

# Recovery Action Plan 2022 – 2024

Recovering from the February-March 2022 disaster events



## Acknowledgement of Country

Byron Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of this land, the Arakwal people, the Minjungbal people and the Widjabul people of the Bundjalung Nation.

People of the Bundjalung Nation have lived in this area for thousands of years before the arrival of non-Indigenous people. The Bundjalung Nation retains a strong connection to the maintenance, protection and management of Aboriginal cultural values in the Shire.

Since 2001 the Bundjalung of Byron Bay (Arakwal) People have entered into four Indigenous Land Use Agreements recognising their Native Title rights as Traditional Owners to lands and waters in and around Byron Bay.

Council also acknowledges the Native Title claim currently before the Federal Court by traditional owners the Widjabul-Wiabal People to lands and waters in western areas of the Byron Shire.

Today, Byron Shire is also home to many Australian Indigenous people from around the country.



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## Message from the Mayor

I think it's fair to say that this year has been one of the most challenging ever faced by the Byron Shire community (and our neighbouring communities), certainly in recent history.

During the February and March rain and flood events the Byron Shire community did what it's renowned for and rose up to support neighbours, friends, family and strangers. People who themselves had lost everything were out there volunteering, and helping flood affected neighbours move furniture or clean the mud. It was raw, emotional and life-affirming. We were surrounded by adversity and loss and yet our community spirit grew stronger than ever.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude on behalf of Council and our community to those helpers, volunteers and kind neighbours who selflessly gave time and resources to ease some of the impacts of this disaster.

Thank you too to the many charities, community organisations, and government agencies who have shown incredible dedication and cooperation on our recovery journey so far.

Council is committed to providing and advocating for recovery support for our community, and we will continue the conversations with our community to ensure Council remains attentive to the ever changing and unique needs of our diverse Shire.

To everyone directly impacted by this event, please know that we are working hard behind the scenes to rebuild and recover.

This Plan demonstrates the incredible strides we have already made along our recovery journey and gives us a map of where to go from here as we use our creativity, our networks and connections and our local knowledge to ensure we're better prepared for the future.

Cr. Michael Lyon

Mayor



Thank you  
*Byron Shire*

LOVE

# About Byron Shire

Byron Shire is located on the far north coast of NSW. We share boundaries with the Tweed, Lismore, and Ballina Local Government Areas. Brisbane is about 200 km north and Sydney about 800 km to the south. Our shire is 556 square km in size and our region is famed for its rural beauty and beaches. In 2021, the population of Byron Shire was 36,077.



# Introduction

Between 25 February and 2 March 2022, a series of severe rain and flooding events occurred along the east coast of Australia. The Northern Rivers area of the state was recognised amongst the most impacted, with water levels significantly exceeding those in recent history. These events have had profound and continuing impacts on our Shire.

## Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the Recovery Action Plan is to:

- 1) Convey our understanding of the disaster events in Byron Shire and community needs as the basis of our continuing work;
- 2) Describe the considerable recovery activities we have undertaken since the disaster events;
- 3) Identify the actions that we can take to support recovery in the next two years in line with Council's designated roles;
- 4) Provide a basis upon which to communicate our recovery efforts to other affected Local Governments, and to State and Federal Government agencies, in order to support joint effort, clarity in respective roles, and appropriate resourcing; and
- 5) Communicate to our communities, including how we will work with community members and groups on recovery efforts.

The Recovery Action Plan is presented in three parts:

**Part I: Our recovery framework.** This is our approach to recovery planning, including the purpose and scope of the plan, Council's legislative roles and the key focus areas (domains) for recovery.

**Part II: From disaster to recovery.** We offer an account of the disaster events and recovery experience to date as the basis of understanding and responding to community needs.

**Part III: Actions.** We identify the actions we've committed to undertake as part of our Shire's recovery.

The recovery process is expected to take many years. The two-year timeframe of the Recovery Action Plan reflects the expected timeframe to make a substantial impact on disaster recovery in Byron Shire. This is our current reflection of disaster recovery and actions may be altered if community needs and circumstances change.

Following the adoption of this Action Plan, the actions will be embedded directly in Council's Operational Plan and will be subject to regular public reporting.

# Part I Our recovery framework

## Scope of the Plan

The Recovery Action Plan responds to the disaster events of February and March 2022.

The term 'disaster events' is used to encompass the heavy rains, unprecedented flooding of river systems, and devastating land slips which have had significant negative impacts within Byron Shire.

The Recovery Action Plan is not only about reinstatement and remediation following the February-March disaster events. Recovery includes determining how to build back with greater preparedness. Recovery means adapting to the current context, as we have not yet returned to 'normal'. Recovery includes leveraging what we have learned and improving our preparation for possible future disasters. In these ways, the Recovery Action Plan is also about disaster resilience.

Encompassing this complexity, the term 'recovery' is used in this Action Plan to span a breadth of activities that needed in response to the disaster events in our shire.

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**Recovery** in relation to an emergency includes the process of returning an affected community to its proper level of functioning after an emergency.

Source: State Emergency and Rescue Management Act (1989) Sec 5(d).

**Disaster resilience** is an outcome derived from a sharing of responsibility between all levels of government, business, the non-government sector and the community who then act on this basis prior to, during and after a disaster. Disaster resilience is significantly increased by active planning and preparation. A shared understanding of the disaster risks at community level is a vital precursor.

Source: NSW State Emergency Management Plan 2018.

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The Recovery Action Plan is being published many months after the 2022 disaster events in Byron Shire. A great deal of recovery work has occurred in the intervening timeframe. The Recovery Action Plan is therefore a reflection of our current needs, but also acknowledges recovery efforts to date.

The Recovery Action Plan is for all of Byron Shire. The disaster events of early 2022 impacted all of us within the region, with many communities united through the common experience of isolation, loss, trauma and grief, as well as buoyed by the collective action of neighbour helping neighbour. While we recognise the broad impact of the disaster events, we also know that some locations and individuals have borne a direct and particularly heavy toll. We have established our Recovery Action Plan priorities accordingly to respond to the greatest needs.

## Council's role in recovery

For our communities, Council is the face of government at a local level.

From a legislative perspective, Council has the broad responsibility to “facilitate local communities that are strong, healthy and prosperous” (Local Government Act 1993, S8). Council's roles are more specifically to:

- provide strong and effective representation, leadership, planning and decision-making;
- provide the best possible value for residents and ratepayers;
- plan strategically, using the integrated planning and reporting framework, for the provision of effective and efficient services to meet the diverse needs of the local community;
- work cooperatively with other Councils and NSW Government to achieve desired outcomes for community; and
- manage lands and assets so that current and future local community needs are met in an affordable way

We contribute to disaster recovery through Council's ongoing functions across planning and operations. Council's role in disaster recovery also includes our specified responsibilities in emergency management and disaster recovery operations.



Our Recovery Action Plan reflects relevant NSW Acts and Regulations and should also be understood within the context of the NSW Recovery Plan (2021), Tweed Byron Local Emergency Management Plan (2019) and Tweed Byron Local Recovery Plan (2019).

We work alongside non-governmental organisations and community associations which are key to the recovery effort. We recognise that more informal groups, families and neighbourhoods have been, and continue to be, pivotal to recovery efforts in Byron Shire.

## Resources for recovery

Recovery from the disaster events is expected to be lengthy and costly. The cost of rebuilding our Shire's road infrastructure alone is expected to exceed \$180 million. It has not yet been possible to quantify the immense costs related to damage of private properties, loss of income, impact on the natural environment, and the burden of psychosocial trauma amongst our community members.

Towards the massive recovery effort, we have received several NSW Government disaster recovery grants which help our delivery capability in areas including planning, project management and project delivery. We continue to pursue additional grant opportunities such as individual infrastructure grants for identified reinstatement projects in our Shire.

Even with funding, there are still notable resource constraints that will impact our disaster recovery activities. These factors include:

- Region-wide scope of the disaster and recovery efforts across the seven Local Government Areas in Northern NSW;
- Recruitment challenges and staffing shortfalls;
- Limited marketplace for contractors, builders, project managers and other providers in the region to deliver multiple, large and complex infrastructure projects;
- Housing constraints that limit the entry of new contractors, service providers and staff to our region;
- Application processes and timeframes for securing grant funding;
- Escalating infrastructure costs impacted by the macroeconomic context and market forces;
- Limited number of non-government organisation service partners located in or providing service to Byron Shire;
- Complexity and timeframes for involvement of multiple government agencies in local projects; and,
- Community fatigue and resources, noting the time and resourcing required to coordinate and carry out community-based resilience building and individual-level recovery.

With these constraints in mind, the Recovery Action Plan provides the optimal anticipated scenario for our recovery activity. As with other councils in our region, we are facing the necessity of shifting what we are able to deliver in our Operational Plan over the next few years to enable a focus on disaster recovery.

## Vulnerability in Byron Shire

Council's adopted Climate Change Adaptation Plan acknowledges that 'flooding due to extreme rainfall' is one of four identified high risk climate scenarios in Byron Shire (the others are: coastal storm surges, extreme heat and increased fire weather). As experienced in February and March 2022, land slips of saturated unstable soil are also a related issue in our shire.

Climate projections predict that extreme rain periods are projected to become more intense on the east coast of Australia.

Byron Shire is comprised of four major floodplains: Tallow Creek, Belongil Creek, Brunswick River and Marshalls Creek. Both the Wilson and Brunswick rivers flood in times of heavy rain, as do many of the minor streams and tributaries.

In times of significant rainfall Upper Wilsons Creek, Upper Main Arm, Huonbrook and The Pocket can be isolated due to peak flows from other catchment areas, and the steep topography of these areas are also vulnerable to land slips. Isolation can also occur in Mullumbimby and some coastal villages during flood events.

Recovery in Byron Shire must acknowledge these inherent risks and introduce improved mitigation and adaptation strategies where possible.

## Principles for disaster recovery

To guide our recovery work, we have committed to the following principles:

- We recognise that the climate, topography and rural context of Byron Shire affects our vulnerability to disaster, and we will prioritise disaster resilience and preparedness in order to mitigate risks and reduce impacts;
- We will undertake disaster recovery projects where they are most needed, and will delay or deprioritise other types of Council projects when required;
- We recognise that disaster events impact individuals and communities in different ways and will take a place-based and context-informed approach to our recovery activities;
- We recognise that community participation and leadership in recovery is pivotal to the recovery effort, and will aim for community engagement to play a key role in recovery activities wherever possible;
- We will work with communities to support appropriate community-based initiatives and programs to aid recovery; and
- We will clearly and accurately communicate local needs to, and work in partnership with, other levels of government to support appropriate programs and resourcing to aid disaster recovery.

## Five domains of recovery

Recovery must take a holistic perspective in order to address a range of impacts. The NSW Recovery Plan (2021) has identified four domains of holistic disaster recovery, encompassing the built environment, natural environment, economy, and community wellbeing.

A fully considered approach to disaster recovery also includes review and planning of emergency arrangements with the aim for improved emergency preparedness and resilience for potential future disaster events. For this reason, we have adopted emergency arrangements as a fifth domain for the Recovery Action Plan.

The five domains of our disaster recovery framework are presented in Figure 2, noting that community participation is integrated across all of these areas. Community participation means appropriate and meaningful engagement across our recovery activities, noting that the form and scope of community involvement may vary depending on the nature and significance of the activity. A substantial degree of disaster recovery will be instigated and led by community, and we will receive input and guidance from community stakeholders to optimise what we deliver.



Five dimensions of recovery in the Recovery Action Plan

## Intended outcomes

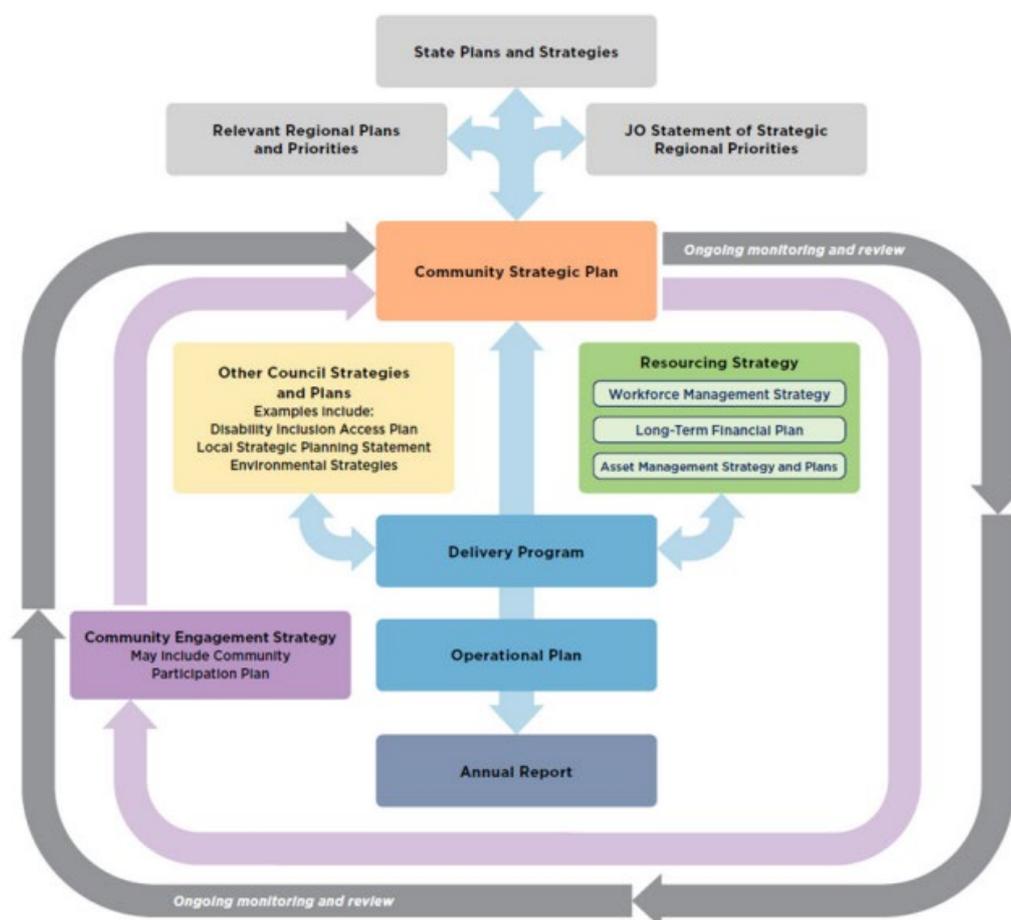
We have developed the following outcomes statements to convey the intent of the Recovery Action Plan across the five domains of recovery.

Recovery Action Plan outcome statements	
	<p><b>Built Environment</b></p> <p>We have reinstated Council infrastructure on a priority basis, including integration of disaster resilience wherever possible.</p> <p>We have integrated new information about disaster risk into land use planning.</p>
	<p><b>Natural Environment</b></p> <p>We have facilitated the recovery of the natural environment and increasing resilience to future environmental events.</p>
	<p><b>Economic recovery</b></p> <p>We have facilitated access to financial supports, and contributed to economic recovery of businesses, industries and individuals.</p>
	<p><b>Community wellbeing</b></p> <p>We have facilitated disaster recovery and disaster resilience in communities.</p>
	<p><b>Emergency arrangements</b></p> <p>We have improved emergency arrangements to reflect learning from the disaster experience.</p>

## Integrated planning and reporting

The NSW Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework requires all councils to adopt a suite of strategic plans. These long-term plans provide transparency and make it possible for Council to plan in a manner which ensures that community needs, and priorities are responded to well into the future. Council also has a range of policies to inform operations and decision making which are aligned with the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

The Recovery Action Plan sits within the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework. Actions from the Recovery Action Plan will be incorporated directly into Council's Operational Plan which is subject to regular and ongoing public reporting.



Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework

## Part II From disaster to recovery

The disaster events had a broad and considerable reach, and it is challenging to convey the resulting impacts in Byron Shire. In many ways, the experience here can only be understood as part of a broader regional story, acknowledging our close affiliations to adjoining Shires and recognising that the disaster events impacted us simultaneously. While we went through our own experience, our worries also remained for family and friends in difficult circumstances across the region.

While recognising this broader context, Part II focusses only on what occurred in Byron Shire in the lead up to, during, and following the disaster events. The purpose of the account is to ensure that our recovery activities reflect a good understanding of what occurred at the time.

Our brief account of the disaster events is undoubtedly partial and incomplete. Not all details and impacts will be covered, though an attempt has been made to describe the breadth and severity of what occurred, and the monumental recovery efforts to date. Stories contributed by community members further illustrate this account.

Please be aware that this account may be distressing to some readers, particularly those with personal experience of the disaster events.

If you are experiencing distress, help is available through services including:

- Lifeline ph: 13 11 14 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
- Recovery Support Service [www.mdnc.org.au/recovery-support-service](http://www.mdnc.org.au/recovery-support-service)
- Safe Haven Mullumbimby [www.safehavennc.org.au](http://www.safehavennc.org.au)

In Appendix A, we summarise the disaster impact and current community needs through the five domains of the Recovery Action Plan: built environment; natural environment; economic recovery; community wellbeing; and emergency arrangements. Community needs form the basis of the actions identified for this Plan.



## Disaster events and recovery to date

### A Week of Rain

The end of February 2022 saw severe rainstorms bringing huge volumes of water into Byron Shire catchments. As the waters rose, on 26 February, the Mullumbimby water treatment plant ceased production of water due to the high turbidity caused by the flood waters. Community members began to respond to what was happening around them.

*The rain continued heavier as the daylight faded. Made the usual preparations like recharging radio batteries, containers of fresh water, as outages of both power and telephone are common for hinterland residents. By midnight the rain was so heavy I sat on the veranda and blocked my ears to the roar coming from the inlets into Coopers Creek as trees and boulders tumbled and crashed down.*

- Hinterland resident, recounting events of 27-28 February 2022.

### The First Day

Monday 28 February marked the peak of the rainfalls and an escalation of impact, with local Emergency Operations Centres stood up on that morning. On this day, the highest February rainfall on record was experienced in parts of Byron Shire including Mullumbimby (520 mm) and Upper Coopers Creek (702 mm). The heavy rains overflowed rivers, tributaries and creeks, impacting adjacent communities.

As water inundation impacted infrastructure, widespread power and communications outages occurred across Northern NSW, including loss of mobile phone and internet connectivity. This affected key services such as ATMs and EFTPOS payments. Suddenly, even in town centres, people became isolated and lost their access to resources and information. The outages went on for days to weeks across different areas of the Shire.

In Mullumbimby, a significant portion of the township experienced water inundation, including homes, businesses and the Council Chamber. Despite being an inland community, community members began using boats, kayaks and surfboards to traverse the murky polluted water to check on or evacuate neighbours.

As one of the few unaffected buildings in Mullumbimby town, on 28 February Mullumbimby Ex-Services Club was opened as an evacuation centre by the RSL management. Community members waded through flood waters to reach the building, with staff and volunteers entering the waters to assist. The RSL evacuation centre recorded 397 people in attendance. The Mullumbimby & District Neighbourhood Centre provided food assistance to the evacuation centre and assisted an additional 31 residents seeking support and shelter. People stayed in these locations for up to 3 days.

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In hinterland areas of the Shire, bridges failed under the volume of water, vehicles and machinery were pushed along the landscape, and landslips ensued. Roads, trees, farmland and homes were at the mercy of tonnes of sliding earth. Tragically, one person remains missing in Byron Shire as a result of landslips.

*The first I knew that my daughter's house was flooding was when I got out of bed in the early morning to water up to my knees. It was scary as we had no warning or notification that her street was under. We had to get the children up and wade through water to move cars and then walk to the Centre in Dalley Street. The initial feeling was disbelief, fear, worry about our community and how long we would be cut off with no comms and no way out or in town.*

- Service provider recounting events in Mullumbimby on 28 February 2022.

Communities west of Mullumbimby including Main Arm, Wilsons Creek, Upper Cooper's Creek, Palmwoods, Wanganui, Huonbrook, and the Huonbrook Valley experienced seven significant landslides, a number of small to medium landslides, as well as road washouts. The landscape made evident the scale of devastation.

*What shocked me after it hammered down all night after days of constant rain was the damage along the creekbank, similar to a giant lawnmower going through. Large and old trees had been mostly snapped off somewhere above ground level, or pulled out altogether. Medium sized trees have been ringbarked three to four metres up their trunks, or disappeared completely, and smaller trees and shrubs reverted to the horizontal position, some to shoot again and some not. A large clump of self-generated palms disappeared or became part of the rubble, a few survived. I had spent 30 years regenerating the creekbank and now most of it has gone.*

-Hinterland resident, recounting the scene after 28 February 2022

Huonbrook and  
Wanganui valley



## The First Week

Helicopter rescues occurred in the coming days in severely impacted parts of the hinterland.

Isolation of hinterland areas continued from weeks (Main Arm: 2-3 weeks) to months (Hunbrook and Wanganui).

Coastal residents, too, became isolated from one another, with the height of the flood waters surprising long-term residents, newcomers and holiday-goers alike. Properties and park lands adjacent to waterways were inundated. The power failed at the Ocean Shores sewage treatment plant on 28 February (and was reinstated on 3 March).

Other coastal areas faced similar inundation.

*On the second day the helicopters appear – first to rescue a mum and her baby, and then to undertake a night rescue of two of our residents who had spent 30 hours plus trapped under their house that a landslide wiped out, up to their necks in mud and debris. A special thank you to the ‘copter crew, the paramedics winched in and all community members who helped out that night.*

- Hinterland resident, recounting events of 28 February 2022

*At about 7am...the power went down. Telecommunications followed several hours later, and we became a community (like many others) isolated and on our own. Our three villages [Ocean Shores, South Golden Beach and New Brighton] also were separated from each other for a period of time.*

- Coastal residents, recounting the events of 28 February 2022

*The water was up to my calves throughout the whole house. Drove to a friend's place, up a very flooded Broken Head Road. I thought my car would stall because the water on the road was so high. I'm in shock writing this but grateful I have friends I could turn to, in the middle of the night, who live close by.*

- Coastal resident, recounting flood impact

Given the inaccessibility of many roads across the Shire, the absence of communications, and limited external assistance, community members commenced a significant disaster response. Community-organised assistance hubs were initiated across the Shire from the hills to the coast, with people stepping in where they could to supply food, water, clothing and other basic necessities.

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Local businesses donated their supplies to the collective effort, diverting their resources to existing relief hubs. Restauranters walked the streets with platters of food for anyone in need.

With improvement of road conditions, Mullumbimby & District Neighbourhood Centre began to link people to emergency accommodation in the Shire, including hotels/motels, apartments and holiday parks. Further housing services became available through state government.

Ocean Shores Country Club was also operational as an evacuation centre, with 343 people recorded in attendance. On 1 March, road access to the evacuation centre became limited and the Seventh Day Adventist Church offered another welcome base for evacuated residents to seek shelter and supplies. Local community organisations, businesses and volunteers established a flood volunteer hub.

*...A hub began. Originally at a picnic table at the hall, two women in 'hi-vis' vests began a coordination process. White boards, corflute signs, checklists and clipboards became our only communication with residents. Thankfully, the rains slowed allowing the hub to grow, more volunteers to step in and the process to deepen, connecting people in need with people offering cleaning, empathy, food, clothing, tradies and any other support necessary*

- Coastal residents, recounting 1 March and the following days

Waters receded in Mullumbimby within 4 days, allowing the entry of outside supports. Council staff were deployed, in order of priority, to commence reinstatement of water and sewerage systems, and road services. Council supported emergency services and commenced the initial clean-up effort.

Kerbside collection of flood affected materials began on 2 March in urban areas and continued for over a month. Waste was taken to Council's Resource Recovery Centre where it was loaded into larger trucks for transport to regional sites or SE Queensland. Councillors and Council staff became involved in coordinating local supplies and checking in on residents and businesses.

The Mullumbimby water supply quickly dwindled with the commencement of substantial clean-up efforts and significant use of water for residential clean-up activities, leading to the need for water restrictions from 1 to 3 March.

Byron Shire Council's Community Resilience Network was activated within days of the flooding, holding daily coordination meetings in contact with the Tweed Byron Local Emergency Management Committee.

On 7 March, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) commenced Operation Flood Assist in Byron Shire. ADF forces assisted with waste collection and assisted with infrastructure repair. Republic of Fiji Military Forces, initially in Australia for military exercises, partnered with ADF on access reinstatement projects in the hinterland. The help could hardly come fast enough for the scale of the disaster. Unfortunately, many of the footbridges built with military assistance were washed away with the water yet to come.

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Any open retail outlets in the Shire were quickly stripped of supplies including water and fresh food. Multi-day north- and south-bound closures of flooded sections of the M1 Pacific Highway exacerbated the shortage of supplies across the region. With communication EFTPOS and ATM outages continuing, it became a cash economy. Woolworths Mullumbimby offered IOU slips to residents seeking food and water.

Residents continued to seek support from multiple channels. About 600 new clients were received by the Mullumbimby & District Neighbourhood Centre in the immediate aftermath of the disaster and for the following weeks. A substantial volume of food transited their community pantry, where supplies of food were distributed across the Shire and beyond.



Palmwood Road

*...total chaos. And then our residents collect themselves a little, all in shock and traumatised at what has just occurred. The valley is cut off from the outside world, on our own, and the immediate response unfolds.*

*Those that can move start to build temporary river crossings, clearing the roads, hiking overland and finding out if their neighbours are alive or OK. And everything leads into our community hall... becoming a focal point as people try to make their way out to connect with others, some hiking on foot for hours to reach others for help.*

- Hinterland resident, recounting events of 28 February 2022.

## The First Month

On 7 March, official emergency operations transitioned to recovery, with the opening of the Recovery Centre at the Mullumbimby Civic Centre by Council staff and Resilience NSW.

The Recovery Centre offered access to services including Byron Shire Council (business concierge), Centrelink, Service NSW, Resilience NSW, Legal Aid, Suncorp Insurance, Allianz insurance, St Johns Ambulance, Mullumbimby & District Neighbourhood Centre, Department of Primary Industries, Department of Communities and Justice, Red Cross, Salvation Army and Rural Fire Service. Emotional and psychological support services were offered by the chaplaincy network, local psychologists and counsellors, with quiet places of refuge offered on site.



"Kid's corner" in Recovery Centre

Private area in Recovery Centre



Supplementing the Recovery Centre, service providers participated in mobile recovery street teams across the Shire to increase awareness of and access to recovery services.

Disappointingly for Byron Shire, the Prime Minister's flood emergency declaration on 8 March included only three of the impacted Shires in Northern NSW. A national emergency declaration was made on 11 March. It was on 17 March that the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) were extended by the Australian Government to Byron Shire.

Meanwhile, rains continued into the end of March. Clean up, drying efforts and road repairs continued as possible.

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CIVIC

MEMORIAL HALL

THANK YOU

FOOD

CONTRIBUTIONS STORE  
THANK YOU  
FOR DONATING  
ITEMS

IF YOU NEED HELP, WE'LL HELP YOU  
WE'LL HELP YOU  
WE'LL HELP YOU

HINGED  
CIVIC AND JIMMY



## The Second Flood

By 27 March, a slow-moving severe weather system developed, leading to a second distinct disaster event between 30 March and 1 April. While not as severe, the second event inundated areas already impacted by water, compounding the disaster impact. Byron Bay town centre and surrounds also experienced flooding in this second event.

The Cavanbah Centre was briefly opened as an evacuation centre but proved to be inaccessible to some community members, particularly from Suffolk Park.

The clean-up process expanded following the second event, with sodden contents of homes and businesses stripped and piled in heaps along street frontage. Council expanded free kerbside pickup for impacted residents and waived tip fees to dispose of flood affected items.

In collaboration with state government and a local landowner, Council also facilitated supplies and waste management solutions by helicopter for isolated Huonbrook residents.



Clean up in Mullumbimby



Helicopter pick up for Huonbrook

## Impact

The receding waters revealed widespread damage of the two disaster events, including an initial estimate of \$180 million repairs required to the road network. Since the first flood, an estimated 12,000 tonnes of waste had been received and managed through Council's Resource Recovery Centre, one of the Regional Waste Transfer Facilities or various temporary skip bin sites throughout the Shire.

Initial SES estimates identified 2,170 properties impacted in the Byron Shire, including private properties, schools, businesses, emergency services facilities and community facilities, though this figure could be higher. Alongside many other insured property owners, Council commenced its insurance claim process for damaged Council facilities, with the majority of these located in Mullumbimby.

Some property owners started to rebuild. For others, the rebuilding pathway was more uncertain or halted completely due to lack of insurance or few financially viable options. They relocated (where possible), sought grants (where eligible) and reconsidered their futures. Some residents remained in water damaged buildings, with likely impacts to their mental or physical health.

Months on, temporary pod villages started to establish in Mullumbimby and Brunswick Heads, with uncertainty about who amongst the many in need would receive a placement. People sleeping rough in Byron Shire prior to the disaster events would not be among them, missing out on the eligibility criteria. The housing affordability issue in the shire became worse than previously imagined.

The overall impact to the natural environment also started to become clear. Australian Wildlife Rescue Organisation WIRES reported 167 animals rescues in the Byron Shire between the 25 February and the 31 March 2022, of which 69 animals survived. Many other animals likely drowned in burrows, creeks or ponds, or were buried under debris after landslides. Over the longer term, many species are likely to be impacted by displacement and starvation due to loss of food sources, making them weaker and more vulnerable to predation by feral animals.

*Absolutely everything has been affected in some way. ... The challenging question now is how to ensure that the materials use to rebuild are environmentally responsible and will withstand another deluge – maybe next year, the year after?*

- Byron Shire resident, on the rebuilding process

The warm, wet conditions following the flood resulted in increased growth in environmental and agricultural weeds, particularly highly invasive aquatic weeds that are transported in flood waters. These humid conditions have increased the risk of livestock diseases.

With the deluge of black water which ran through to coastal areas, water quality monitoring became an important function, and Council posted beach and estuary monitoring results on the Council website for months. Poor water quality has had a significant impact on the health of marine and freshwater aquatic species, and on animals that feed on these. However, in natural landscapes, flooding is an important ecological process and can also bring positive

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side effects like transporting nutrients, wildlife migration, new feeding opportunities and wildlife breeding booms.

In response to ongoing community demand, the Recovery Centre in Mullumbimby continued for many months with Council support, eventually closing its operations as an initiative of Resilience NSW on 31 August. On 1 September this service point transitioned with Council support to a Recovery Hub coordinated through Mullumbimby and District Neighbourhood Centre.

Other dedicated disaster recovery services commenced for the Shire including the Recovery Support Service (Mullumbimby and District Neighbourhood Centre) and Safe Haven (Healthy North Coast). Workers from these services heard about the financial stress clients were facing and provided assistance with navigating government grants. As another troubling indication of community impact, clients reported greater exposure to domestic and family violence since the disaster events.

New community associations sprung to life or gained a renewed resiliency focus.

Council continued an array of recovery programs including assistance with temporary accommodation settlements, preparation of the After the Floods Discussion Paper, and administration of the Service NSW Rates Relief Program for flood impacted residents. Council commenced dedicated staffing for identified elements of disaster recovery.

The face of the disaster has changed somewhat in the ensuing months, if slowly. We remain connected by our collective experience. Stormy weather has taken on new significance, no longer the stuff of small-talk, but now sometimes laced with uncertainty or fear. Still, on sunny days, we relish the ability to come together at markets, cafes and on the beach, ever sweeter after the past years' restrictions. We are still recovering, one step at a time.

*So now we are on the flimsy and long road to recovery, flooded in again Sept 23 with just 150 mm of rain, temporary roads and causeways damaged even further whilst trying to prepare for the upcoming wet season and what it may bring. The big heroes are our community firstly.*

- Hinterland resident, reflecting on the disaster events.

*We are still caring but with a more preparedness focus. There is a lot of anxiety amongst many of our community at the thought of what a third La Nina event could bring. ... We aren't just focussed on flood, we are also planning for drought, fire, tsunami and any other potential impact that will affect our villages. We've learnt to expect the unexpected. We've also learnt about the power of community connections and pooling of resources and skills.*

- Coastal residents reflecting on 8 months of community-based response and recovery since the disaster events.



## Summary of needs

Largely occupied with the business of recovery, individuals and organisations on the front line have had little opportunity to reflect and take stock of the disaster impact. While recognising the gaps in documented knowledge, we have engaged with an array of organisations and community members since the disaster events. Along with key secondary sources such as the Flood Inquiry, we have come to a good (and constantly evolving) understanding of community needs. These are presented in Appendix A and grouped into the following:

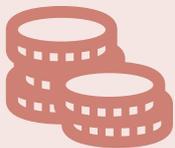
1. Built environment
  - a. Need to reinstate access to roads, buildings and homes
  - b. Need for safe, secure housing for all residents of Byron Shire
2. Natural environment: Need for natural ecosystems to be rehabilitated and restored
3. Economic recovery: Need for invigoration of local industries and financial recovery
4. Community wellbeing: Need for trauma recovery and community-based disaster resilience
5. Emergency arrangements: Need for consolidated and improved disaster response

Community needs are reflected in the outcome statements identified in Part I of the Recovery Action Plan, and inform the Actions described in Part III.

# Part III Actions

Built Environment	Reference to Delivery Program Priority	Recovery Actions
	<p>3.3.2 Mitigate the impact of flooding on private and public property</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Undertake review of Council’s growth management strategies to reflect updated understanding of flood and climate risks and community preferences.</li> <li>2. Implement whole-of-Shire flood mitigation works in accordance with Council adopted <a href="#">Flood Risk Management Plans</a></li> <li>3. Implement Council’s drainage maintenance and management program.</li> <li>4. Deliver <a href="#">South Golden Beach Resilience Betterment</a> program.</li> <li>5. Plan for emergency management of hazardous waste including identification and pre-approval of waste transfer sites.</li> </ol>
	<p>4.2.1 Seek opportunities that provide fair, appropriate and affordable housing for people experiencing housing insecurity</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Partner with Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation and relevant Government agencies to support the delivery of the <a href="#">Resilient Homes program</a></li> <li>7. Work with Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation and relevant State government agencies on settlement preferences of community members.</li> </ol>
	<p>5.1.5 Restore the affected parts of the road network that were impacted by the 2022 flood event</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8a. Reinstate the affected parts of Council’s road network.</li> <li>8b. Implement Road network betterment initiatives in accordance with approved programs.</li> <li>9. Reinstate safe and proportionate access to communities isolated by landslips.</li> </ol>
	<p>5.4.1 Ongoing maintenance and capital upgrades of community buildings with a focus on increasing accessibility</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10a. Reinstate Council’s flood affected buildings.</li> <li>10b. Implement building betterment initiatives in accordance with approved programs.</li> </ol>

Natural Environment	Reference to Delivery Program Priority	Recovery Actions
	3.1.1 Use best practice land management to improve ecological resilience and reduce threats to biodiversity	11. Support wildlife care groups to protect native wildlife before, during and after flood events.
	3.1.2 Continue best practice Integrated Pest Management on council owned and managed land	12. Monitor the impact of pest and weeds as a result of floods before, during and after events.
	3.1.3 Restore degraded areas that provide high environmental or community value	13. Incentivise and support private landholder habitat restoration through grant-funded landholder extension and education.  14. Monitor the impact of floods on key habitat and habitat restoration sites.
	3.3.3 Investigate and support catchment health improvement initiatives	15. Monitor the impact of floods on river and estuary water quality before, during, and after events.  16. Restore riverbank sites that have been affected by flood events on a priority basis.
	3.4.2 Enhance community resilience and ability to adapt before, during, and after climate events	17. Implement <a href="#">Council's Climate Adaptation Plan</a> actions  18. Provide advice, information and education for private landholders on climate-ready ecological restoration, and support other community organisations
	4.3.5 Develop and implement strategies to support regenerative agriculture, agribusiness and farmers	19. Implement <a href="#">Council's Agriculture Action Plan</a>

Economic recovery	Reference to Delivery Program Priority	Recovery Actions
	<p>4.5.2 Support disaster recovery following the 2022 flood events</p>	<p>20. Advocate for recovery and support programs to recognise broader disaster impacts, including landslips, in funding eligibility criteria.</p> <p>21. Administer the <a href="#">rates relief program</a> on behalf of Service NSW</p> <p>22. Support local business to develop resilience and capability in response to natural disasters</p> <p>23. Support recovery and adaptation of town and village centres through <a href="#">Place Plans</a></p> <p>24. Administer the Byron Shire <a href="#">Mayoral Flood Recovery Appeal Fund</a></p>

Community wellbeing	Reference to Delivery Program Priority	Recovery Actions
	<p>4.2.1 Seek opportunities that provide fair, appropriate, and affordable housing for people experiencing housing insecurity</p>	<p>25. Advocate for inclusive housing programs including for disaster-impacted people and people experiencing homelessness prior to the disaster events</p>
	<p>4.5.3 Support and coordinate disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities</p>	<p>26. Facilitate the Community Resilience Network</p> <p>27. Facilitate access to disaster recovery information and services</p>

Emergency arrangements	Reference to Delivery Program Priority	Recovery Actions
	<p>4.5.1 Support and participate in local emergency management</p>	<p>28. Work with relevant Government agencies to improve and resource the regional emergency management system in preparation for potential future large-scale disasters</p> <p>29. Work with relevant State Government agencies to identify suitable emergency and temporary housing options</p> <p>30. Review Council's emergency management roles, systems and training</p> <p>31. Continue to manage and improve Council's <a href="#">Emergency Dashboard</a> and Incident Management System</p>
	<p>4.5.3 Support and coordinate disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities</p>	<p>32. Partner with relevant State Government Agencies to review and improve evacuation routes and evacuation centres in the Shire</p> <p>33. Work with State and Federal Government agencies including Australian Defence Force and NSW Public Works to understand roles and process in clean up phase, including coordination of resources across the region</p> <p>34. Provide information and resources to community stakeholders to assist with salvage, repair and appropriate disposal during disaster clean up</p> <p>35. Support development of community resilience hubs</p>
	<p>5.3.4 Advocate for more disaster resilient communication networks</p>	<p>36. Work with relevant Government, telecommunication and community stakeholders to improve communications capability during emergencies</p>

# Appendix A - Summary of needs

This appendix presents the known disaster impacts and needs as they relate to the five domains of the Recovery Action Plan.



Sources of information:

- Byron Shire Local Recovery Committee and Health & Wellbeing Subcommittee
- Byron Shire Community Resilience Network
- Byron Shire Council surveys, including business survey, property owners' survey, and community survey
- Council staff participation in formal and informal meetings with community groups, business groups, individuals and service providers
- Flood Recovery Centre Situation Reports
- North Coast LGA Impact Assessment
- 2022 NSW Floods Inquiry report
- Report of the Legislative Council Select Committee on the Response to major flooding across NSW in 2022

While this array of resources captures community impact from different perspectives, there are still recognised gaps in the available information.



**1a. Built Environment: Need to reinstate access (roads, buildings and homes)**

The experience:	The needs:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scale of infrastructure damage was unprecedented, including roads and buildings.</li> <li>• Flood inundation and destruction of road access severely limited or delayed emergency response efforts.</li> <li>• The scale of road damage and ongoing wet weather has necessitated progressive and ongoing repair efforts.</li> <li>• Remote parts of the Shire remained cut off for extended periods of time, impacting their ability to access essential supplies</li> <li>• Council's insurance process has not yet concluded, and disaster impacted buildings have not yet been restored. Lack of access to facilities such as community halls may hinder community activities and social connections.</li> <li>• Widespread outages to electricity and telecommunication networks significantly impacted communications during and after the emergency efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and delivery of infrastructure works to reinstate access to roads and community facilities on a priority basis.</li> <li>• Access to adequate contractors and staff to meet the scale of required infrastructure works.</li> <li>• Adequate financial support to meet the escalating costs of infrastructure projects.</li> <li>• Communication systems that can be stood up in an emergency that are not susceptible to failure</li> </ul>



**1b. Built Environment: Need for safe, secure housing**

The experience:	The needs:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There have been limited emergency and temporary accommodation options available in the Shire. Some residents are still living in flood impacted environments. Pod villages have taken an extended timeframe to establish, do not offer a solution for all flood impacted residents, and have at times been controversial.</li> <li>• It has been financially and practically challenging for property owners to repair damages. In some cases, financial support has been available through insurance or grants.</li> <li>• When insured, property owners have experienced sometimes lengthy insurance processes regarding damage to their homes. Even when resolved, insurance claims do not always cover all of the losses.</li> <li>• Property owners have been navigating an array of grant opportunities which could potentially provide financial relief. Residents affected by landslips or who are renters or are part of multiple occupancy properties have not always received financial support due to eligibility restrictions.</li> <li>• There are lengthy waits for contractors and trades who can restore and rebuild, and significantly escalating costs for building supplies and labour.</li> <li>• People experiencing homelessness prior to the disaster events have been displaced from existing programs due housing shortages and not eligible to access disaster-specific housing programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing support from NSW Government grants with appropriate eligibility criteria reflecting different types of disaster impact and which provide sufficient financial support to enable individual/family recovery.</li> <li>• Continuation of locally based recovery services to support Byron Shire residents' access to grants and connectivity to other disaster recovery services</li> <li>• Further data about the Shire's impacted residential and commercial properties, and the suitability for rebuilding and resilience activities.</li> <li>• Ongoing information and advice for property owners about rebuilding and resilience.</li> <li>• Ongoing financial relief for property owners to rebuild damaged homes and reinstate private driveway access.</li> <li>• Ongoing information and advice for property owners about rebuilding and disaster resilience.</li> <li>• Homelessness programs which are inclusive to people experiencing homelessness prior to the disaster events.</li> </ul>

 <b>2. Natural Environment: Need for natural ecosystems to be rehabilitated and restored</b>	
The experience:	The need:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural environmental systems experienced significant damage, most noticeably to wildlife and water quality.</li> <li>• Wildlife injury and death were a direct result of the flood. Lasting impacts include food chain disruptions, vulnerability to disease and road strike.</li> <li>• Many restoration sites were inundated by flood waters or damaged by landslips</li> <li>• Warm wet conditions resulted in a boom in invasive weed species, and invasive animals.</li> <li>• Farms were impacted by erosion, inundation, loss of livestock and crops, and risk of spread of livestock diseases in warm, wet conditions.</li> <li>• Significant impact on waterways and rivers with erosion and scouring of riverbanks, straightening of channels and changes to river meandering, increase of riverbed levels and loss of deep pools, sedimentation and loss of riparian habitat.</li> <li>• Flood water brought waste, contaminated material and large debris down rivers and waterways depositing in nearshore areas and on open beaches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing funding support and information for landholders about how they can contribute to ecological recovery and resilience</li> <li>• Support for wildlife carers – e.g. providing harvestable food source for wildlife carers.</li> <li>• Support and information for the farming community regarding sustainable agriculture practices</li> <li>• Improved resources to manage invasive weeds and feral animals in areas of high environmental value.</li> <li>• Ongoing support and funding to address priority riverbank erosion sites.</li> <li>• Water quality monitoring program and sampling before, during and after flood events.</li> <li>• River, waterway and beach clean-ups waste/debris clean-ups.</li> </ul>



### 3. Economic recovery: Need for reinvigoration of local industries and financial recovery

#### The experience:

- The range of industries including agriculture, tourism and construction and other services has been impacted by the disaster events
- Council’s survey of disaster-impacted businesses confirmed damage to property, loss of income, loss of staff, impediments to supply chain, and considerable reduction in demand. At the time of the survey (April/May 2022), 18% of surveyed businesses were considering permanent closure due to flood impact and financial pressures. A further 15% were considering relocation. The majority of businesses noted that disaster insurance was unavailable or cost prohibitive.
- Many properties are not covered by flood insurance (not available or prohibitively expensive) and insurance may not cover the extent of loss from the disaster events.
- Support services report that disaster impacted individuals and families are experiencing cost of living pressures and are having difficulty meeting basic expenses.

#### The need:

- Ongoing support from NSW Government grants with appropriate eligibility criteria reflecting different types of disaster impact and which provide sufficient financial support to enable individual/family recovery.
- Development of place-based recovery and adaptation activities.
- Community events and programs that stimulate the local economy
- Reinstatement of local businesses, and incentives/schemes to support sustainability
- Incentives/schemes to support establishment of new businesses
- Disaster resilience for local industries, particularly those with ongoing vulnerability to weather related disasters (e.g., agriculture).

 <b>4. Community wellbeing: Need for trauma recovery and community-based disaster resilience</b>	
The experience:	The need:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many disaster-impacted residents went through harrowing experiences during the disaster events. As a result, these residents have experienced sometimes-dramatic changes to everyday life circumstances, such as damage to or loss of home and personal belongings. Ongoing rain events are creating collective anxiety amongst our communities, with considerable fear about a potential future disaster event. These factors have made it challenging for some residents to achieve wellbeing following the flood.</li> <li>• Even prior to the disaster events, Byron Shire had a deficit of locally based and accessible psychosocial support services, particularly clinical services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic disaster recovery which engages community participation as appropriate.</li> <li>• Community and place-based disaster preparedness and resilience activities.</li> <li>• Sufficient clinical psychological supports and other psychosocial support programs accessible to Byron Shire residents.</li> </ul>

 <b>5. Emergency arrangements: Need for consolidated and improved disaster response</b>	
The experience:	The need:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many communities had little warning to leave their homes and the area. Access roads were quickly inundated, preventing entry and exit.</li> <li>• The amount and timing of first responder assistance was insufficient for the disaster events. Community response became a considerable part of the emergency response effort.</li> <li>• The failure of communication systems early in the disaster events constrained dissemination of warnings and advice, and coordination of emergency response efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved emergency response arrangements which reflect lessons learned from the disaster events.</li> <li>• Emergency evacuation centre locations suitable to a range of emergency evacuation scenarios</li> <li>• Clear information for community regarding disaster risk during and outside of emergency response</li> <li>• Community based and community led disaster preparedness and resilience activities.</li> <li>• Ensure alternative communications strategies which can be accessible and operational during disaster events.</li> </ul>



**BYRON**  
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