

**Submission
No 53**

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

Organisation: The Casino Food Co-op

Date Received: 26 May 2022

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Hon Walt Secord MLC (Chair)
Select Committee Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022
Submission: In Person - Murwillumbah Hearing 1st June 2022

Dear Chair,

Re: The Casino Food Co-op (The Co-op) Submission

I am pleased to represent The Co-op and share our experience in relation to the major flood of February 28, 2022.

Whilst the destruction and loss from the floods of February/March 2022 was almost overwhelming, one positive is the response from our community, and in our case the response from employees of the Casino Food Co-op. In fact, the major theme of our submission, with regard to the type of event the Northern Rivers experienced, is that local community leaders can be major contributors in response to natural disasters and by extension, must be heavily involved in the response and reconstruction phase.

The majority of our emergency response tasks below were spontaneous and in many cases established as a result of someone who knew someone who knew someone...the local network. No manuals, no complex authorization systems, simply getting the job done.

About the Casino Food Co-op

We are a farmer owned processor Co-operative with separate beef & pork processing facilities. Established in 1933, we employ over 1,000 staff at peak processing capacity and are the largest private employer in the region. Our processing facilities are located in Casino (Richmond Valley Council) and Booyong (Byron Shire Council) noting a large proportion of our employees live in the Lismore City Council area.

Our Emergency Response

Evacuation Centers

Almost as soon as evacuation centres in Lismore were established, we offered to supply fresh meat. Our facilities were fully operational and we had the means to provide suitable fresh meat products. As the emergency phase ended and the recovery phase began, we continued supplying meat for volunteer BBQ "pop ups" in many of the towns who were feeding the community and volunteers during the huge clean up task.

Emergency Food and supplies Drops

With many communities isolated due to flooding or landslides, we worked with emergency services to establish a helicopter landing pad in the carpark at our Casino site. The Emergency command center (based in Lismore Council Chambers) would co-ordinate details of required drops and we utilized our facilities and logistics skills to prepare packages of food, water and sanitary products for loading onto a mix of air services including RAF, RFS, SES and private contractors.

An example of community initiative was in relation to baby formula. Extensive requests from isolated communities for baby formula were coming down the line. By this stage, a local branch of the Army reserve were on site assisting us with the logistics. A young lady in the battalion used her network of friends and social media network and by the next day we had a pallet of baby formula arrive from Brisbane. That's a testament to the power of community, we had Army and all emergency services available yet through community initiative a problem was solved in record time.

Another example of local community rapid response was in relation to supplies for Coraki. Again, a local Lady made contact seeking ice and fuel for delivery by boat to Coraki. Casino locals understood their need was not so much for food, rather ice to household items preserved and fuel to run generators. Remember these local & rural communities understand what other communities needed.

The SES were unable to approve boat transfer of supplies given the potential danger in the flooded river systems. Casino locals were prepared to travel by boat, motivated not only because it was their family & friends in need but community in need. In addition, these people had grown up on these rivers and had local knowledge of where to go or not to go, so they understood the river and its possible dangers. We supplied pallets of ice for the "Casino Boaties" to deliver to downstream communities.

Clean up

With many of our workmates and their families directly impacted, The Co-op utilized resources to mobilise cleaning teams, providing services including cleaning, electrical and general rubbish removal. Whilst this may sound an obvious thing to do, this example supports our message that large rural businesses can be an integral part of the emergency response and post emergency recovery.

Our Observation

Emergency services are crucial in supporting communities in all types of events and we commend the terrific job they performed for our community during this flood event. What we did notice in this event was a tendency of emergency organisations to work in silos, not necessarily interacting as we would expect, which as a result, hampered effective communication. We particularly evidenced this by many instances of miscommunication with regard emergency drops. Chopper pilots had different instructions from our teams (including Army reserves who were on site with us) with respect loading quantities and destinations. At one point central command for emergency drops appeared to be from three agencies, Police, Army and RFS.

Organisations by design require layers of systems and controls that are necessary for reasons including safety and Governance, however the more layers of bureaucratic red tape creates inefficiencies, particularly in extreme emergency situations, which let's face it, no manual or system can be prepared for.

In extreme circumstances, such as the 2022 Floods, there needs to be a mix of systems and "gut instinct", without compromising safety of people. In our view, this comes from local leaders, specifically business leaders. Business leaders have direct access to local networks, capital and human assets, intel and importantly entrepreneurial spirit.

Thank you for considering this submission and allowing me to speak to it.

Yours faithfully

Simon Stahl
Chief Executive Officer



