
TRANSCRIPT IN CONFIDENCE

NSW FLOOD INQUIRY

AN INDEPENDENT INQUIRY BEING LED BY

PROFESSOR MARY O'KANE AC AND
MICHAEL FULLER APM

HELD AT LISMORE TOWN HALL, SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY
MILITARY ROAD EAST LISMORE

ON TUESDAY, 3 MAY, 2022.

TRANSCRIBED BUT NOT RECORDED BY APT TRANSCRIPTIONS

MR ROCHE: Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Ben Roche. I'm a staff member here at Southern Cross University and on behalf of the university it gives me really great pleasure to welcome you to the university, welcome back to the university or in some cases many of you have never left so just hello again. It's really great to see you all here tonight. My job is as a volunteer to help facilitate the process which we'll come to in a little bit. As we do at the university and we do in all other major formal events we always start with a welcome to country and please join me now in welcoming Uncle Herb to do that. Thank you, Herb.

10 UNCLE HERB: I'm very nervous because this is the first time in a couple of years I've actually had to do this so I just want to start – that's bright. On behalf of my ancestral home, the Widjabul Wia-bal People of Lismore I just want to say (says Aboriginal word) which is hello. (Says Aboriginal word) mine, our land. I want to pay our respects to our elders past, present and emerging and it with great love and sincerity that I ask our ancestors, all of our ancestors regardless of who we are that they led us with love, guidance and spirituality so we can all walk this land united as one. So in saying that, I just want to say thank you and welcome everybody tonight.

20 There's just one more thing I wanted to add. I just want to sincerely thank everybody involved in what happened to our community in the last few – four or five weeks. Seeing what I saw was – I know a lot of older people my age and older could agree the magnitude of it was unbelievable and I've always asked our ancestors to lead us with love and guidance and spirituality and with the events that happened it was so great to see everybody – everyone work together regardless of age, colour, religion all came together and it's helped this community and Lower Richmond get through what we went through. So I just sincerely thank everybody and everybody involved and the uni for putting up the residents or the homeless people at that stage and continue to help with the community. So again thank you everyone and welcome. Thanks.

30 MR ROCHE: Thank you very much, Uncle Herb. It now gives me great pleasure to welcome the Mayor of Lismore Steve Krieg.

40 MR KRIEG: Thanks, Ben, and thanks to the uni for hosting us. I'd like to acknowledge as well that we're on Bundjalung land and acknowledge the elders from the Widjabul Wia-bal People both past, present and emerging and it's really great to see so many people come out tonight. We're all gathered as individuals, we've all come here as individuals but together we gather as a community. It's a really important step not only in the rebuilding of our city but also in the rebuilding of our individual lives and tonight you're going to have the opportunity to ask questions. There's no guarantees that you'll get answers at the moment but I want you to really listen to everyone that has the opportunity to speak.

We're on a pretty strict timeframe and it's important that as a community we don't double-up with questions that might've already been answered or asked. So please be respectful of that. There are hundreds of you here, we've got only two hours to get through obviously a lot of information. So I'm not going to keep talking but I'd like to introduce you to our two facilitators tonight Professor Mary O'Kane who has a fantastic record of leading these inquiries and also Mick Fuller who have come to join us today.

They're leading this inquiry. One thing that I have learnt in the last eight or nine weeks is this is a disaster that we're living through like no other and the government response to this has been like no other as well and I know there's a lot of frustration, I know there's quite a bit of anger as well but from my experience I know that the government's working hard and this inquiry is one step in repairing and moving forward for our community.

10 So as Ben said - I believe Ben's one of our facilitators tonight but it's an opportunity for you to ask the questions that you may have to Mick and to Mary. This is not a public execution in any way, shape or form, we need to remember that we need to be respectful of the process, need to be respectful of the fact that you're not going to get all the answers tonight, that's the simple reality of it but we need to start the conversation and that's what this meeting is about is to start the conversation with the community. So I'd like to thank Mick and Mary for being here tonight. They're doing a tough job in very trying circumstances. So without any further ado I'd like to hand over to Mick and Mary to lead off, if that's what we're doing.

20 PROF. O'KANE: Thanks, Steve, and welcome. It's wonderful to see such a great crowd for our first town hall for the independent inquiry into this year's floods. You can't hear me. Can you hear me better now? Thank you. Thank you, Steve, for that introduction but I'm going to disappoint you, we're not going to give you any answers. Mick and I are here to listen. This is for us to hear you about the various things that are covered in our terms of reference. The causes of the floods, what happened during them, the response going on into recovery and we want to hear your stories because as we do this inquiry we will be very informed by what you tell us. So we're here to listen.

30 We'll be recording tonight's events, so transcript will be taken, it will be publicly available should you want to see it but we're also looking forward to submissions from you and submissions are open technically to the 20th of May and you can do them in all sorts of forms, emails, photos, going and talking to a Service New South Wales centre but many of you have been very directly affected by the floods and don't worry too much about that deadline. We will take submissions from you any time up to the end of the inquiry. So tonight we've got - you know, we're thrilled to have you here but we're here to hear what you tell us and I'll pass over to Mick to make a few more comments.

40 MR FULLER: Thanks, Mary. Good evening ladies and gents. It is a great honour to be back. It's May and I's second time on the ground since the weather event and we haven't had a chance obviously to talk to everyone but we have walked the streets, we have been out into the communities and we have been talking to emergency services and other agencies and the Mayor and we thank you for your hospitality since we have been here as well. So we are not absolute strangers to what has happened here in Lismore or the history of Lismore. I guess from my perspective the lens is more around that emergency management response, it's about the intelligence, it's about what happened over the course of those few weeks into recovery, the areas that the government's asked me to come on from my expertise to work with Mary hand in hand. So look, from my perspective if you don't get a say tonight please try and find time to put in a submission. It has been so important. The information that we have received

over the last few weeks has been vital to us in starting to build the picture. So thank you for all the people of Lismore in terms of welcoming Mary and I and we look forward to hearing what you have to say tonight. Thanks very much.

10 MR ROCHE: Thank you very much, co-chairs. I just wanted to give you a sense of just some of the basics in terms of housekeeping. So the bathrooms are behind you. Male on this side - I'm not going to try and gamble whether that's left or right – and females on that side. If there is an emergency evacuation you won't be able to miss the sound and at that point you just simply make your way to the lit exits. There's one either side at the front and also at the rear. The assembly point is just out in the carpark over there and there will be people to show you where to go if, in fact, we have that sort of fun in store for us tonight.

We also have a team from the university Safety and Security team who are first-aiders as well. So we've got lots of people wrapped around this evening to provide support. It gives me great pleasure to introduce my co-facilitator for tonight Mel Campbell. Over to you, Mel.

20 MS CAMPBELL: That was quick. Thanks, Ben. So I just wanted to start by saying that Ben and I are locals and we have lived this flood experience with you. So we volunteered to come along tonight to enable you to tell your stories. So we want to facilitate the conversation and we want to hear it from as many of you as we can tonight. So that's our job. We have an online presence, we've got a Zoom meeting going on at the same time and I just wanted to let all those participants know that unfortunately given the sheer number of people that are here in the auditorium tonight you will not get a chance to tell your story online; however, if you tell it in a chat function your name will be saved that you logged on with and that will be submitted to the inquiry as well.

30 So if you've got a Facebook story that you told during the event, copy and paste it into the chat function. That's fine to receive that as a submission. So any way you can submit your story please go ahead and do so. So obviously for tonight to go well and so we can get as much out of it as possible there's a few guidelines or rules that Ben and I have made up so I'm going to hand over to Ben to tell you the rules.

40 MR ROCHE: Thanks, Mel. As a community we're pretty good at self-organisation and I'm going to need your help to do that tonight in the sense that we have four minutes slotted for each story to be told and you can just – the sheer logistics of that will be something that Mel and I will overcome the whole way through the evening. What we're going to do is we need your help to signal when you're ready to tell your story and if you do that what will happen, we've got people roaming with microphones and also people spotting so we've got lots of eyes to keep a lookout. We'll then come to you and Mel and I are going to alternate between sides of the room as we move through each of your important stories.

It is only four minutes and when the lights are on you and the mic's in your hand that can go very quick so we're going to help you a bit. We're going to have a bell that's going to ring at three and a half minutes and then we're going to have a second bell that's going to ring at four minutes. No pressure. Just like speed dating. Although

unfortunately unlike speed dating if you exceed past the four minutes we'll just simply take the sound out of the microphone and keep moving. I'm doing that not to be a dictator but I'm doing that so that we can have as many opportunities to share your stories as humanly possible. So it is about respect and about equity. So I really appeal to each of you to try and help each other work with the time constraints that we've got.

10 So we're going to put a hand up if you're ready to tell your story. We are tight on time and we're going to really show our lovely co-chairs how respectful and how awesome Lismore residents can really be in this kind of setting. Okay. So let's really bring out our best. We're going to work with you side by side. Mel and my role is to create as many opportunities for you to tell your story as humanly possible. So work with us and hopefully we'll get through as many of those stories tonight as we can.

20 MS CAMPBELL: Great. And just one last thing before we hook into the stories. There are members of the safety team here so if you think that you do need help please just indicate and we'll send someone to you. We do have counsellors at the back if you feel emotional or triggered at any point in the evening. You can make your way to the door at the back, there's an empty room across the corridor there that you can go to if you need a breather or some space. So please just signal if you need any assistance in any way. So now it's time for us to hear your stories. So if you're ready to tell your story please indicate and we just ask you to tell us who you are, where you're from and then in four minutes tell us your story. So, Ben, away you go.

MR ROCHE: Thank you, Mel. So shows of hands and we'll have the mic coming. We'll come back to you. I saw you. Thank you. And if you could just share your name and where you're from would be lovely, thank you.

30 [REDACTED] Okay. I'm [REDACTED]. I'm a voice from the hills. I just wanted to say that we know in the hills whenever Lismore is going to experience a major flood but our voices are no longer heard. It used to be that the old farmers would ring in the radio stations and they would let them know when it was getting pretty high out there. This is not happening anymore and there is no official channel for people from the hills like myself to say when we know it's just going to flood and we can't do anything about it and we know that horror is coming. This time I knew 12 hours beforehand because when my back drain overflows Lismore floods. Six hours before Lismore flooded I knew it was going to be really, really bad and I rang the SES and I got no response whatsoever. It was like if you have a concern about people ring the police. That's not going to work if we're going to get events like this.

40 We have started organising CB radio networks in the hills and to get satellite dishes because we all lost our communication lines when it happened out there. We had massive disasters out there too which I'm sure you know and we now have 10 CB radios for the Nimbin area that encompass all the different small communities and areas of the Nimbin and I'm pretty sure similar stuff is happening over the hills in Wilsons Creek and other places in the Tweed Valley and I would recommend this for anywhere. When we lost those communications it made it 10 times worse, yeah, and if we could possibly have a direct channel of communication before things get really bad I know that our input could be incredibly valuable. It was heartbreaking for me personally to know what

was coming to Lismore and, yeah, it's just horrible so if you can listen to us in the hills and work out a way that that can happen it would be fantastic for all of us.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you. We're going to go up the back here now to this gentleman.

10 [REDACTED] Yeah. My name's [REDACTED]. I live at the [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. We want to know why the drain was put in the
back of North Lismore and since that drain's been put in we have had two major floods
in our caravan park and before that the drain went straight through to the river. Now
the drain and the fences have been all blocked up and haven't been cleaned out for three
years. We lost 62 units at the caravan park plus a lot of other people were washed out
and before it only used to come over the road and block up. So that's our question. And
the other question is why is it the SES headquarters is based in Newcastle or
Wollongong or Sydney instead of left here in Lismore like it was years ago? Thank
you.

20 MR ROCHE: We are going to get to you in the middle there. Deb, just hover there and
we'll go next. Do you want to show your hand? Thank you so much. This brave lady
was the first one to put her hand up and she's still waiting so let's make sure we get your
story.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Four days ago I got this from the Lord and
that's really good, he's my Lord and he has the answers to everything. If we put block
and tackles on all the houses that are down in the basin for the people that want to stay
as community and we put them down maybe 80 foot or a hundred foot or at least until
they set onto hard rock and block and tackle and get rid of your heavy furniture. I know
30 heavy old furniture is beautiful but if you just block and tackle for your house structure
and get bamboo furniture and live simply then you can still stay in your community.
We can still do that for your sustainable plants that you want to grow and everything
else that's in the area plan it as swamp and the native people, the people from this
country whose country it was in the first place that was their meeting place, they will
tell us what plants to put there and what the plants are used for and for much of the
healing of the community.

40 We need to put huge pipes, huge pipes that have water wheels that are sustainable and
take the water and ship it out to where the water needs to be set out into the plains
because if you dig holes and you put natural substance in the hole it's a native – it's a
natural drawer and we will reclaim the desert. Is there any reason why this couldn't be
done? The steel – the steel that's for the block and tackle for the houses to raise them
up as high as you want to make them and they are like the New Zealand totems. Our
brothers have totems over there. Well, we'll have steel totems that can keep community
and we can use the steel from – we can make smelters and use all our car parts and melt
them down and we can still retain community because there's a lot of people that still
want to stay in their place. It could go global because there's a lot of places that have
been built on swamps but we need to respect swamps too. Swamps are so important.

Swamps get left out. The animals still know that this is swamplands and there is much more.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you. Name and where you're from, thank you.

10 [REDACTED]: My name's [REDACTED] and I live in [REDACTED] Street and in the 2017 flood the water came up to my ceiling downstairs so when we got word that this was going to flood again I took everything upstairs because we had no indication that it would be worse than 2017. In fact, there was no indication it would even be as bad as 2017. So I took everything of value upstairs, my guitars, I have 14 of them, my laptop, my PA system, my photos, everything of value. Well, I woke up at 2.30 in the morning and the water was ankle deep upstairs so it was at that stage that I knew I had to get out. My daughter and her mother live in the same street so I kayaked down to 13 and 11, picked them up, the dog, the guinea pig and their neighbour, we got them out to [REDACTED] Street near the corner of, what is it, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] Street, dropped them off.

20 I went back to my house to try and get some valuables out. So I went back in the tinny, rather, the tinny and got seven of my guitars out and got them to land. I went back to get more and – more of my guitars and my laptop and the valuable things but there was a guy standing on a wheelie bin, you know, he was about to drown, he couldn't swim so we picked him up. Then we got a phone call from a friend of my daughter saying that her daughter was in a flat in [REDACTED] Street, she needed to be rescued so instead of going back and getting my precious things I was rescuing people.

30 So, you know, the disappointing thing is that there was no real clear warning of any value that made us aware that this was going to be as bad as it was and look, I'm not criticising the SES because I don't know what happened but I only saw one SES boat with a motor on it and the other one didn't have a motor and it was being pulled by the SES boat with the motor and there were all these civilians in their boats with motors rescuing people. So, you know, like I could've got back and got things of value out of my house if I hadn't been rescuing people. So, you know, there's got to be a better system for letting people know how bad it's going to be and there's got to be a better system for rescuing people. Yeah.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

40 [REDACTED]: Thank you.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you. Just over here in the middle. Thank you.

[REDACTED]: Hi. My name is [REDACTED]. I was one of the first Army helicopter rescues out at Bungawalbin.

MR ROCHE: Just a bit closer.

[REDACTED]: Sorry.

MR ROCHE: Perfect.

██████████: Yeah. My name is ██████████. I was one of the first Army helicopter rescues out of Bungawalbin, elderly lady that we rescued and my son. After we were rescued by the Army helicopter about three days later we went back and through some friends and that we found our dog and after that we were in boats for basically five and a half weeks doing rescues out of Bungawalbin, sustaining life, taking generators, fuel, food continually and during that whole process we were alone, we were just the public getting together and doing it.

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We first launched from Broadwater then we were launching from ██████████ Road, then we were launching from Coraki and we had no assistance anywhere at all. We did it all ourselves, just the public and, yeah, I wonder like ██████████ was saying, who I know ██████████ yeah, we wonder why there was no help from anyone anywhere. We self-funded, you know, we did it all ourselves and without any support and then since that now we've been doing furniture distributing through communities, we're distributing furniture everywhere. We unloaded another B-double the other day, two containers yesterday and we're all doing this as public. No one's helping.

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I got asked about eight days ago about is anyone getting any of these grants. I put a post up all over the pages because everybody knows me now and so far we're up to 890 comments and not one person, and it was a two-way question, not one person has come back to me and said they've got a grant. We've all got the three \$1,000 things and basically that's about it. That needs to be sped up, you know, people need help now, not three months, six months down the track, we all need now. I've also been with another company, we're distributing dehumidifiers through houses. These things are costing 13,000 each. This company has just – they've brought me down 20, we distribute them, we've been networking them through streets. That's another thing that should've – you know, we need help with.

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The water was no good in Lismore early in the piece which is understandable. I tried to put a post up on a Lismore page stating that the water was no good. I've got these people in contact with me that do these water purification buckets. They use them in Ethiopia, Tahiti last time. They're a simple easy thing that anybody can use. I put a post up to say the water was no good, wouldn't let me post it. Took out the part about the water no good. Let me post it. You know, this is a self-funding – this is a school in the Gold Coast that are distributing these. They got laughed at at the centres taking them there. They've given me now about 120 of them, I've had not one person go we don't need them. You know, they're going yeah, we're getting crook off the water. You know, it should be publicly put out there, you know, that they shouldn't be drinking the Lismore water. You know, there's all these things that are just – it's not getting out to the public and it's making it hard. You know, there needs to be more information on what really is going on. Thank you.

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MS CAMPBELL: Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Right up the back to you. Thank you.

[REDACTED]: Hi. My name's [REDACTED] and I used to live in [REDACTED] Avenue near Wade Park. I've been living there for 11 years and have been in Lismore for just over 30. I've seen lots of floods come and go but this is the first time we've been hit in East Lismore the way that we were hit. Gradually the water we've noticed over the years hasn't been able to drain away at the bottom of Marlyn and Anne Street and we did report it many years ago to council but there's always other jobs to be done that never seem to be resolved and we used to watch Wade Park gradually, gradually go under with heavy rains but that Sunday night on the 27th the end of Wade Park towards the soccer fields was a lake and I thought, oh gosh, what's going on. All right. I'm glad we closed school. I work at a school, I run a school as well. We'll head out to school on Monday anyway, get some work done but geez, it looks like there's a flood on its way.

At 6.30 in the morning the person I share the flat with said, look, I don't think we're going to be able to get out and I said, what are you talking about. Usually the driveway – because of the drainage of the end of Marlyn and Anne Street doesn't empty we thought maybe the water's just come up a little bit but it was right up about a half a metre to the door at 6.30. We thought, okay, quickly it's going to come inside, grab whatever we need, and we threw it in a bucket, quickly go have a shower, quickly get ready, let's go. By the time that happened, within about 10 minutes, by the time I got to the bathroom all the raw sewage was coming up through the drains, the sink, everywhere on the floor and water was piling in.

So we'd moved up to our ankles very quickly, moved up to our knees and it was like we were in a glass and it was being filled up from the top and we were in the glass, our whole street was the glass and we thought, right, let's just go and we left in our PJs and just ran and went to the back door and there was a current in the flat itself and knocked over the fridge and knocked over everything. We made it to the back door, got out and my friend started banging on the doors of the other flats and I remember the indigenous families that lived across the road from us, I remember the screams, they were coming from there because they had just suddenly realised the situation was dire and by the time we were banging on the doors trying to get people up, two young guys just in the area wanting to work in the area, you know, shell-shocked, said come with us, let's go.

By the time we moved around the corner and we made it to the next block of flats that the water was already chest-high and my friend is shorter than me so I'm holding her up from the water and holding the bucket, buckets float, grab a bucket if you need to if you're ever in that situation and we managed to get through and made it up to Military Road in the dry flat area. No water at that time, no electricity, no internet service. I had tried to call the SES, tried to call the police, wasn't successful. From there we eventually made it to our school which we run in [REDACTED] and being in [REDACTED] you'd think that we would be fine, we're up on stilts, the little school in [REDACTED] and all the water from the top of the hill with the mud as well came smack in into every single room and classroom. Thank you. So we copped it in both locations but what I wanted to make a suggestion was, was one, the SES made a phone call to the school three days after the flood saying alert, alert, alert, dire situation. I thought, well, that's a little late. In New Zealand they have a system on the mobile phones, there's a sound that they made after Christchurch disaster. It's a constant siren that does not stop, that continues

and continues and continues until you pick up your phone and you find out there's an alarm of evacuation. We need something like that. Thank you. And the last one is we left the rescue helicopter with a starling satellite that was supposed to come to school, we need that here because that helped a lot. Lismore needs a good satellite service. That's all, thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you. Just over here.

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[REDACTED]: Hi. My name's [REDACTED]. I have lived in Lismore since 2006. I went to school here, I love this place deeply like I'm sure many of you do and I'm speaking as someone who was not directly flooded but I feel very directly impacted because of the effect that this has had on my community. It's devastating, I feel traumatised, I think there's a lot of collective trauma and grief that our community has been through and will continue to go through for months and years to come and I want to speak about the drivers of this event. The fact that this catastrophic flooding that was suddenly two or more metres higher than it was five years ago is not a freak accident, it's the result of calculated government decisions to continue to fund fossil

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fuels. It's calculated decisions of elected representatives funding fossil fuels which scientists know, the Climate Council and other scientists know are causing warming to our climate and are creating – and I don't mean to debate with anyone, like I did a science degree, we're seeing the changes. I'm really concerned as a young person about what the government's doing because Lismore doesn't feel survivable for me into the future and I'm shaking because it's heartbreaking and I went through the 2017 flood, I was part of the clean-up effort, I was part of helping with this effort as well with Resilient Lismore and the Koori Mail and the amazing leadership of our community but we've been stretched beyond our capacity to cope with these disasters and what we need is Federal and State political leadership to fund climate adaptation, to continue community consultation and engagement about how we can live here now and into the future, about affordable housing, about listening to First Nations leaders about how they would live with this country along this river.

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There's so much that can be said about this and lots of people's stories need to be heard and there's the immediate crisis of the fact that I had a friend contact me trapped from her roof who was unable to be rescued, not for lack of the SES trying, they were doing the best that they could but our systems and our resources are not built for the climate crisis. They do not currently take into account the projections of warming and the redistribution of our water cycle where glaciers are melting around the world and that water has to go somewhere and it's being dumped on our town. The rainfall, the extreme weather we are going to have more flooding and it's going to be unpredictable and it's going to be more severe and so as someone who loves Lismore deeply and wants to live here into the future I'm asking for leadership, I'm asking for real and sincere commitment to withdraw support from fossil fuel projects which are driving climate change and making it uninhabitable for us to live here.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you.

10 [REDACTED]: That's a hard act to follow, she spoke so well but I'm [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] a dermatologist, medical practitioner and my business I've been since
2008 in [REDACTED] Street which is in the centre of town just opposite the river so I
have river views, more than I want really. I went through the 2017 flood, it came 30
centimetres into the building and we coped with that. I would agree with what the
people have said is that this time, even up till maybe 12 hours before the flood hit they
were calling it a minor flood, then suddenly it was a moderate and then suddenly it was
severe and then suddenly it was like, you know. So it went to the roof of my practice
and practice has been wiped out. I lost all my equipment, beds, et cetera, because I
moved them up quite high but not expecting it to go so high.

20 I also own the building and it's gone onto the first floor which a lot of people never
expected. They lost their business and houses so there's a whole lot of destruction. The
town is a ghost town now and it's kind of inexcusable. I was looking up through the
history, you know, every time there's a flood, you know, '54, '74, '89, 2017 there's
always an inquiry and there's always something, you know. I'm not discounting the
need for inquiry and consultation and things like that, I think it's very valuable but each
time the council may be given money – and I'll go on a different tangent. I think global
warming is important, medium to long term we can do something about it but every time
there's a flood I just have to wonder, and I get very disappointed about the fact that
there's no flood – actual flood mitigation or any serious nature that takes place after
these events.

30 Whether it's upstream like holding ponds or, you know, minor dams, lots of trees
planted down to the fact that we have two rivers that come together right in the centre
of Lismore and I know after the '54 flood, 70 years ago, there was an Italian engineer
who came here and said, why don't you divert Leycester Creek back behind the airport
and then we won't get the double – it's just like a bath, you turn on two taps, you're
going to twice as much water in there. We also probably could dredge the river a little
bit, I don't know how much that would help but that might lower the level and also
downstream if we can be serious about taking a few bends out of the river so that we
can have a bigger plughole so the water leaves.

40 I know it's not going to be the whole answer but it certainly will help the minor floods,
not the catastrophic events maybe but the minor nuisance floods that happen regularly
and they're going to happen again. Surely we've got the money. You know, I think
this area's been poorly served because the government – the State Government took
away the trainline to save a couple of million dollars allegedly and then they spent, you
know, \$6 billion building a climate-destroying highway, four lanes each way from
Woolgoolga to Ballina, from Sydney to Queensland which cost billions and billions of
dollars and they're able to move mountains and put bridges. You know, it was \$300
million to put a bridge across the Clarence River.

Surely we deserve a bit of money for potholes and, you know, better decisions about
how we can – you know, the Netherlands can hold back the sea for thousands of years

and we can't even get water to run around us. I just think it's bizarre. And another inquiry is not going to do it, just get a shovel and start digging.

10 [REDACTED]: G'day guys. My name is [REDACTED]. My father was [REDACTED] eye surgeon and my mother is [REDACTED], the all-round legend who's kept it going since [REDACTED] carked it 30 years ago. I'm a GP in the local area, depend how you count it, I've been working here 10 years, 20 years or six years. Before medicine I was a marine biologist with a science degree. This wasn't an unpredictable event. [REDACTED] spoken to that very well. I wasn't born in Lismore but two of my
10 children were. My youngest daughter's [REDACTED], she's five. She's just had her first wobbly tooth and during those five years of her life she's had five, as I read them, environmental disasters, 17 floods, 18, 19 highly accelerated drought, 19 to 20 fires, flood 1, flood 2, 2022.

20 Covid pandemic, we can talk about health in a moment if we need but as per my engagement with health I worked at [REDACTED] for the first three nights sleeping on the floor of the office hearing the rainfall, getting the alarm too late. I watched Australian blokes in an army of tinnies save literally thousands of lives that would've been lost. The death toll of this could've been two or three orders or magnitude higher
20 and we all know that. We also know that the death toll of this for winter with geriatric deaths, psychiatric deaths, infective death this winter will be never counted effectively, perhaps not for years until statisticians can work back.

I subsequently travelled home when I was relieved and assisted with the flooding of – with the evacuation of Ballina Hospital. Ironically as I travelled to Ballina the lights went out as I went past the big prawn. It was f***** scary. Sorry. Very scary. I was in a wetsuit because I thought if I couldn't cross the canal in Ballina I'd be working my way back through the West Ballina Caravan Parks which aren't people who are particularly lucky in life and I thought I'd be clearing houses like they were clearing
30 houses in Lismore, not with people on the roofs but with people who aren't mobile.

I've worked as a doctor in West Ballina. I assisted with the evacuation at Ballina Hospital. I then subsequently took a day to get back bringing flood refugees with me and another doctor and we went to volunteer at the two centres, CSU and GSAC the next day. My colleague was able to get to Evans Head, I asked him how because they were relatively well staffed here including with doctors who had lost everything. I subsequently was put in a helicopter to Coraki, I had the good sense to ask Health for some medicines because there's point having a ride if you don't have ammunition and I provided care to at least 60 patients that I documented in 48 hours, some of which were
40 very, very complicated in a town that we know from every single flood in living memory has had itself cut off.

There's a \$4 million health facility in that town, there's a six million one down in Evans, there's a bunch of things. That building wasn't flood-damaged but it couldn't be opened. I set up a clinic and delivered excellent care to people as best I could, people who were shocked and absolutely destroyed. As soon as I got out I liaised with senior media people because I have that access and as soon as I was in the Sydney Morning Herald, which you're all welcome to Google, and on A Current Affair and the Today

show I have subsequently had my competency questioned which feels a little bit like a gag order and I appreciate that for the safety of patients doctors must be safe.

I drive two Volvos, I'd really like it if they invented a Volvo bloody helicopter so if I have to get in another one I can do it. My five year old daughter has had five of these events in her life. I liaised and worked extensively with SES, Fire and Rescue, local legends on the ground, local nursing staff, volunteers but the left hand know the right hand existed and we've got a bushfire and climate Royal – sorry, Natural Disaster Royal Commission two years ago and we just repeated every single mistake. I love this part
10 of the planet, I've chosen to live here, I'm particularly interested in the fact that all of the poison that was scraped off the streets of Lismore has been put at the top of the hill and is now floating back down in the second flood.

Needless to say, I got to Coraki in flood 2 and [REDACTED] assisted me to get home after I provided 48 hours of medical care in flood 2. This was a shambles, everybody here knows that. Thank you all for your individual acts of heroism. Please do not re-brief your trauma, re-brief your own heroism, don't think about the one you didn't get through, think about the 19 that you helped. Even if you're just a grandma holding a baby while mum brushed her teeth or had a wee, you're a hero.

20 MS CAMPBELL: Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Hello.

[REDACTED]: Hi everyone. My name's [REDACTED], I'm from Pottsville, I've got family here in Lismore. I received a call on the Monday morning, the 28th of February to come and help. I'm proficient in the water, I'm a good surfer, I've got a jet ski, I was here by about 8.30am probably rescued between – somewhere between 15 to 20 people that morning and then got heavily involved on the ground for the next six weeks, mostly
30 with [REDACTED] servicing the river. We fed animals, we took medical, we took mail and to this day we were still the only boat that we saw up there actually doing anything, supplying food, supplying everything. The response particularly up from Coraki to Bungawalbin was absolutely appalling.

Further to that, I run a large telegram channel with over 70,000 people on there and I accurately predicted this flood was coming. Now, how did I do that? Many years ago I familiarised myself with a 1967 New South Wales Rainmaking Control Act. I encourage you all to see that. Thank you. I also am familiar with the case in Tasmania where the Hydro Tasmania was asked to explain the cloud seeding in the catchment
40 prior to the fatal floods in 2016. For 90 days prior to this flooding event I was documenting extensive spraying over the entire region for 90 days and I wasn't the only person to predict this flood.

Now, the lady over there I commend her for what she was saying about the fossil fuels and the climate change. There's manmade climate change, there's also natural climate change and cycles but there's also manmade climate engineering and I believe firmly that we witnessed that happen in this region and we need answers. Thank you very much.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

10 ■■■■■: Hello. ■■■■■ and ■■■■■ we're in South Lismore. We're fortunately we're in a very large brick building with a 16-metre second floor. We could've got a lot of our business stuff up but the staff asked me Friday, do you want us to put stuff up before we go and I actually said no, what I'm hearing is 10 and a half, minor flooding, there is no urgency whatsoever. ■■■■■ and I were down in the shed at 2 o'clock, I think, on Sunday morning or Monday morning with forklift and trying to get what we could up. What we did get up we put on a back of a truck and on our highest floor, on the ground floor it had all got totally destroyed.

20 So I'd rather talk more about how – what I think we need to do about getting through this event and maybe reducing it by a metre in the long term. That is, I believe, the new highway is actually a dam. ■■■■■ has sent me some photos, she flew over the area the next morning or the next day and it shows a wall of water on our side and very little on the other side. People say, well, you're way up at Lismore. Water isn't that unlevelled. I believe that the blockage down there has affected probably by a metre in Lismore. If you take the last metre away you would've saved a lot of people and a lot of property. So I would really like to see the highway investigated, proven one way or another whether it played a role or not. ■■■■■ has some points too, I won't take up the whole four minutes. Thank you.

30 ■■■■■: Hi. My concerns are more to do with what's happening now with the recovery. I don't want to talk about the flood itself because it's too traumatic for me to discuss. I would like to see all of our potholes with a painted big white painted sign around them so that we know where they are when we're driving at night but it's not just water on the road, there's a bloody big hole there. I would very much like to have any volunteers that come in here after a flood, I want them trained. My son had his prosthetic legs thrown out, he had his wheelchair thrown out, he had his kneel walker thrown out, he had all of his hand tools thrown out, he had – they threw everything out. Nobody said to him do you want to save this or whatever. They need to know that there are things that can be saved.

40 We have a freezer that went under. It works perfectly, we didn't throw it out. Thank God we didn't because it still works. A lot of people don't know what can be saved. We need to educate everybody on what you can save if we have another flood. There are things, don't throw them out day one, see if they can be saved, if they can work again. Hand tools, saws, hammers, hoses they were thrown out. These things do not need to be thrown out, they can be washed and reused again. People have been left with nothing. They don't need to be left with nothing. You can have some stuff that can be washed. A lot of furniture can be washed and reused. The other one that I'm thinking of too is a lot of people love their houses, they know that where they're living in South and North Lismore is dangerous, they love their houses. Is there any way we can start exploring the possibility of actually moving the house? I think that's about it from me. I'm sorry. Thank you.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you very much.

10 [REDACTED]: Hello. [REDACTED] my name. I'm a [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] and a lawyer. I've got a firm called [REDACTED], we've
done a lot of work with people since the floods, particularly tenants, also landlords and
lots and lots of insurance cases. Good on you, Mary and Mick, for turning up tonight
and I hope you keep turning up and I hope that you do this not just in Tumbulgum
tomorrow but you visit all of the different parts of the region. I'd like to back-up what
everyone said tonight, I think it's fantastic to hear people speak in such an articulate and
direct way.

The crisis not only continues, it's in us, it's in our bodies, you know, this flood is in all
of our bodies. Like the doctor said before, we've got huge impacts which will last for a
long period of time and we need to measure that properly. We need to understand the
ongoing magnitude of this epic disaster. It's not over. Every fibre of government these
days wants to click back into business as usual as quickly as possible. That's the basic
problem. There is no business as usual. This is still a crisis and we need to recognise
that and everything that we do needs to be informed by that basic fact.

20 Okay. So I love coming to Lismore, mainly to play football for [REDACTED], I've done
that for 10 years, we won 4-nil on Friday night. Thanks for asking. Anyway, you know,
you've played at Oaks Oval which is destroyed, being reconstructed. NORPA, I've
done shows at NORPA, I've done shows at the Star Court Theatre with Dustieski, these
places are dark tonight. Okay. This place is still a disaster zone and that must be
respected at every level of government and that's really what – thank you.

30 Now, the difficulty is that there's a kind of contradiction or a paradox, if you like, that
you've got a region-wide disaster but it's got very particular local nuances, to use one
of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] favourite words. Nuance. Anyway, it's not rugby league nuance, it's
flood nuance and in South Golden Beach or Ocean Shores it means one thing, lots of
inundated houses and bad drainage and issues around water outlets at the river and then
in Huonbrook and Wanganui or Upper Wilsons Creek it means being disconnected from
the rest of the shire and no one even really knowing about it for days.

40 So people utterly petrified all that time and then finally the flood comes to Byron
because water likes linen, it would appear, and so we see the images wildly exaggerated
on the telly, seriously, finally a newsagents is inundated and Byron, Byron, Byron
always gets on the bloody news. Right. Well, frankly it was a bit of joke because it was
a lame effort of the flood, it didn't do that much damage but there's a serious point to
be made. When the second flood came, a bit like [REDACTED] original point, she could see
it – feel it coming in the hills. When the second flood came I was looking at the BOM
updates, listening to the ABC which did a fantastic job, by the way, and there was no –
there was no inkling that there were people standing knee-deep in water in their
loungerooms in Suffolk Park. Absolutely no idea in the official channels that this was
happening.

Anyway, in 25 words or less, there was no flood drill. When the floods came people looked at each other, all of the government agencies were active but in parallel in silos. They need to talk to each other and they need to talk to the community. In Byron shire we had big – two big evacuation centres, we need small ones. Why? We need small ones people can get to. Four minutes, sorry, I could go on for four weeks and so could frankly most of the people in this room. Thank you for turning up. We want you to keep turning up and the main answer here is to develop a regional plan that plays catch-up for all of the problems with regional development over decades.

- 10 So you have like a master plan for the region with local variations and then you have to see that the floods, like [REDACTED] was saying before, it's not just floods, it's fire, it's tsunami, that will come as well, Byron wasn't excluded that time, and, you know, we need to incorporate disaster planning into regional development in a master plan that is integrated and takes infrastructure seriously and sorts out water, drainage and sewage for the very, very long term. Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

- 20 [REDACTED]: Hi. My name's [REDACTED] and I lived at [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] Street for 20 years and it was owned by the [REDACTED]. Yeah. I was at – the day before the flood I went to Byron Bay and by the time I got the bus back the road had been cut at Bruxner Highway and I found myself stranded in Ballina and I approached the local hospital and I said that I had no money and nowhere to go and I found myself being told it was my fault that I was in that situation and if I had money to go to a movie then I had money for accommodation and it was one of the most harrowing experiences of my life and I'm currently working with a psychologist to write a letter to the Ballina Hospital because I was asking for help with my medicine pack as well and I suffer from a complex tremor and I realise that certain things weren't seen and what I'm asking for is that for all regional hospitals to have a system put in place
30 – phone numbers and contact systems put in place that – because I don't want people to go through what I was put through as someone being prepared to throw me back out into the rain and it was only because I contacted someone at the disability support place where I work that managed to contact my NDIS support worker that we managed to arrange for accommodation and it's the start of a five-day long journey to get me back to Lismore and I would also like to know why there have been no disabled toilets provided for any of the residents in the Lismore area because there have been port-a-loos brought in but if you're a person with a disability we've been told go s*** yourselves because there are square shed designs available, yet nothing has been
40 provided for us and God help you if you're on the streets because you have nowhere to go and we deserve basic decency and we seem to have been forgotten about. Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you very much.

[REDACTED]: Sorry, that just took me - - -

MR ROCHE: I think it did for all of us.

██████████: Okay. My name's ██████████ I live on the corner of ██████████ and ██████████ Street in North Lismore. We bought our property at the end of 2017, not coming from the area, originally from Evans Head. On the night of the – the night of the flood, I'll just say that, the updates that we were getting that the water was coming at different levels seemed to be not consistent with what we were measuring. We were measuring 180 to 190mls every 20 minutes. We know our floor level. I was coordinating with not only my father who's a volunteer for ██████████ in Evans Head, my partner who's a ██████████ employee as well as my family that are based in Melbourne and
10 over in Europe, we were all trying to work out how long we had during the night and how much water was coming.

Our floor level's 13, about 13.6, 13.7 and the messages that we were receiving from council, SES, services they were not right, they were wrong. It's not a blame on the SES or the council but rather their systems and the support that they have and that only comes from a higher level. At 4 o'clock in the morning I felt a brick wall under – we are located on a house block on our own, we don't have any neighbouring houses, we've only got the ██████████, ██████████. We felt the brick wall have buoyancy under our house. I've rang triple O because I was worried that the house was going to collapse.
20 It took 25 minutes for that call to be answered. We then knew that no one was coming. Again, it's not a directed attack.

At about 6 o'clock in the morning we got rescued by a member of the public. His name is ██████████ and if it wasn't for him we don't know what would've happened. We had 1.6 to 1.7 metres in our house. We were rescued in a boat and then we had to go rescue our neighbour who was a metre – his floor level is a metre lower than ours so he had about 100ml before he was probably not going to be here today. My – I guess what I'm getting at is, when I was making that phone call to be rescued I was told to get in our roof cavity. Me not thinking, obviously partner's – I've gone we need to get in the roof. He's like, we're not getting in the bloody roof. We were lucky enough to have a
30 ladder in our kitchen, we've pulled that out.

You can't inform people to get in a roof cavity and if they've got tin roofs there is no possible way that they can open that roof. Just everyday person that has no physical – I wouldn't have been able to do it. It's just advice that shouldn't have been given. So, I guess, if those houses in those areas, in those flood plains are going to stay there I think a flood hatch should be in the way a skylight has to be mandatory in those areas or people should be given the option to relocate.

40 MR ROCHE: Thank you.

██████████: Good evening. My name is ██████████. I'm a four-year resident of Lismore. I'm 84 years of age. I'm trying to tell you something and not impose it. We are not going to get absolutely anywhere until we decide to change and alter the course of the rivers inland. We can do this, the science, the engineering is available. What it takes now is vision and the willingness to do it. You will not achieve anything until you do that. I'm speaking as an environmental scientist, planner and consultant. I've been in the planning industry since 1973. In '77 I graduated with a

Masters in Environmental Science specialising in riverbed management, did studies for the EPA and also international studies.

10 The issue is once and for all we have to think outside of the box, we've got to do it intelligently, willingly rather than spending billions of dollars in submarines that perhaps will never come, to spend a billion or two in understanding that by diverting the course of the rivers here we not only safeguard regions on the continental scale, turn inland, salvage the artisan basin and above all, the Murray Darling Basin. It's a law in basic mathematics that when you've got two negatives in algebra it becomes a plus. We have the means if we want to, to bring inland, save whole regions, bring the rivers inland, bring life and recharge the artisan basin and also remember that we are dealing virtually with one-quarter of a continental scale region and the breadbaskets of the nations are in this part of the world.

20 We can bring life to all of that, save entire regions by thinking outside of the box and willing it. You, the people, must do it. I must tell you also something. By the time I was seven I went through 25 air bombardments. I was nearly killed but the scale of the suffering to us all in my childhood is still with me. It took us five days to drive down from Southern Queensland back to Lismore and in the process I saw the devastation and the suffering of the people. There's no need for this. We can intelligently apply, understanding science, engineering and the will and command the governments to do as we are telling them and save our lives and our regions. Thank you.

30 [REDACTED]: Hi. I'm [REDACTED]. My house is at the [REDACTED] Street end of [REDACTED] Street in the CBD and it was washed completely off its foundations and crashed forward onto the edge of the footpath. I would like to see more attention to building codes and real estate rules in terms of declarations about things like that. If I'd have had any idea – well, I don't know what I would've done if I'd have had any idea that that was possible that my house could actually come off its footings, off its stumps but that would be something that I would like to see considered.

40 Also as was mentioned, more safety measures. You know, my friend around the corner rescued an old lady from the top of her house using Christmas lights and pulling her across in the water. So perhaps ladders up the sides of houses, things like that, more actual safety measures for getting out of your house and getting to a higher place and the other thing is the insurance industry needs to be really seriously overhauled. I think a one postcode fits all system does not work. I think individual properties need to be actually analysed based on the mitigation measures the homeowners have put into the properties. Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

[REDACTED]: Hi. My name's [REDACTED]. I'm the [REDACTED] candidate for [REDACTED] in this election and the response to this flood is the reason that I decided to run. Not the sole reason, I'd already gone through the bushfires, I was writing articles about the readiness problems that we had with bushfires that slowly developed into horrific mismanagement, that borderline bewildering incompetence and then I fought in those fires and then we went through Covid again with so much

mismanagement, it seemed malevolent and then now we have the response to the flood which, to be honest, was a third-world response. It was horrific.

To the people who spoke earlier that ended up not even being part of a government system and saying we're just going to do it ourselves, our community can be strong, we're going to get together and we'll rescue people, we'll feed these animals. I just thank you from the bottom of my heart. The amount of people I've met that have been rescued by these people is just mind-blowing. Where was the government in all of this? We're going to have a review, a commission inquiry, we've had 118 of these in a hundred years and I don't know what's changed. I can't see any major policy change in all of that time so what are we going to get out of this one?

I'd also like to point out that people talking about climate change be very careful you don't hand over a get-out-of-gaol-free card to these people who will throw their hands in the air and say, obviously it wasn't the highway, it wasn't the modelling, it wasn't anything we could do and just a little bit about my background. I was the manager of (01:10:59) Integrity for that highway construction and I've also represented landholders against the RMS and against other public authorities for the failure of modelling in infrastructure. This isn't my first rodeo in this but there are things that are being talked that are very, very problematic.

To blame it on climate change when what it was caused by was a cool air mass over Antarctica because East Antarctica is cooling that raise at about the 500 hectopascal mark, it's about five kilometres altitude, came across a cool Australia continent, one of the coolest summers on record, no 40 degree days, it ended up out over the water and that lower the rate of precipitation and we get more rain. By blaming it on climate change we are giving them a get-out-of-gaol-free card.

Lastly, the biggest issue that isn't seemed to be addressed is that we had hundreds, and I mean hundreds of nurses and doctors and emergency service personnel that could not work because they weren't jabbed. Now, at the start of this you can go on the New South Wales Health website any day of the week and you can divide the amount of cases by the amount of deaths and you can see Covid is now demonstrably less deadly than the flu. By any proxy (01:12:23), you pick the proxy, average age of death, average comorbidity, you pick the proxy and these people were saying we will work for free, we will even take a RAT test, just let us help and they were turned away. They were turned away while people who had Covid, who were jabbed were allowed to work.

Now, that is a serious problem that as a community we have to address right now and as I said, whether it's climate change, whether it's the highway, whether it's the response, these are tough questions and we have to sit down and we have to talk about them and not just spend money on a Commission that, in my opinion, is going to find no fault. Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Just down the front here, Deb. Yeah, thank you. Perfect. We're doing our best to come to you all. Thank you for your patience.

██████████: My name is ██████████, I live at Girards Hill and the human cost was immense. So I went to my friend – we went to our friend’s funeral who drowned while trying to get rescued on Facebook. However, I’d like to speak for the silent majority which is the wildlife which really has not been in any conversations and I know myself Girards Hill is actually a wildlife refuge, Wilsons River Reserve is a wildlife refuge and I was really horrified to hear they’re considering using a dual purpose facility which is the East Lismore Golf Club which also is the – the Lismore Workers Club is on the table at the council for redevelopment for a shopping mall.

10 Now, that is such an important habitat for wildlife because the corridor which runs along the top of the ridge is adjoining the golf course. So there’s wallabies and koalas and all kinds of animals that use that. So what I would like to talk about is in developing – I know, think global, act local, let’s consider the wildlife, let’s consider actually not taking away really important sporting facilities that also people walk in, that use in that community, let’s really address if we’re going to redevelop let’s think of the wildlife, let’s think of nature, let’s really include everything else that inhabits this region with us humans. Thank you.

20 ██████████: Hi. Thanks. My name’s ██████████. I’m a ██████████ but I want to speak in my capacity as a coordinator with ██████████ which is a community-led organisation, volunteer-run. We sit at about 130 volunteers that are coordinating our initiatives. One of our primary ways of organising is we facilitate a Facebook that has around 30,000 people in it and one of the real lack – inadequacies I see in disaster response is around public information. So I don’t know how many times I’ve spoken to people in this official response and said, use our group, come into our group and talk to our community directly, tell them the information that you have because what we find instead is that our group of community people are responsible for sifting through the reams and reams of official information about the recovery and sharing with our broader community.

30 Government has a responsibility to message carefully, clearly and concisely to our community and communities access information on social media. They do it on ABC radio and kudos to ABC North Coast for doing an incredible job but the governments need to go to where the communities are. So that’s in public information. Also governments need to go to where community responders are. So governments need to find the community organisations and the community networks that are working to support their own communities and ask them what they need, supply them with what they need so that we can save and support our own communities.

40 If that looks like practical things like providing refuelling stations for people who are delivering food around the region and providing access to those people no questions asked then do something like that. If that looks like asking the community what it needs and giving it to them, then do something like that. Simple things like give them infrastructure, give them generators, give them the things that we need to organise to support our communities rather than waiting – expecting us to come cup in hand to government to sort those things out.

The other thing that we really desperately need is funding after disasters to extend beyond the initial first two years of recovery. Time and time again we see recovery funding put forward that ends after two years. That recovery needs to be ongoing and that funding needs to be ongoing and not just focused on recovery but focused on preparedness. So we need equal, if not more money put into communities to resource us to enable us to develop community-led plans. So we need to fund small communities like Coraki, like The Channon, like Nimbin, like Lismore to develop community-led plan so that we are able to respond as a community and work together because we are the ones that know our communities, we know the local information, we know where
10 the people are in different parts of our community that we need to get to. So we need to be resourced to develop those plans about how to work together to protect and save ourselves.

I want to really acknowledge while I have the microphone that – I want to acknowledge our community of the Northern Rivers and the experience that we're all going through together because it is incomprehensible and I just wanted to say that to all of you here as we sit in this room that the journey we're on is something we will never forget but there is an opportunity here for us to become stronger, more networked, more together, more connected so that next time we know how to do this and we know how to do it
20 together.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

██████████: Hi. My name's ██████████ and I live in South Golden Beach. For the first couple of days we watched Lismore go under feeling helpless and then all of a sudden it hit us as well. South Golden Beach, New Brighton, Billinudgel, Mullumbimby we all flooded. Brunswick Heads has never flooded before and that flooded as well. I've been tasked by the local community association, the Ocean Shores Community Association, OSCA, to collect the flood impact stories on behalf of the North Byron district. I lost everything, by the way, in South Golden Beach so I'm feeling fairly
30 motivated to assist where I can.

Eight weeks later the flood impact stories that I'm collecting are pretty horrendous. There's people sleeping in sleeping bags in their mouldy houses, in backyard Ocean Shores there's people sleeping in a tent in their backyard - sorry, I'll get it together in a second – with no hot water, no kitchen, no power, no internet. We're living in third world conditions. I feel for Lismore because we feel it as well in North Byron district. There's collapsed sewerage pipes in our backyards, there's still sewage bubbling up in the backyards. There's pumps in South Golden Beach that pump the water back from
40 the streets into the creek that overtopped back into the streets. Our pumps and our drainage systems that can handle a standard storm can't handle a one in 100 year flood and I'm being told that this might've been a one in 100 and not a one in 500 so God help us all when the one in 500 comes. Our infrastructure cannot handle a basic storm.

Many people are not insured, many people are underinsured. Another option if you don't want to sleep in your mouldy house is to rent a house for anywhere up to \$1,600 a week and that's pretty standard. I've submitted dozens of suggestions to Byron Council. I'm sure they're sick of me already. I'm picking out my favourite suggestions

because this is the State Government Flood Inquiry so I'm picking what I think might be State Government suggestions. I agree with the guy about selling a couple of submarines, that wouldn't be a bad idea but we need the drainage issues and infrastructure in the whole region fixed including North Byron district. We need flood insurance to be subsidised. On our rates we need Starlink satellite dishes on the roof of all community buildings and lifesaving towers perhaps.

10 We all need back-up generators, there's still people in Ocean Shores without power. The State Government needs to send extra staff to each council in the Northern Rivers to fast-track their DAs so that folks can get back to their houses. We need the State Government to pay for houses to be jacked up, for houses to be waterproofed. The State Government has a \$7,200 rental assistance. I got to Byron 30 years ago when rent was reasonable. Now you can't get anything in Byron for under a thousand dollars a week. That's not my fault that that's happened and local residents are subject to that.

20 The \$7,200 in the local area that I've lived in for 30 years covers you for five weeks. It doesn't cover you for 16 weeks. So we need the State Government to double, triple, quadruple that amount. The biggest problem in Byron is that Airbnb has locked in a lot of the accommodation. We need the State Government to look Airbnb and rein it in and I think that's all I can think of in terms of State Government. I've got heaps more but that will do, I think.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

30 [REDACTED]: Hi. I'm [REDACTED]. Been in this area about 44 years. In the time of the flood I was actually in Queensland and monitoring the situation down here. Why? Because I spent 44 years in the SES down here. I offered some information and intelligence and was not given the opportunity to disclose it and it wasn't till 3 o'clock in the morning of the first flood that I got a phone call asking if I'd run our flood model that we had that goes back to [REDACTED] the recent county council engineer when – after the '74 flood put together. So what happened was we ran our model, we had military and maths master putting in calculus and we flood forecast from Woodburn because the Met bureau forecast Woodburn but no one – the Met bureau doesn't forecast below Woodburn to include Broadwater, Wardell, the ferry, Byrnes Point ferry and eventually Ballina itself.

40 So we fed the information back to BMT who's the hydrology people who work for Ballina Shire doing the flood plan and they thanked us very much and they then got back to us and said with that information Ballina's going to be flooded. So what we did – I then spoke to the emergency management group down there and said this flood is different from the 2017. Cyclone Debbie flood has more water in the Bungawalbin, it has more water coming down on the Teven side and, in fact, in Lismore you've got two rivers in total flood.

I've been doing intelligence for 44 years and so they listened to me and they said, okay, [REDACTED] we'll run with that. Can you draw the polygon? So I drew the polygon for the

flood inundation of Ballina which included Wardell and those strips of areas up there. It did flood Ballina and it did do what we put into the information. So what I've got here is a series of questions, although I was in Queensland and feeding information back to – sorry. Although I was living in Queensland and isolated in the floods up there I fed information back down here. So I've got a series of questions that I'd like to ask and I can table them and give them to you to take away.

10 So question 1. How do we give more timely flood information to the community? Is it a matter of staff shortages or funding? Is it a matter of the community do not understanding the warnings? Or does it need media messaging and social media? So that's the question. How do we address the situation where the messaging needs to get out and how we go about changing what happened in this flood and other floods. About 25 years ago we managed the floods ourselves – we managed the floods ourselves, we didn't have input from staff at that stage, it was all run locally. So how do we improve the call-taking ability of triple O and 132500 services? The question is, what are the agent's trigger to increase the capacity of call centres in an escalating major event?

20 The next one is will State Government fund the recommendations from this inquiry? The next one is will there be a timeline for the implementation of the recommendations? Is the State Government prepared to fund the drainage problems facing local governments in the Northern Rivers? If you talk to all the councillors at the moment they've all got drainage problems or in Byron it's one in five years drainage, it's not one in a hundred. And if you look at what's happened in Ballina and you talk to council it's the old floodgates that have jammed in the farmlands and I think the next thing we're going to face is a fish kill.

30 Apart from that the next one then is, what happened to local knowledge in the last two floods? Will there be a concerted effort to improve the local – the lack of local knowledge? Do lead agencies have required equipment to meet their capability in all areas of flooding and do lead agencies have the number of volunteers they need to meet their capability? Question. If not, what do they propose to do? Last. Who will be responsible for making sure the recommendations are implemented by agencies and governments at all levels and will the community be advised of the adoption of the recommendations? And lastly on this point, planning and preparation of floods. Flood plans need to be updated and reflect the changes at levels that has occurred in the last two floods.

40 Politics and policy-driven drive the outcomes of inquiries. I don't care where you are or what you do but that has been the process over years. So politics and policy drive the outcomes of inquiries. Mother nature isn't governed by either politics or policy. Mother nature takes no prisoners.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you. Up the back here.

██████████ Good evening everyone. My name's ██████████, I'm a large animal veterinarian based here in the Northern Rivers. I've lived here all of my 38 years less 10 years studying away. I might come at it from a slightly different perspective, I guess, seeing things from certainly the veterinary and animal side of it and obviously

I've got a strong bias towards farmers in the region given that we're a small-time third generation farmer and that's who we've been trying to help mostly the last nine weeks.

10 Certainly don't pretend to have all the answers in four minutes so it is biased heavily towards criticisms, I guess, by nature of these sessions; however, more than happy to be party to some of the solutions later on. Firstly, I think from the Bureau of Meteorology that topic I think their dates and their warnings and just their raw data coming through was hopelessly and has been proven to be dangerously slow. The information was just not coming. If you were looking at river heights, rainfall data it was simply not current and that didn't allow people to make their own assessment which if you provide people with the information and the raw data you then allow people to make informed decisions. That was lacking.

20 Secondly, with the SES I have a huge issue with volunteers not being able to be criticised because they're volunteers. I think that's completely wrong. When you have volunteers who are directing people they are, therefore, liable to criticism and the SES have to be open to major, major reflection on their response here in Lismore to be turning rescuers away when they knew that they were dangerously underprepared. So that is fine but likewise you do not push helpers away when there is something clearly catastrophic unfolding in the area.

30 The phone service throughout the entire disaster was basically lacking to non-existent. There were days, almost entire days where there was no phone service. There was no contingency plans, there were no landlines. When we were trying to coordinate animal rescues there were no phone service. I think that also needs to be addressed. You cannot have people stranded, isolated on farms with absolute no way of them being able to contact anybody. I was fortunate, if you'd call it that, to have spent a significant amount of time up in helicopters flying over the entire region stretching from north of Casino up towards Kyogle right down to the coast, halfway to Grafton basically looking for animals trying to - among a whole bunch of other volunteer vets, rescuers, heaps of people, it was a huge team effort to try and get to these farmers, get to these animals.

40 So I had a birds eye perspective over a lot of it, trudging through water, trying to get to farmers and the images that were seeing are obviously just harrowing. Dropping into farms, seeing farmers coming out of sheds, out of houses, some that stayed, some that were then boated in afterwards is obviously completely harrowing. The DPI who I've been very publicly critical of were seven days too slow to arrive to provide any sort of agricultural assistance and that pathetic response stretches right to the very top. I mean, basically, in summary, every level of government is open to criticism right from the Premier down, every minister, the local members who I tried to contact throughout the disaster to let them know what we were seeing and what I thought we needed. I would get emails giving me links to government assistance. That was not helping farmers, helping animals who were stranded and who were in their hour of need.

Basically I hope these inquiries basically go somewhere. The area is a mess, there's no understating that. There's no overstating that, rather. The area is on its knees and unless every tier of government is open to criticism, is open to feedback, is open to change the area will die. It is still a catastrophic mess out there from the CBD of Lismore to farm

after farm after farm, business after business after business the area and people are on their knees and are in dire need for help and that is going to be ongoing for sometime yet.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you.

10 [REDACTED]: Hi. My name is [REDACTED]. I work for [REDACTED] which is a support service for people living with disabilities. We lost four venues in the flood. I'm actually speaking on behalf – asking these questions on behalf of my CEO who can't be here tonight, [REDACTED]. She has asked is there a plan with insurance underwriting from the government? Will the CBD remain in the same location? And when can we expect grants for employers of 20 or more people? So that's from [REDACTED], from [REDACTED].

20 A lot of the workers that I work with, because I work in the roster team, have been affected and it's made it very difficult to provide the support that we provide. We support over 300 people living with disabilities in the region. Got some of the workers here tonight and I wanted to know being on the frontline and speaking with the workers is there any sort of plan for community engagement around collective trauma because when you are working on the frontline you're already dealing with people in vulnerable situations and we've had – we've had participants, like families of four people with disabilities living in evac centres with dogs and pets and we've been supporting these people and the vicarious trauma, I'm also trauma-trained as are some of my colleagues, the impact is huge and some of the stories that I've heard about children being rescued out of roofs, children seeing their pets die, their livestock swept away, like this stuff lives with children for a long time and can drastically affect their future. So I'd like to know from the State Government if there is going to be a concerted effort to address the collective trauma that the whole region is feeling.

30 MR ROCHE: Thank you.

40 [REDACTED]: Hi. My name's [REDACTED]. I'm from the other side of the highway and let me tell you we got water. We had 1.7 metres of water go through our home and we had just under three metres of water go through our commercial mushroom farm. We've been there 15 months, we relied on local people to tell us what we should do because when we looked at buying our farm we didn't get a lot of data on flooding, we couldn't get flood insurance. We were told on the Sunday, guys, you'll be fine, lift up your gear from the low-lying part of your farm, it will all be okay, you won't get water in your house. We have just spent \$90,000 on renovating our home and worked our butts off for 14 months to turn our farm around. We now have nothing. We don't have a farm that we can walk back in, throw some compost in and start work again. We have lost 13 buildings out of 15 on our farm.

So we are in big trouble. I want to know when and how quickly are we going to start receiving these grants? We are two months post-flood and still today we have not received anything. We employ 10 local people – we employ 10 local people that are now out of work. These guys live pay packet to pay packet and there's not many jobs out there for them at the moment either. So that is a worrying concern for me as well.

My other point is, I do believe the highway has had something to do with this simply because we live on a little road between Woodburn and Evans Head on a little town called Doonbah, we call ourself the forgotten road because we literally feel like we have been forgotten. When the floods resided we had the Army come in, they came to our farm and told both my husband and I, this is to dangerous for us, we can't help you and left. So we relied on friends that came a thousand kilometres from inland with their equipment and helped us dismantle something we had worked so hard at for 15 months. It took us 21 days of family and friends helping us and 123 truckloads out to the quarry.

10 That was not funded by the government, that was funded by us and our mates from out west.

So I just really want the government to think about that going forward. It's great that you sent 500 Army personnel to Evans Head and spread them all over the district but they were limited to what they could do and not really highly trained in the equipment they had. The fact that they were getting bogged on the side of the road, they were coming in with machinery that they didn't know how use and if I knew the guy's name I'd love to say it but told us that, hey, we only get trained in these vehicles for about two weeks, then we get moved on. You're giving them ticket after ticket but they actually don't know how to use the machinery.

20

So I think that needs an overhaul and for the SES, no disrespect, but the fact that we had a fire brigade called to our farm that was completely drenched anyway and then when my husband went to ask for more help he was accused of making the triple O call by the head of SES in Woodburn and we don't need that when we're on our knees. We need support.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

30 [REDACTED]: Hi everybody. [REDACTED] my name. I live at Woodburn and I'm a farmer down there. Firstly, I'd just like to say when you've announced at the start of the meeting, Mary, that you're going to extend the submission period till the 20th of May that's excellent. You need to really advertise that though because everywhere is still showing the 8th of May. What we need, and we all know here, that most of us have got internet connection, no computers, we've got no means of typing a submission and for the vast majority of a lot of people they're probably in the frame of mind to even sit down and do that. They're still cleaning their homes, helping people and so anyhow, I think the 20th of May should be the earliest that you wrap it up because don't worry, none of us will forget what happened.

40

The other thing. I think it's time that after this event we've all got to wake up and this is about the preservation of life now. We've got to forget all the, you know, bits and pieces of just wasting time and too much bureaucracy to do this and do that. It's about the preservation of life and we were very, very lucky that more people didn't lose their lives. Still some people, I believe, missing and the search still goes on but anyhow, we'll see what happens.

The whole river was devastated, everywhere from, you know, the lower levels of the river right through. So, therefore, it needs a whole of river approach. I think just the fact that Ballina was flooded or West Ballina area was flooded, because of the proximity to the bar and the sea, that's where the water gets out, that is a clear indication of how desperately needed dredging of the entire lower length of the river is required. I mean, the old – we talk about Uncle Herb and all of our ancestors, I think all had far more knowledge of the river system and what needs to be done. Dredging went on for tens of bloody hundreds of years when the government ships used to come up as far as Lismore. You'd probably get a dinghy up in a lot of the areas of the river now, it's just full of silt and sand.

Apart from that, the other things that we experience, you know, communication is a big issue right from the whole – through the whole (01:45:03). When we were all evacuated to evacuation centres there needs to be permanent evacuation centres set up in strategic points where people can get to or where you can ferry people easily to. Have them permanently set up, have food, bedding, whatever you need, water, totally driven by generators because that's what you've got when you've got a flood, you can't rely on the mains power, so that when people get there they can sleep and eat. There needs to be, you know, hundreds of phone – just simple things like phone chargers. There were people that were sort of driven bereft when they couldn't contact family members or friends to check on to see if they were okay and in reality they were perfectly fine but because all of our phones were dead after, you know, eight hours no one could contact them.

The other problem is the Tuckombil Canal. We need to remove it, go back to how it used to be so that more water can escape through the Evans River and the old M1 motorway. I don't know – I'm very disappointed that the engineers at the time didn't do exactly the same as what they did at Kempsey. That's what needed to be done, they could've put it up at a height that would've been out of one in a hundred flood and desperately needs to be fixed.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

MS CAMPBELL: Thank you. I'm just conscious of the time. So we have about 10 minutes left so there's probably time for three at the most to speak which we have lined up. So I apologise. We'll go over here and then we'll throw over there and we may be able to end in the middle.

██████████: Thank you. My name's ██████████. I live in ██████████ Street. My building is one of the first ones to go on that side of ██████████ Street. It's directly opposite the levy and it was built in 1910. It's built with slats and so, therefore, the water comes in and it goes out so I thoroughly recommend the suggestion before that somebody made about houses being made with flood mitigation in mind and also definitely the ability to escape and ladders on the side, I think that was fabulous.

I'd like to not talk so much about my experience of the flood but more about going forward and some of the recovery stuff. This is my – I'd like to say it's my third flood but it's actually my fourth and those of us who have been here since 2000 would know

what I mean. In 2000 it was a fairly minor flood but I remember the first thing that happened for people who were in flood the government came and gave us whitegoods, we got a free washing machine, a free fridge. In 2017 the same thing happened and I had just got off the phone today with one of the head people of Lifeline and also in 2017 through Lifeline they were rolling furniture out and I'd just like to thank the Koori Mail, Resilience, all the community groups that have come together because they have been amazing.

10 I'd like to see an inquiry into Red Cross, Lifeline, where's that money going because there was so much furniture rolling through in 2017 and that was such a minor event compared to this one so there should be more. We love that people try and give us food, you know, we love clothing, right. It would be nice to have a cupboard to put your undies in and it would be nice to have a fridge to put the food in. So have a think about how these donations come rolling around. Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

20 [REDACTED]: Good evening everyone. My name's [REDACTED] and I was born and raised in Lismore. I live down the road these days in the Ballina Shire so I've gone a long way in life. What I think – some of the pertinent information that comes to mind for myself is, yes, communication and it seems very odd that they had better communication in the 1954 and '74 floods. A little unknown fact is that most of us with our mobile phone coverage, if you're an international visitor with international roaming your mobile phone will go to the strongest signal.

30 I have a different plan to my wife, I had some connection, she didn't. That luxury isn't afforded to Australians. It's a very simple switch for the telecommunications companies to address that little issue. Not only that, there's obviously options for mobile telecommunication towers, mobile ones to be set up but it does – it is interesting that the Telstra tech told me about eight months ago that I was one of the last people in the Ballina Shire to have a landline connection and communication is really key, isn't it, it's key to avoid catastrophes and issues and to address them.

40 Now, being born and bred I was up that evening and sending text to people in South Lismore because I was checking the BOM and that just comes from local knowledge. Now, when I was a lad the radio which is now the most reliable communication tool really in this area, the radio would interview farmers in various locations and check river heights and we would all get updates very quickly. So for me communication is absolutely key, some much so it forced me to – I've never signed up to social media but I did on this occasion and sent a tweet out to Elon Musk. He didn't hear me but he thankfully [REDACTED] and there is the tech there. So first and foremost communication is key because we couldn't contact loved ones, we couldn't band together too easily.

Secondly, for me, you know, there is a mile of different massive – massive projects that could be undertaken which take time, effort and money. My mother educated me that in 1955 - after the '54 flood my grandfather with the [REDACTED] who did a lot of civil engineering around this area put a proposal to council to do an overflow from Eltham to

Teven. It's about four kilometres. Now, look, that may not be viable in this day and age but the point before about running Leycester Creek around the back of the airport, there is – there is – you know, there is some options or a second bar cross but for me - communication that's all time and money, for me communication.

10 Not only that, we learnt that cash is king. Anyone that speaks of cashless society doesn't know what they're talking about. We had – we actually had banks helicopter in cash into regions here. We were running out of cash. So communication. But really lastly, my – I have some vested interest, well, from my family side of things in business and property in Lismore; however, the priority must go to people that are in the impact zone because as you said, saving life, it really is key.

20 Now, in some of the spots with respect to flooding we've obviously got water that comes up slowly but the real danger is the fast-flowing water and I was at Wotherspoon Street in North Lismore just after the flood and the fear that was in the eyes of some of those residents that were chopped off their roofs was incredible. One of the easiest ways to make money – to bring money out of thin air in this country as most developers know is the stroke of a pen from rural zoning to residential. We saw it with West Byron and \$7 million to purchase that land, let's even say it was another 20, 23 to do environmental studies and lobby friends in Macquarie Street, now he has property there worth – I'd hate to imagine, it be over 500 million.

30 So with respect to that, government has the power to acquire land. Regardless of that I think such a great community, we've all learnt that the ones we need to depend on are the other fellows in this room, not government, it's actually ourselves. So in that respect I think it would be – I think it would be really pleasing to me if some other landholders around the Tuncester, Wyrallah, various other Dunoon areas actually took it upon themselves to look at options for development and recovery and relocation of some of these homes, a lot that have been condemned, have great Australian hardwood timbers that can be transported quite easily.

40 There's a cost involved in that, a lot of the tenants don't have the money. However, back to what I suggested in regards to rezoning of land. There is a massive windfall that could occur to pay for this for those people that are in those impact zones and when I say impact zones I'm meaning water rushing through at 15 knots-plus. Now, one tree, one tank from a farm up the road will smash their house and smash their lives. So preservation of life really is key and this inquiry and all of the detail that will – it will entail will take a very long time to get boots on the ground. However, it will not take a long time if we look at, with local council, ways in which we can relocate some of these homes and these families that are living in the impact zone because we can talk about – we can talk about the failure of – sorry.

MR ROCHE: We're over time.

[REDACTED]: Thank you.

MR ROCHE: Thank you.

MS CAMPBELL: So just finish off with - - -

MR ROCHE: I'm determined to get one more in. Yeah, thank you.

MS CAMPBELL: One gentleman down here has been waiting patiently.

10 [REDACTED]: Thank you very much. My name's [REDACTED] I've previously been on Lismore City Council for my sins. I would like to talk about community and community cohesion because to me I think that's the most important resource we have and I feel while there's been incredible displays of community during this period it's at risk and it's at risk because the areas of North, South Lismore, East Lismore, the basin and the business communities are faced with actual destruction of their homes or if not destruction, their homes are going to be blighted.

20 We could very easily see ourselves in an Asian-type situation where there are people living in Goonellabah and up the hill who have comfortable lives in Lismore and then there are people who are down in the flood plain, they aren't insured, they have very little resources and they live separately and there will be growing and growing discord and lack of community because of that. We have to find ways to change that and what I think we need to do is for the inquiry to go to those communities and talk to them about what the situation is and what their alternatives are.

30 You know, whether that's staying in place and getting flood-resilient homes, whether it's land swaps, whether it's being houses moved, all those options need to be made available to people but we need to do that in a very thorough and considered way because otherwise we're going to find this community shattered and that's not a community I want to be a part of. I've lived here most of my life, I love this community deeply but I see this as a real threat and I think the way around it is consultation and let's be serious about this because everything's changed through this, you know, everything has changed. We have to be really serious about everything we do because - particularly because of climate change. I mean, how is it, for instance, that one of the first things that happened was the SES headquarters were flooded. I mean, for goodness sake, we really have to look at every single decision that's made in this community and see it in the light of climate change and what the implications of it are. Thank you.

40 MR ROCHE: We're unfortunately over time. So I know there's still so many stories left untold. We've done our absolute best, I think, to squeeze in significant amounts. Mel's showing you a sheet of paper that is either - if it's not on your chair they're certainly on the tables as you exit. They have all the myriad of ways that you can continue to share your story and table your experience with the inquiry. So really, really critically important. I just want to thank you for making the job of a bunch of volunteers very easy. Honestly, I understand the passion, the emotion and the trauma in the room and you've conducted yourselves exemplary and I just want to thank you so very much for that. Mary or Mick, would you like to just make some closing remarks before we conclude?

PROF. O'KANE: Well, there's not much to say except thank you. They were tremendous suggestions, tremendous stories and tremendous reminders of things that

have to happen. So thank you and good luck with what's going to be a tough phase continuing on immediately.

MR FULLER: Thanks ladies and gents. I'll be very quick. Thanks so much. I asked for information around the intelligence, I heard some really strong information around that, the response right through to recovery so for my perspective it was such a valued trip to come out here tonight. I thank you for that information and there's obviously some of you I'd like to talk to in more detail at the same time as well but certainly one thing that came out strong is you're a community that won't be defeated so I look forward to working with you in the coming weeks. Thanks very much.

MEETING CONCLUDED

