

**Submission  
No 39**

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

**Organisation:** Ombudsman New South Wales

**Date Received:** 16 May 2022

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16 May 2022

Mr Walt Secord  
Chair  
Select Committee on the response  
to major flooding across NSW in 2022

Email: [Floods@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Floods@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Secord

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

The people of NSW have experienced a number of natural disasters and other crises in recent years. These events have significant implications for the delivery of public and community services, and their oversight.

In March 2021 we tabled a report in Parliament titled: *2020 hindsight: the first 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic*. The focus of the report is on the NSW Government response to the pandemic. However, it also canvasses issues (and includes suggestions) that are applicable to crisis response planning generally. In particular, it emphasises the importance of oversight and complaint handling in a crisis, and for these to be consciously considered (and if necessary, designed) at the outset together with other crisis response planning activities. The report can also be accessed on our [website](#).

Some of the key learnings that have become apparent from management of the COVID-19 pandemic, and other crises, such as the major flooding earlier this year are:

- Governments need to be proactive in sharing easily accessible, clear and up-to-date information about crisis response activities, including how complaints can be made to relevant agencies and oversight bodies. This is important given that multiple agencies across different levels of government are often involved, and community members experiencing a crisis situation may have limited capacity to understand and navigate relevant systems and processes.
- Agencies involved in the crisis response should have clear, accessible and responsive complaints-handling processes. If encouraged, listened to and acted upon, complaints allow risks to be identified and controlled before they escalate into major issues. Corrective action can be taken to address issues while they are relatively minor, helping avoid major incidents.
- The NSW Ombudsman and other oversight bodies should be proactively briefed about the government's initiatives surrounding crisis response activities. This enables oversight bodies to better assist people and ensure the contacts we receive are handled quickly and efficiently, and people are referred to the correct agencies (or parts of agencies) or to different oversight bodies where appropriate. It also means we will not unnecessarily add to the workload of those agencies and staff responsible for responding to the affected communities, including through the making of unnecessary direct contact or inquiries with them.

A commitment to these measures will help to ensure that any concerns or issues with service delivery during a crisis will be resolved expeditiously, and that lessons learned will help to inform service delivery during future crises.

If you have any questions please contact Kate Smithers, Executive Strategy Officer

Yours sincerely

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Monica Wolf  
**Acting Ombudsman**