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TRANSCRIPT IN CONFIDENCE

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NSW FLOOD INQUIRY

CLARENCE RIVER MEETING

AN INDEPENDENT INQUIRY BEING LED BY

PROFESSOR MARY O’KANE AC AND  
MICHAEL FULLER APM

HELD VIA ONLINE

ON FRIDAY, 17 JUNE, 2022.

TRANSCRIBED BUT NOT RECORDED BY APT TRANSCRIPTIONS

MR WRIGHT: Good evening, everybody. Thank you very much for joining us - in small numbers at this point in time, but great to see you all here on this Friday evening. My name is Michael Wright. I'm the Leading Secretary supporting the Flood Inquiry. I want to acknowledge that we are on different Aboriginal lands around the State. I am on the land of the Gadigul here in Sydney, and I pay my respects to Aboriginal Elders past, present and emerging.

Normally, I'd welcome Mary O'Kane at this point. Professor Mary O'Kane is one of the Co-leads of the inquiry, together with former police commissioner Mick Fuller.  
10 Hopefully Mary will be able to join us a little later. I know she was detained in a meeting but we hope we'll see her shortly.

Mick Fuller, former police commissioner, is an apology for this evening, but we are privileged to have a former deputy police commissioner, Gary Worboys, standing in for Mick for this session.

Before we move to the run, I just want to make it clear that the purpose of this evening's session is to hear from you your views about what happened before, during and after the floods. How it impacted you, how it impacted your communities, your  
20 businesses. We want to take that feedback and incorporate into our thinking as we move towards finalising a report to the Premier on this important business.

In terms of how we're going to run this evening, we have some speakers who have indicated they wish to speak, and we'll take those in order. We'll allocate three minutes per speaker, although given we have so few speakers at this point of time, I'm hoping to be more generous with time if people want to speak for longer than three minutes.

If you haven't registered your interest to speak beforehand, please do so in the chat  
30 function on this Zoom meeting. If you prefer, you can write comments in the chat as we go, or you might alternatively prefer to make a submission to the inquiry. I think

Peter will be posting details about how you best make a submission to the inquiry later this evening.

So, with that I think we will kick off. I have as the first speaker Debrah Novak. Debrah.

SPEAKER: You'll need to unmute, Deb. I've just asked for unmute. You're good.

10 MS NOVAK: Yes. Hi everybody. I'd like to start with by acknowledging that we are coming to you live from the Clarence Valley and we have three First Nation lands within our valley, and our 20,000-kilometre or 10,000 square kilometre LGA. We have the Bundjalung, Gumbaynggirr and Yaegl Nations here so I pay my respects to them.

I am talking today as a wearer of many hats. I'm an elected Councillor to Clarence Valley Council. In my previous life as a media person, I have covered the last 25 years of floods here in the Clarence Valley, on the ground and from the air. I'm also a chair of an organisation called Clarence Valley Food Inc, where we advocate and support our primary producers in our area, and most of all the community member  
20 that is happy to get out there and roll her sleeves up and get her hands into the action and support her community.

I was very active in the bushfires, helping my community there, and in my role as a Councillor, elected Councillor, and in my role as a community person who can triage lots of activities or events to support my community.

On the back of the flood in January and March last year, and through my experience as an elected Councillor, I was pretty disturbed by the agency's response. From our community and my own lived experience, I also run two farmers' markets where I  
30 receive 70 microbusinesses in those two farmers' market settings. So I get a lot of feedback. I have to micromanage some of those activities when it comes to natural disasters, which I did during the bushfires and during the floods when we actually got

caught up with the floods, and having to have some of my stallholders stay in evacuation centres in Yamba.

Those lessons I learned from March last year, where I was fairly scathing because of what I saw on behalf of Clarence Valley Council and the external agencies. I actually made formal complaints on how I felt that they had, how they'd let your community down.

10 I have to say, this time around, Clarence Valley Council did an extraordinary job in keeping our community informed. That was one of the biggest issues that came out of the March floods last year, not being reliably informed with reliable data. Council this time, I'm very proud to say, went above and beyond what most councils would do. They just kept this information coming so that our community could make informed decisions. We got lots of praise for that, our staff got lots of praise for just that information, the quality information, that was coming out there, and there was daily reports for our community. That was really, really exciting for us.

20 We learned from that. I'm probably a lot more scathing of the rescue agencies this time because of the length of the flood, the height of the flood, and the impact of the flood. So, prior to the floods this time, I don't feel that we were prepared, our community was prepared, and nor were the agencies tasked with emergency services were prepared to respond in a timely fashion. A lot of that has to do with when a natural disaster is called, that Council is in a position where they step back and it becomes a State matter. Where they are triaging all the callouts and probably one of the worst incidents was taking a call. I actually took this call myself. Down to the SES in Wollongong and I was looking to move some people into an evacuation centre. I actually asked her in the end - were they going to send a helicopter? Because where they wanted me to send people to was 30 miles, 30 kilometres away. There was no hope [REDACTED] of actually getting there, unless it was via boat. They just were clueless as to what was actually going on in our area. That gave me no faith whatsoever in that  
30 call centre down in Wollongong.

And so again, in my role as a Councillor and also Chair of Clarence Valley Food Inc, I received lots and lots of feedback from our community, our primary producers and small business about what's happened during these floods this time. Where we had the trucking industry, not being able to get out onto the M1 because there's issues with one of the roads there. There's always been argy-bargy between the State and local. Our council about who's actually responsible to get these B-doubles across there and these trucks actually employ, well, one particular firm I have in mind employs a hundred people. They inject \$10 million into our local economy and no-one has been there to support that business. It's been very disturbing to see that these guys are pretty  
10. much hung out to dry and have to make their own way.

We had a lot of issues with regards to the food security and food supply chain disruptions, where Yamba was actually cut off for six days. Wool and Iluka were cut off for six days. There didn't seem to be a coordinated approach into re-entering supply into those villages and into other areas in our area.

A part of the problem with the supply chain matter is that the transport companies use a model called 'Just In Time'. They can't afford to have any supply chain interruptions so if they can't get off the highway, they will keep going. The Clarence Valley like  
20 many other regions north of us, don't have refrigerated areas where they can drop off their supply chain, so they just keep going and we go without. I had a number of people ring me and ask me how they could actually get food into the area. I actually gave them the number of a helicopter and how they could actually get that helicopter to pick up their supply chain for them at Grafton Airport.

No thought was given around how to support our businesses in that space. Of course people have got to prepare but people were prepared for three days, not six days of a road closure.

30 The fact that community and industry don't have a seat at the table at the Local Emergency Management Committee is what I find a little bit disconcerting. We have all the combat agencies there but no-one that represents community. No-one that

represents the business sector or any industry whatsoever. In my view, everybody is just going around in red tape, and they're not listening to actually the needs of the community.

Some of the other things that I felt really impacted our community this time was the M1. The M1 business case or EIS, expressed that along there, the M1 between Woolgoolga to Ballina, would be only a 5 per cent possible increase of water. I have reports from some farmers it was a 50 per cent increase.

10 What I did last year in March when we had the flood, and my background is as a photojournalist, I set up a Facebook group that I asked everybody to start recording the flood last year. Before the flood hit, then whatever happened last year, and then, what happened this year. We've got now hundreds and hundreds of photographs sitting in that Facebook group. Now that people have been putting content in there so that people could actually see what's happened around their area. If anything needs to go court, they will actually have an evidence trail to showcase what actually happened before and after. I think that was a really good way of connecting our community into ensuring that if it ever went to court that they were supported. We've got around 3,000 people on that Facebook group putting in photographs now.

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Some other information that was out there that didn't seem to really have great flow-on was information coming from the BOM. I used four weather apps myself to make informed decisions and the BOM is the worst out of all of them for information. It wasn't updated very regularly. That system that was sitting up in Brisbane. I was very disturbed that they weren't actually escalating that more. At the end of the day, I go, I'm only just me. I could make informed decisions for myself using three other weather apps and the BOM was the last one that I was actually relying on.

30 The BOM – I don't think they actually understand that people like us who live in the country use that information. It's critical for us to make decisions, whether we are leaving our homes or having to move cattle or livestock or anything. We need that information to be 100 per cent accurate.

However, the BOM in Grafton. The radar in Grafton actually has a 100-kilometre gap so a lot of the time, it's a hit and miss. That's really of a concern for our community, in particular when the Clarence Valley, Richmond Valley and Tweed Valley have been named in the top ten places in Australia that will be worse impacted by the changing climate and floods.

MR WRIGHT: Hey, Debrah, can you just bring it to a close if you can, thanks.

10 MS NOVAK: Sure, ok. Yes, ok. I guess the big issue that people have contacted me about is whether it's the primary producers or people who live in urban areas, are the drains. The drain. Whether it's the drains on the farms or the drains in our urban areas, there's that lack of renewal and lack of maintenance that actually keeps them clear, which will allow the flow of whether it's storm or flood waters to get through. That has not been looked after for decades, so we've actually made that a priority in council now. It still doesn't help those who are there now, around the planning issues as well, building on a floodplain. The State really needs to look at that as well.

MR WRIGHT: Debrah, thank you very much for that.

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MS NOVAK: Thank you.

MR WRIGHT: I think we have next [REDACTED]? Yes.

SPEAKER: I've just got to unmute – there you go.

[REDACTED] Hi. Ok. I actually did submit a statement as well. I think Debrah has covered a lot of the big picture stuff. For me, it was very personal. We received the notification to evacuate. I live here with my mother. I'm her carer. She has dementia. She's immobile and she can't communicate very clearly. She can't make decisions for herself, she doesn't necessarily understand what's being said to her. She's in a wheelchair and we use a hoist to move her from bed to chair. We use a shower chair to

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enable her to have showers. I had a plan and my plan failed. I thought the sensible place for my mother would be the hospital. Now, that's a block away – I thought I could wheel her there.

I rang up the hospital. The hospital said no. Then I pushed because I said - surely this area must have some sort of floodplan because this area floods. The receptionist went away and said "You can leave her in a waiting room." Now, I was not going to leave my mother in a waiting room. The indication was that I couldn't stay with her probably due to the COVID restrictions. But I cannot leave somebody in a wheelchair,  
10 who cannot communicate, who cannot go to the toilet themselves, who cannot organise their own meds, with no guarantee that somebody would look after her.

So I evacuated that plan. Now, that may sound like a silly thing, but that was the only thing I could evacuate. I was being bombarded by calls from the SES. We were doorknocked by the SES, by the Rural Fire Service. I kept telling people I couldn't evacuate because we couldn't. We had no physical way of evacuating her. You can't put her in a car. You can't get her into a car as she'll fight you because she doesn't understand why you're trying to push her in a car. You can't get the doors open wide enough to get someone in that state into a normal car.

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The SES came down twice. The second time they tried physically to stuff her in a truck but they couldn't get her in. I was told to call the ambulance service to see if they would do a patient transfer. I called the ambulance service. That didn't go well. By that time, I was quite distraught. I had been up for the night, the whole night, watching the pumps, watching men work because our levy was failing, and it was coming from the base. So, it wasn't just a matter of it topping. We might have been ok if it had topped but if it went, cause I'm one house back from the levy, it would have been like a tsunami. It was terrifying.

30 The ambulance service told me to climb into the roof cavity. I had explained that my mother was not sick, she just had dementia. I needed to evacuate her and there was no



way I could get her into a roof cavity, in any case, she's in a wheelchair. I've got 10-foot ceilings.

They then suggested I use Tupperware as a flotation device. I managed to contain my stress and eventually hung up. Fortunately for me, my sister is with the SES. Now, she had been pushing the SES to try and get us out, and eventually somebody found somebody, who knew somebody with a wheelchair-friendly vehicle. So, we got mum up to the evacuation centre and we were greeted with "This isn't a suitable place for you."

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I knew it was not a suitable place for mum but there was nowhere for her to go. We couldn't toilet her, we couldn't change her, I couldn't put in or out of a bed. They're trying to find an alternative. I mean, it was just totally horrifying. It took three days and two nights of wondering if we were going to be alive because I wasn't going to leave mum here by herself. I wasn't going to leave her anywhere by herself.

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From a personal viewpoint, it was an absolutely terrifying time. Even getting out of the evacuation centre was difficult because there was no transport. I've made suggestions in my statement of things that could be done including some sort of register. That could be done through: My Aged Care and NDIS. When they go into homes and they're talking to people so if they want to be involved, if they want to declare that they're perhaps a vulnerable person to this sort of thing, maybe a plan could be put in place. Maybe wheelchair-available vehicles that are through Connect You Too, which I believe is partly government-funded, and they have one. They had no driver. I think their driver was in Yamba, but surely there's a solution there where, somehow or other, we could evacuate.

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We were not the only people. I heard about a 90-year-old who the SES tried to move and they couldn't move her. There is no facility to move people, there is no suitable place to move people who are incapacitated and I think that's truly appalling. We're just abandoned, I am still struggling with it. I'm now having counselling because it was truly the most terrifying time. I don't want to have to go through that again.

MR WRIGHT: Thanks, [REDACTED]. Thanks for the obviously very, very difficult experience. And I note in the chat that [REDACTED], who lives in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and has been assisting the residents in Yamba, wants to talk. [REDACTED], are you able to unmute? I know you can't get your camera to work but we can probably hear you if you unmute.

SPEAKER: Ok. [REDACTED] has got a problem with both her camera and her audio, even though she's unmuted.

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MR WRIGHT: Ok

SPEAKER: So, what we'll need her to do is probably back out and come back in. That means exit out, [REDACTED] and connect back in and see if you can connect back up.

MR WRIGHT: Ok. While [REDACTED] is doing that, is there anybody else who would like to say something? We've got [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]? [REDACTED]?

SPEAKER: [REDACTED] wants to talk. We were having problems with her microphone earlier. Let's see if it works if we unmute.

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MR WRIGHT: Ok

SPEAKER: [REDACTED], just try to unmute. Let's see if we can hear you. Ok. So, their microphone is not working as well. Hang on, I just heard them. Try again. Try talking to us. I had them for a split second.

MR WRIGHT: Ok. [REDACTED] I'm sorry that we can't hear you. If you want to put any commentary in the chat please feel free to do that. We might try to come back to them later [REDACTED] and see if we can get some sound.

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SPEAKER: Yes.

MR WRIGHT: Would anybody else like to speak? No? [REDACTED] wants to say something. I think. [REDACTED]?

SPEAKER: You need to unmute, [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]: Ok. Can you hear me?

MR WRIGHT: We can hear you.

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[REDACTED]: Great. Look, I'll be very brief. I put in a submission. The floods really didn't impact me much because we live on top of a crest of a hill. We're well above flood levels which is the reason why I bought the house here. It was really inconvenient. We'd pre-empted things and had reserves, so we were fine personally.

My main issues are with regard to poor planning. I realise a lot of the issues that have arisen are because of historical reasons. The way transport worked on the rivers back two centuries ago but it's really poor planning. Yamba was a classic example where council planning has really just been atrocious, to say it mildly.

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Now, things haven't implemented the way they should have been. Things have been approved that I don't consider are appropriate. So planning is the real issue and I'm a real campaigner for planned retreats in flood-prone areas.

Development should not be allowed on flood-prone areas. Period. I've worked for local government in different jurisdictions and our planning scheme wouldn't allow that. So we didn't have half the problems that areas like this have. I grew up in Mullumbimby so I'm aware of high rainfall and floods and so on but really, governments have to get their planning issues together and to solve that problem. A lot of the problems they have so then a planned retreat is the only way to go. I'll leave it at that. The rest of submissions go far more exhaustive. They can be in writing and they'll obviously get into the system.

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MR WRIGHT: Thank you very much, [REDACTED].

SPEAKER: We'll just try [REDACTED] again.

MR WRIGHT: Yes. [REDACTED]?

SPEAKER: We'll just see if we can hear them again. Try now. I heard a mouse click and that's as good as I get from them.

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MR WRIGHT: Sorry, [REDACTED]. We're not able to hear you still. What about [REDACTED]? Is she able to speak?

SPEAKER: We'll try again. [REDACTED] do you want to unmute? Ok. She's got "Connecting to audio", so she's ok. She's connected. Now we'll just go unmute. [REDACTED], you've got to click the unmute button. Ok. We're not getting any success there either by the looks of it. I'm sorry about that.

MR WRIGHT: Ok. One last call for anybody who would like to say something?  
20 Nobody else? [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I'm sorry that we can't hear you this evening. If you haven't already, I'd encourage you, if you wish, to make a submission to the inquiry. You can see the details there in the chat. My apologies. Zoom is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination.

Ok. Look, unfortunately, Mary O'Kane hasn't been able to join us. She's obviously still detained but she just sent her apologies. Gary, anything you want to say before we wrap up? If you can unmute.

SPEAKER: You've got to hit the unmute button, Gary. There we go.

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MR WORBOYS: Yes, is that a little bit better? Yes, sorry people, I'm in a motor vehicle. I struggle with technology at the best of times, so – now, a couple of you

know, there are quite harrowing and very personal accounts here, and then of course [REDACTED] around planning. I've been in and around emergency management for the last 20-odd years – pandemic, fires and floods – and I must say that it really brings a tear to my eye and it annoys that we still can't get this evacuation centre arrangement right. It really is something that we just seem to see as a crisis situation every single time. Then we struggle with challenges that it brings with scale, that it brings with unique circumstances, and then of course the technology and transport arrangements. It's not as if these things fall out of the sky. Fires and floods don't fall out of the sky. We plan for our emergencies. We know that we'll have evacuations and rescues.

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And I guess what I am buoyed by is that this inquiry will make a number of recommendations. These are influenced by what we have heard from real people and with real experiences. I just hope that we continue to improve what we provide as an emergency service family, no matter who that is in the agency, to people at their greatest time of need.

So certainly, those stories are not lost on me. The planning side of it, that is Professor Mary O'Kane's side with local government and State Government. It makes a lot of sense.

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The other thing that Michael and I and others have heard right throughout the last month or more is the need for agencies to actually adopt community responders and allow people to not only help themselves but help communities, and actually complement the agency response.

It's really easy to rely on legislation, the State Emergency Rescue and Rescue Management Act and Policies, and emergency management principles, and all of that sort of thing. But there are so many people out there that just simply want to help agencies, help their communities, their families; and I really hope that out of what we've heard over the last weeks and months that we can influence some of these agencies to put systems in place. Whether that's simple spreadsheets around vulnerable people and what they might need, right through to people who have really

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professional and exciting skills that can help agencies in emergencies and all of those people in-between.

I'll finish by saying that I have absolute strength around and faith in our emergency management procedures at a local, regional and State level. I often wonder why we don't use them to our very best advantage every single time. So often, the local committees, if they bring all of those people in the community together, that can add value to that committee, that is the very first place where we can start helping people at their greatest time of need. And then of course as scale comes, it escalates to regional and state level. It's by no means perfect but I guess what I would say is that while ever agencies continue to listen and try and strive towards that perfection, and most importantly, the time has come when agencies need to adopt communities as partners in planning and response, and indeed recovery, rather than alienating them or leaving them on the outside.

I'll finish there but if there's a question or two, I'm happy to take that. I'll leave that up to you as the Chair but thank you to those people that have given up their time.

MR WRIGHT: Thank you very much Gary. Happy for Gary to take questions if people feel the desire to ask Gary questions. I think Gary's comments there are very insightful and reflect what a lot of the participants tonight have been saying. I note that [REDACTED] has posted in the chat: lots of commentary about planning and development at Yamba and the impact that has on drainage. Thank you [REDACTED] and we'll take note of that as part of our considerations as we move towards finalising our report. [REDACTED], sorry?

SPEAKER: Michael, can we just check and see if we can get [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] working now – are they with us?

MR WRIGHT: Yes. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], are you with us now?

[REDACTED]: Can you hear us now?

MR WRIGHT: Yes, we can. How about that! Fantastic.

SPEAKER: We can.

██████████ Right. Yes. My name is ██████████. I'm familiar with Yamba in particular since the late 1950s. I served as the flood mitigation engineer in the valley in the '90s, and I've been a senior project manager on the Pacific Highway Project until I retired.

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Part of the problem we struck is before the major flood height hit on the 1<sup>st</sup>. We had rainfall drop in one day of about 300 millimetres. Now, while that's a very high one-day event, it's happened probably four or five times similarly since records have been kept in our weather station. What it's indicated to me is that since development started here, it's been done very higgledy-piggledy. The areas were filled, which were being developed to above the 1 per cent or the accepted 1 per cent flood at the time. They filled in all the storage areas where the water used to run and the added increase in water into the same drainage systems, which can no longer cope.

20 My wife and ██████████ and Valley Watch people have called in many of the visitors who were not visitors, sorry, owners...

██████████: Residents.

██████████: Residents who were flooded out in this first storm event. I'm not talking about the flood event. I'm talking about the stormwater event. The water that went through their place was fairly clear. It's because the properties immediately behind them has been completely filled. Where the water used to drain into, what was a natural detention area/farmlands, it's been stopped, and now it runs down through their  
30 places. This has got to stop.

██████████: Yes, the flow paths have been interrupted. Can you still hear us?

SPEAKER: Yes.

MR WRIGHT: We can, yes.

[REDACTED] Good. We've lost the video, that's all but you can hear us – that's good.

MR WRIGHT: Yes. We can still see you as well.

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[REDACTED]: Good. Ok.

[REDACTED]: Yes. The natural flow path has been completely instructed, and nothing put into their places, and the old drains that used to drain the area – we're only talking stormwater events here, not flood events – no longer function.

[REDACTED]: Unfortunately, council is not really doing its compliance in relation to the DCP where adversely residents, existing residents are being adversely impacted by this. Just horrendous. It really is. Yeah. Do you want to say anything more?

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[REDACTED] No.

[REDACTED] We're not really prepared.

[REDACTED] I haven't been prepared but I just want to get that point through. A lot of it is development that has been done not in accordance with their own...

[REDACTED]: Conditions of consent.

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[REDACTED] Yes, conditions of consent.

[REDACTED] And the LEP or the DCP.



██████████ And now we're riding the whirlwind.

██████████: Yes.

██████████ We're getting water discharged into outlets which are already overloaded, and then down through areas where the water just can't get out. We've got floodgates that haven't been properly maintained so it's a lack of maintenance. Now, when I was a flood mitigation area in this valley ...

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██████████ Engineer.

██████████: Yeah, I was the engineer and I had one purpose. I had to get the funds to do it. It was to maintain flooding structures and drains within the area. That was my sole responsibility. I had to build the South Grafton Levee at the same time but it doesn't seem to have that focus now. We've got a not large but a general purpose Council. The council seems to think they're a large organisation but we still only have a population of a bit over 50,000 permanents. That's not big. When I worked for Wyong Shire which during the peak of its development, there was a population of 20 250,000 people. They had drainage plans drawn up, the developers had to put in drainage to meet the overall drainage of the area cause it tended to be above the earlier developed area, and we've got none of that here. We've got no overall drainage plan for any of these new developments plan.

██████████ Masterplan or stormwater management plan on any of these developments. You know, linking it and integrating it all together in those areas. I very much fear that if this continues, there will be homes that will become uninhabitable and need demolition.

30 Now, our Council appears to be in a situation of being forced to approve thousands of more new residents to be housed in homes here in these over-55s villages. Yet to be built. The land is just being continuing to be filled and this has been thousands of

years that have filled, that has been a wetland that are being now filled. We need to pause. We need to stop.

MR WRIGHT: Ok. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] thank you very much for those comments. I think it ties in with some of the commentary that [REDACTED] has made in the chat there as well, so that's good integration there.

[REDACTED] Good. Thank you.

10 MR WRIGHT: I can see that Professor Mary O'Kane has joined us. Mary, just before you joined us, Gary Worboys gave some views that he has formed during part of his time at the Inquiry about some of the issues that we're seeing, which are being heard again in this forum. Mary, anything you want to say?

PROF. O'KANE: No, I just want to apologise for being late. I had been really looking forward to hearing this. For us, the importance of hearing these stories, even just hearing the ones about the drains and about the filling-in of wetlands, is tremendously useful. We have heard that before but it's good to hear it from different angles. From different places.

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And, Michael, I'm sure you've mentioned about the submissions that people can do later submissions?

MR WRIGHT: Indeed.

PROF. O'KANE: That was the only other reminder. I'd rather say a few words right at the end but I'd rather listen and hear more of the stories. That's what's real gold for us.

30 MR WRIGHT: Yes. We are close to the end because I think we've all but exhausted our speakers.

PROF. O'KANE: Right.

MR WRIGHT: I'll ask anybody. We've got a small group this evening but they've been very articulate and vocal, so thank you very much. Unless there's anybody else who would like to say something else, I think we have done the rounds, so to speak.

PROF. O'KANE: All right. Well, I'll look forward to reading the transcript.

MS NOVAK: I would like to say something else, thanks.

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PROF. O'KANE: Yes, Debrah, please. Yes.

MR WRIGHT: Yes, sure.

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MS NOVAK: Sorry, it was on the back of Gary's comments about agencies connecting and adopting community partners. I'm not sure if he's talking about the actual rescue agencies or the recovery agencies? A lot of the problems with the recovery agencies that are parachuted into our regions to do recovery or to do the rescues are that they don't know the area. Even the fact that we have very poor telecommunications. It makes their job very difficult but because they're even coming into our area. People will not trust these people, you know? I can't understand why the State Government isn't giving capability in our own community for people to stand up? Whether it be the cadets, the school, our retired armed services or veterans; we have this extraordinary range of capability in our community that are able to step up and who already step and support our community. They're our unsung heroes like what happened in Lismore.

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For agencies to be parachuted in with a credit card, in my view, that takes a lot. There is a lot of red tape in that. If we've got community that have been given a new skillset, that takes a coordinated approach to support our community, who are on standby. That to me, just makes for the building of much greater relationships and management of an emergency than just parachuting an agency or somebody in to direct the show.

MR WRIGHT: Thanks, Debrah. And Mary, just before you were up, I think [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] might want to say something else. I'm just looking at the chat here. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]?

[REDACTED]: Can you hear us?

[REDACTED] Can you hear us now?

10 MR WRIGHT: Yes.

[REDACTED] One thing that is important about all these new areas that have been filled above the 1 per cent flood. The people who live there are safe and sound but in a good storm, let alone a river flood, you cannot get to them. How are the people going to get in and out? It was said earlier, "We were out for six days." Now, these are over-50s who are coming to these places. How do we evacuate them? The SES in the area are not able to do it. There's a very small group. I'm not sure how that's going to ever be addressed. There's no helicopter landing sites on the developments so the people will be stuck there. Somehow, if they've got to get out for any reason at all, we had people isolated down Carrs Drive for that very reason. They had to be taken out by flood boat because they'd fallen over in the mud and couldn't get out.

[REDACTED] Not only that, the Northern Regional Planning Panel in March, we were able to do submissions to that. There were a number of people, members from Valley Watch who gave presentations. That particular development which has already been filled some time ago was deferred for three months because of a number of reasons. One in particular was that there was no evacuation plan and they were asked to obtain that. There was lack of the allocation of open space. The impact on the surrounding residents, the stormwater drainage needs to be looked at and managed.

30

But apart from that as well, we found as Valley Watch members, we've been doorknocking people around the area. So many people didn't know about the mobile

recovery support, Resilience NSW. They weren't aware of the grants that they may be eligible for if they've had water through their homes. There's so many that didn't even know about this flood property assessment program. Where even if their house wasn't flooded and had not had water through it, the piers - they sat in water, above-ground water for days. They can get a free assessment by a particular building group to see if there's any structural damage at all. That's all I think I need to say. Thank you very much for allowing me.

MR WRIGHT: O.K., [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Thank you very much. And I can see that [REDACTED]  
10 [REDACTED] wants to make a statement or ask a question. [REDACTED]?

[REDACTED]: I was just going to ask a question. Basically what happens with where I live is, when Brooms Head Road goes under, we don't have any access to Townsend shops because Brooms Head Road is the only road. When that goes under, we have no way of getting out to the evacuate centres or to where the food is. Sometimes we don't get much notification when that goes under because it goes under pretty quick. I was just wondering if there was actually some kind of plan to avoid that? Particularly where the cemetery is because once that goes under, that's pretty much everyone in Gulmarrad, Brooms Head, just cut off.

20

SPEAKER: It makes sense.

MR WRIGHT: I might at that point throw to Mary. That is a question. I'll let you answer that, Mary.

PROF. O'KANE: Ok. We're certainly recommending that there has to be good evacuations if people are going to live in a particular place. Given the size of the State, we probably won't give a particular road but we will talk about the principles. We'll do it on how it should be sorted, planned and managed.

30

[REDACTED]: *The comment made here by the member of public was not transcribable.*

██████████: That's been said.

PROF. O'KANE: But we will use some examples from things like tonight and from other public meetings to give illustrations of particular places that need to be considered. I just want to say, thank you all. I'll really look forward to reading this transcript and learning about it. I think the Inquiry has – have you mentioned, Michael, about the Inquiry moving forward in reporting?

10 MR WRIGHT: Not as yet but I can see ██████████ also wants to make another comment or ask a question.

PROF. O'KANE: All right.

MR WRIGHT: ██████████.

██████████ Hi. Well, you've heard my story about trying to get out. My concern is that we still have rains on the way. More rain potentially coming and I still have no solution. I'm concerned that I'm waiting a year or more for an Inquiry to come up with  
20 the solution. I need a solution now, you know!? We're in rented accommodation. I'm not in a position where I can move. I need to know that there's a way of getting my mother out of here in the next emergency.

I'm trying to find a way to make this happen sooner rather than later. I don't want to go through that again. I can just see that this is going to go on forever cause there's so many issues here from what I'm hearing. Basically, if people need to be evacuated, they need to be evacuated. So how do we make that simple?

PROF. O'KANE: That's what we'll be talking about and this is what I'll mention.  
30 We are so worried about exactly the point you're making. We've spoken to the Premier about bringing the whole report forward so that now the final report is coming in at the end of July. We're not doing a June 30 one. Just get the whole thing wrapped

up at the end of July because we worry about the same point. Hopefully the government can. We're suggesting they think about this. They are responding to implementation and ideas so it's good that they've got the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Authority up and running. It's good to see injections of funding from the emergency services. It's really important, as you say, that we just can't wait.

MS NOVAK: Can I just say something to [REDACTED]?

PROF. O'KANE: Yes.

10

MS NOVAK: Thanks. Thank you. Hey, [REDACTED], the Councillor of Clarence Valley Council. In Ballina, there is a disability advocate that has just flown over to the UK to attend a conference over there to talk about accessibility and disability in natural disasters. She's presenting over in the UK and you might want to connect with her when she comes back next week if you want a quick fix straightaway. Now, you can connect to her.

[REDACTED] Yes.

20 MS NOVAK: Council is a signature to the accessibility legislation so, I'm surprised! I attended the forum in Lismore where the lady got up and spoke about the fact that she had a disability. What it was like for her to try and get back into Lismore. It took five days. How she was treated and also dropped off at the hospital. I was quite shocked by that because even the emergency services and people who brought in toilets for the CBD in Lismore, didn't bring anything that was a toilet for people with disabilities. No disability was acknowledged at all. I think not just Council but any of the emergency services should have or be a part of the accessibility legislation and conversation as well, to see how they can make their service accessible friendly.

30 [REDACTED]: Yes. NSW Health needs to be brought onboard because when you have people who are that incapacitated, a hospital is the safest place.

MS NOVAK: Of course. Of course.

█ If that's not made available with all the equipment, then you can't support that person. You know? You can't support that person and you can't keep them safe.

MS NOVAK: Yes, exactly.

█ Medication was another issue in the valley, trying to get medication. That was really tricky. On top of food, medication.

10

MS NOVAK: Yes, I'd heard that too.

█ Yes.

MS NOVAK: And food for livestock, so major issues.

█: Yes.

PROF. O'KANE: Debrah, are you going to put your name in the chat?

20

MR WRIGHT: Well, thank you, Debrah and █. Mary, over to you.

█: Thank you.

PROF. O'KANE: I was just going to ask Debrah to help █. Can you put the name in the chat for the person she should contact?

MS NOVAK: I'll just have to google that cause I heard the lady being interviewed on ABC the other day. I'll try and find her name on ABC.

30

PROF. O'KANE: Great, thank you. Sorry, Michael, over to you.



MR WRIGHT: That's ok. There's more commentary there from [REDACTED] on some of the planning issues at Yamba which is great to see. I think, Mary, that is it. Anything else, Mary, that you'd like to say?

PROF. O'KANE: No. As I said, I want to read the transcript of this and I've been busily taking photographs of the chat because there are some amazing stories running through in there.

MR WRIGHT: Indeed. This session has been recorded and it will be transcribed.  
10 We'll use that at the Inquiry as a really useful reference to inform the report. I'd like to thank you all for the time you put in, for the heartfelt and honest statements you've made, the observations you've made, it's been really a useful session. So thank you very much and enjoy the weekend.

PROF. O'KANE: Thank you.

MS NOVAK: Thank you. Thank you for allowing this opportunity because we know we came in as a late starter. We wanted to say, on behalf of the Clarence Valley for taking up our request to actually do this, so thank you.  
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MR WRIGHT: You're welcome.

MEETING CONCLUDED