

**Submission
No 79**

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

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2022 Flood Inquiry Submission – Joanne Carusi

Terms of Reference

Background

I was born in Lismore, NSW. I lived in Woodburn NSW until the age of 18 and then Lismore for approximately 20 years thereafter. I experienced many floods both in Woodburn (or Kilgin which is where the family farm is) and also Lismore. I was 13 years of age when the 1974 flood occurred, the water came in our farm house up to our knees. We had to stay in the house with the water for four days, we raised the stove and our beds and as many other things as we could. It was a time that I will never forget, I honestly can state that I am still traumatised from that event today at the age of 60.

Not only did our family have to stay there, my parents, myself and my brother but our two neighbours and 5 dogs (on the front veranda of the house). One thing that has stuck in my mind is my mother and I would lift our legs out of the water and we would be covered in leaches. My father (a smoker at the time) would put the end of his cigarette on the leaches and they would back out.

My parents built a new home on a mound high above what Council had recommended approximately 30 years ago. Never in a million years did we ever think the water would go anywhere near that new home but this last flood event of Feb/March 2022 saw the water come into that home up to almost 2 metres in height. What a nightmare it was. Everything has been lost or destroyed, this house and the original farmhouse (which had water almost over the roof), both gone, all the machinery including tractors, harvesters etc, a rice mill and other associated equipment, tonnes of fertilizer that was stored ready for use in the sheds, everything in all the sheds including tools, stored hay for the cattle etc., all the cattle (around 250 head that drowned) and all the crops, fences etc. How does one recover from that!!!!

I spent many a time in Lismore helping the Office where I worked move files to higher grounds in times of flood. As a local you got to know the pattern of the water, at what stage would it break the bank in front of the Police Station in Lismore, when it would start to enter the various streets, at what point the shop owners would start to pack up and move their stock, when the local SES would tell people to get their cars out of the city centre, at what time they would consider it unsafe to be anywhere near the square etc. This local information was invaluable to local business and shop owners and locals generally.

1. Causes and contributing factors

Why was this flood such a disaster? What was so different?

Has the newly constructed **M1 Motorway** south of Woodburn caused or contributed to this inordinately higher volume of water entering the town of Woodburn and surrounding areas that have never experienced such levels ever before?

This new motorway has acted like a dam wall, holding water in. The water simply could not escape anywhere. How could it escape when there are no 'flood escapes' for it. I cant believe the Engineers did not insist on regular and essential flood escapes for that motorway. You talk to the locals and some that were actually on the committee that was formed at the time where local knowledge and input was invaluable, and they say that they did raise this as a critical issue and forecast such a disaster occurring. It would appear that the local knowledge and input was a waste of time and now look at the result. Many many lives and businesses have been ruined because of this recent flood event. To me that reeks of negligence. Where was the duty of care in the construction of the motorway to ensure that there was no negative impact caused by the design and modelling of that motorway?

1.2 Preparation and planning

Bureau of Meteorology (BOM): There was insufficient warning and no accurate projection of water levels.

State Emergency Services (SES): There needs to be local SES stations with local knowledge of the area, not the SES in Wollongong responsible for what is happening (or not) some hundreds of kilometres away.

The need for permanent emergency evacuation centres

This is essential to any and every local area to know that there are permanent, well stocked and maintained evacuation centres. This was not the case with this recent flood event. At the very least, have bedding, food, water, first aid, mobile phone chargers, phones, internet access, showers and toilets.

Flood Reserves needed for cattle

There needs to be flood reserves for cattle. This should be mandatory.

Communications

It was a stressful time when I could not raise my Brother on his phone, for over 24 hours I had no idea where he was or whether he was safe. His phone had gone flat of course and there were no chargers anywhere. Again, total disaster. Communication is imperative in times of these natural disasters.

Street Signs.

In addition, the need to be able to see street signs in larger towns such as Lismore is critical. People trapped inside homes and saying their street location when all street signs are covered by flood water. There needs to be some landmarks at certain points in all towns so that they can be used as markers in times of natural disasters.

1.3 Transition from incident response to recovery.

The hubs that have been established in the local communities have been a big asset. It is difficult to complete forms and provide details when some people have lost absolutely everything, their computers, hard drives, laptops, filing /paperwork, ID, mobile phones etc. In some cases only now are they getting back online with their internets etc after some months post flood.

1.4 Recovery from floods

I don't know if those affected by this recent peril will ever fully recover. What has this done to their spirit and mental health? Use this as an opportunity to action what is needed at all levels of government state and federal to ensure that the next time this happens people will be better positioned to cope with it. We cannot stop these natural disasters but surely we can learn from our mistakes and improve on how we deal with them in the future.

I consent to the publishing of this submission with my name but do not wish to be invited to give evidence at any hearing.