

UWU Response to Extreme Flooding in NSW and QLD

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2022



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During a crisis it is important for Union members to act in solidarity with one another.

Thousands of UWU members live in regions impacted by extreme flooding in New South Wales and Queensland in February and March of 2022.

Members were impacted in a variety of ways and to varying extents; from losing homes and living homeless, to losing hours at work, to transport disruptions or experiencing new hazards in the workplace; and everything in between.

Across NSW and QLD we identified at least 272 members who reported being impacted by flooding in February-March of 2022. In the Northern Rivers region of NSW a full 50% of all members who responded to our outreach reported being impacted, often severely.

UWU's peer-to-peer outreach in response to these floods aimed to establish contact with members in these regions, check on their wellbeing, express solidarity, and understand how they have been impacted at home and at work.

Through this process we recorded valuable information and stories about how members are impacted by extreme flooding, which will guide future outreach, organising and campaigning.

Additionally, we wanted to ensure members were aware of supports made available to them by United Workers Union including our Climate Disaster Relief fund.

SUMMARY

OUR OBJECTIVES

1

Check in on members, are they safe and well?

Were they affected by the floods at home / in the community?

- Property damage or loss
- Income loss
- Service disruptions, etc

Was work affected by the floods?

- If yes, how was it affected?
- Did work cease, slow down, reduce hours?
- Any workplace health and safety issues?
- Fatigue, morale, stress levels in the workplace?
- Work outside of their usual roles?
- Problems with management?
- Need a follow up visit?

2

Inform members about support available via the Union

- Our Climate Disaster Relief Fund available to members impacted by the floods.
- Our Extreme Weather at Work health and safety training available to all members, and we able to run specific sessions for workplace and/or industry groups.

3

Record information and stories about how members were impacted at work and home

WHAT WE DID

UWU was able to respond rapidly and more effectively to the flooding disaster of Feb-March 2022 than during the Bushfire Disaster of 2019/20.

Our Climate Disaster Relief Fund was ready and the infrastructure to support it was in place and ready to go with just a few quick tweaks. Before the disaster had even peaked, we were able to get communications to members in affected states letting them know about our Climate Disaster Relief Fund and had applications coming in.

Our Extreme Weather Working Group had been established in late 2021 and was able to immediately bring staff together from across portfolios and states to lock in cross union collaboration on our response. Our WHS Extreme Weather at Work training was also ready-to-go and we had staff members skilled up and ready to deliver it, so we did.

We also already knew what it looked like to do personal 1-to-1 outreach to thousands of disaster-impacted members, and had scripts, surveys, training templates and reflections from the 2019/20 Bushfire response to use as a starting point. So we did.

What that looks like

- Two emergency sessions of our WHS Extreme Weather at Work training.
- Emergency meeting of Extreme Weather Working Group convened by Louise (Allied) and Claire (Member Power) on March 1.
 - Attended by 30+ staff from across a breadth of portfolios and states.
 - Discussed impacts on members, brief on how the union had responded so far.
 - Ensured staff knew details of the Climate Disaster Relief Fund.
 - Agreed that peer-to-peer outreach to impacted members was needed.
- Cross portfolio collaboration between Allied, New Organising and Strategic Power to identify strategic industrial opportunities and ensure outreach gathered relevant information.

Peer-to-peer outreach to
5000+



- Purposeful outreach plan with clear objectives
- Trained and supported 20+ staff, members and volunteers to conduct outreach
- Climate Action Group volunteers made 1500+ contacts (excluding staff)
- Recorded valuable information and stories about how members were impacted



Provided
\$129,750

worth of direct financial assistance to flood impacted UWU members via our Climate Disaster Relief Fund.

HOW MEMBERS WERE IMPACTED

Summary of impacts

Members were impacted in a very wide variety of ways.

In the workplace this ranged from members having their workplaces shut for the long-term for reconstruction due to structural damage, or closed in the short term due to road closures or understaffing, right through to members whose workplaces had extra work and found themselves with overtime opportunities.

At home these experiences ranged from members who lost everything and are sleeping on the floor at a relatives home, or people who were flooded in a for a few days and lost income, right through to people who just had to stay home and look after their kids because their local ECEC centre was closed.

Geographical differences between Northern Rivers region of NSW, Queensland and Sydney catchment area and surrounds.



Queensland had the largest number of people identified as 'impacted' by flooding (195), at 36% of all respondents (540).

Impacted members in Queensland were significantly more likely to have been affected at work (90%) than at home (42%), included some severe impacts including houses lost, but were also far more likely to have been able to access to financial support (such as disaster leave) via either their employer or the government. Employers both private and public sector appear more prepared and able to respond in Queensland than New South Wales.

Northern NSW had the highest proportion of people reporting being impacted by the flooding (46), a full 50% of all respondents in that region (92).

These members were the most likely to be impacted at both home and work (59%), and to report severe impacts such as loss of their home (and associated ongoing homelessness or housing insecurity), loss of income, or loss of transport.

Sydney catchment region had the lowest number of members reporting impacts (31), representing only 18% of respondents (174).

These impacts were less likely to be severe and were more likely to relate to losing hours, pay, or leave entitlements as result of work disruptions.

Key themes of members experience

- Impacts both at work and at home
- Loss of income or entitlement
- Property damage (major and minor)
- Transport disruption and hazards
- Understaffing
- Mould and other hazards
- Closure of worksites (short and long term)



Floods in Maryborough, Queensland, Australia, February 2022. Photo: QFES'

QUEENSLAND

Summary of impact

Queensland had the largest total number of people who reported being impacted by flooding, with **195 impacted members identified**.



“

Hi [..], **Our house was affected by the floods and we are now displaced whilst our home is getting fixed.** Thanks.

K, Health Worker from Newmarket

As a portion of the **540 people** who responded to the outreach in total:

36%
reported
impacts

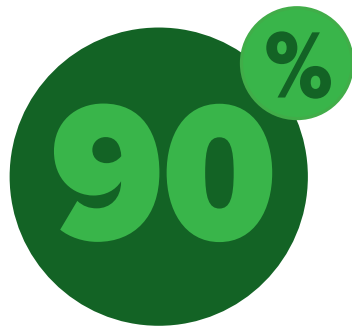
64%
reported being
'not affected'

11%
reported being affected
at home and work

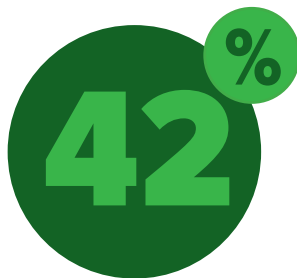
32%
reported being
affected at work

15%
reported being
affected at home

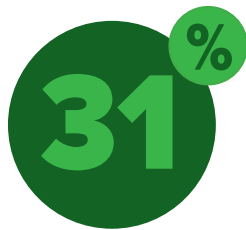
Of these 195 impacted members:



*reported impacts
at work*



*reported impacts
at home*



*reported impacts at
both work and home*

How many people were identified as being affected?


Not affected	Home and work	Work only	At home only	No response	Total affected members
345	61	114	20	2424	195

How were people affected at home?

Property Loss	Transport Loss	Income Loss	Service/Supply	Mental Health	Other
24	7	32	10	4	5

How were people affected at work?

Loss of income	Loss of hours	Loss of leave	Understaffing	Structural Damage	Worksite Closed
26	22	2	14	-	3



Hey brother yeah we had to relocate my place went under in goodna. **Lost everything pretty much except for me my partner and daughters clothes, we only just found a place again last fri.** Doing alright got a lil bit of money from the government and yeah just **working overtime starting from the bottom again but blessed to have another rental house again thanks for checking in brother means a lot!**

My work place was fine just couldnt get to work for a few days because the high ways and back roads were flooded, thank you heaps, yeap I submitted a application [for UWU Climate Disaster Relief Fund]. Will help a lot since where starting from the bottom again love united number 1 man appreciate it! I would love to share my story the please!! Im pretty shy but want them to know where all in this together and united cares!!”



Josiah, Logistics Worker from Goodna

Quotes from QLD members

“

Thanks for checking on me. We are all good except we were blocked in the state due to flood roads. During that flood week was hard as the supermarkets near me were empty and my compound had flash flooded. My house was not flooded inside. It was little bit stressful but we are alright now. For food I had just enough dry ingredients to make up meals. Thankyou so much.

S, 'Teachers Aide' at Marsden High School, QLD

“Hi [], thank you for your text. I am ok but house has storm damage waiting to see insurance assessor. Also had troubles with driving around, cancellations, etc etc. [...] Work was supportive, all worked out.”

J, Aged Care Worker from Mount Warren

“hey [], thanks for the check in! i'm safe, and so is the business i'm working at currently. I was flooded in for about 3 days at the peak of it all and that did affect my pay slightly, but I've been having a hard time accessing any flood support via centrelink. All the roads that led from my suburb into my workplace had flooded in, so while my house itself wasn't effected i wasn't able to get into work for those days.”

A, Hospitality Worker from Yeronga

“I wasn't affected by the flood except the ceiling fell down onto my tv. I didn't have to leave the house and I still went to work, but I had no contents insurance.”

L, Bakery Worker from Kingston

“Hi Sandy 16.5 metres deep in the backyard. House was spared. Both CHEP Oxley and Rocklea are flood affected and will require rebuilding. The boys are working at cleaning up. No loss of hours for anyone. 2 free paid weeks leave immediately following the flood. The boys are working 6 hours a day on full pay. Still awaiting power to be reconnected. Management have decided to relocate both sites.”

D, Manufacturing Worker in East Ipswich.

“

“I am all good now. My car was flooded and was not able to work for 3 days that week. But all good now. No [I didn't lose income..] I got paid natural disaster leave.”

M, Augustine Heights, Education worker

Hi [] I was affected and was blocked in couldn't get to work for 3 day. No I wasn't paid for time off as I am only a casual and im pretty sure we were under staffed for the 3 days I had off and then the 2 days I was there a few people were still flooded in.

T, Logistics, Ipswich

“House was badly damaged but being taken care of by insurance and took days off unpaid by choice to deal with it. Lost income made up for by disaster pay from govt.

I, Security Officer from Everton Park

“Hi sorry for late reply just finishing work..I was isolated at Gympie however was paid basic disaster pay for 3 of the 5 days and I didn't apply for []as I wasn't really affected flood wise just couldn't get out.. have spoken with Care Coordinator [] in Gympie as I work in Noosa, and next time if and when we are flooded again and if I haven't retired will try and do a few shifts for them up there if I can get to clients and don't take work from someone else who works in Gympie [].. if that makes sense”

Trysh, Aged Care Worker

“Yes I was affected by the recent floods. At home. Water damage to my room, my boys room (walls, carpet etc). I've had to throw away my boys beds, clothes, shoes etc

T - Logistics Worker from Raceview

Quotes from QLD members

“

“Hey [] cheers for the message bro. I am doing good, I was flooded in so missed about 4-5 days work. But as a casual I wasn't sure I was entitled to anything. But back at work and things are going good.”

B, Logistics Worker from Logan Reserve

“Hi, that's a sore point . Yes im ok thank you. Yes loss of hours. I tried to return to work on Wednesday the 3rd march at 4.10 am. Got onto paradise rd slacks creek, road closed due to flooding, I had a panic attack and turned around and went home. Notified work colleague and bsm. I didn't get special leave pay due to road closure.. Bsm put it as sick leave 6.5 hours, because I mentioned mental health. And what has pissed me off is bsm reimbursed one of my colleagues sick leave. She did exactly what I did. She went home. I spoke to union and not happy with the out come there either.”

G, Education Worker from Edens Landing

“I couldn't come to work yesterday because of flooding. Our house is ok. But the roads are closed. It was ok this morning. 1 road is still closed. 2 roads access are open. This is the second time for me. I am a casual, 4am to 12pm shift. I called to let supervisor know that I couldn't come to work because of road closures. There were no other work issues. Thank you for your concerns.”

A, Casino Worker from Tallebudgera

“Hi I am alright, I just had some flash flood damaged my car in the car port. And I could not get to work for 4 days due to that plus the road closure. They did pay for that time off. Thanks for asking.”

H, Aged Care Worker from Goodna

“Hi, My assigned work vehicle was written off and the company hasn't said if they will replace it. They are struggling to keep me in a car I can fit in due to my height 2m and ergonomics due to a previous injury but for now I'm still working. Thanks for checking in.”

TF, Airport Worker from Sherwood

“

“Hi [], Thanks for checking in on me. Yes our school was flooded & was closed for the whole wk. School ovals are still closed for the kids to play on. No school was very supportive & pay was payed as normal. Few staff did go into school (like myself) to help with clean up & help set up new classrooms to get us through to the end of term. It's been tough mentally as well as we went completely under in 2011 & brought up a lot of memories for staff that went through it then as well.

T, Education Worker from Flinders View

“I was unaffected. Work was cancelled for a couple of days to keep people safe while travelling during the changes conditions. Some people were flooded in and so they couldn't leave their houses. So they were off for a few days. We still got paid though. Shifts were sent home early during the flood, before they cancelled production for Sunday arvo and Monday and I think Tuesday. One guy was sent home early on Saturday night because of road hazards. Relating this story to me he was mad because the delay between realising the hazard and releasing the workers to travel home meant he got stuck on the highway more than 20 hours because by then the flood waters had risen. So I think Dean had the worst experience out of everyone because of this. The main danger imo is that with flood waters rising people will try to get to work and put themselves at risk while travelling. I think our work did the right thing by canceling shifts to avoid this.”

L, Food & Beverage Worker from Bundamba

“Yes, I am safe but still coping of the aftermath of the floods. Temporary accomodation is now twice the distance traveling to work. No, i didnt [know about the UWU Climate Disaster Relief Fund]. No one contacted me since the flood from there. You're the first one checking up how I am. Thank u for that.”

J, Casino Worker from Churchill

Quotes from QLD members

“

“Hi [], Fortunately my home was safe, but I lost all of the food in my fridge and 2 freezers as the power was out for 36 hours due to flooding at the end of my street. My family and I were also stuck at home due to road closures, and school being closed for a week. [] our union lady helped my boss and I to get paid disaster leave for the days we couldn't get to work. Goodstart was trying to make us use our own personal leave at the time. Thank you for checking in and I hope you were all safe and well!”

K, ECEC Worker from Bundamba

“

“Hi.. yes thank you [], although I had 5 days off work as I live in Goodna and the highways were all under. I had already used all my annual leave but I did qualify for the 1000 from Centerlink thank goodness.. came in handy. Damage to our house was played for by the owners because I'm renting so my household was ok compared to many others. Thanks for checking in!”

N, Food Processing Worker from Goodna

“Was affected but all under control. No serious disruption. House was badly damaged but being taken care of by insurance and took days off unpaid by choice to deal with it. Lost income made up for by disaster pay from Gov't. Its all good. Saw it coming, mitigated 99%. disruptions.”

L, Security Worker from Everton Park



The northern NSW town of Lismore has again been issued with evacuation orders. -AAP Image²
<https://www.sheppnews.com.au/national/lismore-flood-levee-bursts-again/>

NORTHERN NSW

Summary of impact

Northern NSW had highest density of impacted members, with a full 50% (46 members) of all people who responded reporting having been impacted by the floods



“

Hey [...] yes safe and well now, yes have been effected lost everything in the floods, [...]. **Thanks so much for your concern. Water inundated our two story dwelling house which has never happen before in history we were stuck for six hours had to be boated out to higher ground waited hours for another boat to collect us. Lost our cars and everything in the house, our whole community has been devastated.**

M, Homecare worker from South Lismore

As a portion of the **92 people** who responded to the outreach in total:

50%
reported impacts

50%
reported being 'not affected'

30%
reported being affected at home and work

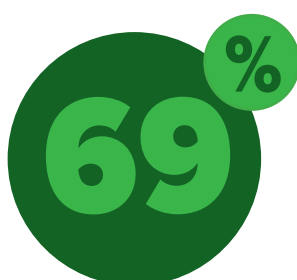
45%
reported being affected at work

35%
reported being affected at home

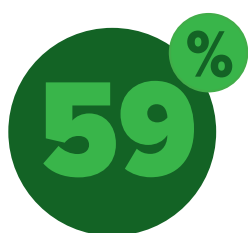
Of these 46 impacted members:



*reported impacts
at work*



*reported impacts
at home*



*reported impacts
at work and home*

How many people were identified as being affected?


Not affected	Home and work	Work only	At home only	No response	Total affected members
46	27	14	5	543	46

How were people affected at home?


Property Loss	Transport Loss	Income Loss	Service/Supply	Mental Health	Other
15	2	7	2	1	2

How were people affected at work?

Loss of income	Loss of hours	Loss of leave	Understaffing	Structural Damage	Worksite Closed
8	10	2	10	1	5



**I've lost my home
and job :(. I think its
unfair as they've hired
others, [....] from UWU
is following up.**



M, Hospitality Worker from Girards Hill

Quotes from NSW members

“

“Hi [] I’m Safe and well, yes my work is been affected we were closed for about 2 weeks I was helping cooking for people that evacuated on that flood my boss uses my annual leave for the flooding time. My boss only use 20 hours that’s all he paid me on that week. [I lost out on] \$1250 worth of wages.”

R, Hospitality Worker from Evans Head

“Thanks for the check in []. I’m very fortunate that I live and work in the higher part of Lismore, but as you are aware Lismore has been severely devastated which in turn affects us all. It’s a sad town at the moment. But we will get there. Emotionally it’s been very tough. As a true born and bred local it’s been super difficult and heart breaking. During the floods we were understaffed, which meant we were non operational for several days. We’ve had a huge demand for care from families who’s normal centres are completely devastated. Added stress on staff and trying to care for those who need it. Added stress on a daily basis. It has been difficult but manageable. We are fortunate enough to have a management committee who are very supportive. I think what we need to look at is income protection in these events- obviously with a minimum as it would be a huge expense but if people are unable to get to work due to local emergencies they should not be penalised financially”

E, Early Childhood Educator from Goonellabah

“Yes [I’ve been affected] mate, I got flooded out completely. No [I didn’t lose my home].. just most of what’s in it.”

G, UWU Member from Chinderah

“Hi []. I am fine. My home was ruined by the floods but we have somewhere to go. My work has been very flexible with allowing for time off. I wasn’t aware [of UWUs Climate Disaster Relief Fund]. Thanks”

S, Early Childhood Educator from West Ballina

“

“I’m safe now but I’m still feeling the affects of the flood. I’m still sleeping on the floor at my son’s house because there is no accommodation anywhere in the area. I think I might have to leave the region and move to Queensland. I lost everything but my car. The real estate agent has taken all my bond and I’m taking them to court next week. I wonder how many other people they’re doing it to. “

A, Home Care worker from East Lismore

“Thanks []. All safe where I am. Currently between jobs so nope. Thanks again. Nope no power loss. Bit of roof leakage but I have sorted that out. I can see the Manning river from my house so I can keep a close eye on what’s going on around me. Ohh absolutely. If any fellow hospo workers in the area need assistance or a hand I’d be happy to help out any way that’s possible. Thanks alot for checking in also. Yea I could do that [help outreach to flood impacted UWU members via SMS] I could really use a distraction today. What do I have to do to get involved?”

C, School Cleaner from Tabulam

“The school was shut as deemed unsafe for staff and students but we had to choose whether to use our holiday pay or no pay - I chose no pay and I told them it was unfair. Within school communities the only ones not paid - u guessed it - CLEANERS.”

G, UWU Member from Chinderah

“I’m safe and well work didn’t get flooded we just couldn’t get to work for a few days but all is good now. I only lost hours as I couldn’t get to work so we were a little understaffed for a few days and the boss stepped up and worked but nothing major.”

K, Hospitality Worker from Banora Point

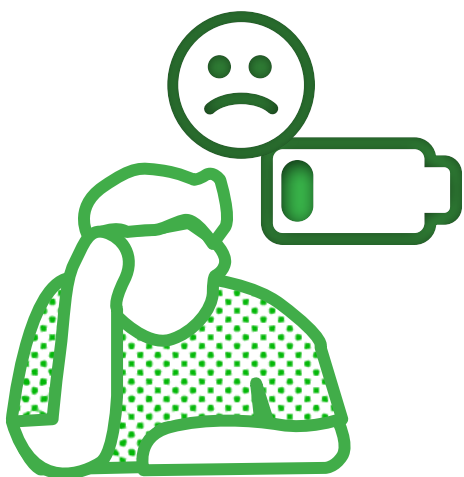


Image source: www.dw.com/en/australias-sydney-braces-for-floods-amid-massive-rainfall/a-623405983

SYDNEY CATCHMENT

Summary of impact

Sydney catchment area had the lowest portion of people reporting impacts (31 people). Response rates and conversation quality for our Sydney outreach was also lower than other areas.



“

G'day mate safe and well **just mentally tough right now as it looks like we might go again this week.** Other thing that sucked was using all my sickies I just got them back and **the headache of work constantly telling me to get a stat decs for each day was annoying but what can you do?** Thanks for checking up.

R, Logistics Worker from Bligh Park

As a portion of the **174 people** who responded to the outreach in total:

18%
reported
impacts

82%
reported being
'not affected'

9%
reported being affected
at home and work

13%
reported being
affected at work

14%
reported being
affected at home

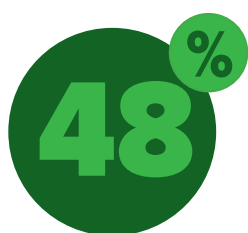
Of these 31 impacted members:



*reported impacts
at home*



*reported impacts
at work*



*reported impacts
at work and home*

How many people were identified as being affected?


Not affected	Home and work	Work only	At home only	No response	Total affected members
143	15	7	9	983	31

How were people affected at home?


Property Loss	Transport Loss	Income Loss	Service/Supply	Mental Health	Other
7	2	7	0	1	7

How were people affected at work?

Loss of income	Loss of hours	Loss of leave	Understaffing	Structural Damage	Worksite Closed
7	7	1	11	0	3



**Most definitely [I have been affected by the floods].. Primary school was shut. My centre was shut, the kids childcare centre shut aswell.
Lost income [...] a few days work.**



H, Early Childhood Educator from South Nowra

Quotes from Sydney Catchment members

“

“I lost two weeks pay because of it..”

S, Logistic Worker from Flinders

“Hi, yes everything is very wet and muddy a lot of mould forming from the rain humidity.”

M, Home Care Worker from Wyoming

“Hi [], thank you checking up. Nothing too troubling during the floods. However it did flood a little of my house and stopped me from making it to work the day of 22/2. Best regards “

S, Call Centre Worker from Marrickville

“

“Hi [], I’ve been safe and well. Thanks for asking, I did lose a couple of days work due to my kids daycare being shut due to flooding and roads being closed. Management have pretty good, but when I asked to use some of my annual leave to cover the days they refused. I wanted to do this due to being out of sick leave. [] work has been very safe and same with my house.”

J, Logistics Worker from Bligh Park

“I got flooded in and couldn’t go to work so then I didn’t get paid cause I’m on casual.”

M, Home Care Worker from Milton

WHAT WENT WELL

Most of what we did went well, given the circumstances. We were able to use our prior experience to rapidly rollout a movement leading response and outreach program, while only diverting a very limited amount of Union resources to the outreach.

Cross-portfolio collaboration

Able to use internal processes and relationships to rapidly collaborate across the union.
Had a clear purpose for our outreach that was directly related to industrial strategy.

.....

The outreach itself

Re-purposed previous outreach scripts from the Bushfire outreach in 2020 to create the templates for our Floods outreach conversation.

Discovered organising opportunities at workplace, community, and political levels.

Learned a lot about how members were impacted both at work and at home.

Successfully recorded statistical information and personal stories which are relevant to campaigning for improvement to Disaster & Emergency Services Leave provisions, as well as broader climate campaigning.

.....

How members responded

Members appreciate being checked on, regardless of whether they were affected or not.

Members were able to access Climate Disaster Relief Fund successfully and in a timely manner.

Member volunteers, mostly from our Climate Action Group, contacted roughly 1500 members in flood impacted parts of Queensland and Northern NSW.

Strong conversations by two members who themselves lived in flood impacted regions.

.....

Using our best people for our most sensitive conversations

Using our most experienced people for the most sensitive contacts to people in Northern NSW, particularly around Ballina and Lismore.

WHAT DIDN'T GO WELL?

The biggest challenges we faced were related to a lack of resourcing and clear lines of responsibility.

Nobody is clearly responsible for determining who the impacted members are and so the first round of communications about our Climate Disaster Relief Fund went out to *whole states* rather than to smaller groups of clearly impacted members.

This results in a larger burden of administration on the CDRF approvals process to weed out any ineligible applications.

The best process would be to ensure a clear list of impacted postcodes is established and categorized as soon as possible. Ideally this information could then be put into geographical mapping software, along with the locations of worksites and members home addresses for easy visualization, list-cutting, to help categorise impact zones within postcodes, and to identify key priority areas and workplaces for outreach efforts.

Identifying and categorizing impacted member groups

Example categorisation / coding system

Lack of capacity

Volunteer skills

Quality of partner-group outreach

Technical challenges

Data quality



Identifying and categorizing impacted member groups

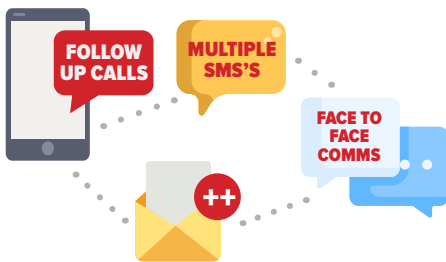
A person or team of people should be clearly responsible for identifying the impact region when a disaster is declared, and creating and maintaining the list of impacted members.

In practice this looks like monitoring emergency services evacuation and warning zone notices, BOM, and media reports about impacts for the purpose of developing a list of impacted postcodes, and categorising / coding those impact zones according to priority for outreach.

Breaking this down further 'within a postcode' may be possible, but would likely require additional tools.

Example categorisation / coding system

1 100'S



The smallest group with highest likelihood of severe impact, and highest chance of any impact.

Top priority for urgent outreach 1-to-1 once immediate disaster subsides. We want to contact all of these people and ensure they are safe and well and support them to access the Climate Disaster Relief Fund where appropriate. This means significant effort to follow up – emails, sms, calls, via delegates or other members, potentially even via site visits if necessary.

2 1000'S



Significantly larger group of people, with a lower likelihood of severe impact but still a strong chance of any impact.

Depending on the size and severity of the disaster, this group may receive 1 to 1 outreach via SMS. We're less concerned about hearing from every one of these people, so we are unlikely to follow up with most of the people on this list beyond peer-to-peer SMS.

We may want to separate out key people within this section for extra one-to-one follow up – such as OHS reps, delegates and climate leaders.

3 1000'S+



The broader group of members in impacted regions, near-zero likelihood of severe impact, low chance of any impact. Bulk communications only.

These people have a very low likelihood of being severely impacted at home, but may have experienced impacts at work or through broader social disruption such as closed roads, essential service disruptions, etc. We do not need to do 1-to-1 outreach to this group.

Lack of capacity

A lack of capacity meant we were unable to follow up with members who did not reply at all.

Ideally, we would get in contact with every member if possible. This might mean we need to make phonecalls, email, send sms to the member, and where that fails to get a reply, reaching out to a worksite delegate or even having the relevant team conduct a workplace visit.

Volunteer skills

Other challenges primarily related to using volunteers who for many this was the first time ever taking part in a peer-to-peer SMS outreach program of any kind, and who did not all have a significant background in organising.

Quality of partner-group outreach

While there was significant enthusiasm and some partner volunteers committed well, in general the follow through and quality of outreach by partners was significantly lower than that conducted by UWU members or staff.

Technical challenges

Some technical issues also resulted in a number of messages not being responded to in an appropriate time frame, and/or not being responded to by an equally skilled person. Lessons learned include:

- Ensure we have a skilled person assigned responsibility for picking up any conversations which are left hanging.
 - Ensure we set a 48hr time before 'idle messages' – which have been received on our end but not replied to, are redistributed to the responsible person.
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Data quality

Due to the limitations of our data gathering in CallHub, we were unable to easily record 'multiple impacts' on people at work, or home.

As such our records prioritise the impact considered most severe in the moment, or most focused on by the member.

This means reporting for each type of impact is likely an understatement, especially for things like "service/supply disruption" and "mental health impacts" which are likely to coincide with other issues such as "property and income loss".

It's fair to assume anyone who lost their home all their personal things, will also be experiencing some mental health impacts as a result of that.

Similarly, anyone who lost their home is also extremely likely to have had access and service disruptions on many other fronts too – such as electricity, food, water, shelter, communications, travel.

WHAT COULD BE DONE BETTER NEXT TIME?

There are lots of things which could be done better to make this outreach more effective and meaningful, and to combine it with on-the-ground organising.

Primarily this would involve setting up formal processes around how the Union responds to disasters, including:

- establish lines of responsibility for deciding the Union will respond to disaster, approving the necessary allocation of resources to respond, and instructing relevant personnel to prioritise the work to make it happen.
- establish a clear set of criteria to be used in determining whether and/or the extent to which the Union will respond to a disaster, as it is occurring.
- identify and secure the resourcing commitments required to enable the Union to respond effectively during and after disasters.
- building a group of specifically trained staff, delegates and members to lead and undertake UWU's disaster response outreach and organising.

Examples of things which could have been done better

Greater oversight and training of volunteers

Surge resourcing for 'case management' could improve outcome:

Eligibility Criteria for Climate Disaster Relief Fund

Greater oversight and training of volunteers

Example 1: A volunteer had been shown where to find member details during a detailed induction, but did not have direct oversight:

“Hey mate yep I’m good got blocked in for a week with no pay and I’ve applied for the grant through Centrelink but my application was rejected other than that all good.”

[Volunteer] - provides member with UWU Climate Disaster Relief Fund information.

“Thank you so much I’ll go on after work that will be a big help thanks. Are you able to send me my member number as it is required for the relief application please.”

– **J, Logistics Worker from Dutton Park**

[Volunteer]: I’m just a volunteer on this flood response campaign. You’ll have to contact your local branch office to get your member number. Refer the following contact list.”

Greater oversight and training of volunteers

Example 2: A volunteer didn’t get back to a member in time, and then failed to recognise this as an organising opportunity which needed to be passed on. More oversight would enable us to ensure everyone is replied to, and a more experienced organiser would have asked follow up questions, and connect the impacted member directly to their relevant organiser:

“ Hey mate all good. I was cut of but unaffected. Disappointed we were made to use AL [Annual Leave] instead of disaster leave. Given nurses and teacher were given emergency leave. Is there any update re getting that reimbursed?”

– **S, Ambulance worker from Pine Mountain**

[Volunteer]: Glad you’re OK. Sorry we took so long to get back, but your reply got misdirected. I’m just volunteering on this flood relief campaign, so don’t know the answer to your question about leave. Maybe your local union office might know. I’ll send a couple of other messages about the flood campaign, but here is a link to UWU’s contacts list: [link]” [end]

Surge resourcing for 'case management' could improve outcome:

Example 3: A member wanted to contact us the following day, but we were too underresourced and couldn't get back to them in time. Surge resourcing and planning for case management would enable us to better support and organise members in the moment of need.

"Yes I have been affected by flood and my car has been flooded and still I am working but it's a little bit hard for working and I wanna inform you about my working hours because I am working as part time work. Actually it is tough but we need to move on. I do loose my car which helped for so long and I didn't know about Union relief fund if it can help me a little bit then that will be more relief for me at the moment. Thank you [] is it possible if I can contact you tomorrow for any discussion?"

- **S, Cleaner from Moorooka**

[Volunteer]: Me personally, I am not the right person, unfortunately. But I will pass your contact details and the relevant information along now for follow up. [end]

Eligibility Criteria for Climate Disaster Relief Fund

Example 4: Ensure eligibility criteria are applied consistently.

Additionally, the specific wording of the criteria meant that some people who were significantly affected couldn't claim, even though they probably really needed the support:

"I'm good thank you for asking...me and my family was affected by the floods as we were stranded at home could not get to work for 6 days.. I just checked the [Climate Disaster Relief Fund] link I can not claim anything but fee waiver which is disappointing."

- **M, Bakery Worker, Logan Reserve**

"I lost two weeks pay because of it.."

- **S, Logistic Worker from Flinders**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Establish a policy document outlining the various ways in which the Union may respond to a disaster, and how the Union would undertake and resource those responses.
- 2** Establish clear lines of responsibility for deciding when and how the Union will respond to disaster, approving the necessary allocation of resources to respond, and instructing relevant personnel to prioritise the work to make it happen.
- 3** Establish a clear set of criteria to be used in determining whether and/or the extent to which the Union will respond to a disaster, as it is occurring.
- 4** Identify and secure the cross-union resourcing commitments required to enable the Union to respond rapidly and effectively during and after disasters.
- 5** Build a group of specifically trained staff, delegates and members to lead and undertake UWU's disaster response outreach and organising.
- 6** Update eligibility criteria for Climate Disaster Relief Fund to enable people who lose significant amounts of income to make a claim for more than just fee relief.
- 7** Ensure Climate Disaster Relief Fund eligibility criteria is applied consistently. Responsibility for application approvals should be designated to a senior staff member.
- 8** Enable members to make solidarity contributions (donate) to the Climate Disaster Relief Fund, and promote the fund to members outside of the impact region, during disasters.
- 9** Share this work with other Unions and non-profit organisations and work to enable effective collaboration both during disasters, and in campaigns around climate impacts.
- 10** Campaign for improved access to disaster leave for all workers.

REFERENCES

¹ Floods in Maryborough, Queensland, Australia, February 2022. Photo: QFES. <https://floodlist.com/australia/australia-floods-queensland-newsouthwales-february-2022>

² The northern NSW town of Lismore has again been issued with evacuation orders. -AAP Image. www.sheppnews.com.au/national/lismore-flood-levée-bursts-again/

³ Image source: www.dw.com/en/australias-sydney-braces-for-floods-amid-massive-rainfall/a-62340598

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