

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

Organisation: RIVER FM
Date Received: 20 May 2022

FLOOD INQUIRY SUBMISSION

92.9 RIVER FM is a community radio station based in Lismore, NSW, that has been operating for over 40 years under the entity North Coast Radio Incorporated. The station currently resides on the second floor of a building at 4 Foley's Road, South Lismore, NSW.

The station has always attempted to keep listeners informed of possible flood risks, associated impacts such as road closures, evacuation announcements and assistance available post flood.

CAUSES OF FLOODS

Given its proximity to the Richmond River Lismore has always been prone to flooding events. Anecdotally these events have been exacerbated by

- the construction of the levee to protect the CBD forcing waters into South and North Lismore.
- the construction of the freeway at Ballina acting as a dam restricting flow of flood waters to the sea.
- the impact of Climate Change.

PREPARATION FOR FLOODS

Primary resources for the station in ascertaining the possibility of a flood event are

the Bureau of Meteorology and the State Emergency Services.

Secondary resources are the Lismore City Council Disaster Dashboard, MyRoadInfo and Lismore based community groups on Facebook.

Using these resources the station communicates information on

- weather
- river heights
- road closures
- location of flood mitigation resources such as sandbags
- warnings about dangers of entering flood waters
- information about flood preparation
- contact details of relevant authorities
- evacuation alerts
- location of evacuation centres and safe routes to them

RESPONSE TO FLOODS

Floods can be categorised as minor, moderate and major, with each category corresponding with an appropriate level of response from the station.

Minor to moderate flooding has normal programming with periodic updates of weather conditions, road closures, river heights, location of sandbags and updates from State Emergency Services.

Moderate to major flooding sees a cessation of normal programming with presenters asked to follow safety protocol of the State Emergency Services.

Two trained presenters then takeover programming with rolling updates of weather, river heights, road closures, evacuation alerts and location of evacuation centres.

2022 FLOODS

The flood of February 2022 saw the station enact its flood procedure which was instrumental in providing listeners the warning they needed to retreat to higher ground.

The rising flood waters saw the electricity meter box located in the ground floor of the station premises submerged, resulting in a loss of power and transmission capabilities.

The presenters then directed their efforts to coordinating a rescue of neighbouring residents in Foley Street. Flagging down a boat and using the station as a drop off point for the 13 people subsequently rescued from surrounding roofs.

Rescued people were then fed and provided warmth till the State Emergency Service could organise larger boats to take them and one of the presenters to the evacuation centre located at Southern Cross University.

The remaining presenter then went through the building lifting station property up on to tables to protect it in the event that the water entered the top floor. The flood peak of 14.6 metres was two metres short of entering the station premises.

When the flood waters receded, the station purchased a generator to power the studio for 12 hours per day, 8am to 8pm.

POST FLOOD RECOVERY

Despite setbacks with transmission due to power outages the station has made a significant contribution to the community recovery effort. The station broadcast information about

- State Emergency Service and government directives
- Lismore City Council updates on road, power and water services
- the Southern Cross University evacuation centre
- recovery centres where residents could access supplies and resources
- location of and contacts for government agencies
- how to access human resources of Australian Defence Force
- how to access help from Resilience Lismore and other volunteer organisations
- the location of banking facilities
- information about accessing flood relief payments and grants
- details of businesses that had reopened
- where people could donate money, goods and services
- locations of providers of physical and mental health
- locations of veterinarians
- social events

Information was gathered through giving public and agencies access to an email address news@2ncr.org.au, as well as presenters visiting recovery centres and collecting information from social media.

All this information has been condensed into a daily morning bulletin, supplemented by select sharing of items during the day.

The recovery effort was hampered by the arrival of a second flood on March 30 2022, that while not as severe as the February flood, was still one of the highest floods recorded and caused significant damage to the area.

Unfortunately the flood caused an electricity outage in South Gundurimbah where the station's transmitter is located, meant that the station was unable to broadcast for two days after the flood peak.

Resuming transmission the station has continued to provide information to assist recovery efforts as well as providing entertainment to help the mental wellbeing of those affected by the flood.

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

While the floods of 2022 were unprecedented in their severity, they were indicative of the facts that floods are a recurring feature in the region and there is a high possibility of similar cataclysmic events occurring in the future.

The station is already in the process of implementing strategies towards being better prepared for future floods.

The floods have provided an excellent opportunity to build communication networks with agencies, businesses and citizens of the local area. The floods have proven that the community and volunteers within it underpin effective response and recovery efforts, that the station can play an integral role in helping communicate objectives and what is needed to reach them.

The station already has a strong multicultural presence featuring programs from a number of ethnic backgrounds. Implementation of multilingual flood warnings is feasible.

The station has undertaken to improve its transmission capabilities in inclement weather with the purchase of new STL links for its transmitter and is investigating other means to improve its performance.

The purchase of a generator provides an option for keeping studio running should mains power be interrupted. Means of providing an independent power supply to the generator is being investigated.

The interruption of the NBN server highlighted the need for a backup server to cover such eventualities.

Due to the experience of providing a place of sanctuary for flood victims near the station, provisions to cater for such a contingency in the future are to be kept on the premises,

A stockpile of batteries, torches, dry food, water, phones, laptop computers, fuel, oil and first-aid equipment will be established for presenters.

A clearer line of communication between the studio and relevant authorities such as the State Emergency Services is to be made to avoid time lags in dissemination of information.

The establishment of satellite communication would assist communication with authorities and asking for assistance in the event that communication towers were not operating.

CONCLUSION

92.9 RIVER FM has always played a role in preparation for, response to and recovery from flood events in the local area. The station is working towards improving its community relationships and technical infrastructure to improve its performance in the future.

The loss of a number of the station's sponsors due to flood damage and the limited local economic opportunities for the station in the foreseeable future, mean that the scope and scale of improvements is limited.

Hopefully the inquiry can see the value of the service we provide the community and contribute some funding towards supporting the station in its endeavours.