

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria

Rochester – Wednesday 23 August 2023

#### MEMBERS

Sonja Terpstra – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Melina Bath

Gaelle Broad

Wendy Lovell

Samantha Ratnam

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Sheena Watt

#### PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

John Berger

Ann-Marie Hermans

Joe McCracken

Evan Mulholland

Rachel Payne

**WITNESS**

Amanda Logie, Manager, Rochester Community House.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open the committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria. Could I please ask that the gallery remain silent. We are starting the next session. This public hearing is for the Environment and Planning Committee, a bipartisan committee of the Parliament looking into the October flood event. We will be providing a report to Parliament, which will include recommendations to the government. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and paying my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I welcome any members of the public in the gallery and remind those in the room to be respectful of proceedings and to remain silent at all times.

All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders, therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

I will just take the opportunity to introduce myself and the rest of the committee to you. My name is Sonja Terpstra. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee and a Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region.

**John BERGER:** I am John Berger, Member for Southern Metro.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Wendy Lovell, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Hi. Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

**Melina BATH:** Hello. Melina Bath, Member for Eastern Victoria Region.

**Sheena WATT:** Sheena Watt, Northern Metropolitan.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for Northern Victoria Region.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Morning. Samantha Ratnam, Member for Northern Metropolitan Region.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you all. With that, I will hand over to you. If you can keep your opening remarks to about 5 to 10 minutes, that will allow us lots of time to ask you questions, so over to you. Thanks, Amanda.

**Amanda LOGIE:** My name is Amanda Logie, and I have been the Manager/coordinator at Rochester Community House for the past 14 years and was on the ground during both the 2011 and 2022 flood events. Welcome to Rochester. I am not sure how many of you stayed here last night or stayed close by, but I wondered how you found our frosty morning this morning.

**John BERGER:** Fresh. Very cold.

**Amanda LOGIE:** Oh, so imagine waking up in your caravan this morning and then having to run outside to the toilet, then running back outside again to the portable shower to have a shower. That is how many of our community are still living 10 months down the track. On the ground immediately following the event it was local volunteers and organisations who rallied and got in and got the job done. With many of us having lived the experience of the 2011 event, we knew that we needed to get teams on the ground and clean houses out. As

a community, we enabled our own playbook, developing a simple Google doc for people who needed help and people who could help. Team meetings were held every morning to plan the day, and then we just got in and got on with it. In comparison to 2022, the 2011 event was a trickle. We estimate that 90 per cent of our community was inundated, but 100 per cent of our community has been affected by this devastation. I am being sidetracked now. As part of those morning meetings, I just want to shout out to Coliban Water, and you will understand why down the track. They were sending out text messages on our behalf. It was our only way of communicating to our entire community, because our NBN was down and our landlines were down.

Here we are, just over 10 months since the October event, and our community, the buildings and the people are all still broken. It is not okay for a large majority of our community to be living in caravans and substandard conditions. We do not know how many people have managed to move back into their homes, because of the level of guilt that they feel for moving forward while some of their friends and family are still waiting to see a scope of works or even for works to begin on their homes. The survivor guilt of those who were not directly impacted is also huge, and this I can attest to. However, I am not sure if I could have steered the ship at community house for this long if I had to go home to a caravan for the last 10 months, not knowing how long I was going to be living like that for. I take my hat off to my staff members who are currently living in these conditions.

The Campaspe River is the fastest rising river in Victoria. It has been proven time and time again that the local knowledge, upstream and downstream, is more accurate than the professionals and the advice that was given at the two community meetings in the week leading up to the October event. The response, and moving into relief within Rochester, was entirely community led. This is where we need change. All levels of government need to recognise that this response was indeed community led and work with communities like us to enable us to better protect ourselves from future events.

Neighbourhood houses play an instrumental role in their communities and respond to the needs at the time. There are over 400 in the state, and we are all well placed to support both the communities and all levels of government, given the opportunity. But this is a two-way street. The houses need immediate resources to be able to provide staff on the ground, because not all communities have the incredible capacity that we have in our community, where so many staff from so many organisations and businesses – and this is where Coliban Water came in as well – willingly give their time and expect nothing in return.

Given our experience and role in the 2011 event, we were – we thought – prepared for the 2022 event. We knew we needed volunteers to help us, and we knew that our community needed all the help that they could get. From the roller-coaster that we have been on for the last 10 months, I am just going to highlight a few things that we have come across that you may like to ask questions about: sandbag distribution; the Australian Defence Force; lack of support from organisations such as Services Australia initially; lack of resources, funding, processes and procedures – a playbook, if you like; volunteer burnout; and insurance. I have made mention of a playbook that we need in times like this – times that we know will become more regular due to the impacts of climate change and lack of mitigation – or, at the very least until, hopefully, we see some form of mitigation upstream of Rochester. I honestly cannot see that this playbook would be that difficult or costly to implement. I am sure it would get used again, unfortunately.

At community house we see the faces of the people every single day; we have done for the last 10 months. When all levels of government have been getting themselves organised and staff into positions, we have had staff on the ground. We have sourced funding, non-governmental, and employed staff so that we can continue to support our community.

The mental health of our community should and must be at the forefront of all levels of government minds. We have been told that we need to be more resilient. This insult from the water minister was a real kick in the guts to the members of the community who heard it, and I challenge you to find a more resilient community than us. Our resilience is the only reason why there has been minimal tragedy over the last 10 months. We have had community events as an organisation. We have partnered with other organisations to provide community and social events for our community. It is so essentially important for our community to maintain that connection with one another. It is absolutely essential. I could go on, but I will not. I am sure you have got plenty of questions, but thank you very much for your time.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Amanda, for those opening remarks. I might start with a question. In previous sessions we have heard – and your submission also echoes this – that there has been a really strong and important community-led response. But we have also heard concerns around the lack of coordination and perhaps that a more centralised kind of response is needed. Those two concepts kind of do not really sit well together. So what should it be? Should it be in partnership with a government response as well as a community response? Who drives it? In your world, in your eyes, what would be the ideal way of leading a community response?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Well, absolutely, exactly what you just said – a partnership.

**The CHAIR:** But who drives it, though?

**Amanda LOGIE:** And that is the thing: we are on the ground. The communities are on the ground. I was having phone calls from the local shire, and so I was constantly in conversations with them and had that support, but we were actually driving it because of the instance of not just Rochester being flooded at the time. There was widespread flooding across the state, which we know, and so we were essentially working together. Now, if it did not look very organised, maybe that was from the outside. From where we were sitting, that 8 o'clock meeting that we had every morning for weeks – it set our day and it set the task. So we actually felt like we were a lot more organised than we were in the 2011 event.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. I think we have heard how people have found it difficult to make claims and those sorts of things. Could you talk about your role – the community house's role, if you did have one – in helping people perhaps make applications and those sorts of things – because I understand originally and initially there was no internet and there were problems with that. So how did you overcome that, and then how did you build on that into then helping people as you went through the process?

**Amanda LOGIE:** There were a few heated phone conversations. We were getting a bit of pushback from the agencies to say, you know, that can be done online. You have only got to look at the stats to see that Rochester has a higher-than-state-average ageing population, so we needed people here on the ground. It was just through quite a few heated phone conversations and us advocating as an organisation for the community to get people here on the ground, and that was the role that we played.

**The CHAIR:** So you were able to get the message out then to people in the community that could not access things online that you could come down.

**Amanda LOGIE:** Absolutely, yes.

**The CHAIR:** How did you do that?

**Amanda LOGIE:** We had volunteers – again, amazing volunteers that we had right from the get-go, locals that were on the ground with us. And we just put out – it was a daily; it has now dropped back to a weekly – Rocky news. We were printing it the best way that we could and emailing it. That is where we also utilised the Coliban Water text messaging system. We would send them a daily message, and they would put that out for us at no cost to us, which was just amazing.

**The CHAIR:** And so the main form of communication during that time, was it email and text message, or was it –

**Amanda LOGIE:** Emails were not working. We had no internet.

**The CHAIR:** No, but you just said you were putting it out by email, so I was just wondering about that.

**Amanda LOGIE:** Sorry, yes. So –

**The CHAIR:** So what was the main form during that time?

**Amanda LOGIE:** The text messaging and the paper copies of the actual Rocky News, we titled it, and we are just continuing that. That was just a bit of a 'What's on'. We also had moved into one of – essentially Rochester is cut in two. I actually live on the east side of the river, so I was stuck over there. We had someone from this side of the river that took over the Presbyterian church hall and the church, and that is where we set up

shop, essentially, because this building had been, like most of the town, inundated. So that is where we were working out of. So once we got into there, that was the place. That was where the barbecues were. We had no supermarket for nearly three weeks, so that is where all the food was and we just had volunteers running that food pantry seven days a week.

**The CHAIR:** So were you getting the physical copies to people – how were you getting them out? Were people dropping in, were you putting them in mailboxes, what were you –

**Amanda LOGIE:** No, no. There was no point putting anything in mailboxes. People were not in their homes.

**The CHAIR:** That is why I am trying to understand what you were doing.

**Amanda LOGIE:** Yes, so it was just there. It was a one-stop shop. It was where you went for your services, so when we had people come in – and they were literally on their laptops hotspotting to their mobile phones because, as I said, we had the NBN actually come and hardwire us up and set us up a little bit the old-fashioned way.

**The CHAIR:** And how long did it take for the NBN to get restored for you to do that? Was it a couple of days or a week, or –

**Amanda LOGIE:** No, I think at home I still did not have great service. My house was one of those essential places because I was stuck on the other side of the river initially, so it was probably a good week or two before we actually had – what is the word I am looking for? – a bit of a system in place.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you. I will throw to you, Wendy.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Thank you. Amanda, thank you for everything that you and your team and the volunteers in this community have done for this community. It really has truly been a locally led response both during the episode and in the response phase. I am just wondering if you can expand on how long the community were left on their own, to their own devices? I have driven around town with you. I know how many houses you have helped put furniture up in, that you went back and ripped out carpets and everything in. How long was it before the state came in to help, and what came? What services came? How long was it? Did the ADF arrive – they drove through, but when did they arrive? How long was it before you actually received some level of response from outside?

**Amanda LOGIE:** I could not be 100 per cent sure on an exact date. As far as the ADF, I actually did not see any in town personally. We saw them driving through on their way from Echuca and we heard them flying over in helicopters, and I believe there were maybe six or 10 that were deployed within Rochester, but I personally did not see any. We were having constant phone calls and conversations again with people to get Services Australia here to get the services on the ground, so it was probably within that first week, but that first week I was kind of working 80 hours – and when I say working, I certainly was not getting paid for that. So it sort of rolled in – one week rolled into the next. We were being supported from a distance, and I say that in that as I said, I was having phone calls with people from local government. We then also did have some visits down the track, and all of this happened while we were still at the Presbyterian church hall, which we did move out of in December, so we moved up to what we call the four Rs at the golf club. We had things in place prior to leaving there, so it was not months, but it certainly was not immediately and it certainly was not without a lot of pressure from people such as me and the other people that were working alongside me that were constantly making phone calls and putting pressure on people.

**Wendy LOVELL:** What about an agency like DFFH with their recovery grants, the immediate \$1000 assistance?

**The CHAIR:** The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – just so everyone knows what you are talking about.

**Wendy LOVELL:** Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

**Amanda LOGIE:** Yes. I actually cannot fault them. We actually had some really good contacts within that organisation. There were phone calls again to get them on the ground, and they were quite understanding that

they needed to be on the ground. When I look back to 2011, they were also one of the first agencies on the ground back then. They kind of got it within that organisation.

**The CHAIR:** This is your last question, Wendy, before we move on.

**Wendy LOVELL:** And just on notifications, everyone has spoken of very few notifications coming out. I personally found the stuff that came out through the EMV app useless. I am just wondering – you spoke about using the Coliban system afterwards. Do you think there is a role for using that kind of system before – I mean, they have a text system for bushfires to tell people to evacuate. Why wouldn't we –

**Amanda LOGIE:** Absolutely. And there is certainly a space for that. It is just that someone, somewhere – and this is where I would refer to it being a two-way street. We have local knowledge. I have heard previous speakers talk about the star pickets along the riverbank upstream. We actually need to start taking notice of those people. I was one of the people that went doorknocking with the SES, volunteering with my family, on the Thursday night. Of the houses that we doorknocked, potentially 50 per cent went and 50 per cent stayed or said they were going to go but did not go. For me as a local, it is a bit like telling our own kids off. Sometimes they will listen to someone else. If a text message comes that says, 'There is water coming; you need to evacuate,' maybe people will listen to that more effectively than someone that is just local volunteering their time in the pouring rain with their kids, doorknocking and trying to encourage people to leave – and not knowing how their own house is going to end up. I talk about volunteer burnout too with regard to our own community members. We are just tired. We are really tired. We have been going non-stop for the last 10 months. We would do it all again in a heartbeat, but we just need a bit of support. We just need to have some hope and know that people are actually taking notice of what we are saying and how we are feeling.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Mr Berger.

**John BERGER:** Thanks for your appearance today, Amanda. I am keen to understand. You mentioned a playbook and that you will probably need it again in the future. What are the critical elements that you see should be in your playbook?

**Amanda LOGIE:** I have had this conversation with a couple of people. I am not sure exactly what needs to be in it, but we know some of the standard things about the local knowledge. It is so essential that we listen to the local people and the people that have that lived experience. You know, we developed the Google docs to talk about people that needed help, so that we knew what houses to go to, and so the people that could help, the people that wanted to volunteer their time, whether they be locals or from out of town, could just jump on and fill it out. Then we would just send out an email to them to say, 'Come and help. You can come on this day; these are the addresses.' We had a really coordinated approach to how that whole process worked, and it worked really well and really efficiently.

When we start to get the different levels of government involved, everything slows down. The bureaucratic red tape is insane, and it does not matter who is in charge or what government is in power, it is the same every single time. We achieved so much in those first few weeks on our own, as opposed to when the different levels of government started to come in. It is wonderful that they came in. But come in and support us; do not come in and have people going, 'Oh, no, you can't do that. Oh, no, to get to there, we've got to go via here and go over there.'

**John BERGER:** Do you have any specific examples?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Look, not off the top of my head sitting here, but I am sure if I had time to sit down and think about it, there would be.

**John BERGER:** Just one final thing – you talked about local knowledge and you also talked about the ageing population. You are going to start to lose a bit of that local knowledge. How will you capture that in your playbook into the future?

**Amanda LOGIE:** That is a great question. But there is a lot to be said too for our community dinners. Last week we had nearly 100 people at our weekly community dinner. That is a free meal in this room. Just sitting around talking to those people and actually taking note of what they have got to offer and what they have got to say is essentially important. I talked about the social events and that social connection that our community

needs – that is essential. We talk about recovery. We are not even in recovery. Recovery for me is when our community are back in their homes and they can start to move forward. That is when we start to recover.

**John BERGER:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Just to follow up on what John was saying when he asked you what examples you found, what you might be able to do is provide that on notice for us.

**Amanda LOGIE:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** You could write back to us and say, ‘These are the specifics’, because I understand that on the spot it is hard sometimes to come up with the examples. But if you have got any, please do feel free to provide that to us on notice.

**Amanda LOGIE:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Watt, a question.

**Sheena WATT:** I am happy to go to the next –

**The CHAIR:** Dr Ratnam.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Thank you so much, Amanda, for your submission and your evidence here today. It is very, very compelling and really gives us an insight into what happened on the ground here and continues to happen. I want to change track slightly and speak to your ongoing role with the community house. Given the broad range of things you have had to do to swing into action to provide a broad range of things – from material assistance to emotional and social support and to what might be happening in the months after – I imagine that people are still coming to you looking for a broad range of support. Could you speak to what you are observing in terms of the ongoing impacts for the community? Is it material or emotional or other support – anything that you would like to share with us so we can document that?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Yes, absolutely. We see people in crisis every single day and have done for the last 10 months. There are compounding issues: there is loss, there is grief, there is life. People had things going on in their lives prior to the October event, and now they are dealing with that as well as everything else that is going on.

Moving into winter we knew that we would have people that were cold. I remember having a conversation with a particular lady to say, ‘If we could give you one thing for life living how you are in a caravan with your kids’ – so the kids are in one van, the parents are in another van in their backyard – ‘what would that look like? Would it be a heater or would it be something – I don’t know – a clothes horse? What would make your life easier?’ And her response to me was, ‘I’d just like a saucepan that I could actually cook a whole packet of pasta in.’ They are the basic needs that we have needed to provide to our community over winter. We have given out hundreds and hundreds of blankets and doonas, heaters – basic human needs. I am not taking away from anyone at all, but we send an enormous amount of money overseas looking after Third World countries. We have got people here in our own country, in this community, living in Third World conditions, and that is not okay.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Could I ask one follow-up question? Do we have an estimate of how many people are living in caravans and continue to live in caravans?

**Amanda LOGIE:** We had a resident drive around a little bit earlier, and there were over 300 caravans.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Wow. Thank you.

**Amanda LOGIE:** We have got a map where you are having lunch, and I would really love it if you had a look at it. On that map we have got about between 1300 and 1500 lived-in dwellings in our community.

**The CHAIR:** Is that the one?

**Amanda LOGIE:** It is actually a close-up version of that one. It is a close-up version of that map that you have got in front of you. There are currently – and that map is not complete – 988 homes on that map that had above-floor inundation.

**Samantha RATNAM:** Thank you.

**Sheena WATT:** Can I just have a clarification on that last point around the 300 caravans? Is that 300 people living in caravans or 300 caravans?

**Amanda LOGIE:** No, that is 300 homes.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs Tyrrell.

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** No, thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** No question?

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thanks, Chair. Thank you so much for the work you do, and I know in our own electorates the work that neighbourhood houses do in their communities. They are absolutely pivotal to community wellbeing, and I am sure they would all say ‘underfunded’ as well, so we can always look for more money in that space. This is a really random question. You just said you had over 100 people at your lunches.

**Amanda LOGIE:** Yes.

**Melina BATH:** Who funds that? How is that funded?

**Amanda LOGIE:** We rely on people, as in organisations.

**Melina BATH:** Community organisations, small businesses and the like to fund it?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Yes. We have had some businesses who have donated to us as an organisation, and that is the funding that we are using.

**Melina BATH:** Fantastic. So they could be the people who are impacted themselves but are still finding time and money to donate, potentially?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Essentially, but a majority of the funding has come from businesses out of town.

**Melina BATH:** Wonderful. Thank you. I wrote down in round figures 1000 homes were displaced, just from my memory. Would it have been helpful to have that as an audit from a government agency – to actually walk with you and talk with people to understand that? I understand that you have done that virtually yourself. In retrospect, we have got Emergency Management Victoria. It has got something like 200 staff based in Melbourne. I want to understand how they could have better supported you – that is, in the emergency sector. But also then we need to audit and quantify these in order to know how grand the scale is to support families and individuals. I guess my question is: from an on-the-ground, government point of view, what sorts of supports would you have liked then, even just for those audits?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Just be here sooner. As you say, the data that we collected and that 988 figure is the most accurate data that we have, and we are 10 months down the track. It should not have to be an underfunded neighbourhood house that has been able to go out with volunteers initially doorknocking. We did, again, a Google Docs survey to capture that data from residents and see how we can best support them. We had a survey, which is still current, with the basic name, address and contact details – ‘Were you inundated? Do you have insurance?’ – capturing all of that kind of data. ‘What are your short-term needs? What are your long-term needs? Will you stay a resident of Rochester?’ It is fairly basic data that I would have thought any government agency would want to know in order to future-protect those communities and to support them in whatever is coming. It breaks my heart to say this, and I apologise to the people sitting behind me, but we cannot sit here and say this is not going to happen again.

**Melina BATH:** That is right. It is a known, isn't it? It is the 'when'.

**Amanda LOGIE:** And we need to be better supported and better prepared.

**Melina BATH:** So identify the region: Rochester and surrounds, indeed. And then what are the requirements and what are the basic pieces of information that should be fed back into Emergency Management Victoria and some of those 200 people that sit in Melbourne? What do they need to know about your community in order to start to press some buttons? Is that –

**Amanda LOGIE:** Yes, absolutely, and make it early. What harm is there in evacuating a town three days earlier, rather than having volunteers with their families doorknocking in the pouring rain the night before? I have watched video footage from a Facebook page that shows drone footage of what came over – that monstrosity down there – and we never stood a chance.

**Melina BATH:** I could tell you some terrible stories about Traralgon too and their lack of information. I am sorry, I did not mean to – but it is your emotional and physical and human investment.

**Amanda LOGIE:** It is because I am so passionate about the community.

**Melina BATH:** That is right. Thank you so much.

**Amanda LOGIE:** And it is not okay.

**Melina BATH:** Yes. Thank you so much for the work that you been doing over such a long time.

**The CHAIR:** Just to follow up on that, you referred to a Google doc. Are you able to provide the committee some links to that as well?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Yes, absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** I understand there may be privacy issues if there is any personal data captured – but deidentified, however.

**Amanda LOGIE:** No, the Google doc I can actually provide you. It would just be as if you were filling it out yourself, so you can see exactly what we were asking.

**The CHAIR:** That would be fantastic. Ms Broad, question.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you. Amanda, I do want to just say thank you to you and your team for the incredible work you have been doing. Just seeing that immediate response – millions of questions and demands coming at you right at the start – you guys were incredible. There were eggs being cooked on the barbie, and the support there was really evident. I guess just hearing you talk about the need for blankets and heaters in caravans – simple things that you are getting support from other businesses and donors and charities to help provide. In your experience, and knowing just recently there has been some support given by the government with caravans, but we are nearly one year on, I guess what are the priorities for you now for this community for that response on the ground? How can the government help?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Again, it is just to be there earlier. Like, this happened back in 2011 – it is not something new. I was talking to an insurance guy the other day at my sister's house, and he said, 'This particular resident, this case, has really made us learn different things about moving forward to the next event.' And I thought, 'That's great, but this is not something new.' And it is the same with this event that we had in October – it is not something new. You do not have to go, 'Oh, gee, what are we going to do?'

I had a conversation with Andrew Crisp one day, and I said, 'You've got a playbook; we're not sure exactly what's in it, but let's just pretend that we've got this playbook, and these are the processes that we need to do.' We need to know the people that need help, the people who would like to help – those kinds of things. And then if something comes in from left field and it is not in the playbook, we get the people that need to make the decisions in a room and within 24 hours we have got a decision and we know what path we are going down. It should not take months. I am not having a go at the Campaspe shire, but it should not take so long for flood recovery officers to be in positions. For the first time ever we actually, as a neighbourhood house, received

funding for a flood recovery officer – which is fantastic, but we had them in place in December. How can it be that hard, that a level of government cannot have that same response and that same support from a higher level of government? I do not say that it is Campaspe shire's fault for not having their staff in place. Their staff are in place now, and they are amazing. The staff that have been in place have been doing an amazing job, and we are working and have been working with them really closely. But it is not fair, again, coming back to the community having to do it themselves. I mean, we would and we will do it again if there is another time. But it should not be that way.

**Gaelle BROAD:** And just with the maps that you have developed, you have not had any sort of government body or assistance to capture that information at this point.

**Amanda LOGIE:** None at all. So with the ICC, we actually had a staff member there that I rang and went, 'Hey, can you get me a couple of copies of the map of Rochy, of the township?' That was it. We got the copies, and that was not long before the ICC actually shut down. We just did it, initially with the assistance of Samaritan's Purse mostly, doing doorknocking when we had volunteers that were actually coming to town. And as that died off and they went back to their own lives, we then were capturing the data through our survey. Sometimes we will have people come in and they will go, 'Oh yeah, we got wet and that is our house, but so did our neighbour,' so we will mark it off there, that way. So it has pretty much just been – even last Friday, I dropped off the car for a service at Bruce Hocking Motors and walked back home, and as I walked I went, just in my notes on my phone, 'That house is wet, that house is wet,' and added a few more to it. That is as basic, but as accurate, the data that we have.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I know your team directly has been impacted, flooded themselves, waiting for works to be done, but how important is it to have that extra support from people outside the region?

**Amanda LOGIE:** Oh, it is essential – but it is also a double-edged sword, because we might have someone ring us and go, 'We want to come up on the weekend, what can we do? What can we bring?' But we do not always know and we do not always have things to do. That is the challenge, and I think I have said this to a few people: we have people moving into their homes, and that in itself is an emotional roller-coaster. There were volunteers helping people to throw out their lives and to pack up their lives; there is no-one there to help you put that back in once you move into your home. We still have stuff upstairs in the hall here that we have not brought downstairs, because we do not have three or four strong men to lift our safe down, but we also do not have the capacity in ourselves to actually go, 'I need to go through that.'

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Now, we have got about five more minutes left for this session, so I think we might be able to sneak in one more question. Ms Lovell, you have drawn the lucky straw.

**Wendy LOVELL:** So additional funding – Amanda, you talked about that coming mainly from sort of private sources. Have you had additional funding from state or federal government to assist you in this response? Also – I know this is not through the community house but rather through the hub – the financial counsellors' funding is about to run out in November. I was just wondering if you can expand on the need for that funding to be renewed. I have had conversations with the minister. I even texted the minister the other day to say, 'Flood recovery is going to be in Bendigo on Wednesday; perhaps it'd be a good announcement.' But we have not seen any commitment to those financial counsellors going on past November, so can you expand on the importance of that?

**Amanda LOGIE:** I will break it up a little bit. So we have received funding for infrastructure works for our community house, and we also run the men's shed. We have received a one-off. Back in 2011 we fought tooth and nail to receive \$10,000 worth of extra funding. We actually received \$20,000 worth of extra funding for additional wages this time, and for the first time ever we also received the funding for a flood recovery officer and support for that. So that is the government funding that we have received. We have also received significant funding through private organisations for other staff members.

With regard to mental health funding particularly, we sourced funding through private organisations and businesses to fund our own mental health support person on the ground two days a week. We had that person in place well before anyone else came on board. We then were fortunate enough that Mind Australia, who were government funded, came on board. They are currently still on board, but that is the funding that Wendy is

referring to. We have been advised that November is when that will finish up. Obviously the powers that be that make those decisions have never heard of Dr Rob Gordon or spoken to him, because he has said – and he will actually be here again tomorrow – that it takes between three and seven years for a community to recover from events such as this.

Now, we are going to be just over 12 months, and this is the second time. They did initially talk about pulling the funding on the mental health support on the ground at 30 June, and it got pushed out. Very high levels of government talk about mental health and how we are doing this wonderful job, and there is a lot of talk about it. On the ground they are not so great at doing it, and that is where we need it. Between Echuca Regional Health and Bendigo Health, who have received funding federally, I believe – and I could be mistaken on that – their staff are busy; Mind Australia's staff are busy; and our staff member Bern has been busy since she literally hit the ground running. And we are still seeing people 10 months down the track for the first time. We are having new members of the community present to us, so we need this support. The mental health support is essential for this community and every other community – but for this community's recovery.

**The CHAIR:** All right. Thank you very much for coming and speaking to us today. I just also want to pass on a personal vote of thanks from the secretariat to you. I know you have been instrumental in helping to organise today, and I am advised that nothing has been too hard. So thank you. A big debt of gratitude from all of us to you. And thank you again for presenting evidence and helping us to understand from your perspective how your community has been affected. Thank you. I will just advise everybody that that brings that session to a close. The committee will now be having a break for half an hour. We will recommence at 12:30. Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**