



Lismore Square underwater
Photo: NR Aerial Photography



Messages of hope
amid disaster
Photo: Chibo



Lismore's tent city recovery centre
Photo: Chibo



ScoMo sidesteps irate locals
Photo: Chibo



Locals tried to clear landslips
Photo: Sue Stock

Northern Rivers climate disaster 2022

Your 12 page recovery report



Roads were cut off
across the region,
isolating people
Pic: PAC



Rescues from rooftops
Photo: Eddie Lloyd



Lismore rain gauges
Photo: Andy Gough



Climate catastrophe 2022: climate deniers be damned

As I sit to write today, a rebound flood is creeping into the backyard exactly one month since the catastrophic flood and landscape collapse event that hit our region on 28th February.

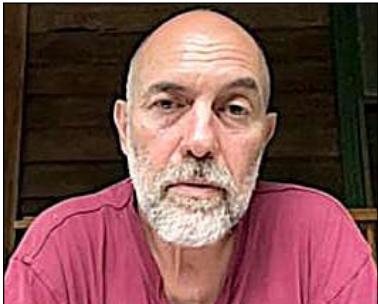
Regardless of what height it reaches, it will extract a major toll on our collective endurance. Australian summers were once something to be enjoyed, but they have become something to be endured.

Australia has always had natural disasters, but the scale and frequency of major disaster has ramped up. We are 30 years on from the credible scientific warnings that carbon accumulation was heating the planet and the result would be bigger and more floods, more extreme droughts and fire seasons, and larger more powerful storms and coastal erosion.

We are now living in the inevitable dystopia that we were warned about, climate denial has been revealed for the cynical crime against humanity that it is.

Corrupt politicians, major party donors, fossil fuel lobbyists and the Murdoch media empire are all guilty of bringing us to this point where our warning period has now lapsed, we are in the climate catastrophe and sadly only the very beginning of it.

It's not that we feel abandoned by government, it is that we have been cynically betrayed. Climate denial as government policy is not just a political problem, it is the cause of the abject failure to monitor, protect, warn and respond



by Aidan Ricketts

to increasingly frequent and serious natural disasters. We have been lied to and decades have been lost.

The Lismore flood and landscape collapse event has proved that the state is ill-prepared when the real catastrophe strikes. Community will always be the first responders; community will always carry the load and be agile enough to respond to unpredictability.

The clunky clockwork of the state works predictably in predictable situations and collapses in novel, catastrophic situations. The problem of rescuing people was not caused by people being under-prepared – Lismore knows floods – but these floods exceeded all official records by two-plus metres in a single bound.

Our community, with some help from state agencies who were able to mobilise, kept the death toll surprisingly low. I am not criticising the heroes of the SES for a moment, but we have all learned that locals will still always be needed on the front line, and in many cases only civilians have the independence to do the really daring stuff.

When it comes to the immediate

aftermath, again we see it is community action like Helping Hands in 2017, and Resilient Lismore and *Koori Mail* in 2022 who emerge quickly to spearhead the recovery while the clockwork of the state is only just winding up.

The community knows what to do, but we could do with support. Government should trust our community first responders and fund and support them fully from the get-go.

Safety issues

This brings me to another important issue. Evacuations and the ideology of 'safety'. In this rebound flood, there has been a flurry of increasingly didactic evacuation orders, for an event that is actually quite moderate.

Let's be clear here, our communities have lived with flood and most home-owners know that as far as possible you need to be on-site, assessing the situation and responding incrementally as it develops.

Yes, we all need survival plans for the worst case scenarios, but in most floods we also need to be there to respond. Evacuation advice is a great idea for those who don't feel confident to stay and respond, but we need to also respect those who do stay and respond.

Mass evacuations would cripple our communities' ability to respond, overload evacuation centres capacity, create a massive disempowered class of displaced people and I fear lead inexorably to an extension of paternalism in which re-entry to our homes and suburbs would be barred in the

aftermath until some official from far away deemed it 'safe' enough for us.

That level of safety is an illusion in a disaster; it's not about the 100-page safety manual when the flood has just smashed all official records, it's about actually responding quickly to the unavoidable risks.

Locals know what they will find when they return home to begin the clean-up; it ain't hygienic; it ain't safe but it's what we have to deal with. Sure there's a slip hazard on my verandah, that's why I want to hose it off; sure there's a snake at the bottom of the stairs, she's probably always there.

We are on a steep learning curve as we walk into the climate crisis. We can't magically move entire towns, and glib statements like "People shouldn't live there" ignores the fact that climate change impacts are creating a poverty cycle that prevents people from moving to the house on the hill, no matter how much they may wish to.

The role of the state should not be to disempower and remove the community, but to support us and assist us in our predicament.

Responses

Climate change is real and the warning period is over. We need to accept that sometimes our town is a river, the railway bridges have to go because some of our streets need to be navigation channels and the railway line acts as massive reef barring boat navigation, and increasing water flow problems.

We need to ensure that flood-prone houses have escape hatches in the roof and ladders to access

higher places when needed.

We need to accept that in events of this size, no amount of 'engineering solution' will ever be enough and lay witness to the fact that the existing Lismore levee works in small floods and causes a CBD tsunami in large floods. The higher the levee the more destructive the overtop tsunami.

From the fires of 2019 to the catastrophic landscape collapse and flood of 2022, we keep learning that community will be the first responders and that evacuation, (whilst useful for those who opt for it) is not the only answer, because when it gets too big for the state, and it will, community is our only hope.

We don't need the state to displace and molly coddle us, we need it to support our emerging functionality in a crisis that is only going to keep growing.

Climate deniers, fossil fools and their fellow travellers be damned. You have poured scorn on reputable scientists for decades and have blocked any meaningful response all along.

Lismore faces big questions about how to live with and respond to what is clearly going to be a greater frequency of extreme events, but the whole country, the planet is facing this. There is nowhere to run. Inland droughts, coastal erosion, super storms and cyclones, nowhere is going to be fully safe.

Time is running out, climate action is overdue, and please don't speak to me about safety, if it doesn't include actually acknowledging the giant existential risk that climate denial has created.

Burning down the house – during a flood?



Photo: Jennifer Steele

One of the most dramatic images from the recent floods was this photo of South Lismore resident Rahima Jackson's home ablaze as it submerged below the floodwaters.

Ms Jackson (*pictured, inset*) was on her roof escaping rising floodwaters when she noticed white smoke pouring from her roof.

"At first I didn't really pay attention to it, because it just didn't really seem like the kind of thing you needed to pay attention to in the middle of a storm, in the middle of a flood," she told ABC North Coast.

She called emergency services but a neighbour with a boat reached her first and ferried her to safer ground.

She has no idea how the fire started, but the house was left uninhabitable, with missing walls and sections of roof caved in.

She wants to return to her South Lismore



Photo: Emma Rennie

home to rebuild but said flood mitigation won't be enough to protect Lismore.

"I don't know what amount of flood mitigation could have helped us. I think they need a different approach, I think it's going to be more about flood-proofing than mitigation," she said.

She called on the government to subsidise the costs of rebuilding homes and businesses.

"I want to rebuild where I am, I'm not interested in moving, so I guess I'm interested to see how they do that, because it needs to be flood-proof," she said.

"We don't need to go through this ever again."

BIBLICAL FLOOD

by Yagia Gentle

In the Bible's Old Testament there is a story about the pharaoh not listening to the grievances of his Jewish subjects. God rains down sicknesses and destructive environmental anomalies until the slaves are liberated.

We've just had a record-breaking flood creating sadness and destruction all down the east coast of Australia. This coming soon after the coronavirus epidemic, huge violent fires, drought, and floods. Climate change is upon us, and still our leaders aren't listening.

Last year, on a trip to Kirabati, our PM Scott Morrison smiled and waved his way past a parade of children pretending to drown in rising water, and proceeded to a world environmental summit in Glasgow, Scotland, where the only offerings he could bring to the table were the leftovers of concessions from the National Party.

Deals such as constructing a rail line for the Adani coal mine, and fracking coal seam gas in the Northern Territory's Beetaloo

Basin have been made by Nationals leader Barnaby Joyce, our own Kevin Hogan, and a few others. Deals that compensate the mining companies they receive donations from.

In the whole governance of Australia, mining companies have had preferential treatment. Subsidies, low taxes and restricting policies around alternatives have become the norm. Even now, when climate change is directly affecting us, the Liberal government is giving \$21 million towards fracking in the Beetaloo Basin, at the risk of poisoning the Great Artesian underground water supply, and against the wishes of the Indigenous people of the area.

Indeed, when the traditional owners from Borroloola and Minyerri told a Senate inquiry they feared fracking would poison their water and destroy the land, they were ignored.

With energy comes responsibility. Society expects that weapons are not misused, anger and violence are in check, vehicles are used for their intended purpose, and money (which is a currency of energy) is

used to benefit society and the environment.

World leaders have not been responsible with energy from fossil fuels. Millions of years of solar energy trapped in coal and gas has been expended in the last one hundred years, and the earth is seeking a balance. Science has been shouting at us to stop. Indigenous people all over the world have been quietly telling us to respect the earth, and now the younger generation is telling us they've had enough.

The new normal is not something to look forward to. Extreme weather events, coral bleaching, deforestation, species extinction is not the way to go. Radical change is needed, and it starts with the individual voting for a government with the savvy to take on the mining and logging companies and support alternatives.

Germany, South Korea, Holland, Costa Rica, and many other countries have found a way out, and Australia can too. There are many good political parties putting their hand up in the next election.

The first step is to vote for one of them.



Val Axtens

Waiting... for rescue...

by Laurie Axtens

"000 ... beep beep beep click ... You have called triple zero. We understand you are calling about an emergency. At the present moment all our operators are busy dealing with a large volume of calls. Please hold the line. Your call is important."

"Your call has progressed. Please hold the line. Your call is important. Your call has progressed. Please hold the line..."

"Lismore police, how can I help you?"

"I live in North Lismore and the floodwater is now a foot high in the dining room. It's coming up at a rate of about a foot every ten minutes."

"I'll put you onto the SES and you can go on their list, but there have been a lot of people requesting help so it might take a while."

"Just put me on the list please."

Crickets.

"Did you receive an order to evacuate?"

"Yes but the water was already in the street when they told us it would be above 1974. My mum is 91, I couldn't get her out even if I wanted to. They're about four hours out. It's 5am now and the water is already above 13 metres – they said it wouldn't be reaching that till 9."

"The gauges have broken, apparently."

"OK, thanks"

"Good luck, Hope they get to you soon."

I ring, text, message and facebook captain

Wally Fishguts, the law lecturer from across the park. He's a boaty. Finally a response: "I have to wait for first light, straight after the family I'll be there."

Brain discovers whole new utterly unutilised regions – there is a fire going on in there. I'm trying to build a floatation device out of blue tack, a garbage bin and wool yarn. That won't work. I build a ladder to the loft made of filing cabinets. Mum won't be able to climb it though.

The water tops the Tesla wall and the lights go out and plunge us into darkness. Thankfully I have a torch.

Large objects in the house start falling over in the rising waters. I glide the beam across the dark waters. Was that the fridge? What was that? A chest of drawers?

The cat has started to yowl constantly on my bed, which has become a raft.

I'm searching for something like a ladder that we could use to get them into the roof. I walk waist-deep back through the house. There is nothing.

Dawn breaks, I see my mother sitting on a chair on a table looking serenely down on the waters growing about her. It's the perfect shot.

The water is chest-deep in the lounge room – a boat appeared at the upper window. Wally and daughter are there... they look like angels in the pale dawn light as it struggles to illuminate the world above the heavy clouds and rain of the morning...

The rescue begins.

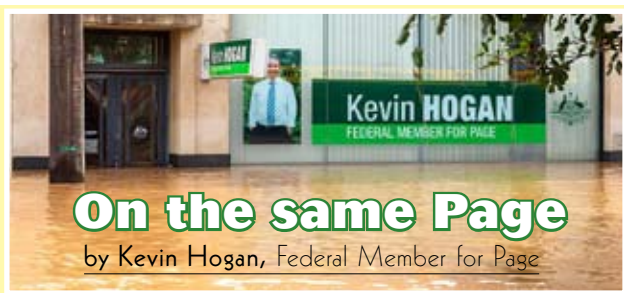
Epic clean-up continues



Photo: Sue Stock



Photo: Chibo



NATURAL DISASTER IN OUR REGION

We have been through a Natural Disaster unlike anything experienced in living memory. I want to thank everyone for the support they have shown each other over the last two weeks.

We have announced significant support for our region.

- The Disaster Recovery Payment is \$1000 per adult and \$400 per child;
- The Disaster Recovery Allowance (DRA) is an ongoing payment for a maximum of 13 weeks. This is up to \$677 per fortnight, depending on your personal circumstances;
- Disaster Relief Grants are available to cover replacement of essential furniture and personal effects, emergency food, clothing and accommodation, repair or, and essential repairs to housing to a habitable condition;
- Temporary housing support is available. This includes hotel accommodation, grants for rental costs, motor homes and temporary dwelling options;
- Grants for small businesses – up to \$50,000 is available to cover costs including repairing damaged fittings and equipment and replacing stock. \$10,000 is available for small businesses not eligible for this support, they will be able to apply on the Service NSW website in the coming days;
- Grants for non-profit organisations – up to \$50,000 is available to cover costs including repairing damaged fittings and equipment and replacing stock;
- Grants for primary producers – up to \$75,000 is available to cover costs including repairing damaged fencing and equipment, replacing livestock, salvaging crops and restoring fields. Grants of up to \$25,000 are available for farmers not currently eligible for this support. For further information, go to: raa.nsw.gov.au or call 1800-678-593;
- Grants for medium sized businesses – \$200,000 grants to assist with clean-up and essential repairs. This program will be run by the Department of Regional NSW and will open in the coming weeks for applications;
- Flood Clean-up Package – the clean-up covers both insured and uninsured properties and assists with the clean-up and restoration of flood damaged assets;
- St Vincent de Paul Society is offering financial assistance of up to \$3,000 depending on the level of damage, the size of the family, and insurance status.
- Freight subsidies for primary producers – up to 50% of the cost on the carriage of livestock and fodder to help primary producers. This will be available through the Rural Assistance Authority, call 1800-678-593 to apply;
- The Australian Taxation Office has also announced support including extra time to pay tax or lodge tax returns, activity statements or other obligations, and are prioritising any refunds owed to you;
- Australian Red Cross will provide two grants to people affected by the New South Wales 2022 floods;
- Bereavement Grant – \$20,000 (to support next-of-kin of those who died as a direct result of the floods);
- Household Grant – \$500 per household;
- BizRebuild is offering vouchers to help small businesses affected by the March 2022 storms and floods;
- Retooling Voucher – \$2,000;
- Business Advisory Voucher – \$500;
- Critical Producer Grants for significantly impacted primary producers (in addition to existing grants). For example, a farmer can apply for herd rebuilding, replacement of fences, and other damaged infrastructure. This program will be run by the Department of Regional NSW and will open in the coming weeks for applications;
- Funding for property assessments and the demolition of those found to be uninhabitable. This is an 'opt-in' program for property owners to cover structural assessments, demolition and waste removal costs. This program will be run by the Department of Regional NSW and will open in the coming weeks for applications;
- Primary Industry Grants for projects that support sector-wide recovery. For example, projects that improve supply chain and building industry resilience. This program will be run by the Department of Regional NSW and will open in the coming weeks for applications.

There is more funding available. To see the full list, go to my Facebook where I post regular updates and announcements.

There are Centrelink and Service NSW staff available at evacuation centres, and a mobile office is set up at Goonellabah Community Centre to assist with claims.

My office has also been flooded, if you need any assistance, please email me at: kevin.hogan.mp@aph.gov.au



by Yagia Gentle

When Lismore's levee broke on Monday morning 1st March, houses and businesses that were prepared for the 1-in-100 years flood were suddenly submerged in an extra two metres of water.

Huge piles of house contents and wall and ceiling linings appeared outside of every affected house, and thousands of shocked people were finding a way to work together while the emergency services prove impotent.

The figures are staggering. In the Lismore area alone, approximately 4000 people were made homeless and 1000 businesses were ruined.

And then there are the landslips. Houses collapsing and twisting, roads that empty into a crevice and mountains of earth blocking roads.

In Mullumbimby, the community organised teams of local mountain climbers to search out houses made isolated by landslips. They found houses submerged in mud, dead and injured people, and people stuck in mud up to their mouths.

Stories of rescues abound. In Lismore locals in their boats rescuing whole families from rooftops after spending all night waiting in the pouring rain. In Coraki a young family waited for three days to be rescued. Some brave people traversed the flooded Wilsons River to be met with constant screams from those trapped in South Lismore.

A friend told me how he had to counsel his daughter at 1am while the water was rising in her house and she was panicking. She was eventually saved by the man next door, who swam under the eve to open her door underwater.

My neighbour explained how he went onto his verandah in the early morning as the land and trees right in front of him fell into the valley.

When the clean-up happened after the flood we got a sample of what poisonous water can do. The floodwater, mixed with clay, agricultural chemicals, dead animals and sewerage, engulfed the whole coast from Brisbane to Sydney, causing infections on the smallest cuts.

In normal times each of these stories would be a news headline, unfortunately these stories are becoming normal. When Tony Abbott was prime minister he got rid of all the research and planning contingencies around climate change and its consequences.

Now we have a prime minister from the same party, who brings coal into Parliament, laughs and tells the opposition not to be afraid of it.

The future of our region: Why we need to act now

As a senior lecturer in science and regenerative agriculture at Southern Cross University, independent candidate for Page, Dr Hanabeth Luke (pictured) teaches weather systems, water flows and climate resilience. She understands both farming and the environment.

As parts of Lismore this week faced another evacuation order, she said her calls for support ahead of the early March floods went unanswered, with tens of thousands of locals now without liveable homes.

"I watched the waters rise in late February and saw the weather system coming down. I knew we were about to be hit by something huge. There is so much more we need to do to be better prepared," she said.

Hanabeth has called for greater community input into preparation, response and recovery in the face of this and future climate disasters.

"I can't reiterate enough how serious this is. We need to have appropriate modelling and planning in place. The future of our region depends on it," she said.



Resilience requires priority funding for:

1. Responsive early warning system
2. Locally managed emergency preparation and response agency
3. Establishment of Recovery Committee that is well resourced to lead the rebuild
4. Well-funded 'wrap around' services for the mental wellbeing of our people

once an emergency was called," she said.

"The reality is the warning signs were ignored. Had we had the right mechanisms in place, I firmly believe we would not be seeing the level of devastation that we're now dealing with.

"Our community is deeply concerned about the future of our region, which we love very much. The sheer scale of these floods fundamentally alters the conversation. We need to talk about the measures required to maintain a safe and habitable city. These discussions must be informed by both science and local knowledge, bringing the community along at every step.

"The needs of businesses, farmers, tenants, homeowners and our homeless

population need to be heard and accepted, across the whole river system. But this is a bigger conversation than the Richmond River; our entire weather system is changing."

More than bricks and mortar

Since announcing as a candidate, Hanabeth has made it her business to meet with leaders of key regional organisations.

At her recent campaign launch, she said the region's housing crisis had now become a housing catastrophe.

"Although I started with this work before the floods, the messages of all these community leaders stand stronger than ever now we've been through this latest crisis.

"Our people need homes right now like never before, but they also need the 'wrap around' services that support mental health, disabilities and domestic violence. If we don't address this with urgency, domestic violence, crime and declining mental health will be like a beast that feeds itself.

"As the eighth poorest electorate in Australia, we know that our community was already struggling. There appears to be an expectation that our people should rebuild and just get on with it. To fix this, we must first properly identify the problem. We are facing a housing crisis at the same time as a climate crisis. The whole region needs to prepare for what comes next.

"Let's be inspired by ideas like the half-houses built in Chile after the 2003 earthquake. Recovery is more than bricks and mortar, though we will need plenty of that. Let's think innovatively and together we can plan for a future where our people and regional businesses can prosper and cope better with what is to come.

"The time for action is now."

Without formal community involvement, disaster recovery could turn into another disaster

by Janelle Saffin MP
Member for Lismore

A month ago our region was hit by a catastrophic extreme weather event and every day we find out more about the extent of this disaster.

As I consult with people around the electorate, I keep hearing both heroic and horror stories, and I am in awe of how local communities stepped up and did so much when government-run services could not cope, despite the best efforts of local SES.

It was friends and strangers who took in evacuees, who cooked meals, who donated goods and sorted donations, who organised health care and prescriptions, set up emergency flying foxes to get supplies to isolated people, who walked in generators to cut off areas, even private helicopter networks did air drops.

We need that local knowledge and experience to be included in recovery and

rebuilding. Two weeks after the flood, I was in Nimbin at a well-run community meeting. People articulated well what is needed in the short, medium and long term.

One of the big lessons was the need for telecommunications systems that are fit for purpose, with internet services and satellite phones we can rely on in emergencies.

I shall continue to advocate to get the changes communities need, including the right response to climate change as raised by the last speaker.

At the Nimbin meeting and the briefing I had at The Channon volunteer hub, it was clear that community took the lead in the flood response and must be at the heart of the recovery process.

That is why I have been calling for a Reconstruction Commission with one clear line of command and all levels of government, community and stakeholders involved,

to lead the rebuilding of our communities (physical, housing, financial, farming, health). And I have called for the NSW mental health commissioner to be included in all recovery efforts.

Be assured I am doing all in my power to get the help we need and deserve, starting with shelter and rebuilding lives.

In the days after the flood I told the Premier we desperately needed more appropriate solutions for shelter for residents who can't return home while homes are repaired, and those who have no home to return to.

Three main things I asked for were in the premier's housing response on 10th March:

- Temporary pod dwellings to allow people to stay on their land while rebuilding
- A supply of mobile motor homes for emergency temporary accommodation
- Longer term rental support scheme, providing 16 weeks rental support that can also



Janelle addressing a community meeting in Nimbin

be used across the border. Unfortunately we are still waiting for details of how this will be done. There is a housing taskforce, but when I asked for the terms of

reference they didn't have one. As the member for Lismore, representing areas hardest hit by the disaster, I expected to be included or consulted, but that hasn't happened.

The taskforce met with local mayors and GMs recently and only National Party MPs were allowed to attend. This is appalling. All MPs from the flood disaster zones should be included.

What was a good immediate response on housing now risks becoming yet another bureaucratic bungle, as people are left in limbo and there is confusion about who will be moved to mobile van parks, and who will be able to get housing pods.

Resilience NSW is the government agency that is supposed to lead disaster and emergency efforts from prevention to recovery. Given that the disaster preparedness was inadequate and the disaster response was inadequate, this disaster is beyond their capacity.

Now one month since the flood, we urgently need a single point of leadership with direction and clear communication to take on the recovery and rebuilding.

Recovery, climate change and adaptation

by Sue Higginson

On the night of the last Wednesday in February, I was told I had won the support of the Greens NSW to become the next Greens MP in the NSW Upper House. I will enter the Parliament as David Shoebridge leaves to run for the Senate in the Federal election next month. I felt deeply humbled, privileged and supported. I was extremely excited, even if a tad nervous about this big new venture.

Then, in the early hours of the following Monday, it was clear our beautiful region was in deadly serious trouble. At daybreak our town friends were in tinnies, on kayaks and jet skis risking their lives rescuing friends from roofs who were holding on for their dear lives as the brown muddy water of our river violently escaped the trap of the levy to reach its flood plains, as a river must.

Our hill friends were holding on to their lives, friends and homes as whole parts of the catchment could no longer hold on and they were cut off from all help. As the scale of the catastrophe unfolded, our hearts shattered as we lost lives, homes, treasures, work and the environment we knew. The losses and harm will continue to be realised as time goes on and our complex minds grapple it all.

This catastrophe was not caused by a flood as we know floods and have experienced them. The catastrophe was caused by an extreme weather event that experts call a cut-off low or colloquially, a rain bomb.

That same morning the IPCC (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change aka the world's most credible climate change body, made up of thousands of the world's most qualified climate and earth systems scientists and experts,

who Liberal National Coalition Governments and their fossil fuel and corporate masters have sought to ridicule and marginalise for over a decade) released its report on 'climate change impacts, adaptation and vulnerability'.

Of its many deep findings and advice, it says "heavy rainfall intensity is projected to increase... over southern and eastern Australia".

The report elaborates on decades of work on adaptation which is defined by the IPCC as "the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects". The converse of adaptation is maladaptation which the IPCC defines as "an action that may lead to increased risk of adverse climate-related outcomes, increased vulnerability to climate change, or diminished welfare, now or in the future".

An example of maladaptation from the IPCC is "a flood mitigation dam built to protect to flood levels anticipated over the next 30 years may fail on longer timescales even though its planned operational lifespan is 60-70 years." The IPCC stresses that adaptation, mitigation and sustainability ought to be linked to realise co-benefits.

What does adaptation that links mitigation and sustainability mean for our region? We know the PMF (probable maximum flood) for Lismore is 16m. We must now look ahead to this as central to our planning, not backward at the 1954, 1974, 2017 or even 2022 (at 14.6m) flood levels.

We know that we cannot engineer our way to safety, that through mitigation we cannot 'flood proof' the catchment and the floodplains. Every engineering option will harm someone somewhere and the bigger we think engineering-wise, the more significant the impact elsewhere.



Adaptation for our region involves a whole of catchment management and rehabilitation plan to retain rainfall, reduce run-off, lower flood heights and delay flood peaks. For some on the lower slopes in flood areas it will mean raising homes and buildings; for those in the lowest areas it means offering supported voluntary land swaps and the swapped lowlands regenerated to nature, cultural, park, recreational, educational and market place lands.

For those who wish to stay in the lower areas they must be supported to do so in the safest way through design and appropriate materials. We need to properly focus on preparedness with all of the training and tools available to community. We need to look at making the water move through, rise and recede in the least harmful way possible, which may mean removing levees, embankments and other such unsafe barriers.

The environment is a complex dynamic living thing with unmatched strength and capacity. It is essential that our region is given the support and opportunity

to rebuild and re-envision our blue-green wonderful region, including its heart, Lismore. All members of the community must be armed with the best available science, knowledge and awareness of the catchment's dynamics and capacity.

Two weeks in to our recovery our Federal MP, National Party's Kevin Hogan, announced "the debates about mitigation are finished" and that he has decided we will be doing flood mitigation which will be engineering works. Kevin is part of the reason we are so unprepared for what we are going through and what lies ahead. Liberal National Coalition governments, their fossil fuel mates and their hatred of science and innovation have stolen the last 10 years of climate action from us.

Ten years ago, we were at the forefront of climate change science and adaptation. We were working on what we must do to protect communities, save lives, work with the environment and transition our economy. Our scientific and technical experts, our public interest institutions and the Climate Commission were leading

the way. Then in 2013 Tony Abbott scrapped it all. He took our money from this life-saving work, marginalised all of the incredible experts who were doing it, and empowered his fossil fuel masters to escalate their carbon pollution efforts. Make no mistake, under Scott Morrison and Kevin Hogan's Government we are still approving new coal mines and gas projects and exporting coal like there is no tomorrow.

Scott Morrison came to visit us in Lismore 10 days into the catastrophe, but he did not talk to the people who waited for him. Instead, he sent some 60 armed police officers to keep the traumatised community members away from him. I witnessed it. It was not an act of leadership in the face of disaster, it was an act of cowardice and disdain. I was standing with the incredible strong women Mandy Nolan, the Greens candidate for Richmond, and Kashmir Miller, the Greens candidate for Page. Women who are smart, strong, kind and ready to lead.

This Federal election in May, the best thing we can do for our recovery is vote the Liberal National Coalition out. I go further and say, vote 1 Greens wherever you are and vote 1 Greens David Shoebridge in the Senate. The best way to take back the stolen decade on climate action and to end coal and gas is to vote 1 Greens. We are the best chance of getting the accelerated action we need.

The IPCC has issued a code red for humanity. UN Secretary-General António Guterres says the alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable. We must take decisive action now. It has to be now. Our lives and everything we know depends on it.

The debates on flood mitigation are finished?

The Federal Government has announced a flood mitigation study for the Wilsons/ Richmond River catchment. It has also allocated \$75 million to fund the findings of such modelling.

Federal Member for Page, Kevin Hogan said the debates on flood mitigation in our

region are finished.

“For too long previous Councils have debated the merits of flood mitigation,” Mr Hogan said. “Today that debate is done. Those days are finished.

“We cannot keep putting our families and businesses through this. Our community needs confidence, and that is what this provides.

“The CSIRO will undertake the modelling and their findings will be implemented. This will include the whole catchment and all towns and villages within the catchment.

“For everyone who is against engineering solutions to flood mitigation, the debate is over. We will be doing engineering work for flood mitigation.”



Controlling Lismore floods is possible if the will is there

by Mark Pestell

According to historians, the Middle Ages lasted for around 1000 years. Life was harsh, with a limited diet and little comfort. Starvation, disease and poverty were common. Children had a 50% survival rate beyond age one, and began to contribute to family life around age 12.

However, one society for over 400 years was distinctly different, the Khmer empire, today the land of Cambodia, in that its standard of living and affluence was exceptional.

Whereas other cultures had outstanding moments of splendour, the Khmer consistently developed and organised an empire where living standards outshone the rest of the planet.

In 1296AD, Chinese traveller Zhou Daguan visited the capital Angkor as a member of a diplomatic mission sent by Chinese Emperor Temur Khan, and his written record of his residency is a detailed eyewitness account of that extraordinary and mysterious time and place.

Put simply, his descriptions plus massive archeological findings, place the Khmer empire as the greatest society in the world at the time.

One of their main achievements was to give the population security against natural disasters by the building of massive man-made dams called barays. These secured nature, controlling and managing water, which allowed for the development and expansion of the society.

The barays captured and controlled the flooding of the monsoon rains which poured down through the country. The water was used for domestic, agricultural and religious purposes, and the management strategy permitted water to be returned back into the river system, and yet enough was left for other uses.

The largest of the barays were the East and West Barays, and both were almost the same size. Both were rectangular in shape and measuring approximately 7.8 by 2.1 kilometres, with walls 13m high. The larger West Baray is one of the largest hand-cut water reservoirs on Earth, possessing a

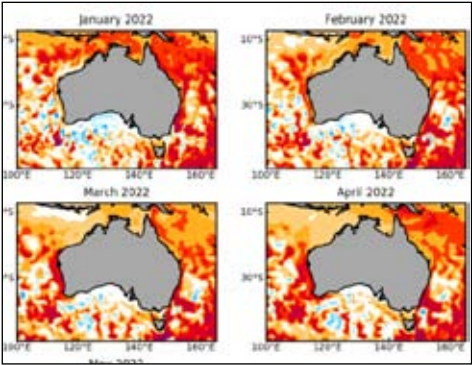
current maximum capacity of 12 to 14 billion gallons of water (53 million m3). Both are considered the largest dams of their type ever built.

The topography of Cambodia is not dissimilar to where the Wilson and Leicester riverine systems meet. The ancient Khmer earthworks show that rapid flooding such as that which hits our area can be controlled.

If a long-term development project was begun to establish large barays to the north and west of Lismore, flooding could be controlled, and with organised management, water would be allowed to flow back into the river.

The surplus water would provide opportunity for regeneration of our rainforest, to develop eco-tourism, to create an Indigenous cultural centre like Mossman Gorge, allow for new real estate opportunities, and act as a carbon sink.

The benefits would be enormous. If only political will could seize the opportunity.



BOM predicted hot water forecast maps

A look into the Bureau of Meteorology forecast shows the expected warming of the Tasman sea from January through to April with a very wide and hot stream of water pouring down from the Coral sea. Cyclones follow the water which is hottest.

In 2022 the BOM are showing for four months the east coast of NSW as far south as Newcastle will experience very warm water, as a potential magnet attracting cyclones which could impact our valley.

Saving the animals

My name is Lucinda from Pets and Saddles, and I rescue and care for unwanted animals.

I'm safe now. Safe under the umbrella of a caring friend, who also lost much in the recent floods in Lismore.

Nevertheless, part of me is still standing on that milk crate, balanced on top of a chair, both of them lashed by my belt and a piece of rope to a strut in the upper walls of the mezzanine floor of a shed.

The chair has begun to float so I have made a further sling that is attached to the wall for me and my phone, in case I also need to float. My head is 20 odd centimetres from the tin roof and the water is up to my shoulders.

The 22 cats with me are hanging in the purlins of the roof in terrified silence. Sadly, there were originally 23, but one panicked and drowned.

About 4.30am I'd realised with a sinking heart that the mezzanine level they had built four metres above the shed floor after the 2017 floods, wasn't going to be high enough.

In the 2017 floods, Max, the difficult parrot that nobody wanted and had therefore lived with me for eight years, plus a guinea pig, were hung from the ceiling of my shop. I thought that they would be safe there. They both drowned, trapped in their cages.

I wasn't about to have that horror happen again, so when the owners of the shed up the road kindly offered their mezzanine floor, I jumped at the chance. The day before the flood, all the birds were temporarily rehoused, and I was sure that the rescue cats would be safe with me. Unfortunately, the fish could not be moved (I lost most of them).

The cats were transported in large portable cages along with their travel cages. When the water was ankle-deep I removed them from the large cages and put them in the carry cages, which I propped on top of the large cages.

When the water was at waist level, I hung towels and sheets from the roof of the shed for the cats to climb and let them out of the carry cages. As has already been mentioned, soon afterwards the only safe place left for them was the purlins in the roof.

I phoned 000 three times. A bit foggy on the times, I think the first was about 5.30am when the water was up to my knees. Reflecting on it now, unlike many who by that time had lost communication, for some reason I still had a connection. Their only answer was. "We have you logged."

Finally, about 12pm when I knew that assistance was not coming anytime soon and drowning was a definite reality, I phoned a volunteer friend and asked her to blast repeatedly across Facebook that I desperately needed help. I also explained which part of the roof I was under, so that if someone came, they would know where to look.

His name is Jason and he came with two mates in a small dinghy down the river from Dunoon.

The first I knew of his bravery was a knock on the roof of the shed at about 1.30pm, then the deafening scream of portable electric tools as he cut a hole in the tin above; so close to my face that I ended up with metal in my eyes.



When he dragged me through the hole and threw me into the boat followed by one sopping wet cat that landed on my chest, did I give a sigh of relief? I truly cannot remember.

I do remember feeling concerned for all those cats left behind and as we putted in the tinny back to Dunoon, perhaps I said something. Because Jason, after depositing me and one cat on dry land returned to the flooded shed, dived into the muddy water, retrieved as many cat cages as he could and saved a further eight cats.

Three days later when the water had receded, I was still locked in at Dunoon and feeling helpless. I knew that the cats left behind were probably still hanging on the mezzanine floor, hungry and frightened.

My worries were quickly allayed by the truly wonderful, volunteers, who went back to the shed and rescued all the cats apart from two that had decided they would take their chances in the uncertain terrain of Lismore CBD.

I am delighted to report that both have since been found and are once again safe; patiently waiting for a kind human to give them a permanent home.

The SES phoned at 4pm on the day of the flood; two and a half hours after Jason and his two friends had saved my life. They asked if I was okay, as did the police, who phoned at 8pm that night. There were many things I might have said, but I just said. "Yes, I'm still alive."

I cannot return to my home as yet. The road to there is impassable. Fortunately I have a caretaker, who is looking after the animals that live there. Fingers crossed it won't be long, although at the moment the road is totally destroyed.

The wet cat that landed on my chest when I was first saved? He is a ginger and had only been in my care for two days. He is so intelligent that when he fell in the water and I yelled. "Swim to me!" He did so. From that moment until Jason dragged us to safety, he never left me.

I cannot keep him, because in the cat world he is not a crowd pleaser. But he is a special boy. Hopefully he will find an appreciative, loving human very soon.

As for me? The old shop is gone. So, I am hoping that someone can rent me a small shop or give me a share space for twelve months at affordable rent. I will only be selling pet and pet food supplies. The animal sanctuary will be elsewhere. Please phone 0412-966-748.

Words cannot express my gratitude to Jason and his friends. They truly saved my life. And a sincere thank you to the volunteers, who, during the most difficult of circumstances made the effort to save my animals.

Drowning in climate inaction

by Emma Briggs

A devastating, deadly, catastrophic, unprecedented, horrifying flood recently destroyed houses, streets and towns in northern New South Wales, where I live. None of these adjectives is exaggerated.

Fortunately for me, I wasn't directly affected, but along with most of the community, I have shovelled mud, carried furniture, demolished walls, washed and cleaned neighbours' homes over the past three weeks.

I hugged a stranger in the street and listened to a friend's sobs as she tried to salvage her little girls' childhood memories. I heard a presenter break down on the local radio station, without explanation. No explanation was needed; I understood.

The flood hit Lismore the hardest. The water reached levels two to three metres higher than ever recorded before. It came overnight, so quickly that many people woke on floating beds and were forced onto their roofs.

Most waited several hours until neighbours in little boats came to their rescue. Hardly anyone is insured because companies either refuse flood cover in this area, or charge exorbitantly for it.

Weeks later the town is still full of toxic, stinking mud. Countless people have become homeless, sick, lost their livelihoods and suffered severe trauma. Some are dead. All these facts are tragic, but they are not the worst part of this disaster.



The worst part is that we know it will happen again. Lismore's last devastating flood was five years ago. We know that extreme weather events are becoming more severe and more frequent, and we have known that this was coming for at least three decades.

It didn't have to be like this, but our systems, and in particular the Australian government, have refused to change, and their actions have inevitably led to this entirely predictable event.

So, when we heard our prime minister was coming to Lismore, we were very interested to see him. We

were even more interested that he see us, and especially, that he listen to us. We can't keep going like this. So much life has been destroyed for the sake of shareholders, profits and endless growth, and it has to stop.

Of course he hid from us. Taxpayer-funded police were used to hold us back while he darted straight from his tinted-window car into the building. For hours, we yelled our desperation at him, while he ducked, weaved and lied for the cameras.

"We are dealing with a different climate to the one we were dealing with before," he said, as though he

had nothing to do with it. Maybe he thinks this crazy old weather is just a whim of God and his 'mysterious ways'.

If our leader wouldn't come to us, we decided to go to him. I helped some of my Lismore friends load up some of their destroyed belongings onto the biggest flatbed truck you can drive without a truck licence, and we headed off to Sydney last weekend. Once there, we transferred the debris into a tipper truck for easy unloading.

Somehow, our plan was leaked and the PM and his family left their residence early in the morning

before police blocked off all the streets around Kirribilli House – another fine example of "our" police being used to silence our voices and weaken our democracy.

However, we are fighting for our home, our planet and our future, so with some nifty driving the truck got close enough so that the fine citizens of Lismore could grab whatever muddy items they could carry, and drag them to the gate of the residence.

Cameras filmed it all and footage and news of the protest went far and wide. Hopefully, this media will be one more nail in the coffin of our unbeloved leader's career, but that is not enough.

I have known the current climate crisis has been coming since the nineties, but to actually experience it is a new feeling. Where will all these people go? There is no point to rebuild in the same place now.

As well as houses, people have lost cars, there are very few shops left and farms have lost crops and animals. What are they going to do? What are we all going to do when something similar happens to us next time?

We need to change everything and we need to do it now. We need decentralised renewable energy, resilient local communities and support for vulnerable people.

We need to stop chasing infinite growth because we have clearly seen that this system is incompatible with life on Earth.

Maybe it's already too late, but every day that we do nothing brings ecological collapse a little bit nearer.

We cannot engineer our way out of climate change



The Greens candidate for Page, Kashmir Miller has spoken out against Nationals MP Kevin Hogan's announcement that there will not be further debate on flood mitigation.

Kashmir said, "It is important that our flood adaption plan is not reduced to only engineering strategies. We need flexible and adaptive strategies for residential areas and business, green infrastructure, and for the government to work with flood survivors to implement land swaps."

The Greens support an on-going community consultation process that ensures voices are not lost in this critical time.

"For Kevin Hogan to claim that the 'debate is over' is silencing fresh initiatives and reducing this climate disaster to a single solution. Engineering solutions are far from the end of this debate. This is a

crucial time for pioneering change and implementing innovative solutions that will mitigate climate change and protect our environment."

Miller also condemned Hogan's comments regarding previous councils. "This flood is not an opportunity for electioneering, and the mitigation strategies of the past council are not to blame. The levee has proven to be a failure at protecting people in North and South Lismore. They deserve far better than this."

The Greens support continuous community consultation around flood mitigation and adaption that incorporates affordable housing strategies and affordable rental property, mental health considerations and a transition to renewable energy to combat climate change.



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THE GREENS

Authorised by Tamara Smith Member for Ballina.
Produced using parliamentary entitlements.



STANDING UP FOR OUR COMMUNITY

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Acknowledgment and forward thinking needed

by Cr Elly Bird

There has been a sign on the roundabout on the corner of Magellan and Dawson St for the last month that says, “If you’re going through hell, just keep going”.

I’ve been driving past it every morning on my way into the epicentre of the disaster zone. Like everyone else, I’m just doing what I can, putting one foot in front of the other as we move through the days that are turning into months since that night four weeks ago that everything changed.

On 31st March it will be the anniversary of the 2017 floods, and right now I’m writing this while we wait and watch to see if this current flood will go over the levee. It’s unbelievably stressful and the anxiety in the community is palpable.

I put the following motion to our Council meeting last week and I want to repeat it here for all of you.

That Council:

1. acknowledges the destruction, heartache and loss in our community; pays our deepest respects to the people who have lost their lives and to their families; and thanks every single individual, community group, business and government agency, within the region, and from other communities around the nation. Everyone involved has displayed and continues to display incredible courage, fortitude, strength and support as we continue to respond to this life changing, catastrophic event.
 2. acknowledges that community effort has saved lives, and has also provided desperately needed funds, goods and volunteer labour to our entire community.
 3. acknowledges that we will experience further events of this nature as climate change continues to escalate.
- Community will always stand up to save, protect and support each other. We have done just that and



Signs of a resilient community
Photo: Chibo



Photo:
Dom Feain

we continue to do it day in and day out. The community response right across the region is phenomenal. I acknowledge the extraordinary leadership of the *Koori Mail* and our First Nations leaders who have been on the ground since impact providing support and relief to everyone in need. I also acknowledge the incredible community leadership being shown across the region by community organisers and responders at the heart of impacted areas. I am working with Resilient Lismore, which is just one part of the community response. We are working as best we can alongside the formal recovery we are so grateful for everything they are doing, but it still isn't enough: we still have no temporary housing, people are living in ruined homes in the flood zone, and we have no certainty about what the government is going to offer us to

help find our way forward. I always knew that when the big one came it would be bad, but this nightmare we are living through is unbelievable. Our beautiful city at the heart of our beautiful home is in ruins. And amongst the rubble, the incredible people of Lismore are working, working, working to restore safety, shelter and security. Every now and then I lift my head to try and think forward a bit. What is the next phase, what do we need to plan for next, how can we help people to be safe? I'm worried about people living

in flood-damaged homes as we move into Autumn, with Winter just around the corner. I try to think about sourcing building supplies and armies of tradies and where we can store stuff and where the helpers might stay. It's an insurmountable task, and at the same time I'm sitting in on meetings and talking to government officials and waiting for replies that never come to emails sent to 'admin' asking for the solutions we need right here right now. Four weeks after the disaster our community is navigating a second disaster. A disaster of bureaucratic proportions. I hear the stories of hours of hold music, of double and triple proof required, of gaps in support, of people carrying huge mortgages with no relief available. It's a shit show and I make no apologies for saying so. We need rapid response from our governments. Five weeks in and there is still barely any temporary

accommodation, five weeks in and there is no response to the growing call for a Reconstruction Commission, five weeks in and the millions and billions of promised relief are yet to start flowing. And of course, there is resounding silence on the blatantly obvious impact that climate change is having on our community. Last week I joined with Mayors and Councillors from 31 Councils across Australia to call on the Federal Government to deliver the following actions. We need urgent action. No more spin and no more denial. Time for meaningful action.

- Lead the country in delivering on an ambitious emissions reduction target this decade, in partnership with state and local governments, to respond to accelerating climate change at the scale and pace required.
- Increase funding sources to councils for responding to climate impacts, and cutting greenhouse gas emissions, including providing a minimum of \$200 million a year in the form of a disaster mitigation fund and an additional \$200 million over four years for a local government climate response partnership.
- Invest in preparing before climate disasters strike and take responsibility for coordination of climate impact responses to ensure consistency and clearly delineated responsibilities between different levels of government.
- Ensure all disaster response funding extends to all damaged assets and incorporates the principle of "betterment" to allow cities and communities to be rebuilt in a way that takes into account the inevitable future changes in climate and makes them more resilient.
- Establish a national body, or expand the remit of an existing one, to support research on adaptation and act as a centralised hub for up-to-date climate change information.

Priorities for roads and housing

by Cr Darlene Cook

Driving through Lismore in recent weeks has been heart-breaking. I thought we would never see the devastation from 2017 ever again, but tragically this time the damage caused in this catastrophe is even worse, including the deaths of four residents, many pets and numerous farm and native animals. Like most of the community, I have friends who have lost everything. I count my blessings that I was safe where I live, and I have helped out as best I can with clearing houses and doing food drops. I found out that asthma and the smell of sodden household goods and mud were not a great mix. I also painfully discovered that muddy boots and muddy polished wood

floors are not a good mix either, which left me with many colourful bruises and sprains. I have not been able to get out to Nimbin, so like many others I am only aware of the damage to the communities there from drone footage and social media. My heart goes out to those of you whose homes have flooded or have been lost, and those who are cut off by roads, causeways and bridges damaged by floodwater and landslips. I can assure you that Council and the ADF are working as fast as they can to restore the water supply, clear and re-open local roads. I'm not going to list the many agencies and charities who can help families and businesses affected by this catastrophe – I'm sure the NGT will report on these. From Council's perspective, the priorities are the

restoration of water and sewerage services; clearing roads and putting in alternate access if needed for residents; and getting short and medium term housing in place for our displaced residents as soon as possible. Although we have many promises from politicians for significant financial assistance for the repairs to our road network, and for a housing taskforce to provide short and medium term housing strategies, we wait to see if the money actually arrives.

Floodplain risk management

At the first meeting of the Floodplain Risk Management Committee for this term held in February, the new Chairperson Cr Jensen sacked the community representatives on the community reference group. At the Council meeting

in March, she also moved that all work to amend the terms of reference for the group, all recruitment for new community members of the group, and all work on researching flood mitigation options be paused. This is apparently in response to Kevin Hogan's announcement that CSIRO will investigate the river and options for mitigation, and also that: "For everyone who is against engineering solutions to flood mitigation, the debate is over. We will be doing engineering work for flood mitigation," Mr Hogan said. In other words, all the work the Council's floodplain risk committee has been doing with SCU, DPIE and Engeny for five years to find engineering and nature-based options for flood mitigation on the Wilsons River is in limbo.



Photo: PAC

It appears to me that the political forces for construction of huge dams on local creeks, and building great levee walls are in the ascendent. I urge the community to keep an eye on this development – excluding community participation from the flood

mitigation debates right now, in the aftermath of the worst floods in recorded history, seems to be the first step in ignoring community wishes permanently. I can be contacted by phone on either 6626-0154 or 0427-895-316; or email to: darlene.cook@lismore.nsw.gov.au

More flood levees in Lismore would be folly

Calls for federal funds to build more, higher flood levees in Lismore have been heavily criticised by local environmentalist and long-time resident Dr John Corkill OAM as “completely out of line”.

He described on-air remarks by both new Lismore City Council mayor Steve Krieg and Page MP Kevin Hogan as “speaking out of turn”, uninformed and “highly inappropriate”.

Dr Corkill was foundation secretary of The Big Scrub Environment Centre Inc, a local community group which made an extensive submission opposing the construction of levees around Lismore in 1994, warning the then flood mitigation authority the Richmond River County Council (RRCC), of a failure to consider climate change impacts, the possibility of higher floods and creating a false sense of security about the level of protection the levee actually provided to householders and businesses in the Lismore ‘basin’. He said the Centre’s conclusion then was that ‘the levee is a lemon’: an assessment which has sadly now been proven to be correct.

“Millions of dollars have been spent on building and repairing the existing levee on the Wilson’s River’s east bank at Lismore, and other engineering works to manipulate the floodplain downstream, but it is now starkly clear that these ‘works’ have not worked, that all these public funds have been wasted, and many people adversely affected by this narrow ‘engineering’ approach”, Dr Corkill said.

He said that the proposal to build three massive encircling levees, explored by RRCC in the mid-1990s, was deeply criticised in the



Centre’s submission opposing the levees in 1994. “Even if all three proposed levees had been built, as first planned, they would not have protected homes or businesses in South, North or Lismore basin, under the extreme conditions recently experienced.”

“The levee which was built, raised the riverbank height in Lismore one metre, from 10m to 11m AHD, before water entered the CBD. This flood of 14.4m went 3+m over that levee. So a new levee for the CBD would need to be five times the existing barrier’s height. The levees elsewhere would have to be built from scratch. Even if this were still technically feasible, which is doubtful, its forecast cost nearly 30 years ago was over \$22m, when acquisition of houses was costed at an average of \$100,000,” he said.

“But the evidence of Debbie and this ‘rain bomb’ flood shows that building levees is a failed strategy

and a public policy folly. So for the Lismore mayor and Page MP to announce they want more public funds for more of the same is quite simply staggering. This totally ignores the evidence right before our eyes that the “build a barrier approach” has not worked, and cannot work,” he said.

Dr Corkill said it was not the LCC mayor’s call to determine the flood plain management response in a press release, or media comments mid-emergency, and criticised the mayor for overstepping his authority, and ignoring proper process under existing law.

“Decisions on post-flood mitigation response are for the current flood mitigation authority, the Rous County Council, in which LCC has only two votes, and the Mayor is not a delegate. Further, given his business interests, it is highly inappropriate for him to be advocating for, or seeking

to determine the direction of, any public funding for the flood mitigation response in the CBD. Like all CBD business-owning councillors, the mayor has a direct pecuniary interest, and under the *Local Government Act 1993*, must fully declare their financial interests, not participate in the debate and absent themselves from the vote on all matters for decision by Council, where millions of dollars of public funds investment would, or may, benefit them personally. That’s the law, and the mayor ought to know that.

“Mr Krieg would do well to say no more about public funding of levees. He needs to learn what his actual responsibilities are, that require his attention as mayor of the whole of Lismore, not just the CBD, and should focus on what is in the greater public interest.”

Federal Page MP Kevin Hogan’s comments were also “flawed” and

“deeply problematic,” Dr Corkill said.

“Under current law, flood mitigation is not a federal government responsibility. So it’s clearly not Mr Hogan’s call either,” he said.

“His comments on ABC Radio “promising” to find federal grant money for a higher levee – as if that was the best and only option available – were a knee-jerk response and highly inappropriate. It’s not his job, as federal MP, to decide the direction of future floodplain management for the Wilson’s River system, using another federal government pre-election slush fund.

This “more of the same” failed strategy usurps Rous County Council’s role, pre-empts any rational assessment of future flood mitigation options, and compromises community input into decisions about flood mitigation, and spending of public funds, by the lawful public authority”, Dr Corkill said.

Dr Corkill said, “Mr Hogan has unfairly and unnecessarily politicised the post-flood recovery funding, and ignored other priorities where urgent funding is desperately needed. His announcement of a special federal slush fund, and levees as the top issue for federal government’s post-flood spending, distorts the allocation of public funds for other priority needs. It’s a gob-smacking proposition.”

“Any attempt by Mr Hogan or Mayor Krieg to contrive a federal pre-election “promise” to ‘lock in’ use of this fund to build higher levees in Lismore, must be seen as cynical, wholly inappropriate, and inconsistent with existing NSW law,” he said.



by Chibo Mertineit

On Saturday 12th March, eleven days after the catastrophic flood in the Northern Rivers, the *Koori Mail* invited the whole of the Lismore community to a Block Party at 2pm in Molesworth Street, Lismore for a chance to check in, catch up and see family and friends.

While their community hub was in full swing helping people with their different

needs, they had organised a flat-bed truck for performers and DJs. There was free food, face painting and dancers ‘til the early evening. The good music got some dancing on this sunny afternoon.

Then the general manager of the *Koori Mail*, Naomi Moran (pictured) took the microphone and informed us: “I’m incredibly grateful and overwhelmed with the amount of support that this community and communities around the nation have shown not just the *Koori Mail*, but the people of the

Koori Mail to the rescue

Bundjalung nation here, Lismore and the surrounding towns.

“This is not about us worse than them, this is about us taking things in to our own hands and self-determining, what it looks like to rescue and care for our own people when they are in need. What you see here surrounding you over the past week, this hasn’t been about us going to their tables, this has been about us doing our own black tables and making people come to ours.

“While I acknowledge that local resources in City Council and government resources are extremely stretched when it comes to natural disasters, crisis, destruction and devastation; everything that you see here on the ground has been built by the community for the community.

“This is a grassroots operation and it has taken some other local groups six days to get down here and offer support. It has taken other groups six days or a week to build databases, spreadsheets, red tape, process and policy.



“Within those six days we have been out to over 500 homes. We have been to all your Aboriginal communities on the outskirts of these towns, which are absolutely at high risk whenever there is a natural disaster, because they have been purposely placed on the fringes of our town and on the outskirts of our communities, purposely cut off from our town.

“So if anybody asks why we did what we did on those

first few days, we responded to our people.

“We are in sorry business right now with what’s happening here on our Bundjalung land. Everything that we are doing here, on top of what has been already done, is in preparation to make sure that our people get back on to their traditional land and that no government agency, person or individual uses this as an opportunity and excuse to

further remove our people from their traditional land.

“The *Koori Mail* has been based here on the Widjbul/Waibul land for 30 years, as a 100% Aboriginal-owned and self-run, 100% for-profit black organisation. With the fundraiser that we’ve been doing for our Bundjalung communities surrounding this region, we are now up to \$570,000.”

Thanks for a great afternoon, *Koori Mail*.

Nimbin community swings into action

by Linnet Pike,
CWA Nimbin president

Over the last days of February, our sweet, multi-faceted Far North Coast community world(s) fractured, splintered into shards, glinting in the mud of peoples' lives.

That rift will always speak to us; the Before Times and the After: when our world broke and changed. Forever.

It's still hard to grasp; there are no words for such devastation, desolation, and destruction. Even today, coming up for four weeks since the Great Flood, people are only now finding out what happened to their mates, in the next valley or over the ridges.

We're all still in a liminal space, a threshold world, waiting to see what emerges, day at a time; crafting solutions, making do, helping and healing each other, caring for country and community. Still wondering, dreading, and dreaming of how our world will look on the other side, whilst deeply embracing each other with hope, picking a path through to the rim edge far across the chasm of this shattered world.

For me personally, up on Mount Nardi, we were beyond fearful for those downstream, we were without power or any form of communication (other than our disaster torch for local ABC radio), cut off from Nimbin by large landslips, knowing that loved ones and the wider community were deeply suffering further afield.

I walked off Mount Nardi on Wednesday 2nd March, and got a ride to Nimbin from the other side of the huge slips near Nimbin Valley Dairy. Gumbooting around our village that day, it became clear that our CWA had to attempt to help our community, in any way we could.

There was virtually no communication possible in the village, eftpos was out, food was running out, phones had stopped working.

Since CWA Nimbin re-formed in March 2019, we've had the Mount Nardi fires, then floods, then Covid and now another disaster... we've learnt lessons, reflected, grown, adapted, collaborated, persevered, hoped and dreamed.

We opened our doors on Thursday 3rd March, and initially started cooking.

Community, cultural, familial, spatial and cartographic networks are a strange thing... they are what allow such things as communication, reciprocity, and action. Our agriculture and environment officer,



L to R Ashoka Joblin, Dee Sempit, Sandi Hill, Claire Delacey and Sue Hammond

Ashoka Joblin, had some comms at home at Paradise Valley, and was told that Meals on Wheels couldn't be delivered for the Nimbin Aged Care and Respite Services' clients. No names or any data at that point – only that that at least 20 people needed meals.

Our publicity officer, Tash Fuller had been cleaning up the flooded Nimbin Service Station, her family's business. They had no fuel and the place was mud. But it was still a vital meeting place in town. Tash and Ashoka, foundation CWA members, know our ropes.

Our treasurer, Kaz Ratcliffe, co-owner of the Bush Theatre Café was away and initially missed out on the mud and destruction.

Over that first week, without any comms, our Nimbin community, all the interwoven strands, cut off from the outside world, came together and created systems that fed, clothed, supported and loved each other through this period.

The town businesses, the Bakery, the Emporium, the Newsagency, the Apothecary, the Medical Centre (seeing Dr Sanjoy Dutta climbing through the tower of mud at the dairy slip is memorable), the heroes at Nimbin Village Pharmacy trying to get urgent meds, our small Hospital... so many people in our community trying so hard to support others.

Our beautiful dedicated local RFS, our local police, ADF folks and other essential services liaised and worked tirelessly with few resources.

CWA Nimbin became a core part of the collective who maintained our village and the surrounding hills and vales. We collaborated with our Neighbourhood Centre (NNIC), the evacuation centre at the A&I Showground (whose executive were also dealing with large losses on their own properties and communities), and helped establish, support, supply and sustain the Information HUB at the Nimbin Hall.

Our CWA Room became a safe space for many but also for regular daily meetings/

briefings/debriefings with many concerned. We fed many, and were open for days, distributing clothes, bedding, all essentials, sharing resources and space with NNIC. We were beyond grateful when support trickled into town.

The *Koori Mail*, and that wonderful mob, 'Rekindling the Spirit' sent us necessities. And, the indomitable Cerise Acacia acted from the beginning as a roving info hub, linking and updating all groups: the servo, evacuation centre, NNIC, the Hub, CWA, fireys et al., working closely with the stoical and good-humoured Digby from DCJ who "fortunately" lives in Nimbin and was working from the beginning.

From the evacuation centre at the showground, all free essential supplies that were distributed from the evacuation centre, were sorted and boxed and driven around to drop-offs in cut off sites... by local volunteers from the beginning. Communities from near and far eventually sent deliveries of "everything".

Our collective system, here on the ground, was beyond extraordinary; competent and compassionate volunteers came in from wounded properties... social workers, mental health specialists, hospitality veterans, nurses, all working collectively with our Town Mob.

It's that magic of people from far and wide, organically helping others, working so hard in unison, anchored by our shared past and histories, that gives us hope for our shared future.

Without this collective solidarity, we'd have been up that proverbial (beyond flooded) creek. Our widely separated communities here, on the rivers and in the hills, have shown us, of late, that we have the strength, heart and spirit to walk the path ahead, together.

CWA Nimbin Branch meets on the second Monday of the month, at 4.30pm for a 5pm start. Our CWA Room is situated in the Nimbin Community Centre, nestled behind the Nimbin RFS shed, off Sibley Street.



Flood warning systems fail again

Flooding in Byron Bay 30th March, 2022. Photo: Paul Blackmore / Byron Echo

by Cr Mark Swivel

The second flood was a shock across Byron Shire. We went to bed relying on the 11pm BoM forecast, which essentially said we'd be wet but OK. So as the rain got wild, people got worried.

After midnight, people in Suffolk Park reported knee-deep water in their lounge rooms. In Bangalow cars were being lost. In Mullum the rain eventually eased. The BoM and SES response covered Grafton to Tweed but on the 2am news, somehow the rivers, creeks and communities of Byron Shire didn't get mentioned.

We woke to a town centre that was inundated and some long term locals said

parts of the town flooded like they'd never seen before. In short, the warning systems again failed our communities.

Non-official storm watch websites like Higgins got it right but the official channels did not. People are rightly concerned and angry in the right way.

We did not have it as bad as Lismore, and our hearts go out to everyone there. But last night showed that we need a fundamental rethink of emergency response and how we resource our key agencies.

We also need to listen to communities as they report the experience of natural disaster. This is climate change in action, and the new conditions we live in are chaotic.

So change, fundamental change, is not negotiable.

Buyers beware of developments with land on a '1 in 100 year flood'

by Jim Beatson

Flooding and damage to homes and businesses in New South Wales are as big an issue as they are in Queensland where I now live.

The recent local flood devastation is the fault of the on-going development practice by which buildings are permitted to be built on floodplains. The oft cited measuring stick is the phrase: '1 in 100 year flood' level clearance. Sounds exactly like the situation back where I used to live, in nearby Byron Shire.

Currently government in Australia uses the 1/100 AEP (Annual Exceedance Probability,) event, or '1 in 100 year flood'; with an appropriate additional height for buildings that is designated as having an 'acceptable' risk for planning purposes, regardless of the potential consequences of a flood. Obviously this is unsatisfactory as climate change marches ahead.

What do senior scientists think? The Office of Queensland Chief Scientist's website says: "Currently, the 1% AEP event is designated as having an 'acceptable' risk for planning purposes nearly everywhere in Australia. However, good planning needs to consider more than just the 1% AEP flood."

The report added, "1% annual exceedance probability (1% AEP), are preferred because they avoid the common misconception



that a '1 in 100 year flood' for example, can only occur once every 100 years; or that you are 'safe' for another 100 years after you experience such an event. For example, in Kempsey, NSW, major floods approaching the 1% AEP level occurred in 1949 and then again a year later in 1950."

A recent example is the sorry experience of someone who in July last year, bought and upgraded a small regional store near Gympie. Only six months later they were devastated when the flooding rose up to halfway up the two-storey building. It happened again in the recent floods! The owner had been assured that the site was robust as per '1/100 AEP'.

The same flooding happened on nearby greenfield land, which has a DA already approved by Gympie Council. When asked the developer for his response, he quickly said, "The Development Application had met the '1/100 years' rule. So the

development can go ahead."

On checking on this flooding issue with Gympie's Regional Council, their Director of Community Sustainability, Adrian Burns explained, "A 1/100 flood event is an event that is mathematically calculated by hydrological engineers... (The) development must meet the requirements that were assigned at the time of the assessment (in this case, back in 2013 when the DA was originally approved).

"Please note that the buying and selling of land has no council involvement. Additional requirements cannot be placed on an already-approved Development Applications in the future, should certain benchmarks, such as flooding, change."

In other words, for existing developers with an approved DA, "no worries". But buyers, beware! The recent approval of mega development of the locals' West Byron DA is based on the same gob-smacking legal logic.



Lismore flood #2, March 30
Photo: David Lowe



Photo: Chibo



Photo: PAC



Photo: Chibo



Getting down and dirty

Magellan Street resident Renata Dooley much appreciated the help to clean out her sodden possessions given by 21 employees of Brookies distillery, Byron Bay.



Photo: PAC



Army helps with pipeline repairs

Corporal Chris Muelener, left, and Sapper Joe Barns use a chainsaw to clear debris from Mulgum Creek Weir in Nimbin. Photo: Sgt Nunu Campos

by Captain Catalina Martinez Pinto and Flight Lieutenant Dee Irwin

Australian Army combat engineers and Lismore City Council workers swung into action after Nimbin was left with only 60 days of water following the floods.

Within two days of the council's request, 21st Construction Squadron sappers from 6th Engineer Support Regiment were clearing trees around the damaged pipeline to allow vehicles access ahead of repairs.

Lieutenant Jordan Bell, who is leading the restoration efforts of the Nimbin water supply, said, "The DE Williams Dam was severely damaged in the flooding, which majorly impacted water supplies to Nimbin.

"Part of our role, alongside Lismore City Council, is to lay pipe that will restore water

supplies to the town." Army engineer Major Kuchel said, "This project is important for the community, so it's imperative we reconnect the water pipeline as quickly as possible."

After initial assessments of the area on 9th March, there were six council workers and around 10 Army personnel assigned, including combat engineers, plant operators and plumbers.

Repairs to the damaged pipeline are an Army priority task, and were expected to be completed in coming weeks, before the second flood came.

Lieutenant Bell said, "It's been a great opportunity to come out here and help the residents. Being able to assist and support the community to get back on their feet is important."



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Lismore Regional Gallery in tatters



by Ashleigh Ralph, director

The hearts of the team at Lismore Regional Gallery go out to all people directly and indirectly affected by the catastrophic flood that ripped across the Northern Rivers region, and we have the deepest gratitude to every person who has contributed to the recovery of our Lismore community.

The historic flood entirely inundated Lismore Regional Gallery. Artworks in our permanent collection and current exhibitions, and 70 years of history were damaged and lost to the flood.

In preparation for a moderate flood on Sunday, we moved everything to the gallery's top floor to mitigate any chance of damage. However, the water rose to an unprecedented level in hours.

Since then, our staff tirelessly and carefully removed damaged artworks

from the gallery for conservation and insurance assessment, with assistance from specialist art handlers and conservators.

Over 350 volunteers helped us clear debris from the building and scrubbed mud and filth from every surface. We anticipate a long road to recovery for the gallery and, of course, our community.

We are working closely with Lismore City Council's insurance company and International Art Services in preparation to conserve salvageable works in our beloved permanent collection, the Hannah Cabinet and exhibition artworks.

The Hannah Cabinet is currently under assessment at IAS in Canberra, and we have received encouraging reports from the conservators.

Special thanks to Create NSW and Museums & Galleries of NSW for their support in helping us manage the

logistics of this massive effort.

Help fund the recovery

Our gallery is one of the longest-running cultural organisations in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales, loved by the local community and visitors alike. It is a place where we come together to share art, culture and stories.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to help our gallery recover and become a thriving space again, at: <https://www.givenow.com.au/lrg-recovery-fund>

Your generous donation demonstrates the value of Lismore Regional Gallery as a location for expression, healing, and creativity.

While the gallery is temporarily closed, we are working on a program of offsite projects for our community – watch this space.



by Boyd Townsend, acting manager, Northern Rivers Zone RFS

It has been an extraordinary time for our community and also for many of our members who have personally been so affected by this extraordinary rain event which has led to so much damage across our region.

I am incredibly proud of what our brigades and our members in the Northern Rivers have contributed in this time to help the community and each other.

For over two weeks straight the district was providing 30-40 trucks and

over 100 members per day to the clean-up effort in every town, village and rural area that has been impacted with several thousand jobs completed.

This was of course effectively doubled by the out of area teams that have travelled long distances to help, which is greatly appreciated.

A number of our district's brigades are still working with the out of area crews and the ADF etc. to continue the clean-up. This local input and knowledge is essential.

There is still much to do in many areas and as we look forward we expect to see the out of area crews with us for some

time yet giving us a hand.

Of course, after this assistance has gone, we expect to see sporadic requests for help and we will try to gauge this and adapt our local resourcing to best deal with these assistance requests. If the work is still of such significance as we move forward, the level of out of area support will be extended.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all RFS members for what you have done, and what you continue to do for our communities. For all of us this is a challenging time; remember to look out for one another and if you need any support in any way, please just ask.