

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

Name: Mrs Veronica Coughlan

Date Received: 31 May 2022

Partially
Confidential

From: P & V Coughlan
Sent: Tuesday, 31 May 2022 9:44 PM
To: Floods Committee
Subject: Coughlan family Flood story
Attachments: Flood Story 2022 docx.docx

To Senate Inquiry Tuesday 31st May 2022 Lismore 2480

Thank you for listening to our stories today in Lismore. The Human stories were honest and heartfelt and our community is extraordinary in the diversity of human beings I listened to for 8 hours today.

Hope you can carry our stories safely and restore our city with justice by our NSW State Government providing our businesses, our families and children with generous financial assistance.

Then make decisions and enact them quickly to buy back and or to supply housing before we become a series of homeless communities lining our river banks waiting for the next flood to swirl us into oblivion.

Desperate situations require desperate responses.

Thank you for the active listening and respect shown by all members of the inquiry here today. It gives us hope.

(Mrs) Veronica Coughlan

LISMORE A CITY IN MOURNING

At 5:30am Monday 28th February 2022 I called 000 and asked for help as my son-in-law was stranded on the roof, very soon I was connected to SES, way down South, Newcastle or Sydney or Wollongong. I was assured that an officer would be there as soon as possible. We also called a friend with a small boat who responded and when he arrived at the edge of the water he was requested by the SES not to enter the water as it was too dangerous.

From both contacts, SES and the friend with a boat, we waited in the false hope that my Son-in-law, Yoyok, would be rescued. For the next five hours we waited, hoping to hear from him or to see him.

On Tuesday afternoon 1st March, thirty four and a half hours after my request for help from emergency services, 000, and the SES, who assured me there would be an officer there asap, a Police Constable, way down south, contacted me to check on the safety of my Son-in law.

*The frightening experience was the **false hope** we had in our public services. It was very scary and has been the cause of some nightmares and sleepless nights.*

The 2022 Lismore Flood story of Suhartoyo (Yoyok) Katie ,

10 yrs and 6yrs

By Veronica Coughlan 07/04/2022

At 5:30am Monday the 28th February after listening to the local radio during the night I called my son-in-law, who had stayed in his home, with their little dog, Hunter, at St East Lismore over- night. His wife, Katie Coughlan, and two daughters, 10yrs and 6yrs evacuated on Sunday, in the early evening, to my home in Dibbs Street.

Round 11pm on Sunday an SES person passed by and confirmed with Yoyok that all should be well as there was no flood in the house in the 2017 flood. With this reassurance he continued to lift items up from under the house even until 2:30am. Then he went to sleep.

The little girls had Covid the week 20th February and so Katie checked into hospital on way to my place and it was confirmed on Tuesday she had Covid.

My call at 5:30am alerted Yoyok to the height of the water as it was lapping the top front step. As he hastened to collect the dog and get keys to his van, which had been driven to my place for safety on Sunday evening, the water rose quickly to his waist.

Katie spoke with Yoyok until he had got the dog to safety on to their own roof then when the water had risen to the top of the rail on the landing he swam to the neighbour's roof, as it was lower, and waited, hoping someone would rescue him. By then we had a photo of him on the roof but his mobile dropped out as it became waterlogged.



Immediately I called 000 and asked for help, very soon I was connected to SES, way down South, Newcastle, Sydney or Wollongong. I was assured that an officer would be there as soon as possible. We also called a friend with a small boat who responded and when he arrived at the edge of the water he was requested by the SES not to enter the water as it was too dangerous.

From both contacts, SES and the friend with a boat, we waited in the false hope that Yoyok would be rescued. For the next five hours we waited, hoping to hear from him or to see him.

Eventually, round mid-morning , Yoyok appeared with Hunter, the little dog, at Street. The joyful ring of little girls' voices calling. "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Hunter" brought us all to tears.



The son of a neighbour, about three doors up from , came in his fishing Boat to rescue his mother. Then the woman and daughter next door were rescued and then Hunter, at the command of his master, jumped from the roof into the boat and Yoyok followed.

Yoyok was aware that the man across the road was still trapped. So the boatman turned his boat over the whirlpool of waters and they found the older man up on the porch section of his roof at the back, the side closest to the continuously rising river topping the levee. This was a dangerous manoeuvre and the SES was not prepared to enter these waters. Next they realised that the woman next door was still in the house with all doors and windows closed. Yoyok lifted himself out of the boat and with the help of a fishing rod was able to break a window, while treading water. Then lifting the window he called to the woman who came to the kitchen treading water up to her chest. She had a cat in a box, the cat was saved then Yoyok encouraged her to climb on to the kitchen bench and then he pulled her through the window. With broken glass she endured some scratching but as he pulled her through the window Yoyok fell back into the boat and the woman fell on top of him to safety.

The Boat owner was in dangerous waters but he responded to these people and there is no doubt that two of those people may not have been saved if the Boatman had not agreed to continue to search and save them. He continued to save another 30 people that day, the last day of February.

After this Yoyok then walked to his family for about an hour and a half. Usually it is a 15 min walk but with flood waters blocking him at every turn it was a marathon.

On Tuesday afternoon, 1st March, I received a call from a Constable In a police station somewhere, Sydney or Newcastle, at 4pm asking me about the safety of my son-in-law. **Thirty four and a half hours after my request for help from emergency services, 000, and the SES, who assured me there would be an officer there asap, a Police Constable contacted me to check on my Son-in law.** The frightening

experience was the **false hope** we had in our public services. It was very scary and has been the cause of some nightmares and sleepless nights.

The Flood waters rose to the top of the doors. It has never flooded in this house in 100 years. The precautions taken followed the experience of the 2017 flood which were reasonable But this weather event was beyond our experience.

From Wednesday 2nd March, Yoyok worked tirelessly on cleaning their home. By Friday, after 12 to 14 hours of cleaning each day, he was very unwell and tested positive to Covid.

- Their home is standing





Kitchen fell apart as items were lifted to see what could be rescued

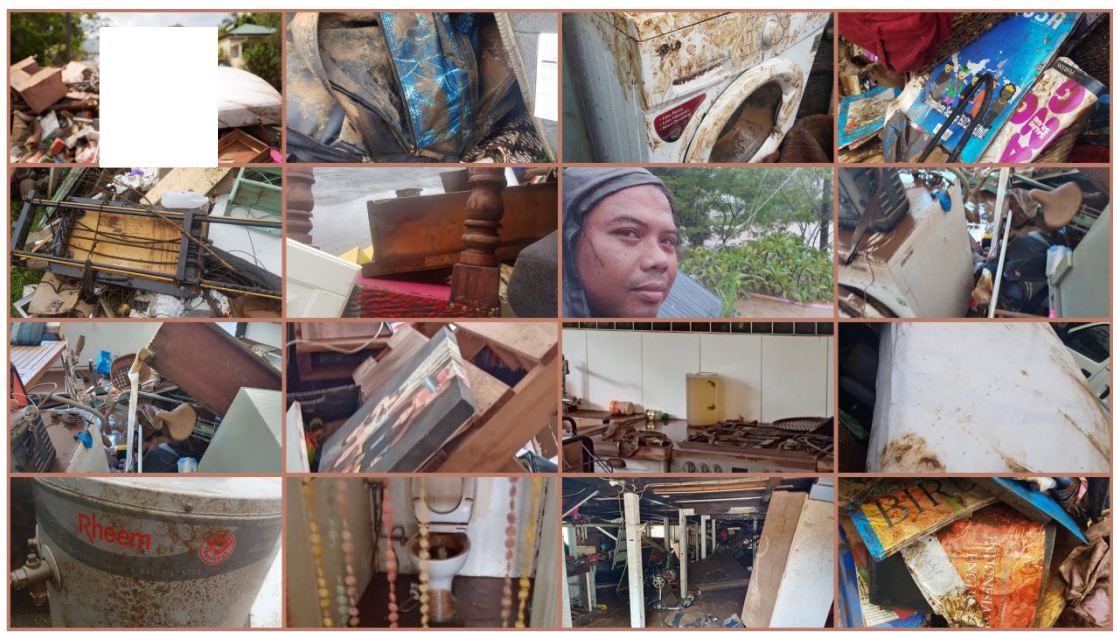


Dining table and seating destroyed beyond repair



The

Kitchen is totally gutted.





- and in front of everything from their home destroyed by flood
- Contents from bedrooms flood-mud destroyed.
- Yoyok works from home for Social Futures so all office works destroyed.
- Precious letters, cards, memorabilia gone.



bravely facing the future after
losing everything in their house.



Bathroom will need complete renovation



A board from every wall removed to allow for mould to be treated

Insurance: House insured but **not** for flood as premium is too expensive.

A Hydrologist has to estimate how much water came from flood and how much from storm and run off.

The Electricals in the house have to be assessed. **High cost of materials.**

Air conditioning separate assessment.

Hot water system on roof to be quoted and type of system to be installed before the electrician works on electricity fittings.



All furniture and piano in living areas destroyed.

Floors, polished in January, will need rebuffing.



Electric water system gone

The Floods have taken its toll on the girls' schooling as they have been at school only 5 weeks out of an 11 week term.

A few items of clothing, after much washing by friends and some crockery have been saved. This has been their home since two weeks before the 2017 flood (31st March) so it was slowly becoming the childhood home for their daughters. **The insecurity of seeing all they treasured flooded away and now wishing to be safe in their own home yet experiencing their own home as not as safe as it was, causes uncertainty and fear of rain and stormy weather.**

Then the following weeks of WAITING IN Queues.

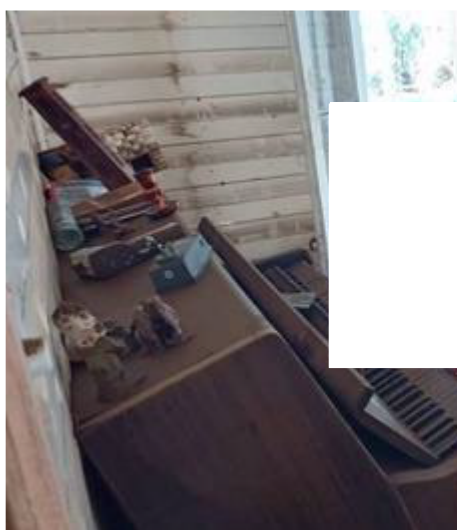
Trying to make decisions while we wait for our elected leaders to inform us of the decisions made to preserve our city is a nerve wracking time because if there are plans to action flood mitigation then this knowledge needs to be shared with the citizens so our decisions can be as well informed as possible.

We are desperate for strong leadership from people with the authority and power to enforce outcomes for a build-back-better Lismore. If we build back the same then we are destined to drown.

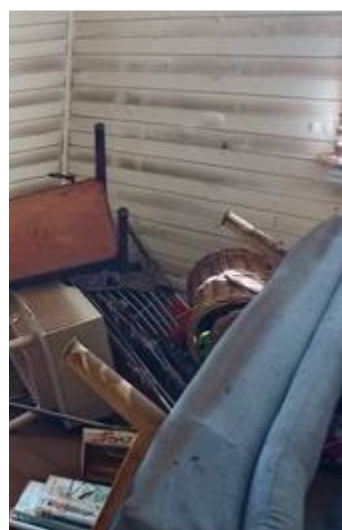
My heart hurts.
My swollen heart overflowing with sadness.
My heart's erratic rhythm quickens and slows with pangs for my people.
My racing heart jolts me awake at wee hours with urgency for action.
My little girl's heart longs to 'just be in my own bed mummy.'
My big girl's heart searches for a sense of justice for all swept up in this destruction.
My heart feels numb pushing away 'what ifs' I cannot yet face.
My expanding heart is making room for the boundless generosity of so many, we are hard wired for kindness it seems.
My constricted heart is consumed with aching compassion for friends who are our family.
My heart sparks with joy at the rainbow birds overhead, oblivious to us they continue.
Emotional deluge flowing.
We are reduced but we are rising on a tide of love.
LoveMore

By Katie Coughlan

March 8th 2022



10yrs and



6 yrs return home on Wed morning 2nd March

The genuine concern of family and friends interstate has sustained us as we survive from day to day.

There has been a constant stream of gifts for girls to help replace their clothes and school bags. Uniforms given to them from school with care.

The kind generosity of friends and random people from Brisbane and the Gold Coast turning up to help clean the house for days and weekends have brought tears of gratitude to our eyes often.

Usually the sound of rain, even thunder and lightning storms were welcome and enjoyed now little girls wake in fear that they will be washed away. **The Flood is not over when it is over.**

Our family, Veronica and Patrick Coughlan (*RIP2020*) arrived in Lismore in April 1985 with two daughters, Katie 2yrs and Siobhan 3mths. We have been part of this community for 37 years. As a teacher at Trinity Catholic College from 1986 to 2014 my family was involved in many pre-flood preparations and clean-ups over those years. As a very new recruit of Murwillumbah SES, Siobhan has been close to desperate people in the surrounding areas and specially South Lismore. So our own trauma and that of others has been deeply felt by all the family. The Floods of 2022 have rocked our family and the insecurity of the fear of our granddaughters not feeling safe in their own home has shattered our confidence in the city we love.

LISMORE A CITY IN MOURNING.