NSW Parliamentary Inquiry's Report on the Response to the Major Flooding Across NSW in 2022

Date : August 18, 2023

On 9 August 2022, the NSW Select Committee (**Committee**) released a report following an inquiry (**Inquiry**) into the response to major flooding across NSW in 2022 (**Report**).

The Inquiry was set up to consider the NSW Government's preparedness, coordination, and response to flooding events. The Committee received 87 submissions, 4 supplementary submissions and 119 responses from individual participants to an online questionnaire. The Committee also undertook site visits and conducted public forums for local residents.

The Report acknowledged that major flooding of February-March 2022 was one of the worst flooding disasters NSW has ever seen, and that the physical, mental and emotional impacts of these floods will likely be enduring. The Committee recognised that the priority now is on recovery and rebuilding, and expects the Report to be valuable for improving the NSW Government's response to future natural disasters, including future flooding events.

A particular focus of this Inquiry was on the performance of the NSW State Emergency Service (**SES**), as the leading agency in emergency response, and Resilience NSW, as the leading agency in recovery. In the Committee's view, neither agency was effective in carrying out their responsibilities during the February-March 2022 flooding event. While the Committee acknowledged the many volunteers and frontline staff who supported the response and recovery efforts, the Committee ultimately believed that the performances of both organisations fell short in their respective roles.

The Committee made a total of 21 findings and 37 recommendations.

Some of the key findings include:

- That SES and Resilience NSW failed as lead agencies to provide adequate leadership and effective coordination during the major flooding of February-March 2022;
- That NSW Government agencies lacked coordination, created confusion and responded poorly in the February-March 2022 floods;
- That the centralisation of SES and a shortage of volunteers significantly hindered the ability of the agency to lead the response to the major flooding of February-March 2022;
- That SES failed in its public communication of flood warnings and evacuation information during the February-March 2022 floods, by issuing out of date, inaccurate and confusing messages;
- That some of the processes surrounding the administration of grants following the February-March 2022 floods were insensitive and compounded the trauma of flood affected individuals;
- That the NSW Government failed to adequately prepare effective temporary and long-term housing solutions for those who became displaced as a result of the February-

March 2022 floods;

- That better management of drainage channels could have reduced the severity of the February-March 2022 flooding event as well as the frequency and severity of future floods.

Some of the key recommendations include:

- That the NSW Government consider a restructure of SES with consideration to realigning the focus of the organisation to harness local knowledge and networks;
- That the NSW Government consider abolishing Resilience NSW if it is unable to ensure the organisation's role is clear and its policies are focused on meeting community needs;
- That the NSW Government ensure that all emergency and recovery plans are reviewed and updated regularly;
- That the NSW Government review its public awareness and communication strategies in relation to natural disasters;
- That the NSW Government work with local governments to identify alternative routes to vulnerable roads, and that the NSW and Australian Governments fund the construction of these important routes to improve evacuation and access options in times of disaster;
- That the NSW Government ensure that flood affected individuals can continue to access financial assistance for as long as there is demonstrated need;
- That the NSW Government advocate through the National Cabinet to widen eligibility under the Disaster Funding Recovery Arrangements to allow local councils to build back better;
- That the NSW Government significantly increase its investment in flood mitigation and preparation, including its support of local governments to do the same; and
- That the NSW Government work with relevant agencies and local landowners to find ways to improve the management of drainage channels.

A copy of the Report can be found via this link.