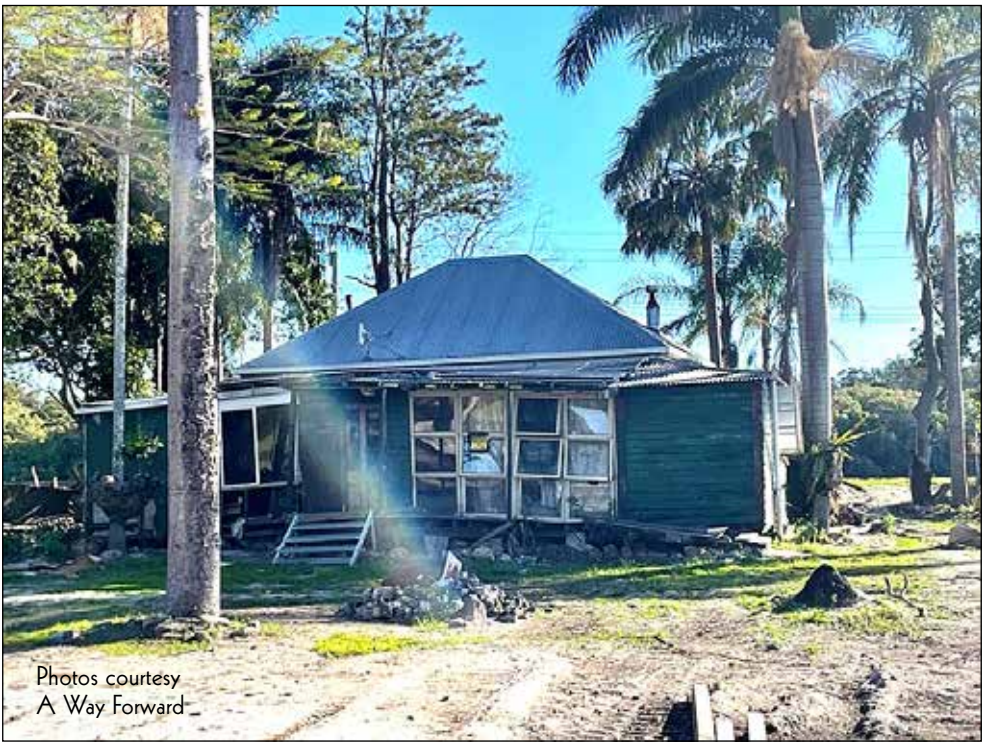


# Glimmer of hope on buy-backs



Photos courtesy  
A Way Forward

by Bob Dooley

The flood recovery is now 18 months down the track, and thousands of Northern Rivers residents are still waiting anxiously to see whether or not they will receive assistance via home buy-backs, retrofitting or house-raising.

Hundreds have been told they will receive no help from Government. Many are still homeless, living with family or in partly destroyed homes.

With reportedly 19 buy-backs approved so far, morale has dropped to a new low.

On 28th July, the Federal Emergency Services Minister, Murray Watt held a press

conference in Coraki on the Northern Rivers Recovery and Resilience Program, mitigation and resilience funding for the Northern Rivers, and flood mapping.

He said he wanted to demonstrate to the local community that they haven't been forgotten, and that "we do want to keep supporting them through what will be a very long recovery process."

He announced \$100 million more funding from the Federal Government to assist in the recovery and building future resilience, on top of the \$50 million provided in February, to be used for infrastructure projects identified by the CSIRO.

In response to journalists' questions about funding for buy-backs, Mr Watt said, "The NSW Government announced 1100 buy-backs, and I'm aware that that was well below what the community was hoping for.

"We have been having regular discussions with the NSW Government, including myself with NSW Ministers, about the potential for extra funding for buy-backs.

"Of course, there is also funding available for home-raising and retrofitting as well.

"So those discussions are underway (and) have been happening for a few weeks now ... we will get that

finalised as quickly as we possibly can."

Meanwhile, community advocacy group Reclaim our Recovery (ROR) have labelled the Homes and Lands recovery programs to date as a failure.

A spokesperson for ROR, Sally Newham, said, "ROR believes that the lack of transparency from the Corporation, perhaps intended to shield the community from disappointment or dissension, has served to create confusion, distrust and despair in an already traumatised community.

"The on-going lack of transparency and

accountability is an indictment on the Corporation that brings its social license into question."

ROR has convened a community meeting on Friday 11th August at the Star Court Theatre, hoping to start a conversation about a community-led recovery (see story Page 3).

Sally Newham said, "ROR will be bringing extensive feedback regarding community needs and aspirations, which will show that the community have engaged in a more sincere effort of consultation than the Corp itself when it comes to both the Homes and Lands programs."

The Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation have made representations to the government requesting the release of the second tranche funding, and this decision now rests with the New South Wales State and Federal governments.

However, despite Minister Watt's assurances, both the timeline and the quantum remain uncertain.

The Flood Recovery Study showed that uncertainty has been linked to more than half of affected residents not coping, with detrimental impacts on their mental health.

But for now, it's still a waiting game.



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