



Gender & Disaster Australia

# Lismore

DISASTER CONTEXT

Socio-demographics from  
a gendered perspective





# Lismore

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## INTRODUCTION

Lismore is situated beneath a complex catchment near several major creeks feeding into the Wilsons River and Leycester Creek, which meet at Lismore. Major flooding can occur when water rises in either of these two watercourses. As a result, Lismore is one of the most flood-prone towns in Australia,<sup>1</sup> and has experienced fifteen major floods since 1970.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the floods in February 2022, the record highest flood was 12.14 metres in 1974, and the most recent major flood was in March 2017, reaching a height of 11.59 metres. Resulting from the clashing of three separate weather systems, the February 28 2022 flood comprehensively broke the 1974 record by more than two metres, reaching a height of 14.40m. It was followed one month later by another cluster of major floods on March 29-30, reaching a maximum height of 11.4 metres.<sup>3</sup> All together, the floods in QLD and NSW in early 2022 were Australia's most expensive flood, costing \$5.28 billion (compared to \$2.32 billion for the 2019-2020 bushfires).<sup>4</sup>

As of late 2022, it is too early for academic literature on the social impacts of the 2022 floods to have been published. However, a number of studies were conducted on the 2017 floods. One study (Rolfe et al., 2020) examined the social vulnerability of Lismore residents affected by floods compared to residents of flood-affected regions of

Sydney, finding that those in Lismore were significantly more vulnerable. In particular, almost 82% of residents of Lismore's town centre were from the lowest socio-economic quintile, compared to 27% for the region and 16% for Sydney. In addition, these residents had significantly higher rates of smoking and alcohol consumption, depression and anxiety, and poorer health.<sup>5</sup>

Another study examining Lismore residents' experiences of responses to the 2017 floods (Darab et al. 2021) found that, while local institutional responses (such as the local branch of the SES) were valued by residents, the state-level institution response was characterised by a lack of clear information, ignoring local knowledge and experience. In contrast, informal community help developed organically into a highly and organised and efficient system drawing on pre-existing networks formed during the social movement against coal seam gas in previous years. Further, some residents were able to draw on their local knowledge and experience to protect themselves and their properties during the flood, but this resilience was unevenly distributed among the community and preparations were often foiled by incorrect information about the expected flood level.<sup>6</sup> A similar failure has already been documented about the 2022 floods.<sup>7</sup>





Finally, a survey of the mental health effects of the 2017 Lismore floods (Matthews et al. 2019) was conducted six months after the floods on about 2500 respondents in the area. The study found that higher proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, single and unemployed people, and people receiving income support reported flooding in liveable areas of their home. Six months after the floods, 22% reported still being distressed, suffering from a combination of anxiety, PTSD, depression and suicidal ideation (7%). The severity of mental health problems was related to how badly

respondents had been affected by the floods; for example, those displaced for more than six months were more than twice as likely to report symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression.<sup>8</sup>

Anecdotally, in Lismore, the First Nations run 'Koori Mail' established support for 2022 flood affected residents within two days of the first flood event, providing food and essential goods from a carpark in the CBD. 'Resilient Lismore' was established within weeks of the disaster with a constant presence for most of 2022, providing a range of necessary products.



From [abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SED10045](https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/SED10045)





## DISASTER BACKGROUND

Kind of disasters affecting this region/town: floods, bushfire

EVENT NAME	Hazard Type(s)
NSW - NSW Flooding (14 September 2022)	Flood
NSW floods (22 February 2022 onwards)	Flood
NSW Severe Weather and Flooding (9 November 2021 onwards)	Flood
NSW - NSW Storms and Floods (10 March 2021 onwards)	Flood, Storm
NSW - North Coast Storms and Floods (19 February 2021 onwards)	Flood, Storm
NSW - NSW Storms and Floods (10 December 2020 onwards)	Flood, Storm
NSW Storms and Floods: 15 January 2020 onwards	Flood, Storm
NSW Bushfires: 31 August 2019 onwards	Bushfire

Drawn from NEMA data LGA Profiles <https://nema.gov.au/data#/map>

Recent major disaster: February and March 2022 major floods

- Fatalities: 5<sup>9</sup>
- People displaced:
  - Immediately after the floods, many displaced people were sent to an evacuation centre at Southern Cross University's Lismore campus, before being sent to caravan parks and boarding houses; others moved into tents or stayed with friends or acquaintances<sup>10</sup>
  - On March 2, an estimated 10,000 people were homeless in Northern Rivers region<sup>11</sup>
  - As of 29 May, 1300 people were still in emergency housing (e.g. caravans, tents) and less than 20% of businesses were operating<sup>12</sup>
  - As of 18 October, 1000 people in Northern NSW were registered as still needing emergency housing<sup>13</sup>
  - An estimated 31,000 people in the Lismore local government area were affected by the floods<sup>14</sup>





- Properties and infrastructure affected:
  - On 28 February, 3000 homes and commercial buildings were inundated beyond floor level in Lismore<sup>15</sup>
  - As of 19 May, more than 4000 houses were left uninhabitable across the Northern Rivers region; additionally, almost 11,000 were damaged and 8000 inundated<sup>16</sup>
  - 90% of Lismore's 1200 km road network suffered severe and extensive damage estimated at \$150-200 million to repair<sup>17</sup>
- Insurance statistics (Lismore):
  - Cost of overall damage incurred: \$508 million<sup>18</sup>
  - Damage incurred per capita: \$19,028<sup>19</sup>
  - Average claim value: \$79,000<sup>20</sup>
  - Estimated underinsurance rates (note these are from a 2013 study):<sup>21</sup>
    - 28% of homes suffering total damage not insured
    - Average underinsurance of buildings was 28% of rebuilding value
    - Average underinsurance of contents was 48% of replacement value
  - Before the floods, people had been quoted premiums of up to \$24000/year<sup>22</sup>

## ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

- Lismore LGA is ranked:<sup>23</sup>
  - 197 out of 544 LGAs in Australia (where 544 is least disadvantaged)
  - in the 4<sup>th</sup> decile (out of 10, where 10 is least disadvantaged)
  - in the 37<sup>th</sup> percentile (out of 100, where 100 is least disadvantaged)

## HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS

- Housing affordability
  - Median rent: \$310/week (NSW: \$420/week)<sup>24</sup>
  - Renter households where rent payments are greater than 30% of household income: 41.3% (NSW: 35.5%)<sup>25</sup>
  - For a household on the median income for Lismore (around \$68,000), rental accommodation is classed on the border between "moderately unaffordable" and "unaffordable"<sup>26</sup>
- Homelessness (before the 2022 floods):
  - In June 2021, more than 300 people were sleeping rough in Tweed Heads, Byron Bay and Lismore<sup>27</sup>
  - 250 people across the NSW North Coast were on the priority housing waiting list<sup>28</sup>
  - The private rental market vacancy rate was 0.5%<sup>29</sup>
  - The Northern Rivers has 4% of the NSW population but almost 20% of its rough sleepers<sup>30</sup>
  - Housing prices almost doubled from 2016-2021<sup>31</sup>
  - Number of clients in Lismore LGA assisted by specialist homelessness services (2020-2021): 272 per 10,000 population<sup>32</sup>
    - Males: 237 per 10,000; females: 271 per 10,000





## MENTAL HEALTH

- Mental health conditions (any): 12.4% (NSW: 8.0%)<sup>33</sup>
- Suicide rate for Statistical Area 3 Richmond Valley - Hinterland<sup>34</sup>
  - age-standardised rate per 100 000: 20.1 (NSW: 10.6)
  - 73 deaths 2017-2021



## GENDER EQUALITY

### *Lone parent status*<sup>35</sup>

- One-parent families (Lismore LGA): 21.6% (NSW: 15.8%) - 78.4% female-led (NSW: 81.0%)

### *Mothers' index*<sup>36</sup>

- Lismore LGA is ranked 103 out of 152 LGAs in NSW where 1 is the 'best place for a mother to live'

### *Unpaid care*<sup>37</sup>

- unpaid domestic work
  - 7955 men did more than 5 hours of unpaid domestic work per week compared to 22,606 women
- Unpaid assistance to a person with a disability
  - 2029 men compared to 3116 women provided unpaid assistance
- Unpaid childcare
  - 3835 men compared to 5459 women provided childcare (whether for their own child or other children)

### *Violence against women*<sup>38</sup>

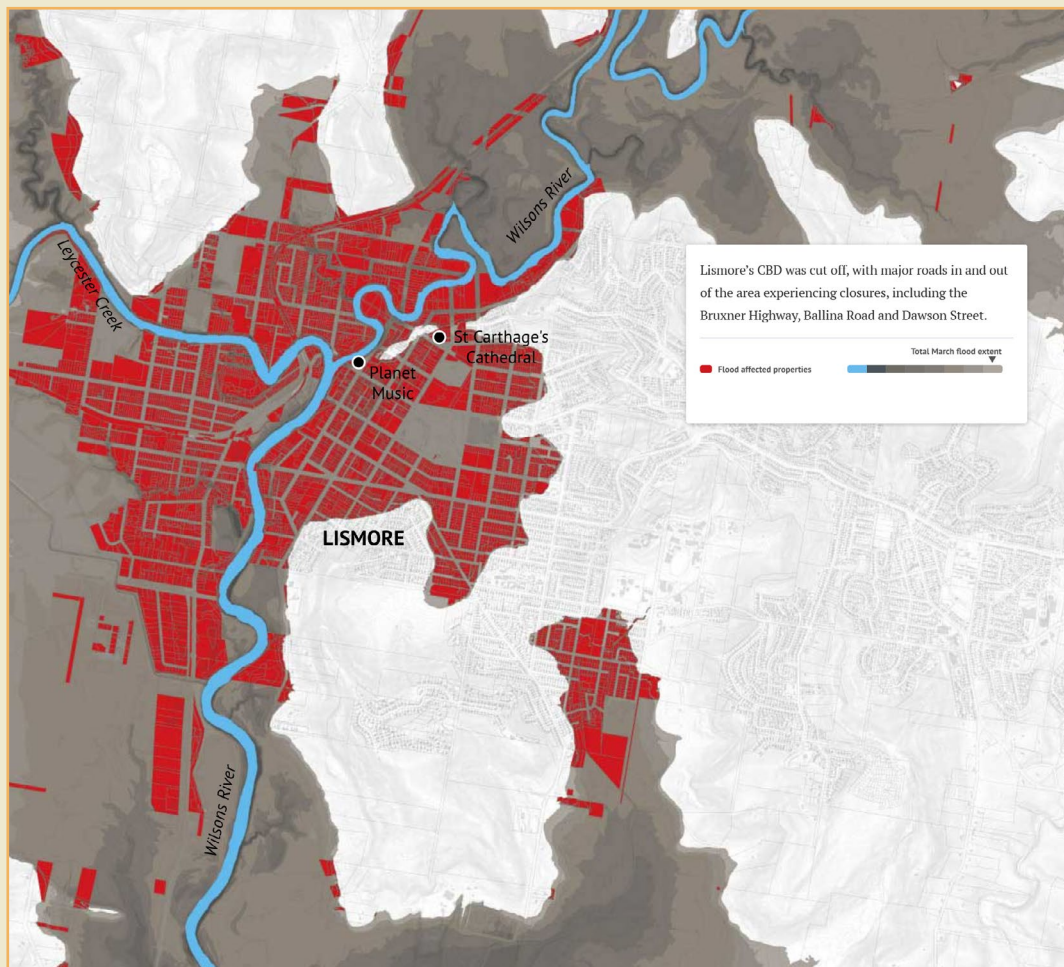
- Domestic violence-related assault (Jan-Dec 2021, rate per 100,000 population): 632.1 (NSW: 393.4)
  - LGA rank: 32 (out of 120), where 1 has the highest rate of crime
- Sexual assault (Jan-Dec 2021, rate per 100,000 population): 167.2 (NSW: 89.2)
  - LGA rank: 31 (out of 120), where 1 has the highest rate of crime





### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Median age <sup>39</sup>	44 (NSW: 39)
Indigenous status <sup>40</sup>	5.9% (NSW: 3.4%)
Both parents born in Australia <sup>41</sup>	68.4% (NSW: 43.7%)
Non-English language used in household <sup>42</sup>	7.2% (NSW: 29.5%)
With university education <sup>43</sup>	20.9% (NSW: 27.8%)
Year 10 as highest qualification <sup>44</sup>	13.6% (NSW: 10.6%)
Part-time workers <sup>45</sup>	38.4% (NSW: 29.7%)
Unemployed <sup>46</sup>	5.1% (NSW: 4.9%)
Personal income <sup>47</sup>	\$685/week (NSW: \$813/week)
Household income <sup>48</sup>	\$1319/week (NSW: \$1829/week)
Rate of people on Disability Support Pension per 10,000 population <sup>49</sup>	620 (NSW: 294)



[smh.com.au/interactive/2022/lismore-flooding/](http://smh.com.au/interactive/2022/lismore-flooding/)

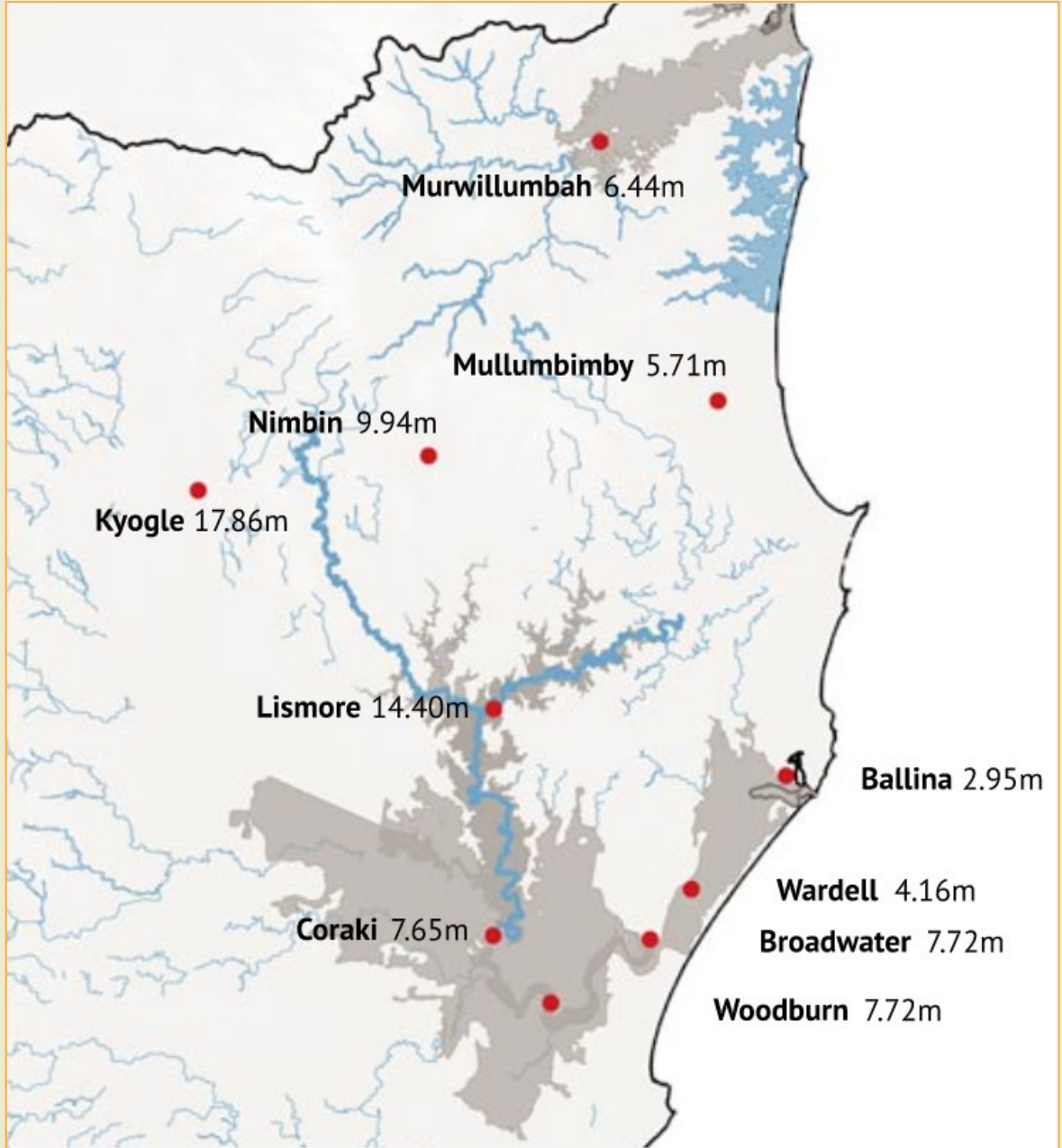




### FLOOD EXTENT WITHIN THE RICHMOND CATCHMENT AREA, NSW

February-March 2022 flooding event and affected NSW towns with maximum water heights.

[smh.com.au/interactive/2022/lismore-flooding](https://smh.com.au/interactive/2022/lismore-flooding)



Lismore Citizens Flood Review Group, WaterNSW







## ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/flood-awareness-nsw/northern-rivers/lismore-lga/>
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- 3 [http://australiasevereweather.com/floods/lismore\\_flood\\_pictures\\_reports.htm](http://australiasevereweather.com/floods/lismore_flood_pictures_reports.htm)
- 4 [https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/McKell\\_Cost-of-Natural-Disasters\\_SINGLES\\_WEB.pdf](https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/McKell_Cost-of-Natural-Disasters_SINGLES_WEB.pdf)
- 5 Rolfe, M., et al. (2020) "Social vulnerability in a high-risk flood-affected rural region of NSW, Australia". *Natural Hazards* 101:631-650.
- 6 Darab, S., Harman, Y. & Pittaway, E. (2020) "Building community resilience: lessons from flood-affected residents in a regional Australian town". *The International Journal of Community and Social Development* 2(4):409-425.
- 7 Visual Stories Team & Gilmore, H. (30 June 2022). "Anatomy of the Lismore Disaster" in The Sydney Morning Herald. <https://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2022/lismore-flooding/>
- 8 Mattews, V., et al. (2019) "Differential mental health impact six months after extensive river flooding in rural Australia: a cross-sectional analysis through an equity lens". *Frontiers in Public Health* 7:1-10.
- 9 <https://www.lismorecitynews.com.au/story/7725874/confirmation-of-flood-death-toll-sought-by-councillor/>
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- 11 <https://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2022/lismore-flooding/>
- 12 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-05-29/lismore-floods-hundreds-in-emergency-accommodation/101106706>
- 13 <https://www.lismorecitynews.com.au/story/7939240/do-better-mp-slams-flood-response-as-clunky/>
- 14 <https://www.smh.com.au/interactive/2022/lismore-flooding/>
- 15 <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2022/august/john-van-tiggelen/rethinking-lismore-new-era-floods>
- 16 <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/insight/article/homeless-with-a-mortgage-lismores-vulnerable-look-for-a-post-flood-future/tpq0rfxil>
- 17 [https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/McKell\\_Cost-of-Natural-Disasters\\_SINGLES\\_WEB.pdf](https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/McKell_Cost-of-Natural-Disasters_SINGLES_WEB.pdf)
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- 21 These figures are from a Legal Aid NSW survey on the 2013 Blue Mountains fire. According to the Insurance Council of Australia, they are consistent with industry expectations and other publicly reported figures, so have been included here. [https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/McKell\\_Cost-of-Natural-Disasters\\_SINGLES\\_WEB.pdf](https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/McKell_Cost-of-Natural-Disasters_SINGLES_WEB.pdf)
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- 23 <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2033.0.55.0012016?OpenDocument>  
(third data cube LGA Indexes, SEIFA 2016)
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- 32 <https://reporting.aihw.gov.au/Reports/openRVUrl.do>
- 33 <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA14850>
- 34 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/deaths-by-suicide-in-australia/suicide-deaths-by-state-territories>
- 35 <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA14850>
- 36 The mothers' index consists of composite scores from five different indicators relating to maternal wellbeing (maternal health, children's wellbeing, educational status, economic status and socio-economic disadvantage), with each indicator given equal weighting. Scores were sorted from low to high and ranked from 1 to 152 (1 being the best place for a mother to live) to give the overall Mothers Index rank for each LGA in NSW.  
<https://apo.org.au/node/63692>
- 37 <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/community-profiles/2021/1RNSW>
- 38 [https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar\\_crime\\_stats/bocsar\\_lgaexceltables.aspx](https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_crime_stats/bocsar_lgaexceltables.aspx)
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