

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

Organisation: BayFM Community Radio

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From prevention to recovery:

BayFM community radio can help build a more resilient, better informed Northern Rivers region

This is a Submission to the Select Committee Inquiry into the response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022. This submission addresses in particular the following point in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

(d) public communication, systems and strategies

Opening statement

During the February/March 2022 floods, BayFM community radio enabled people in our region to take appropriate action to stay safe and remain informed, in some cases in the absence of all other communication. The station also assisted in making recovery efforts faster and more effective, providing updates live on air several times a day for weeks after the floods..

BayFM was able to do all this despite being severely underfunded and inadequately equipped. The station's presenters are virtually all volunteers, working for nothing, but they are highly motivated to serve our community. There were instances of presenters who had personally suffered trauma, loss and damage going above and beyond to keep our community informed. These people were often gleaning critical information first hand, providing hyper-local advice right down to individual street and creek level.

Imagine what BayFM could do when properly funded and resourced. Whether flood, bushfire or other emergency, BayFM can become an even greater part of our region's resilience infrastructure, a trusted source of information in an area where some people cannot receive the ABC or other radio stations.



Why BayFM is making this Submission

In the case of any event requiring community resilience, whether flood, bushfire, COVID outbreak or anything else, **good communication is critical.**

BayFM community radio has a proven record of good communication in such events and we are keen to continue to provide this to the extent that we can. Properly resourced, the station can become a formal part of a more clearly-coordinated response to future events in our region, acting as a media and emergency hub for the Byron Shire.

Under such an arrangement, the station would work in concert with Byron Shire Council, Resilience NSW, Resilient Byron, the SES, other emergency services, recovery providers and broad-based information services such as ABC North Coast.

Specifically, BayFM can provide support:

1 During an event – providing emergency information to the public

BayFM can act as a rapid, centralised conduit for information from all the emergency services, giving our community real-time, verified, hyperlocal information. For example, in the case of flooding this would be to individual street and creek crossing level.

2 After an event – assisting with recovery efforts

As the immediate danger passes, BayFM can provide regular updates on how to help – and how to get help of any kind. We have been doing this recently for flood recovery efforts from Woodburn to Tweed.

3 Before an event – preparing and prevention

BayFM can play a longer term role in mitigation – providing information and education programs around preparing for emergencies of all kinds, enabling our community to be in better shape next time trouble strikes. This is important as new events become more widespread and affect people previously unprepared for them.



Why our region needs a resilient response and why BayFM is qualified to provide it.

The Byron Shire and surrounds is a vulnerable area

As well as flooding, the area is prone to bushfire and storms. Additionally, very high levels of tourists mean the pandemic and other introduced threats are likely to pose disproportionately large problems in this area.

Communication in this region has proven difficult when danger strikes

During the floods, when mobile phone and internet service failed, when even the police station phone lines were down, BayFM remained on air providing essential advice. Unfortunately our sister community radio stations in Lismore and Ballina were both out of action. Fortunately our coverage extends partly to those areas too. Even with areas in no electricity, BayFM was still working on battery-powered radios. There are areas in the Shire where it is not possible to pick up ABC radio, so for some that is not an option.

BayFM is hyper-local and highly specific

Unlike ABC North Coast which provides excellent information but has to cover a wide geographic area, BayFM is intimately acquainted with our area. We know the suburbs, villages, streets and rivers and can provide highly specific information.

BayFM is familiar and trusted

The station has been an integral part of our community for over 30 years. Information on BayFM is coming from a known and reliable source.

BayFM has demonstrated its ability as a communication hub for recovery efforts

Following the floods the station has connected people with recovery services and information – emergency medical care, legal aid and help with insurance claims.

BayFM has also coordinated relief efforts. We've provided information on the things that keep life ticking along – such as where to drop off prepared meals and where to get a hot shower. We've let donors know about those unusual items that are urgently needed but not often thought of – such as hose connectors, squeegees, chargers, gumboots and chainsaw oil.



In addition, the station provided a central point where people can volunteer their skills and services, and where other people can request them. This includes: chippies, sparkies and handymen helping to repair power tools, electronics, appliances and furniture; locksmiths offering free help; music stores offering to clean instruments; vets offering free consultations for flood affected pets.

BayFM is also providing general recovery information, such as how to tackle mould, what to do with asbestos, why not to start a flood affected car and how to get appliances tagged and sockets checked.

The BayFM Community Newsroom is a hub for influential people to share information.

Bay FM's newsroom has hosted many guests during the recovery period, including the Byron Shire Mayor Michael Lyon, the Deputy Mayor Sarah Ndiaye, the local NSW Member Tamara Smith MP, the Tweed-Byron Police District Chief Inspector Matt Kehoe and local Federal Member Justine Elliot MP.

The station also plays an important role in sharing the work of community heroes, celebrating the work of people such as the staff of the Koori Mail who, together with hundreds of volunteers, have worked tirelessly to coordinate a flood relief centre.

Community radio in general has high audience reach

One-third of all adults listens to community radio. BayFM is not a niche or hard to find service, we are online as well as on-air. Even people who don't currently listen know how to find BayFM with its familiar 99.9FM frequency.



What BayFM would require in order to become a resilient response partner

Currently BayFM is a volunteer organisation and largely unfunded. We are reliant on the goodwill of caring local people and businesses, many of whom have been doing it tough themselves as a result of recent events. When an emergency hits and speed and quality of response is critical, BayFM needs a secure funding base to be able to operate in a way that prioritises community safety and promotes a resilient response. We would require three things:

A Service Level agreement. How much information will be required for a given event? What type? How frequently? We can help to scope this out.

B Information map. How will BayFM plug into all the latest verified information? What are the sources? How does the information get to us? Do we need specialised equipment?

C Equipment upgrade. The station would need failsafe options, both at the transmission site at St Helena and at the station offices on Fletcher Street. We can scope both the human and equipment resources required.

Some facts about BayFM

BayFM radio is the **Byron Shire's community voice**, amplifying messages, information, worthy causes and connecting people to make things happen.

- **100% independent** – we operate solely for the benefit of our local community.
- **Not for profit** – we run lean with volunteers doing most of the work.
- **No ongoing government support** – we are reliant on sponsors and subscribers.
- **Over 30 years of continuous service** – even though we do not have funding security.
- **Free to everyone** – increasingly rare in a world of streaming and paid media.
- **Supporting worthy causes** – we get messages out and make things happen.
- **Over 2,600 Community Service Announcements each year** – all broadcast for free.
- **Shedding light on local issues** – homelessness, housing, environment and much more.
- **Over 3,300 interviews each year** – locals, musos, artists and other fascinating people.
- **Publicising regional services** – and spreading the word on local events
- **Hundreds of hours of news content** – every year from our award-winning newsroom.