



*Rebuilding the*

# RICHMOND VALLEY

A three-year recovery plan  
in response to the 2022 floods



Richmond Valley Council recognises the people of the Bundjalung nation as custodians and traditional owners of this land and we value and appreciate the continuing cultural connection to lands, their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region in the past, present and future.

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## INTRODUCTION

The catastrophic floods of February and March 2022 have changed the face of the Northern Rivers and the Richmond Valley.

Many things have been lost in these floods - homes and livelihoods, crops and livestock, buildings and infrastructure.

But our deep connection to this place, our strong sense of community and our hope for the future has not been swept away. And it will sustain us in the years ahead.

The Richmond Valley has endured eight natural disasters in just three years, and each time, our community has risen to the challenge of rebuilding our homes, repairing the infrastructure that connects our towns and villages and redefining our way forward.

This latest challenge is the largest we have faced and the work to rebuild will take many years.

This plan sets out Richmond Valley Council's vision to help restore the Richmond Valley over the next three years, in partnership with the community, disaster support agencies and state and federal governments.

It is a plan to not just rebuild - but to build back better and stronger, so we are ready to face the next challenge and embrace the next opportunity.





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# REBUILDING THE RICHMOND VALLEY

## *A message from the Mayor and General Manager*

The Richmond Valley local government area was severely impacted by the February-March 2022 catastrophic flood events which resulted in an estimated \$150 million repair bill to restore critical infrastructure.

These two large scale events also severely impacted key industries, including manufacturing and agricultural, and could cost up to \$250 million in lost production.

The devastating event saw homes, businesses, livestock, grazing land, forestry, crops, machinery and infrastructure damaged, destroyed or lost. The sheer scope of the floods means we are yet to fully realise the long-term impacts on the environment, the economy and the health and wellbeing of the community.

Council is actively working to meet the needs of our community today, while continuing to build for the future. Thankfully, both the Australian and NSW governments are supporting our area with funding to rebuild and stimulate the local economy and are working with us to fund essential repairs. We will continue our efforts to secure additional investments in essential areas which require more support to advance our renewal.

Rebuilding the Richmond Valley is a three-year recovery plan which takes real steps to address residents' concerns. It prioritises infrastructure restoration and the economic recovery of our towns and villages, while ensuring we keep sight of delivering the basics our community expects.

Council is working with the affected communities to understand their needs, and also in developing plans for the future of their towns. We have activated advisory groups to ensure there is a true collaboration and communities can share their valuable input.

Ongoing engagement with our communities will continue as we support the recovery journey of the Richmond Valley.

There will be no easy answers, and the way ahead will have plenty of challenges, but we're ready to move forward after what has been a traumatic and testing time for many people.

We would like to thank residents for their determination while times are tough. We are immensely proud of how many people stepped up and worked hard to support and protect our community during and after these flood events.

Despite the fear, the trauma, the uncertainty, and the heartbreak, we keep going. Because every Richmond Valley resident knows in their hearts that our towns and villages will come back. It's already happening. We see it everywhere we go.

Rest assured, we will redouble our efforts to provide certainty at this uncertain time - to see our region boom again, to create new jobs, deliver improved infrastructure, and support the lifestyle our residents love.

Together, we will build back better than ever.



**Vaughan Macdonald**  
General Manager



**Robert Mustow**  
Mayor





# ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE FLOODS

*The rain kept coming...*

Days of relentless rainfall tumbling on to three saturated catchments brought unprecedented flooding to the Northern Rivers in February-March 2022.

The region had just recorded a year of higher than average rainfall when a major rain cell dumped more than a month of rain in a single day. Areas in the Lismore catchment recorded up to 700mm in just 24 hours. Casino saw a new daily record rainfall on Monday 28 February, with 240mm at the airport weather station. This extreme weather event remained in place for several days and the region's three major rivers continued to rise. Flood warnings escalated from moderate to major and evacuation orders were issued. The devastation that followed was reported around the world.

The Richmond Valley is no stranger to flooding – locals can recount the 1954 and 1974 floods, the largest in living memory – but the catastrophe that struck the Mid-Richmond from February 28 saw levels up to two metres higher than these floods. Places that locals had thought were safe were suddenly engulfed in rising water. It was dark. It was cold. It was pelting rain. There was no power. No phone. And nowhere to go. The hours and days that followed the first flood will never be forgotten.

By late March, the clean-up was well underway and families had returned to their homes to begin repairs when a second major flood occurred, breaching the levee bank at Lismore and inundating the Mid-Richmond once again.

The impacts of the 2022 floods are far-reaching. Everyone in the Valley has been affected in some way, and every community has experienced flood damage. Richmond Valley Council has been working to reopen roads, get essential services running again, assess the damage and begin the long task of rebuilding. With the emergency response now completed, the community moves in to the recovery phase. Council expects that this will take at least three years. An important part of this process will be to take the lessons learned from the 2022 flood and incorporate them into our future flood planning and disaster response. This work has already begun, and this Plan maps out the actions Council will continue to undertake to support the Richmond Valley to recover.

***"We've never seen anything like this... the water is 2 metres higher than '54."***



## *Telling Our Story*

### The NSW Flood Inquiry

On 21 March 2022, the NSW Government established an independent flood inquiry to examine and report on the causes of, preparedness for, response to, and recovery from, the 2022 catastrophic flood event.

Professor Mary O'Kane AC and Michael Fuller APM have been engaged to lead the Inquiry.

The Inquiry will deliver two sets of findings – with the first report due on 30 June and the second by 30 September. These findings will help to inform the NSW Government's response to the flood and set direction for the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation, which commences in 1 July 2022.

Richmond Valley Council believes it is vital that our community's voice is heard in the Inquiry - and that the Government's response to the Inquiry recognises the importance of local

people being involved in delivering solutions for their communities. Council encouraged all members of the community to make a personal submission to the Inquiry.

Council also made a submission to the Inquiry on the community's behalf, highlighting the challenges our communities faced during the flood event and emergency response, the issues we are experiencing in the recovery phase and the need to build back better with safer housing and stronger infrastructure.

During the Recovery phase Council is represented on the Northern NSW Regional Recovery Committee and its various sub-committees, as well as the Northern Rivers Housing Recovery Taskforce.

As the findings of the NSW Flood Inquiry are released, we will adjust this Plan, as required, to include any new opportunities or issues that arise for the Richmond Valley.





# COUNTING THE COST

## About the Richmond Valley

- Population – 23,490
- Family households – 5262
- Local jobs – 7923
- Gross regional product - \$900m



## Damage to homes and businesses

- Up to 3000 properties impacted by flooding
- 1200 buildings damaged, including 840 homes and 44 businesses
- 450+ homes uninhabitable
- Up to 1000 people displaced



## Damage to community facilities: 2m+

- 5 community halls
- 6 cultural and educational facilities
- 6 emergency services buildings
- 14 sports and recreation facilities



## Damage to infrastructure: 150m+

- Roads and bridges - \$100m
- Water and sewerage - \$50m



## Total flood clean-up: 6m

- 80,000 tonnes of waste (six times our annual amount to landfill)
- Up to 980 truckloads of waste per day at the Coraki quarry transfer site



## Economic impacts

- Estimated loss to local production - \$250m over 2 years
- Main impacts on agriculture and manufacturing industry



Flood waste pile at Coraki quarry



# WOODBURN

Flooding in Woodburn was like nothing the village had seen before, with levels well above a 1 in 500 year event. Residents rushed to move to higher ground – to places that had previously been safe from flood – but the waters continued to rise. There are many stories of the terror of that Monday night - of those sheltering in the dark on the bridge and feeling the full force of the waters crashing around them – and the overwhelming sense of relief when a small army of boats arrived to rescue them. The evacuation centre at Woodburn School provided shelter for hundreds of locals waiting long days for the water to recede and the roads to reopen.

*Flood waters in Woodburn were well above historic levels*

In the wake of the flood, 154 properties in Woodburn were damaged, as well as community buildings and local businesses providing most of the employment in the village. With a second flood event four weeks later and damage to so many homes, Woodburn faces a long journey to rebuild and recover. But it has already celebrated a major milestone with the re-opening of the local school, supported by Australian Defence Force personnel who came to help with the clean-up. Council has established a Recovery Advisory Group to work with residents and support the recovery and will continue to advocate to the State government for essential needs, such as temporary housing.



## Priority Actions for Woodburn

### Homes

- Simplify and fast-track approvals for rebuild and restoration works
- Advocate for temporary housing

### Repairs to community facilities

- Woodburn Community Hall
- Visitor Information Centre
- Woodburn oval facilities
- Woodburn pool

### Community events and activities

- Woodburn Recovery Advisory Group
- Develop a flood recovery event, in consultation with the community

### Infrastructure

- Woodburn-Evans Head Road
- Woodburn-Coraki Road
- Repair sewage pump stations

### Projects

- Woodburn Place Plan
- CBD Revitalization Plan

## Telling Our Story

**There are many stories of the Woodburn flood. The account below is by Senior Constable Adam Bailey, who is a member of the Woodburn Recovery Advisory Group.**

“After days of relentless heavy rain falls on the Monday I had a phone call from an old timer who was formerly with the SES here in Woodburn. He told me it was going to be record flood levels. I made the decision to open up an evacuation centre on the only high point in town being the Woodburn Public School and Woodburn Preschool.

I rushed around Monday afternoon with assistance from a number of members of the public to move my generators, fridge and fuel to the school canteen. Supplies were taken from the bottom few shelves and deli of Woodburn IGA as water started to rush into the store. These supplies were taken up to the evacuation centre.

During the early hours of Monday night the water continued to rise fast. The situation was clearly going to be far worse than expected. Calls for assistance started to come in with members of the public in need of rescuing. Many from North Woodburn were stuck on the Woodburn Bridge overnight. By the early hours of Tuesday morning the sheer scale of the event was becoming clear. Lisa Symonds and I were working together in an attempt to co-ordinate who needed rescuing and from where. Lisa and others used social media as we deployed members of the community in personal boats

conducting rescue after rescue. This continued as day broke and more boats arrived to help. There must have been 20 to 30 local boats and fishermen from Woodburn and Evans Head on the water assisting with these rescues. Over a period of time I would say they rescued between 300-400 people during the peak of the flood when it was very dangerous. People were being rescued from the roofs and balconies of second storey homes. Boat operators were having to duck under power lines as they approached the evacuation centre’s makeshift boat ramp. As the day went on, phone and internet service all but dropped out, but luckily most had already been moved to safety. I think there could have been about 500 to 600 people and hundreds of pets at the evacuation centre. It was crazy. The Woodburn and Evans Head community did an amazing job to rescue everyone.

Given the numbers, a decision was made to ferry as many people as possible to Evans Head. Priority was given to the elderly or unwell, then woman and children. Many were in need of medication as they left their property in a hurry. Again members of the community in private boats assisted with this in reducing the numbers at the evacuation centre to a manageable level doing trip after trip over a number of days.

As day after day continued the water seemed to take forever to recede. A large number of helicopters serviced Woodburn and outlying areas with food drops and supplies. I think it was day five or six that the water had receded enough that the first Army truck was able to drive into Woodburn. It was a relief to see. The following day further support arrived and roads back into Woodburn were accessible. The devastation was clear to see. Our town and community had been destroyed. It was heartbreaking.”

- **Adam Bailey**  
Senior Constable  
Woodburn Police

*Flood damage at Woodburn Hall*





# BROADWATER

The Broadwater community saw unprecedented flooding, with levels well above a 1 in 500 year event. Low lying areas, including two local caravan parks, were quickly submerged on Monday night (28 February) and there were harrowing stories of elderly residents wading through waist-deep water in the dark and scrambling onto roofs for safety. Long-term locals – who remembered the '74 floods - watched in disbelief as the waters began to rise to the upper levels of their homes. As the rescues began, evacuees were ferried to Evans Head, with a number of evacuation centres opening up to take the ever-increasing numbers.

The first flood was followed by a second deluge four weeks later, with many homes inundated again. The floods have left nearly every home in the village (77 properties) badly damaged. The local school has been destroyed, the local service station inundated and the village's major employer, the Sunshine Sugar Mill severely impacted.

Broadwater village faces a long road to recovery, but is already rallying its resources to the task, as more families continue to move back to their properties. Council has established a Recovery Advisory Group to work with residents and support the recovery process and will continue to advocate to the State government for essential needs.

## Priority Actions for Broadwater

### Homes

- Simplify and fast-track approvals for rebuilding and restoration works
- Advocate for temporary housing

### Repairs to community facilities

- Broadwater-Rileys Hill Community Centre
- Broadwater SES & RFS buildings
- Memorial Park facilities & tennis courts

### Community events and activities

- Broadwater Recovery Advisory Group
- Develop a flood recovery event, in consultation with the community

### Infrastructure

- Pressure sewer system panels and pumps
- Rileys Hill Sewage Treatment Plant
- Broadwater-Evans Head Rd

### Projects

- Broadwater & Rileys Hill Place Plan

## Telling Our Story

**There are many stories of the Broadwater flood. The account below is by Karina McKey, who is a member of the Broadwater Recovery Advisory Group.**

"There aren't really words to describe being in a flood. The certainty it won't come any higher, because it never has before. The panic once you realise you are wrong. The frantic but slow-motion process of getting to safety. Then comes the wait. The games you play in your head of guessing heights, trying to remember the exact placement of precious items then feeling guilty about worrying about material possessions because you are alive and that should be enough. Repeat over and over for days whilst waiting for the water to recede.

But that story is common to every community that flooded. We can all describe exactly how much damage water can do, how at times the smell is overwhelming and how the sound of rain triggers immediate anxiety. Until you've experienced a flood the words will never paint an accurate enough picture.

What makes Broadwater's flood story so special is the community behind it. Our community, with help from others around us, boated people from their homes to our hill. They evacuated people and pets over the week that followed. A group with limited logistics experience banded together to pull off a community disaster response. They moved food, water, medication and fuel that had

been airdropped to us to vulnerable communities around us. People on the hill opened up their homes to those that no longer had theirs. A family turned the air dropped supplies into a hot cooked dinner for everyone who wanted one - every single night. People talked well into the evening - an important peer support group. People that had never met became community over that week, which would set the stage for what came next.

When the water receded, despite being faced with their own devastating clean ups people helped each other. They checked in with each other, shared a drink and sometimes a cry. The wider community arrived with food and care and much needed support, all of it welcomed and very much needed, but, as that fades and our little town again starts to fend for itself, for what we know is going to be a long, slow and frustrating rebuild, something amazing has happened.

We know each other better. We know the names of the people we are waving too. We know who makes an amazing banana cake and who is most

likely to agree to a mid week beer because today was rough. And, one day, when our homes are rebuilt and our school has children in it and you can order a beer at our club, and some of the rawness of being flooded has eased, that will be what defines Broadwater. That we know regardless of what comes, this is an amazing community be a part of."

**- Karina McKey**

*The Army helps with the cleanup in Broadwater*





## EVANS HEAD

Evans Head opened its doors to hundreds of evacuees as residents fled Woodburn, Broadwater and surrounds seeking sanctuary from the flood. A small army of local boats and fishermen ferried evacuees to safety, as more and more centres opened to accommodate the numbers. There were more than 500 evacuees sheltering at the Evans River School, Camp Koinonia and the Evans Head RSL, as helicopters continued to fly in more families who had been rescued from roofs and remote properties.

The town also experienced flash flooding from a major storm on Sunday 27 February, after days of heavy rainfall, with lower lying areas near the bowling club and preschool being affected first. By Monday morning, water had entered the CBD and the south side of the village was cut off by rising waters.

While there have been many images shared of the flood event, residents say it is the sounds of those long dark hours that will remain with them – the howl of the wind, the pelting rain and the roar of a torrent of water rushing from the Evans River out to sea.

In the weeks after the flood, Evans Head has become a vital hub for the recovery effort, providing much needed accommodation and services for Mid-Richmond residents who have lost their homes.

Volunteers from Evans Head help to rescue flood victims at Woodburn



## Priority Actions for Evans Head

### Community facilities and activities

- Develop and implement a signature event for the Mid-Richmond
- Town entrance way upgrade
- Work with EPA to continue beach clean-up and restoration works
- Continue to seek funding for the Three Villages cycleway

### Infrastructure

- Broadwater-Evans Head Rd repairs
- Illawong Lane drainage upgrade
- Evans Head Sewage Treatment Plant Stage 2

### Projects

- Evans Head Place Plan, including design of the CBD upgrade
- Evans Head stormwater study and stormwater upgrade



## Telling Our Story

**There are many stories of the Evans Head flood response. The account below is by Jaime Cooper from the Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre.**

“Throughout that first night, as the rain bucketed from the sky, local heroes launched their boats to save lives. The stories from those who were rescued were raw and traumatic. Some climbed out of bed in the middle of the night to the wet floor of their two-storey home, some saw neighbours’ belongings flow past their front deck, then a vehicle and possibly a shipping container. Others experienced the raging water with devastating losses of livestock and family pets.

By dawn, Evans Head was completely isolated. By 6am Roger jumped into action opening the Evans Head Bowlo for evacuees to have a warm safe place. Brett knocked on the petrol station owner’s front door asking for help to fuel the boats. In a moment, the whole town swung into action.

Our roads turned into boat ramps – one going to Broadwater and one going to Woodburn. By midmorning, with flood waters rapidly rising, laneways became a bustling highway of boats with locals answering the call to rescue families and animals.

The local school opened an evacuation centre. The school became tent city using students’ excursion tents. Animals dotted across the school grounds in between. A second evacuation site at Club Evans opened with the function room filled with donated mattresses and swags. Mid

Richmond Neighbourhood Centre buses were positioned at each ‘boat ramp’ to ferry people to each centre. With over 300 evacuees plus animals, the logistics was overwhelming.

I spent the next three days alternating resource drops to boat ramps, gathering everything the community could find from a resourceless town. Hampers ran short, gas bottles were non-existent, milk was only found in dreams and bread was a distant memory. Yet everyone kept finding and giving. Our community cooked meals, delivered food, toiletries, blankets, pillows, ice and eskies. We took scripts from boat drivers and had them filled overnight to take back the next day. We sent supplies to homes on higher ground sheltering large amounts of people and sent resources to centres at Woodburn, Broadwater and by day three even Coraki.

Locals panicked and drained the supermarkets dry. It wasn’t long before there wasn’t a business open in town where you could buy food. The school oval turned into a landing pad for helicopters delivering essential items including food and more flood evacuees, the Bowlo and Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre coordinated food efforts and, organically, a system began to form. Morning debriefs with council, emergency services and organisations

became a routine, the local pharmacy worked around the clock and the community supported the local baker to ensure they had staff and supplies to provide bread to the community.

Local school teachers volunteered tirelessly and everyone in town had a house guest or a responsibility to assist somewhere, and they did this compassionately and as one unified group.

Ten weeks on I’m still in awe and full of admiration of this community for their ongoing generosity and spirit as they continue to support their neighbours. I feel guilty that I have a nice warm bed. A guilt that is only quelled by trying to be useful in this devastating time.

Without guidance, we seamlessly made things happen and became leaders; uniting through a shared desire for our broader community to know we haven’t forgotten them.”

**- Jaime Cooper**





## CORAKI

Coraki suffered the full force of the February-March deluge, as flood waters from the Wilson and Richmond Rivers converged on the town. While evacuations of low-lying areas and the caravan park had begun earlier, heavy and persistent rainfall saw water levels rise quickly throughout Monday night 28 February, and frantic efforts to rescue family and neighbours began. With the town split by flood waters and isolated from the outside world, temporary evacuation centres emerged and volunteers stepped up to feed the hundreds who found themselves homeless. The town was inaccessible by road for several days, but volunteers continued to rescue stranded residents and ferry in essentials by boat and army helicopters provided food drops.

In the wake of the floods, 300 homes were damaged, along with local businesses and community buildings. The clean-up and recovery process had just begun when a second devastating flood hit the town four weeks later. With no temporary housing available, many locals continued to live in cars, tents and makeshift shelters while they worked to clean and repair their homes.

The people of Coraki have a long journey ahead to restore and reconnect their community. Council has established a local Recovery Advisory Group to work with residents and will continue to advocate to State Government for help with essential needs, such as additional housing and health care.

Coraki aerial view



### Priority Actions for Coraki

#### Homes

- Simplify and fast-track approvals for rebuilding and restoration works
- Advocate for temporary housing within Coraki

#### Repairs to community facilities

- Coraki Caravan Park
- Coraki Pre-School
- Youth Hall
- SES building
- Tennis courts & sports field

#### Community events and activities

- Coraki Recovery Advisory Group
- Develop a flood recovery event, in consultation with the community

#### Infrastructure

- Woodburn-Coraki Road
- Coraki Sewage Treatment Plant

#### Projects

- Coraki Place Plan

## Telling Our Story

**There are many stories from the Coraki flood. The story below, by Coraki Recovery Advisory Group member, Bianca Mavir, captures the experience of one local family.**

"After every storm comes a rainbow of hope..."

The spirit of community and fierce sense of mate-ship inspires the region to keep showing up even on our darkest days.

Day one saw the SES inundated with calls for help. They had not been allocated the resources to cope with a disaster of this magnitude. Countless locals stepped up to conduct rescues. My husband and cousin brought evacuees to our small flat and my Aunty's business next door. The town was completely cut off by floodwaters in a matter of hours. The township was separated by a torrent of water through the center of town. We were on two islands and the official evacuation center was inaccessible to our side of Coraki. We opened our homes and did what we could for one another. There was no communication. We felt very much on our own. We took in close to 30 people that first night, many elderly residents. I will never forget the haunted look in their eyes as we clothed them, fed them, and made sure they were warm. It was too dangerous to conduct rescues at night with the resources that were available. No one slept. I held my cousin as we cried for our relatives on properties out of town. No one ever came for them and we were almost certain we would never see them again. The rain was relentless. Our fear was palpable. There are

no words to describe the overwhelm or trauma. Our local heroes and the SES saved many lives but we were not prepared for this.

Day two of the flood brings a tiny calf to our door that was rescued from the raging waters. Some good Samaritans brought him into the Coraki township by boat and he collapsed in a patch of green grass out the front of our flat, a home with a newborn baby. A stash of frozen breast milk was thawed and we managed to funnel half of this into his mouth by hand. We held very little hope he would survive, but he was a fighter. We found out his mother had also made it and we didn't give up on this little miracle. He was one of only three of his herd to survive. Over time and with support from farmers, vets, and locals, little Theo was reunited with his family. Their reunion was one of the most touching and beautiful things I

Coraki Woodburn Road



have ever witnessed. A happy ending amidst the deep sense of loss our community had suffered

Day two rolls into days three, four and five before the first of the bigger vehicles could finally get to us. Hundreds of people were stranded, homeless, and without the essentials - power, water, and food. We coordinated civilian supply runs until the chopper drops began.

I remember looking across my town to an ocean, an inland body of water that was once a paddock filled with cattle. It is a beautiful crisp morning and the grass surrounding me is vibrant and green. Mother nature is cruel, but her wrath facilitates a green we would have begged for in the wrath of fire and drought years ago. A subtle irony. To me, green is the colour of hope.

As the days bleed together to become weeks we have seen a flurry of community volunteers stepping in and stepping up. Heroes that don't wear capes, but life jackets, aprons, gloves. They are armed with boats, food, cleaning supplies and shoulders to cry on.

We want to help lead our recovery, to be prepared for future disasters. We hope to grow in resilience, but to do so we need support for our businesses and for our people."

- **Bianca Mavir**



## CASINO

Casino saw flood waters flow into the main street for the first time in living memory on Monday 28 February, after days of relentless rain. Low lying areas of the town were evacuated, as flash flooding continued and the river began to break its banks. An emergency evacuation centre was established at Casino High School and volunteers rallied to help provide meals, warm clothing and blankets for the evacuees. As the water began to lap at shop doors in Walker Street, volunteers also helped with sand-bagging entrances and lifting stock and equipment above the water.

By Tuesday morning the waters had begun to recede and a small herd of confused and hungry cattle was spotted roaming around the town. Council rangers helped to round them up and the town clean up process began. By Wednesday, many of the main street shops had reopened

their doors and the clean-up trucks had begun to remove piles of waste from outside local homes. Some 270 properties were damaged, as well as local sporting facilities, roads and infrastructure.

The force of the flood water has left the riverbank severely eroded, with trees and other vegetation ripped out and years of habitat restoration work destroyed. It will take significant time and investment to restore the damage and Council is working with the state agencies responsible for the riverbank to help get stabilisation works underway.

In the aftermath of the floods, Casino's role as a regional hub has continued to grow, supporting residents from Lismore and surrounding areas with essential supplies and services while the work to restore the Lismore CBD continues.

### Priority Actions for Casino

#### Homes

- Simplify and fast-track approvals for rebuilding and restoration works
- Advocate for more temporary and long-term housing

#### Repairs to community facilities

- Casino indoor sports stadium
- Colley Park sports facilities (netball & soccer) and playgroup hall
- Casino croquet club
- Casino art gallery

#### Community events and activities

- Continue to support signature events, including Beef Week, Primex & the Casino Truck Show

#### Infrastructure

- Naughtons Gap Rd realignment & Bentley Rd landslip
- Casino sewage treatment plant & pump stations
- River footbridge replacement

#### Projects

- Casino pool upgrade Stage 1
- Casino to Bentley Northern Rivers Rail Trail
- Casino showground upgrade

## Telling Our Story

**There are many stories from the Casino flood. The story below, by Kristy Knight, captures the experience of one local family.**

"On that Sunday night my husband didn't sleep. We live on the river in Casino with our beautiful children. We could see torches from other houses throughout the night checking on the river levels as well.

On Monday the river broke the bank and reached our retaining wall and then past it. I stood on the deck and watched as the bushland next to us started slowly slipping into the river. At that point I was concerned that the high flow of water would mean our house was next. We decided to evacuate.

We packed up the car and the kids to head to the evacuation centre but we were told the bridge was closed. We were so scared by the height and velocity of the water that we wouldn't have gone

over it anyway. We couldn't find a motel with a vacancy so we just stayed in our car in the park. The whole time I am trying to keep the kids calm which is hard when I felt so much panic. They kept asking if their toys were okay, if we still had a house and when are we going home. I didn't have an answer.

After a few calls we received emergency accommodation at the lifestyle village. When the water stopped rising we checked on the house and realised we were the lucky ones. Both our neighbours were affected but the water stayed just under the deck at our home.

When I was finally able to go and work at the Casino evacuation centre, I realised the devastation other people were experiencing.

The water didn't discriminate about who it affected. From young to elderly, from secure families to rough sleepers. Everyone in its path suffered.

I saw how important it was for animals to be allowed at the evacuation centre. For some people, their beloved furry friend is all they have.

The elderly people at the evacuation centre hold a special place in my heart. They were so scared and completely out of their comfort zone. But they took comfort that they were surrounded by others who were going through the same thing. Not once did they think that it was harder for them than others, they had a hardy resilience... they didn't want fuss. A good book and a crossword puzzle were all they asked for to get them through.

My kids are now constantly focussed on the height of the river. Every time it rains they run to the window to look how high the river is and they tell me where the height of the water is while looking down at the ruined carpark as we cross the bridge. They are always monitoring and asking if it is going to flood again. The truth is, I can't say it won't."

**- Kristy Knight**



Casino aerial view



Casino aerial view



## RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Richmond Valley's rural communities and surrounding farmlands suffered long periods of isolation from rising flood waters and the destruction they left behind. The flooding was widespread, affecting communities such as Bungawalbin, Rappville, Leeville, Swan Bay, Tatham, Tomki, Codrington, Doonbah, Dobies Bite, Stratheden, Clovass and New Italy. There was extensive damage to access roads. Rural communities are still working to complete the flood clean up, to repair their homes, restore power supply, water tanks and on-site sewage treatment and replace damaged fencing and farm equipment.

Communities such as Swan Bay, Bungawalbin and Tatham have seen up to 75% of local properties damaged, including community halls, emergency services buildings and sporting facilities. Crops, livestock and farm infrastructure have also been lost and there has been extensive damage to riverbanks, riparian zones and wildlife corridors.

It will take at least three years to get rural communities back on their feet, restore key access roads and rebuild local infrastructure. Several rural roads have suffered major washouts, landslips and damage to bridges that will require major reconstruction. Repairing local freight routes, so that farmers can continue to get stock and produce to market will be a high priority. Council is establishing a Rural Communities Recovery Advisory Group to help support this process. It will also be working with Rous County Council to encourage the repair of damaged flood mitigation works, such as the Bungawalbin levy, and supporting Rous' programs to control post-flood weed infestations in rural areas.

### Priority Actions for Rural Communities

#### Homes

- Simplify and fast-track approvals for rebuilding and restoration works

#### Repairs to community facilities

- Leeville & Yorklea community halls
- Rappville, Tomki and West Coraki RFS buildings
- Rappville tennis courts

#### Community events and activities

- Rural Communities Recovery Advisory Group
- Develop a flood recovery event in consultation with rural communities

#### Infrastructure

- Bungawalbin-Whiporie Rd
- Rappville Rd
- Upper Cherry Tree Rd
- Bentley Rd landslip

#### Projects

- Work with state agencies and Rous County Council on flood infrastructure and environmental restoration programs
- Complete Rappville Sewerage Scheme

## Telling Our Story

**There are many stories from the floods in our rural communities. The account below by Recovery Advisory Group member Arthur Green captures experiences from the New Italy community.**

"I was worried. I'm involved in the SES at Woodburn and had been chatting with ex SES member Jim McCormack who was concerned about what was coming and how it could flood. None of us expected this though.

As we monitored the major downfalls in the catchment, we began to have increased concerns. Reports were coming in from Whiporie and Rappville of the inundation and at that point we knew we were in trouble.

Generally, out here we can have three different floods from three different catchments, and it can affect us in three different ways. Never all three at once... accept this time.

The long-term locals did our best to prepare the community out here, but the 1954 flood was our only reference and the water went two meters higher than that.

It took me a couple of days to find a spot where we could get service and at best it was limited. I would drive to a location and sometimes get a text message out or be able to make a patchy phone call. A satellite phone would have made the world of difference. I was one of relay services for our community to organise food drops and evacuations. Being able to reach the people we know in emergency services worked far better than the official phone numbers and channels. Local connections and knowledge were

what worked to get things done throughout this disaster. Others from the community have shared how social media saved lives. When all else failed, Facebook pulled through.

When we get flooding out here, we may get cut for a couple of days. That is what we expect and prepare for. The isolation we experienced was unprecedented. The first flood left us isolated for 14-15 days and the second flood for seven. We were without power, fuel, medication and limited food. I've never eaten so much tinned fruit and spaghetti in my life, and I hope not to again.

Our community pulled together like they always do, and we were able to get items from Iluka and Woombah before being able to reach Woodburn and Evans Head. A lot of us had to dip into our own pockets to keep the community going, especially with fuel for generators.

The café at the New Italy Museum set up a food hub. The owner Rob Duncan was so generous to let our community use that space to provide for each other.

The hardest part for me was not being able to care my 90-year-old father from Casino. We normally speak five to six times a day and I drive him to appointments and the shops. Not being able to contact me or have that routine was very hard on him and it has taken time to get him back on track.

Everyday feels like Groundhog Day. Every day it rains, every day we find it hard to move forward, every day we wonder when we can start to earn an income off the land again. It's muddy, wet and the fear of the unknown remains.

All we can do is lend an ear to others who need it, whose frustration and anger grows at the inability to move on from this. Our recovery will take time."

**- Arthur Green**

*Severe damage to Upper Cherry Tree Rd, Mongogarie*





# ABOUT THIS PLAN

The 2022 floods occurred just as councils in the Northern Rivers were preparing to review their Community Strategic Plans under the Local Government Act's IP&R requirements. The Community Strategic Plan (CSP) identifies long-term goals and priorities for the community. This helps to inform the Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plans, which set out how these goals will be achieved by Council and how resources will be allocated. When the floods arrived, Council decided to delay the review of its long-term plan and concentrate on the most immediate needs of our community in recovering from the flood. It adopted a revised IP&R framework and developed three key documents:

- **A Flood Impact Statement** to make all levels of government aware of the extent of the damage and the needs of our community. This document has been provided to the Prime Minister, the NSW Premier and other key Agencies
- **An Economic Impact Statement** to assess the potential effects on our local economy and how we can recover.
- **The Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Recovery Plan**, to guide recovery over the next three years.

Council will base all of its activities around the Recovery Plan for the next 12 months. This will allow time for the community to reflect on the sort of place we want the Richmond Valley to be in the future and prepare a new Community

Strategic Plan. Council will start consulting on the new CSP from September 2022 and adopt the plan in June 2023 after public exhibition. The Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Plan will then be incorporated into Council's new Delivery Program for 2023-25. In the meantime, the Recovery Plan will ensure that essential repairs and practical support is delivered to the people who need it most and that Council can continue to deliver the services our community needs.

**This plan is divided into three sections:**

## 1. Recover

Focusing on the urgent things we need to help people get back on their feet after the flood, revive the economy, help the environment, and start the massive task of fixing our roads, community buildings, sports fields and parks.

## 2. Prepare/Prevent

Identifying what we can do to be better prepared for natural disasters in the future as we face life in a changing climate.

## 3. Sustain

Recognizing that we still need to deliver essential services to the community during the recovery period, to complete important projects that were already funded, and set things in place for the future - such as providing more housing and jobs.

# RECOVERY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

**Community Strategic Plan**  
To be reviewed in 2023



**Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Recovery Plan**  
Replaces the Delivery Program for 2022-23



**resourcing**

**Operational Plan**



**Annual Report**

# FUNDING THE RECOVERY PROCESS

The 2022 floods have left the Richmond Valley with a massive repair bill. In public assets alone, our community is facing more than \$150m in repairs to roads, bridges and sewers— that's five times more than Council would normally spend on capital works each year. We will need to rely heavily on other levels of government for funding and support.

Many of the works envisaged in this Plan involve areas outside of local councils' responsibility – such as providing temporary housing or restoring major riverbank erosion. These works have been included because they are important to the community. Council will actively advocate for other agencies to help deliver these projects. At this stage, we do not have a clear picture of how much government funding will be available to assist our recovery. This will become clearer over the next 12 months, as we continue to work with Recovery agencies and complete damage assessments.

*Coraki Aerial View*

**There are several funding sources available to help deliver this plan. These include:**

## Government Grants

Council receives some operational grants each year, including funding for roads, but these will not be enough to cover the amount of damage from the floods. We will need additional funding and resources from the NSW and Federal Governments. So far, government assistance of more than \$4 billion has been announced in response to the disaster and Council is actively exploring all options to access this funding.

## Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements

This money is provided by the Federal Government and administered by the State. It provides much needed resources to fix roads, bridges and culverts after disasters and Council has relied heavily on this support in the past. In response to the magnitude of these floods, the scheme has now been extended to other infrastructure such as water/sewer and recreational facilities. Some of these funds will be administered by Transport for NSW, and some will be administered by the new Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation.

## Rates, Fees & Charges

This is Council's normal revenue stream and it helps to fund the daily activities that support our community, such as kerbside bin collections, providing library services and maintaining roads, parks and sports fields. Council needs to keep collecting these funds so that normal community services can continue during the recovery period. We are also exploring options for more rate relief for those affected by the floods.

## Insurance

Council has invested in flood insurance and other coverage that will help in the recovery process. Although we will receive up to \$5 million from our insurer, CivicRisk Mutual, our insurance payout will not be sufficient to cover the huge amount of damage and clean-up expenses. Council will use the insurance payments to repair essential community buildings and facilities.



## Objective #1

## HELP COMMUNITIES TO RECOVER AND RECONNECT

**Our communities have lost many things in these catastrophic floods – our homes, jobs, regional centres and services and community facilities - but what has survived, despite these challenges, is the strong connection that people have to this special place and the community ties that hold us together.**

In every community survey and consultation council has conducted over the years, people have consistently told us how much they love the Richmond Valley, the relaxed lifestyle we enjoy and the strong sense of community connection.

That is why helping people to reconnect with their town or village, re-establish their links with community and work together towards recovery is a critical part of this plan. There are practical things that council can do to help our communities to recover, such as:

- Leading community conversations about what our towns and villages will look like in the future – where new housing should be located, what the town centres should look like, the type of community facilities and open spaces that are required. The Place Plans project will help to redesign and revitalise our villages

- Delivering community programs, led by our Resilience and Recovery Team, including local Advisory Groups
- Helping community groups to get back on their feet by restoring important facilities, such as community halls, and continuing support for local groups through Council's annual program of community grants
- Strengthening the role of local libraries, which provide safe and welcoming spaces to learn, make new friends and take part in community programs. Library services will be in big demand after the floods because many people have

lost access to internet services, computers and other digital resources. Our branch libraries and the mobile library service will also play a role in providing outreach programs for rural communities and helping people to access recovery information

- Delivering community events. Our community loves signature events such as Beef Week and Primex, as well as the many local activities that take place throughout the year. Council will continue to actively support the events program, as well as working with individual communities to develop local recovery events



Royal Australian Navy personnel help with the flood clean up

## WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

## Strategies

- Work with the community to revitalize our towns and villages.
- Lead local resilience and recovery programs
- Deliver community events to encourage reconnection
- Strengthen the role of local libraries in community recovery

## Principal Activities

- Prepare Place Plans for towns and villages
- Help community groups to recommence activities
- Establish local Advisory Groups to work with the Richmond Valley Resilience & Recovery Team
- Support the Richmond Valley's signature events program
- Work with communities to develop local recovery events
- Increase technology support and digital resources at libraries
- Provide access to recovery and assistance information
- Develop library-based programs for social connection and wellbeing

## What can other levels of Government do?

- Continue to provide disaster relief and support services through Recovery Centres, Services Australia and Services NSW.
- Provide funding for Council's Recovery and Resilience Team to support community programs and events
- Provide funding programs for community groups and sports clubs to support their recovery.

## PRIORITIES &amp; PROJECTS

## To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Establish Community Advisory Groups in flood affected areas
- Complete the Casino Place Plan
- Begin work on Place Plans for Woodburn, Broadwater, Evans Head and Coraki
- Progress community hall repairs at Woodburn, Broadwater, Coraki, Leeville and Casino
- Continue the RVC Community Grants Program
- Support signature events, including Beef Week
- Host recovery events in Casino and the Mid-Richmond
- Increase the libraries' e-resources and on-line data bases
- Provide new digital services at libraries, including wi-fi printing and teleconferencing
- Offer improved access to technology on the mobile library
- Develop new library outreach programs for rural communities



## Objective #2

## SUPPORT FAMILIES AND BUSINESSES TO REBUILD

**Helping people to get back into their own homes and reopen their businesses is a top priority for the Recovery period.** This may take some time and we will need options for temporary housing for at least two years, so people can remain connected to their communities. The NSW Government will be establishing temporary housing sites in the Mid-Richmond in 2022. Council will also support people to move back on to their property, with additional concessions for caravans and other temporary options.

As part of our Development Concierge service, we will provide clear information for people planning to rebuild and help them to navigate the development application process. The NSW Government is also providing support through the Property Assessment program and Council will work closely with this scheme to help people to re-establish their home as soon as possible. We will also work with the Northern Rivers Redevelopment Corporation to explore any options for voluntary house-raising or buy-back schemes that the government may offer in future.

Getting our business community back on its feet is also a key focus and Council will be actively supporting business owners through

the redevelopment process, as required. We'll also be putting extra effort into ensuring that our commercial districts are well maintained and inviting, as we continue the clean-up and repair process.

Additionally, Council will be advocating for more assistance packages for local businesses and more help for applicants in completing the process. It will also be working with local and regional business organisations to support business recovery and secure local jobs across the region.

## What can other levels of Government do?

- Work with local councils through the Northern Rivers Redevelopment Corporation
- Provide funding for voluntary house-raising and buy-back schemes
- Streamline NSW planning processes to make it easier for homes and business to rebuild
- Expedite business grant applications, so that businesses can move forward with recovery
- Review the business grant criteria to make assistance more accessible

Casino says thank you to Australian Defence Force personnel in Operation Flood Assist



## WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

## Strategies (3 Years)

- Support temporary housing options that keep people connected to their community
- Support flood-affected residents and businesses through the development approval process
- Restore central business districts and town centres
- Support recovery of key industries

## Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Support Resilience NSW to establish modular housing sites
- Support rehoming and fostering of pets for displaced families
- Provide development concierge services to support flood affected properties
- Explore options to improve flood resilience through building design and location
- Ensure CBD precincts in Casino and the Mid-Richmond are well maintained
- Advocate for government assistance for local businesses and employees
- Partner with Regional NSW, RDA and local business organisations to support business recovery



## PRIORITIES &amp; PROJECTS

## To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Work with Resilience NSW to provide temporary homes in the Richmond Valley
- Support residents to use temporary accommodation options, such as caravans, on their own properties
- Seek funding for the RVC animal shelter upgrade to increase capacity and improve animal welfare
- Strengthen links between council and local animal rehoming agencies
- Work with the Government's Property Assessment program to fast-track inspections, orders and DAs for flood affected properties
- Work with the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation to explore options for voluntary house raising and buy-back schemes
- Repair town entrances and flood damaged assets in Woodburn, Broadwater and Coraki business districts
- Ensure Evans Head and Casino CBDs are clean and well maintained to cater for increased patronage
- Advocate to all levels of government for easy-to-access grants and support for local business
- Provide business round-tables and events to support the recovery process



## Objective #3

## RESTORE THE RICHMOND VALLEY'S ROAD NETWORK

**The Richmond Valley's 1175 km road network has been severely damaged by two consecutive major floods and it will take at least three years to repair all the damage.**

Council is currently assessing the full extent of the repairs required and expects that further damage will emerge in the post-flood period as saturated pavements begin to fail. At present, the estimated repair bill stands at \$100m, not including the cost of repairing major landslips in North Casino.

While we're undertaking these important repairs, Council also needs to continue with its existing grant-funded projects, so that we don't lose this funding for our community. We must also ensure that our regular inspection and maintenance programs are carried out, so we identify any emerging issues quickly.

The first step in the recovery process will be to complete the full damage assessment, including bridge inspections, and lodge applications for Disaster Funding Assistance with the NSW Government. Council has been very successful with this funding in the past and looks forward to continued support from the Government.

A top priority in the recovery period will be to keep our key regional link roads and freight routes operational and improve their future flood resilience. This will ensure the community has access to essential supplies and protect thousands of jobs in our major agricultural and manufacturing industries.

Council will also be focusing on our rural roads network, ensuring people have safe access to their properties and systematically repairing major damage as funds become available. Key link roads between communities – such as the Woodburn-Evans Head Road – will also be high on the list.

Another major priority for Council will be to continue our campaign to establish the Woodburn-Casino Road (MR145) as a major regional link road and improve its flood resilience. We will be advocating strongly to all levels of government for the \$40m needed to upgrade this road.



### What can other levels of Government do?

- Provide urgent Disaster Relief funding, so that repairs can be carried out quickly
- Support council with technical expertise to help design solutions to complex problems, such as the Naughtons Gap landslip
- Help Northern Rivers councils to access much-needed contract work crews and trades to complete the repair work



Naughtons Gap Road landslip

### WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

#### Strategies (3 Years)

- Document the extent of infrastructure damage and identify funding sources
- Restore critical regional transport corridors and freight links
- Remediate land-slips and develop long-term solutions for North Casino link roads
- Rebuild and repair damaged roads, bridges and culverts

#### Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Complete asset inspection programs and secure funding commitments through DRFA and other options
- Support restoration works for Summerland Way and Bruxner Highway
- Advocate to upgrade Woodburn-Casino Rd (MR145) as a key regional link road and complete restoration works
- Restore essential freight routes and community access roads
- Complete Naughtons Gap road realignment
- Complete Bentley Rd landslip remediation
- Develop & deliver three-year capital works program for road, bridge & culvert restoration across road network
- Develop & deliver three-year maintenance and inspection program for roads, bridges & culverts

### PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

#### To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Complete bridge inspection program (129 bridges)
- Secure additional resources and manage Disaster Funding claims
- Work with TfNSW to improve regional freight links, such as Summerland Way and Bruxner Highway
- Continue to deliver maintenance contracts for State and Regional Roads
- Commence next stage remediation of Coraki-Woodburn section of MR145 (\$7million)
- Advocate for additional funding to upgrade Woodburn-Casino Rd (MR145) as a key regional link road
- Complete pre-construction planning for Naughtons Gap Rd realignment
- Complete Bentley Rd landslip remediation
- Develop repair programs for Broadwater Bridge and Tatham Bridges
- Review 2022-23 Capital Works Program to prioritize flood damage repairs
- Restore the rural road network and key community roads, as disaster relief funds become available



## Objective #4

## RESTORE ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

**Essential community infrastructure, such as water and sewerage systems, community buildings, sports facilities, footpaths and cycleways have also taken a major hit from the 2022 floods.** The damage bill for our water and sewerage assets alone is at least \$50 million.

A top priority for Council will be getting these essential public health facilities back on line, so we can get people back in their homes – particularly for the Broadwater community and Riley's Hill, where the most damage to sewerage systems has occurred. Casino's aging sewage treatment plant has also suffered badly through major inundation and the plant will need to be replaced in the near future. Other major pump stations and sewage transfer systems in Casino are also badly damaged and it's important that we restore these quickly to protect the environment and keep services operational.

We also need to make significant repairs to the Casino water supply system and fix the damage to water meters and other facilities in the Mid-Richmond villages. Council will be working with Rous Water to help ensure the Mid-Richmond water supply is fully restored.

Other priorities include fixing up our damaged sporting facilities – including the Casino Indoor Sports Stadium. Most of these works are covered

by our flood insurance, but it will take time to complete the damage assessments, source the materials and complete the repairs. Council will work closely with user groups while this work is carried out.

While we're working on the repair program, Council will continue to focus on its regular maintenance routines, so that our parks and gardens, cemeteries and recreational spaces keep looking good.

### What can other levels of Government do?

- Provide Disaster Relief Funding for water/ sewer repair works and recreational facilities
- Expedite Section 60 approvals for new sewerage facilities
- Assist communities with further grants for sporting clubs who have lost equipment or facilities
- Finalize the Casino Water Security Study and Water Treatment Plant review, so that Council can progress with infrastructure upgrades



RVC work crews restoring water services at Broadwater

## WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

### Strategies (3 Years)

- Repair/rebuild water supply networks
- Repair/rebuild sewage treatment plants and sewerage networks
- Restore and maintain community facilities and assets

### Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Complete urgent repair works to water supply assets
- Design, secure approvals & funding for Casino Water Treatment Plant upgrade
- Deliver quality water supply services
- Complete urgent repair works to sewerage system assets
- Complete Evans Head Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) Stage 2
- Construct Rappville Sewerage Scheme
- Design, secure approvals & funding for Casino STP upgrade
- Deliver efficient sewerage services
- Repair flood damaged community buildings
- Restore damaged assets, including sporting facilities, parks, recreation areas, cemeteries, footpaths and cycleways
- Continue to maintain community buildings and assets in accordance with asset plans and programs

## PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

### To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Commence replacement of the carbon dosing system at Casino Raw Water Pump Station
- Repair and recommission Rileys Hill Sewage Treatment Plant
- Complete repairs to Broadwater pressure sewer system and Mid-Richmond sewage pump stations
- Design a new sewage transfer system for South Casino
- Finalise designs and approvals for Evans Head STP Stage 2
- Construct Rappville Sewerage Scheme
- Secure funding for Casino STP upgrade and finalise the concept design
- Complete improvements to chlorine dosing systems at Casino WTP
- Complete repairs to the Indoor Sports Stadium and other facilities at Colley Park
- Repair flood damage to Woodburn Pool plant room
- Commence restoration of sports facilities in the Mid-Richmond villages
- Continue to maintain and develop local cemeteries
- Develop options to reconstruct Casino footbridge across the Richmond River





## Objective #5

# RESTORE THE ENVIRONMENT

**The recovery process for local homes, community buildings and infrastructure is expected to take at least three years, but the recovery process for the natural environment will take much longer than that.**

These unprecedented floods have ripped through riverbanks, destroyed large areas of vital habitat and left a legacy of major pollution incidents. At least 70 percent of the Richmond River catchment within Council's area has been impacted in some way and it will take a long-term program to restore important ecosystems.

Stabilising and restoring the river banks is one of the most urgent issues for our community. The sheer force of flood waters has ripped out trees and vegetation right along the Richmond River and badly eroded the bank. This major task is beyond Council's resources and we will be relying on the State Agencies responsible for managing this land to carry out the restoration works. Council will also be advocating for support to restore damaged river banks in the Bungawalbin and Mid-Richmond areas.

In the meantime, we have started work on restoring important habitat areas, including nesting and feeding sites for migratory birds and the flying fox roosting areas along the river. Restoring this habitat will help to relocate the flying foxes from our local parks and backyards.

Restoring the health of the river will take many years and a targeted clean-up, monitoring and restoration program will be required. Council will be working closely with the EPA, Crown Lands, Local Land Services and other agencies to help improve water quality in our river, to protect our town's drinking water supply, restore habitat and ensure it is safe to swim and fish in the waterways.

We'll also be working with the EPA to help manage pollution risks through damaged fuel tanks and chemical spills that occurred during the floods. Damaged septic tanks and other on-site sewage treatment systems will also need some attention and Council will be undertaking an inspection and improvement program for high risk sites. We'll also be working closely with Rous County Council to help prevent weed infestation from all the material carried down the river and onto our farmlands.



*Critical flying fox roosting areas along the river have been lost*

### What can other levels of Government do?

- Continue to support the clean-up of riverbanks and waterways
- Undertake restoration of riverbanks and waterways
- Provide expertise to help manage pollution risks and contaminated lands
- Support habitat restoration through funding programs



### WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

#### Strategies (3 Years)

- Work with government partners to restore and stabilise damaged river banks
- Restore riparian habitat zones in Casino & the Mid-Richmond
- Finalize flood clean-up and incident management.
- Manage river water quality risks

#### Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Advocate for riverbank assessment and restoration programs in Casino, the Mid-Richmond and Bungawalbin
- Seek funding to design and deliver riparian habitat restoration programs
- Complete inspections of underground petroleum storage systems (UPSS) and develop remediation plans
- Partner with EPA to address flood-related chemical and biological hazard incidents
- Manage high risk on-site sewage management systems (OSSM)
- Partner with State agencies to support Richmond River water quality monitoring
- Manage compliance with Environmental Licences

### PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

#### To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Partner with LLS and DPIE to deliver the rural land Riverbank Erosion Support program
- Work with Rous County Council to support restoration of levee banks
- Assess damage to council-managed riverbank lands and seek funding for restoration works
- Deliver the First Year Milestone for the Flying Fox Habitat grant
- Work with Rous County Council to address post-flood weed infestation
- Identify and assess flood-affected UPSS in high risk areas
- Work with EPA to monitor and remediate contaminated lands in flood-affected areas
- Commence the inspection and remediation program for high-risk OSSM
- Develop remediation plans for leachate and effluent ponds at Council facilities

*Casino aerial view*





## Objective #6

## IMPROVE THE DISASTER RESILIENCE OF PUBLIC ASSETS

**The 2022 flood was one of the worst natural disasters our community has experienced. We want to do everything we can to avoid or reduce the impacts of these events in future.**

While we can't avoid extreme weather events, we can improve the way our assets are designed and invest in flood-proofing high-risk areas.

One of the first tasks will be to restore damaged emergency infrastructure – such as SES and RFS buildings that were impacted by the floods, so it is ready for the next emergency. Council will also continue to maintain the Regional Emergency Operations Centre and explore ways for Casino aerodrome to play a more active role in disaster response. Improving facilities for rescue aircraft to refuel safely will be one of the first options to consider.

Council also plans a major review of stormwater drainage networks in Casino and Evans Head. Although we will always experience stormwater challenges with towns and villages located on the floodplain, there may be options to help reduce the impacts through redesign and improved stormwater management. We will be advocating strongly to State and Federal Governments to help fund the substantial cost of these studies and improvement programs. We'll also be looking at ways to make our sewerage network



Coraki flood clean up

more flood resilient, to try and reduce sewage overflows in heavy rain and flood.

Another key focus for advocacy will be improving telecommunications networks. Many homes and businesses lost internet and mobile phone services at critical times during the flood. Council raised this issue with the Flood Inquiry and we will continue to highlight these problems to Government.

We'll also be looking to build our community's long-term resilience to disaster by improving water security for our region, so we are better prepared for future droughts and bushfire. Council has been working on this plan for the last two years and is ready to start building solutions for the Casino supply.

### What can other levels of Government do?

- Require telecommunications companies to make their networks more resilient and improve their disaster response
- Provide funding to help carry out stormwater studies and build solutions
- Provide funding, technical support and fast-tracking to rebuild better infrastructure with more resilient designs and materials
- Clarify ongoing agency responsibilities for establishing and managing evacuation centres

### WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

#### Strategies (3 Years)

- Restore and strengthen emergency response infrastructure
- Improve local stormwater & drainage networks
- Build resilience into our water supply and sewerage networks
- Advocate for improved telecommunications networks

#### Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Repair flood damage to RFS and SES buildings
- Maintain Regional Emergency Operations Centre and equip council-owned evacuation centres
- Strengthen the role of Casino aerodrome in emergency response
- Review Casino stormwater model and develop stormwater risk management works program
- Develop stormwater model and risk management works for Mid-Richmond communities
- Secure long-term water supply for Casino & the Mid-Richmond
- Complete automation and telemetry upgrade for water/sewer assets
- Reduce inflow/infiltration in sewerage systems
- Advocate for improvements to telecommunications services

### PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

#### To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Complete damage assessments and commence repairs for SES facilities at Broadwater and Coraki
- Complete damage assessments and schedule repairs for RFS facilities
- Assess facilities at Council-owned buildings used for evacuation centres and plan upgrades
- Investigate options to improve aerodrome facilities to support emergency services, including refueling facilities
- Inspect Casino and Evans Head stormwater systems to identify current state and performance of these assets
- Seek funding to review and develop stormwater models for Casino and Mid-Richmond communities and complete risk management planning
- Identify preferred option for Casino water supply augmentation
- Work with Rous Water to secure the Mid-Richmond's water supply
- Complete automation upgrade at Casino WTP
- Continue the inflow detection program for Casino, Coraki and Evans Head sewerage systems
- Consult with the community on issues with telco blackspots during the flood and advocate for improvements



## Objective #7

## BUILD RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

**The Richmond Valley has experienced eight natural disasters in the past three years – each with devastating impacts for our community. Our climate is changing, and we need to be prepared for life in a more challenging environment in the coming years.**

Improving our flood modelling and risk management planning for the floodplain is an important first step. Council has been working on a new flood model for the past 12 months, so we are well advanced to integrate the latest information from the 2022 flood and review our flood modelling. Once this is complete, we will prepare a new Risk Management Plan, which will include flood hazard mapping and consider the building and development standards we apply in flood-affected areas.

Council's Resilience and Recovery Team will also be working closely with communities to provide education programs and improve disaster preparedness. Council has committed to supporting the team for the next two years and will look at establishing a permanent resilience role in the future.

Another strategy to help us adapt is to reduce our demand on natural resources and become more self-reliant for food production and waste management. The Richmond Valley has a long

tradition of agriculture and food processing and there are many benefits from improving our local food supply – both in disaster response and ongoing business and tourism opportunities. Council will continue with its agri-business and Paddock to Plate initiatives, as well as continuing to support more food manufacturing industries to establish in the Regional Jobs Precinct.

Finding better solutions to manage our waste is also part of the long-term strategy to become more resilient. Council has been working with other North Coast councils to help find a regional solution to waste management. We will progress with this project in 2022-23.



### What can other levels of Government do?

- Support Northern Rivers councils to review and finalise their flood modelling and risk management planning
- Deliver the \$10.4m Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative and \$150m pledged to fund flood mitigation and water security projects
- Respond promptly to the NSW Flood Inquiry with a clear action plan
- Continue to deliver the NSW Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy

## WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

### Strategies (3 Years)

- Improve long-term flood planning and risk management
- Improve community preparedness and capacity to respond to natural disasters
- Support local food production
- Reduce our demand on natural resources
- Explore alternative waste management options

### Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Complete Richmond Valley Flood Study and Floodplain Risk Management Plans
- Support safe development in bushfire & flood prone areas
- Support community disaster preparedness education
- Implement the Richmond Valley Adverse Event Plan
- Continue to support farm-based food sales, farmers markets and Paddock to Plate initiatives
- Implement demand management programs to reduce water consumption



## PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

### To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Work with DPE to finalize 2022 flood levels and integrate into Richmond Valley flood study
- Seek funding to complete new Floodplain Risk Management Plans
- Support the Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative and advocate for solutions to mitigate future flood impacts
- Update Bushfire Prone Land maps
- Explore options to provide more information to property owners on disaster risk
- Fund and support the Richmond Valley Resilience & Recovery Team
- Deliver the annual Get Ready disaster preparedness program
- Review the RV Adverse Event Plan to incorporate lessons from the 2022 flood
- Explore new opportunities for farm-based food businesses
- Deliver a new Paddock to Plate "foodie" event in 2022
- Partner with Rous Water to deliver the regional demand management strategy
- Complete the regional alternative waste solutions EOI process and explore opportunities to establish new facilities



## Objective #8

## STRENGTHEN THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

**Strengthening the regional economy and providing more jobs has always been a top priority for the Richmond Valley and Council has been working closely with the NSW Government over the past 12 months to establish the Richmond Valley Regional Jobs Precinct.**

The local economy has recorded steady growth over the past two decades, with annual production of more than \$900 million. Key drivers of the economy are agricultural industries and manufacturing, with support services, such as health and education, also playing an important role. Many of these businesses were already under pressure from the 2019 drought and bushfires, subsequent storms and floods and the COVID pandemic. The 2022 floods delivered another major blow, particularly for those based in the Mid-Richmond.

To help understand the scale of the impacts, Council commissioned an independent Economic Analysis, which predicted production losses of \$250m over the next two years for the local economy. The study said these losses would increase if we couldn't get businesses back on their feet within the first 12 months after the

flood. Objective 2 focuses on this important work and Council will continue to work with local businesses and to advocate for their needs during the recovery period.

The long-term prosperity of our region relies on building a diverse economy, with a range of job opportunities, so Council will continue its focus on building this resilience in the coming years. This will include continuing work on our economic development strategy and working with other development groups in the Northern Rivers to boost the regional economy. Key catalysts for future economic growth in the Richmond Valley include the Regional Jobs Precinct, the Northern Rivers Rail Trail and the upgrade of the Casino showground to house a regional equestrian centre. Continuing to grow our local tourism industries will also be a focus for the future, although there will be some challenges during the recovery period, due to high demand for accommodation. Council plans to establish a tourism advisory group to help guide this process and ensure that the Richmond Valley's visitor economy remains strong.

Council will also continue to grow its own business activities, including the Northern Rivers Livestock Exchange (NRLX) and its two quarries, to provide long-term benefits to the community and support the recovery process.

Northern Rivers Livestock Exchange (NRLX)



### What can other levels of Government do?

- Deliver the Regional Jobs Precinct Master-plan and assist in attracting new investment to the Richmond Valley
- Assist local businesses to rebuild and recover through targeted and easy-to-access assistance programs
- Review the Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Strategy to provide a clear plan for economic recovery

## WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

### Strategies (3 Years)

- Establish the Richmond Valley Regional Jobs Precinct (RJP) and support regional economic growth
- Develop the Northern Rivers Rail Trail and other signature projects for economic stimulus
- Support local businesses to recover and prosper
- Attract new businesses to the Richmond Valley

### Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Finalize and implement the Richmond Valley Regional Jobs Precinct (RJP) master plan
- Work with Regional NSW to attract investment to RJP precincts and the Richmond Valley
- Work with neighbouring councils to support completion of the full length of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail
- Complete Casino memorial pool upgrade
- Complete Casino showground upgrade
- Enhance existing business networks to support business growth.
- Strengthen the visitor economy
- Continue to grow Council's business activities to benefit the community
- Create a regulatory environment that supports investment

## PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

### To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Prepare an Economic Development Strategy for the Richmond Valley
- Contribute to the update of the Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Strategy
- Prepare a Planning Proposal for LEP amendments to support the Regional Jobs Precinct Masterplan
- Continue to work with Regional NSW to implement the RJP project and attract new investment
- Complete Stage 1 of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail – Casino-Bentley Section
- Continue work on Stage 1 of the Casino Memorial Pool upgrade and seek funding for Stage 2
- Continue work on Casino Showground upgrade
- Continue to offer development concierge services and case management to support business developments through the application process
- Maintain a data base of local businesses and actively engage with local and regional business organisations
- Establish a Richmond Valley tourism advisory group to support and revitalize the industry in the recovery period
- Complete the Casino water tower mural and promote the project through the Australian Art Trail
- Position the Northern Rivers Livestock Exchange as the lead facility in Northern NSW



## Objective #9

## ADDRESS LONG-TERM HOUSING NEEDS

**The Northern Rivers was in the grips of a housing crisis before the 2022 floods occurred. Now the situation has escalated, with more than 400 homes uninhabitable in the Richmond Valley local government area and up to 1000 people displaced.**

The housing shortage is hitting those on low incomes the hardest, with young first home buyers struggling to enter the market and private rentals now largely unaffordable for those on income support or low wages. Council's community survey in 2021 showed that only 19% of people thought housing was available or affordable in the Richmond Valley. Anglicare Australia's March 2022 Rental Affordability Snapshot showed rental affordability on the North Coast was at an all-time low. Caravan parks, often the last viable low-cost option for renters, had been inundated and their residents displaced into a rental market where they cannot compete.

Although the NSW Government will help out with temporary housing options, such as pod villages, for the next few years, this will not resolve the long-term lack of housing availability – and the lack of suitable housing choice for people of all ages. Council has been working on this challenge for the past 12 months, with an Urban Growth

Management Study nearing completion. This study will identify how much housing will be required to cater for an increasing population, and where new homes are best located to service employment zones and reduce the risk of natural hazards.

Once the study is finalised – including consultation with the community – it will help to inform Council's future land management strategies, including proposals for new residential rezonings. While many of the new homes envisaged will be provided by the private market, Council will also be working to increase options for social and affordable housing in the Valley.

We are currently working with the NSW Government to activate Crown Lands which are zoned residential to provide more housing options. Council is also supporting not-for-profit organisations to establish affordable housing in the Casino area, with a number of projects in the pipeline. Another option is for Council itself to purchase, develop and offer new housing lots to the market, where a community benefit can be obtained. The recent Canning Grove development has provided 20 new homes for Casino and further development is being considered.

### What can other levels of Government do?

- Invest in affordable housing projects, through activation of Crown Land holdings, or support for community housing providers
- Revise the North Coast Regional Growth Strategy to prepare for new housing release in the Richmond Valley
- Streamline planning processes to make it easier and faster to deliver new housing
- Provide wrap-around social services for people in temporary housing villages to help them find new accommodation
- Provide funding for essential infrastructure to fast-track new greenfield housing developments

*A Coraki family thanks the many volunteers who came to help with the clean-up*



### WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

#### Strategies (3 Years)

- Ensure there is sufficient land & infrastructure to support long-term housing needs
- Provide a range of housing choices for the community
- Identify, purchase and develop suitable residential land to support growth

#### Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Complete the Richmond Valley Urban Growth Management Strategy and start to implement the recommendations
- Work with NSW Planning & Environment to update the Regional Growth Strategy and release additional residential land in Richmond Valley growth areas
- Seek government funding for essential infrastructure to activate new housing areas
- Partner with the NSW Government to activate Crown Land for affordable housing
- Investigate options for Council to secure and develop suitable residential land to increase housing availability
- Streamline approvals for rezoning, sub-division and residential developments
- Promote opportunities for additional development in existing residential areas



### PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

#### To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Work with the Department of Planning & Environment to incorporate the RV Urban Growth Management Strategy recommendations into the Regional Growth Strategy
- Commence the review of the Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS), Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and Development Control Plan (DCP) in response to the Urban Growth Management Strategy, Casino Place Plan and Mid-Richmond Place Plans
- Support applicants to progress planning proposals and servicing strategies for new subdivisions
- Continue to work with the Northern Rivers Housing Taskforce to activate residential Crown Lands for housing
- Investigate options for purchase of suitable land for residential development

*Flood clean-up at Coraki*





## Objective #10

## LEAD AND ADVOCATE FOR OUR COMMUNITY

**Providing clear, accountable leadership will be essential in supporting our community through the recovery process over the coming years.** Council expects it will take at least three years to get things back on track. But not everything will be the same as before.

The 2022 floods have changed the community's understanding of how flooding affects the Valley and there are many views on how we can stay safe from natural disasters in the future. When the floods arrived, the community was mid-way through Our Big Conversation about the future of the Richmond Valley, as part of the review of the Community Strategic Plan. This conversation needs to be resumed, in the light of what we have learned from this catastrophic event. From September 2022, Council will resume the consultation for the long-term plan – and allow

plenty of time so that everyone can have a say on the future of the Valley. We will also continue to keep the community up to date through social media, Council's website, newsletters, live-streaming council meetings and working with advisory groups

Advocating to other levels of government for community priorities will also be a key focus over the next three years. Council is represented on the Northern Rivers Recovery Taskforce and its sub-committees, including the Housing Taskforce. We will also seek to build positive working relationships with the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation to ensure that the Richmond Valley's needs are not forgotten in the massive regional rebuilding process ahead. And we'll continue to work with the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation to explore opportunities for regional advocacy or recovery projects.

## What can other levels of Government do?

- Keep listening to our community – work with Council, local groups and individuals to understand what we need during the recovery period
- Respond promptly to the Independent Flood Inquiry with clear priorities, policies and programs that make a positive difference
- Ensure consistency and collaboration across the many agencies that are involved in flood recovery, so that people receive clear communication

*Volunteers deliver hay to stranded animals*



## WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

## Strategies (3 Years)

- Strengthen engagement between council and the community
- Advocate to federal and state governments for community needs and priorities
- Enhance partnerships with Northern Rivers councils and other regional agencies
- Lead with integrity

## Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Develop and deliver the RV Community Engagement Strategy
- Complete the CSP review in consultation with community
- Advocate for community priorities and actively seek grant funding
- Actively support NRJO shared initiatives
- Provide representative and accountable community governance

*Casino's Thankyou Parade for Australian Defence Force personnel*



## PRIORITIES &amp; PROJECTS

## To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Continue Our Big Conversation to inform the review of the Community Strategic Plan, from September 2022
- Continue to work with community and business advisory groups and develop a program of listening tours and outreach council meetings
- Deliver a new Community Strategic Plan and supporting IP&R plans by June 2023
- Complete a new Richmond Valley Council Community Engagement Strategy by 2023
- Keep the community up to date with information through social media, newsletters, council's website and other media
- Continue to work with the Northern Rivers Recovery Taskforce and other sub-committees to address issues and raise community concerns
- Remain actively engaged with the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation and explore options for shared flood recovery activities
- Ensure Council meetings are accessible to the public and continue to provide live-streaming services
- Support Councillors to undertake professional development programs
- Ensure Richmond Valley Council complies with legislative requirements and processes.



## Objective #11

## MANAGE COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND PROVIDE GREAT SERVICE

**Although the flood response will be front and centre for the next few years, Council still needs to continue the many day to day services that our community relies upon.**

Kerbside bins will still need to be collected, public facilities cleaned, main streets, parks, sports grounds and cemeteries well maintained and all the regulatory services Council provides – such as rangers, environmental health, development assessment and building inspections will still go on.

Managing our resources responsibly and ensuring we have enough funding and staff resources to get the recovery job done will be a key focus for the next three years. The NSW Government has provided some support with cash-flow and offsetting cost increases and Council will continue to work closely with all levels of government to secure as much assistance as possible for our community.

Another key focus will be continuing to offer our local employment schemes for young people, to help them get a start in their career. Council is the second-largest employer in the Richmond

Valley and will continue to invest in local jobs to support recovery. The YES program has provided a wide range of opportunities for school-based trainees and apprenticeships and many participants have gone on to complete further training at TAFE or university. The women's Try a Trade program is also well supported by the community – providing a chance for women to try new opportunities in roles such as road construction, parks and gardens, or waste management. Council will be seeking further funding for employment schemes and additional resources to deliver essential recovery works.

### What can other levels of Government do?

- Continue to offer assistance with local councils' operational costs during the recovery period
- Provide flexibility to allow Council to focus on recovery
- Providing funding to support locally led solutions to rebuild our community



## WHAT WILL COUNCIL DO?

### Strategies (3 Years)

- Manage resources responsibly
- Provide a high standard of customer service
- Strengthen Council's role as a leading local employer
- Deliver quality services for the community

### Principal Activities (3 Years)

- Undertake long-term financial and asset management planning
- Ensure resources are managed sustainably and transparently
- Enhance procurement systems
- Implement the RV Customer Service Charter
- Deliver effective and progressive Regional Library and Casino Indoor Sports Stadium services and programs
- Develop and implement RV Workforce Management Strategy
- Continue to provide local employment schemes & development opportunities
- Deliver efficient & affordable waste management services
- Deliver consistent regulatory and compliance services.
- Provide great corporate support services to improve efficiency

## PRIORITIES & PROJECTS

### To be delivered in year 1 of the Plan

- Ensure RVC meets all regulatory requirements for financial management and audit
- Provide regular reports to Council on financial performance.
- Finalize the RV Asset Management Strategy and asset management plans
- Provide regular reports to Council on performance against Customer Service benchmarks
- Investigate new trends and technologies to support a modern library service
- Develop an online community directory for those seeking assistance from NGOs, agencies and businesses
- Implement the RV Workforce Strategy
- Continue to offer Council's Youth Employment Scheme and annual Try and Trade program for women
- Deliver the Information Technology strategy to support a modern, mobile workforce
- Manage cyber-security and utilise new technologies to improve safety and efficiency
- Deliver the Richmond Valley Waste Management Strategy
- Complete Nammoona waste facility upgrade
- Deliver customer-focused regulatory services that comply with legislative requirements
- Manage Council's fleet and procurement functions efficiently
- Provide quality support services for Council's maintenance and construction crews





# MEASURING SUCCESS

**Council will monitor the delivery of the Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Plan and its success in achieving the objectives. There are two main ways to do this:**

## 1. Measuring Outputs

Did we do what we said we would do? Have we completed all the projects and programs in the plan? Where they delivered on time and within scope and budget?

We will measure these results through our organisational monitoring and reporting systems. Council will receive monthly reports on expenditure and quarterly reports on completion of works.

## 2. Measuring Outcomes

Did we make a positive difference by delivering the actions in this plan? Did they help people to rebuild and recover? Do communities feel safe and connected? Have we helped the environment to recover? Is the local economy in a better position?

We will measure outcomes in a number of ways including:

- Listening to community feedback through surveys, listening tours and other engagement activities
- Monitoring state and regional reports, including reports from the Recovery Taskforce and Regional NSW
- Measuring local trends in redevelopment, housing applications, productivity and employment
- Monitoring environmental health, such as water quality and habitat regeneration
- Comparing Council's financial performance against the NSW local government benchmarks
- Using Council's audit and risk management functions to assess organisational performance

## How we will keep you updated

Council will receive a six-monthly review on progress throughout the life of the plan and the community will receive regular updates through community newsletters, social media and Council's website.

In the final year of the Plan, a State of the Valley report will be prepared for the incoming Council in 2024 to reflect on the Recovery journey and the level of success it has achieved.







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