and the feeling of relief I felt was unimaginable. We were all rescued by private boats. There was no SES in South Lismore.”

She is hoping that reuniting with her and her children’s rescuers, along with connecting other flood victims with the local heroes who saved them will help them start to grieve.



“When we stopped hearing screams from inside...it was pretty horrible,” Perry McPherson

Ben Perry

# They told us not to go across the river - fucken assholes.

Nick Organ and I headed off from Stock St, East Lismore around 7:15am on Monday. We rescued people in East Lismore dropping them back to my house and also Avondale Avenue.

There was lots of debris and with the rain pissing down it was hard to hear clearly. Loud screams and people yelling.

Hectic times very scary to be honest. I had people I personally knew in North and South Lismore that I wanted to get. SES and police were non existent and when we seen them they told us not to go across the river - fucken assholes.

I returned home after 3 hours because we ran low on fuel and also my house was going under. Joe and Wade Scofield then went with Nick to South Lismore to rescue family. I know for a fact they saved a family of 3 from certain death in Ballina Rd. Between us we rescued around 15-18 people.

## We rescued a couple from the CBD near Dawson St that were in serious danger



I know Vinny Marychurch was going all day in South Lismore.

One thing I noticed was there was lots of guys just cruising around in boats sight seeing, the wankers.

We also went for the Tuesday and Wednesday in the boat looking for people and taking people back to their houses in South and North Lismore.

Nick Organ

# The whole thing was traumatic for us and people we were rescuing.

Between 7 and 8 am me and my mate Ben (Perry) went out in his tinnie originally to rescue our mates dad who was stuck over in South Lismore.

We knew that this flood was nothing like any flood we had experienced before because my mate Ben's house in East Lismore never had water coming up his driveway.

We put the boat in at Ben's house half way up his driveway because it was deep enough. As we were heading out we didn't get far, only a street over, when we heard somebody yelling for help and it was a bloke standing on his second storey Veranda at a unit complex still in East Lismore.

So we went and grabbed him and dropped him at the street at the back of St Vincent Hospital. We were then making our way to Ballina Road we heard another person scream for help, grab them and took them to one of the streets before Ballina Road to drop them off.

Once we got to Ballina Road we realised how deep the water was as the transformers on the power poles were starting to go under and that scared us because we weren't sure if the power was on or not.

We took the tinny up Ballina Road and turn right onto Dawson Street and we seen a couple on the building next to Lismore automatic car wash asking us to come over and pick them up to take them to dry ground.

We were taking the couple back to Ben's house and along the way we spoke to a few other people in tinnies and they said that we couldn't get over to South Lismore because the river was running too hard and it hadn't gone over the bridge yet.

Once we got back to Ben's house the water had gone further up his driveway and he needed to stay with his family and move his stuff up high or out of his house.

Just after I dried off, my two mates Joe and Wade turned up and asked if I could go with them to get their dad.

He had been standing up a ladder on his shed since early hours of the morning in Three Chain Road, South Lismore, trying to get as high as he thought away from the rising water.

I took them along the same path as me and Ben went and headed towards Ballina Road. We were heading up Ballina Road towards the bridge to see if we could get over to South Lismore And that's when Joe's mum called and said her brother was in a house along Ballina Road and so we went and rescued him and his partner and young son.

There were other people there trying to get them out of the house because of all the trees and the current going around the house. It was difficult to get in there however we were able to get in there and get the boat around to his front door.

**He was in shock and too scared to open the door because the he thought if the door was open then it would flood the house even more.**

In the end we convinced him to open the door thinking it was just him in the house, but once it was opened we seen that his partner and young son was in there also and they were in distraught.

He said his partner couldn't swim.

At this stage the water was over waist deep in their two storey house.

Because of how in shock the three of them were and how frozen they were, it took us around 30 minutes to get them into the boat and when pulling their uncle into the boat it felt like pulling dead weight because he couldn't hold himself up he was that scared.

We then took them to Ballina Road where everybody was now dropping off people. We made our way back up to Ballina Road towards the bridge to try and get over to South Lismore.

Once we got to the bridge the water wasn't quite over the bridge so we had to hang around for about 20 minutes to half an hour.

Once it was a foot high we got out and pulled the tinny over the bridge and we headed down towards three chain Road in South Lismore to get my two mates dad.

When we got to Three Chain Road we came across other people who need rescuing from their businesses just off Three Chain Road where they were in sheds.

There was about 9 people who we rescued. They weren't submerged in water but they were pretty high in the dry spot of the shed and the water was coming up quickly.

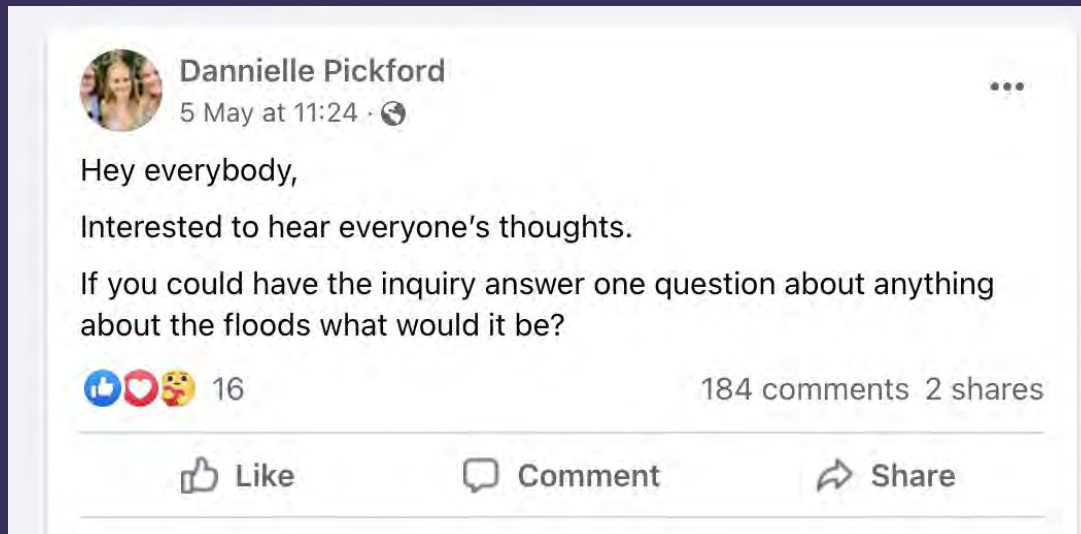
It took around three trips back to the bridge where I offloaded them and each trip we had about five people in the boat including two of us - we dropped Joe to his dad so we could fit more into the boat.

After we dropped the boys' dad to Ballina Street Bridge we then got another phone call to go rescue a mate and his family from Charlton Ave, South Lismore.

As we made our way there we found that the water was a lot more rougher and moving a lot more faster than the other side of the bridge.

Along the way we seen animals like donkeys, cows and horses.

**We seen a horse on the second level of South Lismore Bowling Club standing in water.**



### FLOOD DIARIES: COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

If you could have the inquiry answer one question about anything about the floods what would it be?

## COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

Link to Dannielle Pickford's original post on Resilient Lismore (Lismore Helping Hands) - Community Resilience & Recovery Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/161370884384945/permalink/1350931418762213/>

### Victoria Pitel

- Why didn't the SES respond appropriately to the Army's offer of assistance 3 days prior to our catastrophe flood?
- Why didn't SES respond appropriately to local warnings?
- Moving forward SES evacuation calls should NOT be optional-evacuation should be compulsory for ALL
- SES should be paid employment and NOT volunteer run
- Our councillors are paid AND they hold full time employment, SES and Firefighters should be granted the same

### Carl Mills

Why did the SES only have 2 x boats to service 20,000 people?

### Geoffrey O'Malley

Why aren't we doing enough about Climate Change?

### Melissa Duff

When are the inspections going to start so we can start to rebuild....

### Isaac Campbell

What are they going to do about the 2000+ people in temporary accommodation?

### Marion Conrow

Why were the dodgy levees both on Caniaba road and in town allowed to be built when the modelling showed it would adversely affect South Lismore and North Lismore residents and businesses. This is classist annihilation.

Then turn around and say North and South have to go? Whereas the second flood barely touched south side. Also if the dams broke why don't we hear about that?

### Chantico Love

Why did word from higher in the catchment not get conveyed downstream like it used to?

We knew what would happen when it rains like it did, my heart breaks everytime I think about that moment in time.

SES was warned by at least one local, twice - at 6pm and again around 7pm.

They didn't act on these warnings

### Victoria Pitel

People died .... is head of SES being held accountable?

### Sarah Butler

Why haven't we innovated to make it 'safe enough' for SES to rescue at night. Agree to other comments volunteers are expected to pick up too much of the work. Where are the paid resource who are supposed to serve our country abs people?

**Amanda Charnock**

Pearce's creek was also a raging torrent for hours and hours too adding hundreds and hundreds of mm's of water into the already sodden catchment of the Wilson's river. Why aren't there more gauges on the smaller tributaries?

And government needs to allow more local based rainfall information from local land holders. When my road is flash flooding constantly for days, up in the hills at Mcleans Ridges...Lismore ALWAYS floods!

**Schuurman Vanessa**

Why does NSW not have in place what Qld does re the flood levy .. Why are so many people paying insurance for nothing when a natural disaster happens , involving CAT3 black water and they are denied.

**Wendy King**

What went wrong with the SES WEATHER STATIONS...

**Allan Drury**

Sewer treatment in this whole catchment needs attention before housing development , if we are aiming at complying only with licence requirements rather water in quality of rain back to environment then isn't it a case of same horse and jockey but a longer path to a same finish line as raw effluent

**Paule Diprose**

What is the mitigation plans for next time. Where were the flood alerts. Thank God for the community boats doing a great job in rescuing so many people.

**Lynn Denise**

How have the massive changes of infrastructure over the years (new highways/new estates/filling in of natural wetlands etc) impacted on what was, the natural flow of water.

**De Groot Los**

How many people really died?

**Vee Waters**

When will they support the community groups with finances who do the work on the ground they cannot possibly do?

For example: Resilient Lismore - Lismore Helping Hands Koori Mail

They push responsibility increasingly back into community but do not provide support. This goes also for the SES AND RFS. Having worked on the fires and now being affected by flood I see how they are under resourced.

Grassroots organisations responding need proper databases, strategies for spontaneous volunteering, comms and training support. If you want community to do the work train them and resource them.

**Katie Calisti**

What are they going to do to fix it?

**Sarah Butler**

Why haven't we innovated to make it 'safe enough' for SES to rescue at night. Agree to other comments volunteers are expected to pick up too much of the work. Where are the paid resource who are supposed to serve our country abs people?

**Tennille O'Brien**

Why is no one being held accountable during the first flood for door knocking known flood area residents at midnight telling them they will be fine when by 3am they were climbing onto roofs waiting to be saved.

Why is no one being held accountable during the second flood when evacuation orders were issued, only to be lifted at 10pm allowing people to return when the levee again later overtopped - during the night. Surely an evacuation order should remain in place until daylight at the least.

## Ma Ree

Why are we not already better prepared (after 100+ YEARS of events) with:

- dedicated disaster facilities & refuge areas
- central, easy, online emergency register for RESCUE REQUIRED (situation; # of people; address; contact #) not the shambles of overwhelmed 000 & SES phone only (phones were dead in many areas)
- sturdy, stand-alone weather stations
- trusted, word-of-mouth-warning volunteers
- mobile, stand-alone communications
- multi level CBD with: 2 or 3 story carpark as lower levels or void for undercover activities like roller skating, bmx tracks, trampoline, skateboard area, "outdoor bands" music venue, artificial rock climbing, space for pop-up food & market like carboot market/eat the street, "drive-ins", etcetera
- carpark hi-rise stations to save vehicles
- hi-rise storage
- re-locatable storage pods to save household valuables in floodplain
- secure sewage treatment?

## Fran Colley

How can utility companies be billing and saying disputes will be sorted out later - an unnecessarily thoughtless and clumsy approach. Utility companies - and corporates - not doing the right thing need to held up to scrutiny by the inquiry too.

## Marion Conrow

Why did many of us not get the warning of 13.5 metres?

## Fran Colley

How can utility companies be billing and saying disputes will be sorted out later - an unnecessarily thoughtless and clumsy approach. Utility companies - and corporates - not doing the right thing need to held up to scrutiny by the inquiry too.

## Sarah Butler

What is the death toll, missing person toll and toll for those who died due to flood related injuries?

## Adam Guise

My single question would be: when will the government offer buybacks for impacted residents and what will the terms and details of the buyback be?

## Bernadette Welch

At what point was a complete recce of the Northern Rivers flood area conducted? I've heard so many stories of people stranded with no comms and no official rescue efforts. Did they even understand the full scale of the rescue need?

## Chantico Love

Why have low lying areas that need evacuating never had emergency drills of some sort  
Yearly?

**Michael Bonato**

How do we know this will "not" be the norm from now on, due to climate change, and what are the plans if any to deal with this?

**Graham Wilson**

Why do governments give subsidies to fossil fuel companies.

**Amanda Charnock**

Why weren't rain and river gauges fixed and maintained adequately?

**James Thomson**

Is it true we are targeted by chemical seeding of clouds equals rainbombs (see CSIRO)

**Geof Webb**

Why was there no central place to register as a flood survivor? the only SES website options were 'Donate' and 'Get rescued'.  
Where was the door to door in the days following the flood to see which neighbours had taken in people and whether or not they had what they needed to support them, e.g food, water, batteries, bedding, torches, radios?

**Esabel Klaudia Henry**

Why has nothing been done to move the CBD and low lying residential areas to higher ground after all these years of flooding? It WILL happen again and again.

**Madeleine Smith**

Why Mick Fuller is on the enquiry panel and how much is he being paid?

**Bindi Maddern**

Why is Coraki - the literal 'meeting of the waters' - still without any form of medical care...? We've fought for years, we fought after the fires and we're still fighting now after the floods.

We have no doctor, no hospital, no anything. 85% of our town was underwater. We all got stranded on the hill for 5 days while nobody could reach us with absolutely f\*ck all.

Exactly how horrible a thing has to happen to someone before we get enough headlines to get a damn doctor or nurse positioned here?

Also an evacuation warning would have been cool

**Louise Adele**

Why us the hospital and the conference centre just sitting there going to waste its an evacuation centre right there. And health one is a white elephant. No doctor. We had a hospital and it was given away.

**Crystal Lenane**

Insurance companies need to be reviewed. Why does North Queensland get subsidy for insurance to cover their cyclones. Cyclone, storm and tsunami are covered in general building insurance, but flood cover can cost people upward of 30k a year here. We had flood coverage but now the new flood heights we are likely to be in the same boat as north and south. Also 9 weeks on and insurance companies dragging the chain. Need more rules for insurance on delivery timeframes and roll out.

**Trish Cheal**

Why is there no accountability or transparency with regard to flood support organisations and the funding/ donations they receive. All administrators in the group etc should be made public. Especially if managing public funds.

**Erika Ivers**

Will it happen again like Feb 28???

**Gray Wilson**

Why were the "warnings," and "advices," so horribly wrong, terribly muddled, and unclear?

Why didn't we know a flood of greater than 12.5m was expected until AFTER the levee had overtopped?!

