



Far North Coast Branch

Dear Senators

Thank you for listening to members of our local community talk about their experiences during and after the catastrophic flood of 2022, at the Senate Committee Hearing held in Tweed Heads on 29 June, 2023.

I have attached a letter containing information clarifying some of the topics I mentioned on behalf of the New South Wales Far North Coast Branch. In addition, a question arose concerning the inequity of funding available to community members impacted by the flood. Home owners in residential areas were entitled to grants without an income test being applied. Whereas, people who lived in rural areas had to meet requirements of a non-farm income test. This meant several homeowners received no funding to make repairs to their homes and properties. While farmers with over 50% of their income being from agricultural sources were granted funding, they had to spend the money first, before being able to access the grant funds. Several farmers did not have the money available to spend by the cut-off date and therefore missed out on any government support. We feel there needs to be more equitable processes for the distribution of disaster recovery grants.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to inquire into these matters.
Kind regards

Craig Huf
Chair NSW Farmers Far North Coast Branch



Far North Coast Branch

Senator

9 July 2023

Dear Minister

- 1. CSIRO funding to develop hydrological and hydrodynamic models for the Tweed catchment; and**
- 2. Special Disaster Grants – Expansion of eligibility criteria to include Private Drainage Boards.**

Thank you for the time to speak with you at the Senate Committee Hearing held in Tweed Heads on June 29, 2023. I write to you today to provide written information about two major issues of concern to us in the Tweed Valley in relation to flood mitigation and flood recovery. Our community has experienced two major floods in five years with catastrophic results yet the 2022 flood could have been so much worse if more than one of the three tributaries had reached record heights at the same time. We are fortunate that so far this has never happened, but we do need to prepare for that possibility.

1. CSIRO funding to develop hydrological and hydrodynamic models for the Tweed catchment

We understand that CSIRO has been engaged by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to undertake LiDAR spatial analysis of the Tweed and Richmond catchments. This is outlined on their website. However detailed hydrological and hydrodynamic models will only be produced for the Richmond catchment area. The Tweed is not included in this full and complete modelling. Flood mitigation and resilience measures on the Tweed River can only be effective if those measures are based on a full understanding of the impacts of each option available to us.

Only detailed hydrological and hydrodynamic modelling of the entire Tweed catchment will be able to properly inform our community of different flood mitigation options and their impacts throughout the catchment. It is therefore of great importance to us that further funding is extended via NEMA to the CSIRO to carry out full modelling of the Tweed catchment, like that already being undertaken for the Richmond River, and we are seeking your support to make this happen. Thus far our requests to local and state governments have been ignored and we are concerned that not enough is being done to effectively improve flood mitigation and prepare our area for the next major flood event.

- 2. Special Disaster Grants – Expansion of eligibility criteria to include Private Drainage Boards.** Tweed Drainage Council represents the twelve private drainage boards (commonly referred to as

“drainage unions”) tasked with maintaining drainage systems across the floodplains of Tweed Shire, namely:

- Condong Drainage Union
- Tyngah Drainage Union
- Dulguigan Drainage Union
- Cudgera Drainage Union
- Lavender Drainage Union
- Terranora Drainage Union
- Kynnumboon Plains Drainage Union
- Murwillumbah Swamp Drainage Union
- Mooball and Crabbe’s Creek Swamp Drainage Union
- Duranbah Swamp Drainage Union
- Black’s Drain Swamp Drainage Union
- Cudgen Drainage Union

Private drainage boards are statutory bodies assigned powers and responsibilities by s. 202(1) of the Water Management Act 2000 (NSW) to carry out drainage maintenance within their districts, in particular “to maintain in a state of efficiency the drainage works under its charge, and renew such drainage works if necessary”.

Flood events cause substantial damage to drainage infrastructure, depositing silt and debris in drains that must be removed to restore drainage capacity. Poor drainage increases inundation periods and worsens crop and environmental damage after flooding. Many Special Disaster Grants following flood events are targeted to primary producers to repair damaged farming infrastructure and assets so that they can resume operating as quickly as possible. This is welcome support, but it ignores the key role and legislated responsibility of private drainage boards to maintain the drainage works under their charge.

It also overlooks the importance of functional drainage in enabling primary producers to resume their operations. Private drainage boards are small organisations with limited resources and fund-raising capacity. Funds are raised by levying rates on the very landowners that are themselves recovering from flood disaster and least able to contribute at the time that emergency works are needed. We respectfully ask for expansion of the eligibility criteria for Disaster Recovery Grants that are made available to primary producers so that private drainage boards are also eligible to apply for these grants. Due to the small number of private drainage boards in any given area of New South Wales the budgetary impact of this inclusion would be negligible and yet the benefits would be realised by large numbers of primary producers and other landowners.

We acknowledge that \$5 million dollars was allocated by the Federal Government earlier this year to fund repairs to drainage systems. However, this funding was only available through local government Councils who were required to commitment 50% of the costs to these repairs. No local Council has the capacity to contribute funds to these repairs due to the extensive flood damage bills they already carry, and so the promised \$5 million funding cannot be accessed by the drainage unions. We urge the Government to reconsider the requirements of the funding and allow Drainage Unions to directly access some of this funding to repair and sustain drainage systems, so they are efficient in future flooding events and contribute to minimising the extensive damage caused by trapped flood waters.

We thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Craig Huf

Chair
NSW Farmers' Association Far North Coast Branch