

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

Name: Dr Ross J Lehman

Date Received: 30 May 2022

Walt Secord, MP

Dear Walt

A colleague told me about the Parliamentary Inquiry which you are leading here in Lismore, tomorrow.

I am sending you copies of my two submissions [Attached] to the Independent Flood Inquiry being led by Prof. Mary O’Kane and Michael Fuller.

P l e a s e, open the #2 document and consider a future focussed outcome, rather than the here and now.

Purposely, I have made a case to project any decisions being made NOW, in 2022, into the future, with view to taking into consideration, our current planning thoughts, and projecting them into 2222 – that is, two hundred year in the future.

ARE YOU LISTENING?

If you are inclined, now peruse the contents of my other submission.

I would truly be gratified, if you would inform me your thoughts about the ‘utopian’ proposal that I have submitted.

Further, if you consider it worthwhile, please share the two documents with your colleagues involved in the Parliamentary inquiry.

Your thoughts, please.

Thanking you, in anticipation.

Ross

Dr Ross J Lehman

Dr Ross J. Lehman

Monday, May 2, 2022

INDEPENDENT FLOOD INQUIRY

Professor Mary O’Kane and Michael Fuller

Dear Mary and Michael

I have tried to register to participate in the Open Meeting at the Whitebrook Theatre, Southern Cross University, Lismore Campus advertised for 5:30 pm tomorrow, Tuesday, May 3, 2022.

However, there are no more entry tickets available.

Below are my additional thoughts for consideration by the Independent Flood Review.

My original submission is dated Sunday, April 24, 2022 which has been acknowledged.

FUTURE

Lake Lismore and Dam wall

The year is 2222 – two hundred years from now!

Based on the variety of input from the 2022 Independent Flood Inquiry, the decision-makers moved forward with a robust action plan devised by including urban architects [like Walter Burley Griffin who designed Canberra, ACT and Islamabad, Pakistan with wide boulevards and many green parkland areas] which included:

1. The construction of a huge dam wall near South Gundurimba and the creation of Lake Lismore.
COMMENT: As a consequence, there has never since been a flood along the Richmond River. Woodburn, Broadwater, Coraki and Cabbage Tree Island have been flood-free for the past two hundred years.
COMMENT: The control of the gates to the dam for overflow have been carefully managed, such that issues that have occurred in Brisbane [Wivenhoe Dam] and Sydney [Warragamba Dam] do not occur.
2. The water supply needs for the Northern Rivers region have been plentiful and have met demand, ever since.
3. Housing in the Lake Lismore zone has been built on the higher ground and nearby plateau areas.
4. The Services hub was established on 100 hectares of land in Lindendale and has successfully housed Ambulance, Police, Fire and Rescue, State Emergency Services, the Law Courts and legal entities. The integrated service provision is a key, world standard example of co-ordination
5. The industrial hub established on hundreds of hectares of land in the Tregagle area continues to be successfully developed.
6. The education hub established at Wollongbar is a vast site of inter-related institutions from Pre-school to Post-Graduate and Research at the university level, with library provisions to match the need. A key provision has been the continuous flow of work-ready ‘tradies.’
7. The entertainment hub established north of Wollongbar contains multi-purpose performance spaces for opera, musicals, concerts, meetings, display of many forms of artistic production.

COMMENT: Part of the reason that our indigenous ancestors established the Bora Ring on the plateau near Alstonville was the lovely view and being a flood-free site.

8. Retail centres are scattered at appropriate distances to meet the local areas' requirements, along with sufficient parking, if such is required for whatever means of transport is being used, in 2222.
9. The equivalent of a network of light rail services link all the areas together, including the coastal areas such as Ballina, Lennox Head and Byron.
10. The local government hub established near Lindendale contains the equivalent of city administration, Service NSW, Centrelink and similar entities. Still with plenty of space available for expansion.
11. An infrastructure 'nerve' centre established nearby, has been instrumental in the success of the area, which includes, for example: water, power, housing, communication [radio, television or whatever has been devised in the past 200 years], transport planning and control.
12. Provisions for volunteer and cultural organisations [Red Cross, CWA, Guide and Scouts Groups, PCYC to name a few] have been integrated into the re-establishment planning.
13. A medical and mental health hub along with 'spiritual support' has been established in Lismore Heights.
14. The local indigenous community continue to be consulted during any re-establishment developments of Lismore and environs.
15. Sport and recreation facilities abound, with venues for open air venues for local activities from golf to netball, tennis, cricket, football, hockey, pony club, for example.
16. The regional Botanic Society and interested folk have been successful with their advice and as a consequence, prolific land improvements have been included in all development enterprises. The shoreline of Lismore Lake is a world-renowned tourist attraction.
17. A large stadium established overlooking the Lismore Lake has been constructed with world class events being held there.
18. Indoor facilities for swimming, basketball, table tennis, for example, have been established throughout the plateau.
19. Water sports, including boating and fishing, abound around various centres established beside Lake Lismore.
20. Large areas that are 'pet friendly' have been provided throughout the region.
21. The latest version of the Bruxner Highway is at least a four-laned carriage-way from Tenterfield to Ballina and it crosses over on top of the dam wall in South Gunderimba.
22. Housing provision of allocated provision of special rental homes for itinerant workers, for example: Police, Nurses and Teachers, has been a successful enterprise throughout the Northern Rivers region.

Notes:

1. Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra, ACT was a sheep station during European development. The dam wall created the lake.
2. Under Lake Jindabyne in the Snowy Region is the former town of Jindabyne, now drowned, where diving tours occur to explore the relics in the depths below the surface.
3. As an Anglican, what would happen to the heritage-listed, St Andrew's Anglican Church, a rare Garrison church, in Zadoc Street? If required, it could be moved – brick by brick – to an appropriate site on the Eastern Plateau.

COMMENT: All Saints, Anglican Church, Ainslie, ACT was originally, the first Mortuary Train Station at Rookwood Cemetery. When the steam trains ceased to transport funeral groups from Redfern and the station was closed, it was moved – brick by brick – to Ainslie in Canberra, ACT and refurbished as the current, beautiful, All Saints Church.

4. St Carthages, Catholic Cathedral, along with Trinity Catholic College and the latest version of Richmond River High School could be re-established on the edge of the Dunoon Plateau overlooking Lake Lismore.
COMMENT: For those who have been fortunate enough to visit the Chapel at HMAS Watson on the southern headland of Sydney Harbour, will remember, the awe-inspiring view out from the large Eastern window looking at the ocean. Imagine the view from St Carthages Cathedral across Lismore Lake.
5. To reach Nimbin, in 2222, part of the travel might need to be via a series of highway and light rail tunnels which have been constructed under Lake Lismore.

Further Recommendations:

1. ROADS AND 'POT HOLES:'

A multi-million dollar research grant be awarded to the Engineering Faculty at Southern Cross University. The outcome of the research would be world-class guidelines for the construction of roads. Such would include the foundation and the top-level of road surfaces. The result would mean NO MORE POTHOLE! Or, some process that permanently fixed an imperfection, crack or hole. Wow!

COMMENT: If the O'Brien company can fix cracked windscreens with a successful and invisible process surely the composition of our roads could be constructed using a revolutionary method.

2. PROVISIONS FOR THE WELFARE NEEDS of individuals and families who come from the lower Strata of Socio-Economic Status.

Many of the current 'homeless' and disadvantaged people who formerly lived in flood-prone areas like North and South Lismore established their dwelling place in such areas because the financial cost was less.

COMMENT: There is a special need to develop appropriate policies to be implemented to more adequately provide for the needs of society's poor.

RJL:02/05/2022

Dr Ross J. Lehman

Sunday, April 24, 2022

INDEPENDENT FLOOD INQUIRY

Professor Mary O’Kane and Michael Fuller

Dear Mary and Michael

I am submitting my thoughts towards the review of the preparation for, causes of, response to and recovery from the 2022 catastrophic flood event in the Northern Rivers in February and March, 2022.

I first came to Lismore on Palm Sunday, 1970, to take up an appointment as a Lecturer in Education at the Teachers’ College, Lismore. My office was on the top floor of the building on Magellan Street at the college site which had been renovated after Lismore High School moved out to its flood-free site in East Lismore. It must have been assumed that the young student teachers were better able to cope with recurring floods, compared to the former high school students. For the next few years, there were floods in Lismore and the start of classes was delayed for The Teachers’ College, Lismore and later, Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education. Students would actually enjoy the challenge of about a week with no lectures. Some of their ‘flood parties’ were indeed ‘infamous.’ During my early time as an academic, I researched the local situation and was told on a number of occasions, that in the early days of European settlement along the banks of what is now, Wilson’s River, the settlers were informed by the local indigenous people, NOT to settle in the basin of what became Lismore, as two rivers joined and flooded regularly, nearly every year. However, the early settlers were dependent on the river for their small cargo boats to carry timber to the coast for ultimate delivery in Great Britain.

WERE THE HEARER’S, LISTENING?

Recently, The Northern Rivers Times published an article titled: ‘Multiple floods not an unusual occurrent for Lismore.’ [April 7, 2022, page 15]

WERE THE RESIDENTS, LISTENING?

Clearly, the repetitive cost, both financial and human, and more, should have stopped BUT it hasn’t!

WERE THE DECISION-MAKERS, LISTENING?

There have been multiple Inquiries and various outcomes, such as, building the levee bank around the Lismore CBD; lifting homes in flood-prone areas of North and South Lismore; building higher floors at local schools such as, South Lismore Primary School and Richmond River High School. Just to mention a few recent examples. Also, consider the many Catholic school sites in flood-prone areas. The planners for the future institution, now, Southern Cross University, had LISTENED and the institution was established on higher ground in East Lismore/Lismore Heights. It is confusing as to why Richmond River High School site has had continuous occupation since it was built and expanded by the NSW Dept of Education.

WERE THE EDUCATION PLANNERS, LISTENING?

About twenty years ago, the Lismore City Council moved its Headquarters to higher ground at Goonellabah and the Simeoni land was established as a Shopping Centre.

HEY, SOME FOLK WERE LISTENING!

The 2022 catastrophe led to the Goonellabah Shopping Centre, the nearby the Goonellabah Medical Centre and the City Council offices, becoming the vital regional hub for services and food.

Similarly, the 'out-of-flood' Evacuation Centres at Southern Cross University and Goonellabah Sports Centre were essential for folk affected by the floods, as are the ongoing Recovery Centre provisions at the Southern Cross University site. However, such has meant that the study and learning arrangements for Higher Education students have needed to be changed to 'on-line learning' as a consequence. Is that fair for the Higher Education students?

I was involved as an Anglicare volunteer on Monday, February 28, 2022 at the Evacuation Centre based at P Block, Southern Cross University. The situation was chaotic. From my standpoint, there seemed to be no-one 'in charge' to co-ordinate the demand. The rain poured down, hundreds of folk with pets – dogs, cats, birds in cages – many folk with multiple pets, were left outside in the rain, as there was no arrangements for a 'zoo' inside the Sports Hall. Eventually, a 'pet friendly' site was opened and the bedraggled pet owners moved into shelter. There was a clog-up of folk arriving via helicopter, bus and motor vehicles. The Registration area was at the Front Door, confused with lines of upset and even angry, folk wearing wet and muddy clothes. The initial need was for dry towels, clean underwear, generally larger sized clothing and warm rugs. Later socks, for cold feet, were desperately needed.

A REVIEW OF SUCH FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS IS ESSENTIAL.

WHO WILL BE LISTENING?

Like many people, I became an avid LISTENER of the local ABC Radio 94.5 FM. We must be grateful for their communication system. Jo Shoebridge and her fellow broadcasters and back-up team were amazing and essential.

Two matters that were evident as critical challenges were: Housing and Telephone connections. Related to these were electric power, fresh water supplies, and transport.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, March 8, 2022 I sent an email message to the Premier, Dominic Perrotet and the Mayor of Lismore. Subsequently, I received replies and now, nearly two months later, pod cabin-type housing villages are being established at Wollongbar Sports Field.

A copy of my email is included below:

Tuesday, 8 March 2022 3:59 PM

Hello from Goonellabah

I have some thoughts explained below. I recommend that they receive serious consideration.

Blessings

Ross

I have just returned from the Evacuation Centre at Southern Cross University campus. I was helping distribute delicious lunch meals for all involved + 'listening' to folks' stories and providing a guided response. There are still hundreds of homeless folk, using airbeds and a chair for their 'space.' Many supplementary services are available on-site: medical, SES, Red Cross, Telstra, Chaplaincy [where I was based], police, food services, two trucks fitted out with stacks of clothes washing machines and driers – all running on their own generators, and more!! There is a Business Hub which has laptops and internet connection for local businesses to use as much of the CBD is still without power reconnected after more than a week.

My thinking is there is a need to set up in strategic and difficult to access places with satellite phone systems that are solar powered. Maybe, such

equipment could be prepacked and dropped in by helicopter when required – whether, bush fires or floods.

Also, this country needs to plan how to set up and house -comfortably – about two thousand folk whose homes need to be replaced. Such might be four or five large tent-‘cities’ with all services connected [water, sewage, waste disposal, power, telephone, internet] including access to a special shopping centre [large-type supermarket] with fuel, food, medical/dental, banking, telecommunications, entertainment, school, bottle shop outlet, café, coffee shop, ice-cream, laundry, transport, car park, repair and servicing staff, and more. My guess is such sites will be required for 2 – 3 years. Such would require Community Justice and Police. Especially needed would be a benevolent somewhat autocratic control system.

Your thoughts?

Dr Ross J Lehman

AHAH! SOMEBODY IS LISTENING!

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. A single co-ordinating body be instituted that has responsibility for the whole of the Northern Rivers region – Tweed, Richmond, Clarence.
2. A Benevolent Autocrat be appointed as Head. A LISTENER WHO ACTS WISELY WITH VIEW TO THE LONG-TERM OUTCOMES.
3. If an Advisory Body is included involving, local State and Federal politicians, Mayors and non-political local folk with creative ideas.
WILL THEY LISTEN?
4. Really make an emphasis on solving problems with consideration of creative and different ideas – think ‘outside the box!’
5. Ensure that Mental Health issues are always considered in making and announcing decisions.
6. Somehow, try to avoid the foundation principle of having folk appointed with ‘vested interests.’ Hence, avoid creating a ‘camel’ when a ‘horse’ was required!
7. A comprehensive, flexible PROCEDURES GUIDE/HANDBOOK be produced. Whether the situation is flood, fire, drought, earthquake, riot, should produce varying guidance criteria. Such would need to contain items based on what has been learnt from LISTENING.
8. Subsets of the PROCEDURES GUIDE/HANDBOOK be developed for the many organisations involved. For example: BOM; SES; RFS; Red Cross; Anglicare, Salvation Army, Washing machine trucks, op-shop and community clothing donations, to name a few.
9. A further subset of the PROCEDURES GUIDE/HANDBOOK would be needed for casual users and volunteers, compared to institutionalised staff representing key agencies. A Users’ Guide/Helper.

10. Storage of equipment and supplies when the need is not required.
11. Insurance arrangements for all levels of need whether corporate, volunteer or private.
12. Consider the needs of the thousands of residents who are Welfare recipients. There is overwhelming evidence, that such folk had the greatest needs during evacuation and recovery, as separate from business owners who lost everything related to their business, for example, buildings, equipment, perishable goods, computer equipment, household furniture, personal possessions, to name a few.
13. Move the bulk of the usual occupiers of the Lismore and low areas of North, South and East Lismore to a new city situated in the area of Lindendale, Tregeagle, Wollongbar.
14. Never again, permit domestic housing, trades or businesses to be established in the vacated area.
15. One suggestion made to me, by a colleague, was to build a large DAM wall, somewhere south of Lismore. Hence, store the water that causes the flooding, for future generations to use. The former Lismore replaced by a vast water storage system!
16. Notwithstanding the above, seriously devise standards that are as fire and flood proof as possible for: building, road [foundations and surfaces], telephone towers, electric power, water, drainage and sewer provisions.
17. Create a State or National supply for ready to move portable housing pods, and motor homes, that can be transported within hours of the occurrence of a future catastrophe. BE PREPARED – IN ADVANCE!
18. Develop a system of satellite, solar powered telephones/ videophones, with simple instructions, that can be dropped from a helicopter to stranded people whether affected from fire, flood, landslide, bomb, whatever the critical need might be, when the normal electric powered system fails.
19. Ensure that there are adequate 'back-up' staff for immediate response to a '000' call, no matter what the circumstances.
20. Such comments and suggestions would be appropriate to consider for the relevant context of Woodburn, Broadwater, Coraki, Cabbage Tree Island and Ballina.

There, you have some thoughts from me.

Now!

WHO IS LISTENING?

Ross

RJL:24/04/2022