Dear Reader

The following email messages were collected from affected residents and forwarded to me for the purpose of illustrating the dire situations that many residents were and still are in, in ‘hinterland’ areas of Byron Shire. Cyclone Oswald travelled down the east coast of Australia and reached our region on the long weekend, 26 - 28 January. Days of heavy rain and strong winds loaded and overloaded some of the Shire’s infrastructure including our roads, and electricity and phone networks.

Of particular concern has been the road network which remains damaged in the hinterland. The most significant damage is to Upper Coopers Creek Road - it is the only access to many residents and is closed, even to pedestrians. Alternative routes are being sought for pedestrian and for emergency four-wheel-drive vehicles but there is no ‘regular’ access.

There will likely be no such access for a long period. One call for help is to create that access as soon as possible.

The road-slip in question was caused by a collapse of the steep bank of Coopers Creek. The road traverses the bank. It is known to have slipped previously. Repair will clearly be a complex task. The terrain makes finding an alternative route equally complex.

Emergency organisations are offering services that include ferrying provisions to stranded residents, emergency medical evacuations, etc. The helicopter link is frail however, being limited in bad weather such as during fog or heavy rain. The disconnection from regular life is a recurring worry for residents, who cite issues such as the inability to get to work. This leads to mortgage stress on top of sheer lack of funds to provide staples and the heavy tasks involved in clean-up on their own properties.

I have removed references to individuals from the following ‘accounts’ as I have yet to obtain their permissions to reveal who they are. The first account summarises the situation and does have such permission. It also appeared as Background to my Motion, on Notice for Byron Shire Council’s meeting of 28 February 2013. Each account is numbered on the following pages, annotated with the date I received it and with the area Upper Wilsons Creek (UWC) or Upper Coopers Creek (UCC). I retain some contact details for authors.

The first 3 accounts and #9 are general appeals. The rest describe personal situations. The accounts are preceded by a couple of pictures from Upper Wilsons Creek.

Yours faithfully,
picture 1: tree into bedroom

picture 2: Wilsons Creek Road washed out
picture 3: tree, removed by helicopter to minimise further damage to house

picture 4: power pole displaced by load on wires
Account 1: (received 14 February; UCC)

I write with my concerns regarding the safety and integrity of the Upper Coopers Creek Community after the declaration of a disaster following the landslip during the recent severe storms.

Weeks have passed since the disaster event occurred and still there remains a complete absence of on ground material assistance to the community. We have had senior members of local Police, local government (including Mayor Simon Richardson and councillor Basil Cameron), SES and representatives from state Police and Emergency Services visit our temporary crisis centre at the Upper Coopers Creek Public School and assurances have been offered.

However, our pressing concern is the minimum requirement for pedestrian access to our homes. The section of road where the landslip occurred has been officially closed to pedestrian traffic for a week. Community members have discovered immediate solutions including Baileys Bridges (pre-fabricated steel truss bridges) which are available for hire from the department of Roads and Maritime services. We are awaiting the promised ground exploration from the authorities to establish suitable foot paths around the landslip but in the meantime the only access is across a section of creek which is a hazardous waterfall shin deep in rushing water.

I explored this route yesterday and carried my four year old daughter across in my arms as a mock medical evacuation exercise should a life threatening injury such as a snake bite occur. I requested rope, carabiners and harnesses from SES to provide a safety lifeline at this crossing and I was informed that they could not help with this. The reason this is significant is for the simple reason that a rescue helicopter is unlikely to be able to fly in the event of poor weather evidenced by several meetings with the community cancelled due to this reason. This creek crossing is currently our only avenue of escape in the event of the 'catastrophic collapse' of the landslip area as forewarned by council's sub-contracted geotechnical engineers. Council's advice is not to cross the landslip area at all.

I have approached council for help and the local police command based at Tweed Heads to assist in upgrading this escape route with safety equipment. I have been informed a 'risk assessment' needs to be done and nothing will be done if it is too risky. We rely therefore on our own resources and cooperation to effect solutions. It is lucky we are a resilient community but help from above is thin on the ground and the community is tiring of watching the higher echelons of local government flying in and out by helicopter while nothing changes the facts on the ground. There is no emergency management plan in place and the quality of communications from the powers that be is extremely poor. I have to thank mayor Simon Richardson and Councillor Basil Cameron for making personal visits to our community and Mr. Cameron in particular for making the effort to communicate personally in regards to updates. Councillor Duncan Dey is tabling a notice of motion regarding this issue whilst collating personal impact statements from our community and I thank him for that.

To indicate the severity of this situation we have been offered the alternative of voluntary evacuation or remaining in our homes relying on helicopters transporting our essentials. One young family has no telephone land line, no internet and no mobile coverage. They have a four month old baby and a six year old child in their care. There has been no financial relief from any government agency and many of us are suffering financial hardship because we are unable to attend work. The Australian Government Disaster Compensation Payment is at this point unavailable because the region has not been declared a disaster area. The state-based disaster compensation payment overseen by the Department of Police and Emergency services is unavailable because much of what it covers is irrelevant to community members or the payment does not cover what has been lost such as food spoilage. This must be claimed within 48 hours of the disaster - a physical impossibility given our power and telephone services were cut for more than 110 hours after the severe storms in January.

We appear to be falling through the cracks no matter whether we stand on the landslip or not!
Airlifting supplies is problematic for some. We are expected to establish accounts with grocery stores and make arrangements for parcels to be delivered to Mullumbimby Showground for transhipment by helicopter. We need food, fuel, gas and all the usual basic life essentials however some in the community have no credit cards or internet banking and must somehow make alternative payment arrangements for essentials or evacuate.

We are advised by council that it is not known how long this helicopter service will be available.

There are few solid reassurances flowing into our community and the levels of personal distress and psychological stress amongst our neighbours is palpable with many in tears fearful for there safety and that of their loved ones.

Our community wants a pedestrian access as soon as possible. We want council to liaise with local landowners to assist in upgrading existing access ways such as banana trails/fire trails as an absolute priority.

We want to be updated daily on progress. A face book page has been established that is accessible to all: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Upper-Coopers-Creek-Landslip-Action-Group/332415366859453 and we encourage councillors and emergency services personnel to update us there as well as by e-mail and telephone. We want a failsafe community communications system set up to allow us to communicate in the event of another breakdown in telephone and electricity services. The school has a satellite phone but it is under lock and key and was not accessible during the storm event. We want vehicular access to and from our homes as soon as possible and demand that a temporary truss bridge be installed immediately. We also demand that the state and federal funding agencies make immediate provisions for disaster relief for affected community members and make funding available to local council to assist them in repairing the road or re-establishing a new one.

We want assurances and action not talk-vests and buck passing from state to local authorities who are ill-equipped to deal with these extraordinary events.

Please help us.

The following video is an appeal. More public illustrations of the extent of our hardship and our dissatisfaction with the progress and management of this disaster will be forthcoming in the local and national media.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YW3nvHfaUA8&feature=youtu.be

Account 2: (received 8 February; UWC)

Email to: attorney@ag.gov.au

Subject: Australian Government Disaster Recovery declaration NSW floods January 2013 for Byron Shire residents, particularly Wilsons Creek, Upper Wilsons Creek, Huonbrook, Wanganui and Upper Coopers Creek

The Honourable Mark Dreyfus QC MP

Dear Sir,
Would you kindly consider adding Byron Shire (northern NSW) to the local government areas designated for Australian Government Disaster Recovery Floods NSW January 2013 declaration for floods / storm damage incurred in the Australia Day long weekend 2013 storm event? We live at Upper Wilsons Creek and many residents in the surrounding areas particularly in the hinterland experienced severe impacts from the storm and flood. Local residents have incurred huge expense and disruption during the floods, with power disconnected for more than five days, phones disrupted and internet down for over seven days, extreme road damage and being flooded in or out of homes. There are also several landslips and road damage which may be covered through State Disaster funds. However I understand that there are around 15 homes cut off by landslips at Wanganui, and others at another slip at Upper Coopers Creek. Most people in this area of the hinterland have experienced trees down, and some have damage to homes and infrastructure as a result. We were isolated for several days and some are not covered by insurance.

Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated.

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**Account 3:**

(received 9 February; UWC)

The Honourable Mark Dreyfus QC MP

Dear Sir,

Please consider adding the hinterland of the Byron Shire to the declaration of affected properties under section 36 of the Social Security Act (1991). As a resident of the Upper Wilsons Creek area, I propose to speak on behalf of the residents of this valley. However, I also am aware of effects of the storm and flood event on numerous people throughout the Byron Shire hinterland, including Huonbrook, Wilsons Creek, and Wanganui (where several landslips are impacting on access and egress for residents), as is the case for a severe landslip at Upper Coopers Creek where around 40 residents are stranded.

All residents (approximately 105 people) of the Upper Wilsons Creek valley meet the following criteria of the Social Security (Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment) Determination 2013 (No. 4):

- "Been unable to gain access to their principal place of residence for a period of 24 hours because access to the place of residence is cut off, or the person is unable to leave a place affected by the disaster as a direct result of the disaster".

- "Where a person is stranded in their principal place of residence for a period of 24 hours or more as a direct result of the disaster."

Most residents were flooded in or out of their residence for more than 96 hours.

Wind and rain was so extreme and cyclonic, that trees and branches and other flying debris made leaving homes impossible during the peak wind periods. Additionally residents were cut off from the only road exit from the valley through surging creek waters which cut the road at more than fifteen crossings and other locations. The speed and height of flood-waters meant that no-one could cross the first or any of the subsequent creek crossings from Saturday 26th January (72mm of rain recorded to 6am), the Sunday 27th January (197mm of rain to 6am), Monday 28th January (440mm of rain to 6am) nor Tuesday 29th January (303mm of rain to 6am). On Tuesday the road was still impassable to most vehicles, however local back-hoe operators and others moved along sections of the road (still isolated by flood-waters) to chain-saw where safe to do so. Power lines were down in numerous sections of the road, as were phone cables. Multitudes of trees and debris were over the road, blocking private drive-ways and creek crossings. There were numerous sections of road rendered impassable due to huge sections of the road washing out.

- "Where a person’s principal place of residence was without electricity, water, gas, sewerage service or another essential service as a result of the disaster for a continuous period of 48 hours or more."

(DD roadsliip accounts, page 6)
Virtually all residents were without power for 120 hours (five days).
Approximately 90 people in the Upper Wilsons Creek valley were without power for an extensive period of time, and contents of fridges and freezers were destroyed.
Most people were consequently without internet access, and the large majority without phone access as modern telecommunications equipment generally requires 240volt power. Some residents had no cooking facilities, water pumps were inoperable, hence unable to bathe, flush toilets, wash dishes etc.

- Further the council roads were impassable to anything but high 4WD until Friday 8th February, so many people were restricted until then. The road access continues to be a big issue. Many residents have huge bills and/or many weeks of work for repairs to homes, drive-ways, gardens and properties through tree falls and flying debris from the wind-storm. We were already impacted by a landslip at the Wilsons Creek School a year ago on the Australia Day weekend of 2012, and have been unable to get access to road repair materials and many other essential services through most of the past year, due to 3 tonne and 5 tonne road limits (now 10 tonne limit). Many drive-ways and road accesses were severely impacted by this event.

Please consider this request for consideration for declaration of sections of the Byron Shire under the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment scheme.

Account 4: (received 10 February; UWC)
The Honourable Mark Dreyfus, QC, MP, Attorney General
Dear Sir,
I would like to tell you of my personal difficulties as a result of the recent cyclonic event in the hinterland of Byron Shire, NSW.
I live alone with a Disability Pension and a currently vacant house as my only form of income. I am a sixty year old woman. Luckily, I did not need any medical help during the disaster.
Flooded in from Friday evening till following Friday morning ie – one week
No power or phone from Saturday to following Thursday ie – five days
No Internet for a further 5 days
Unable to:
- cook
- wash – self or anything else
- continue income related project
- pay mortgage
Consequences:
- Trees down – will cost money for workmen to clear
- Trees over water line, therefore I still have no water after two weeks – will cost money for workmen to clear
- $600 worth of road base and labour washed into creek – will cost money to replace and repair
- Tradesmen delayed in working on income producing project (repairing rental house for occupancy to pay mortgage)
- Further wear and tear to my car due to condition of road – I can hear things about to break – will cost money to repair

Going out for a shower and drinking water every second day has devastated my petrol budget and is eating into my meagre food budget

(DD roadsip accounts, page 7)
Eating is restricted, as, with limited water, I am reluctant to cook rice or pasta, which are my staple foods - expensive alternatives.

Fortunately for me, and unfortunately for my neighbours, my property is one of those that escaped the worst of it. Therefore, I request that as per the previous mentioned formal request, you declare the Byron Hinterland a Natural Disaster Area.

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**Account 5:**

(received 11 February; UCC)

Due to the slip on Upper Coopers Creek Rd., we are now confronted by many hardships. Firstly, I am unable to continue running my business from home and my husband cannot continue his farm maintenance work – thus no income.

Secondly, we did have our property on the market, as we are at retirement age, and were planning to sell and move to NZ to retire. This now seems to be postponed indefinitely.

Besides the above, we also have the hardships of everyday living i.e. getting food, fuel and gas to our home, as well as animal feed and other requirements necessary for the running and maintenance of our acreage.

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**Account 6:**

(received 11 February; UCC)

I'm one of the people living on the wrong side of the Upper Coopers Creek landslip which has cut us off from normal life for an unknown period of time. Below I'm outlining the effects that it has had on my life so far:

- absence of communication from Council to notify us that the road was going to be closed. Luckily my neighbour rang me, but could daily have not rung, and one of my other neighbours was not informed until I returned from taking my van and trailer out (I was meeting furniture removalists the next day to collect some of my furniture), so that the road was closed before they too their car out,
- inability to service the car that is now on the home side of the slip,
- inability to have any work or improvements done on the property or the buildings, including repairs to phone and internet (these often konk out during wet seasons in this area),
- difficulty in getting shopping across the slip,
- greater difficulty in bringing home horse feed (I have one very very old horse who relies totally on the bucket, one old horse, and one moderately old horse). This will be impossible if the slip is completely closed to pedestrian traffic and I am unable to take a wheelbarrow to the car on the other side, unless it is choppered in. Today I bought a month's supply of horse feed in case the slip area is completely closed,
- the problem of rubbish building up is going to get worse as time goes on. Today I bought a Soda Stream to reduce the plastic bottles that I normally take to town for recycling,
- I am on the pension and cannot carry all these extra expenses,
- inability to rent out my dairy due to lack of access,
- inability to start a business, such as a market stall, that I am nearly ready to start,
- lack of co-operation from neighbours who could provide alternative access to English' Road (by tractor if necessary). When I first moved here many people came through my property on their way to the swing bridge that was 1 km away, without asking permission. When a second swing bridge was built I was refused access to it, even though the owner used my property for access for many years,
• if the power fails, as it did for 5 days during the flood the internet will also go and I think that we could all be in very serious trouble in keeping food supplies etc. I would purchase a generator if the funds were available,
• I live on the wrong side of the creek on Tickles Road and I am further isolated by flooding creeks for several days at a time.

Account 7: (received 12 February; UCC)
I am not sure exactly how you want this story formatted so I will keep it brief and to the point:
* I live in the valley of Upper Coopers Creek, on the landslide-affected side.
* I have no money to buy food for my family.
* I have missed out on my work today.
* I am supposed to attend SCU in Lismore 3 days/week.
* My 4 year old daughter is supposed to attend Federal pre-school 3 days/week.
* My 15 year old son is supposed to attend Byron High School 5 days/week.
* We were into our 6th day without power after ex-cyclone Oswald hit us.
* We were into our 5th day without a phone, as above.
* We feel isolated, but have enough milk to last tomorrow.
* We have been warned that the road is closed, even to pedestrians.
* We missed out on our meeting at the UCCPSchool today, because weather conditions were unfavourable for the landing of a helicopter in such a restricted area as the school oval.
* Some people in the valley have medical conditions. There is also an infant.
* Please can council let us know what was decided in today's Mullumbimby meeting?

Thanks for your attention and concern,

Account 8: (received 12 February; UCC)
To those whom it may concern,

My family and I recently moved to Upper Coopers Creek from Brisbane, where I was employed full time as an Office Manager and my husband worked nightshifts in order to care for our first child. Our primary reason for relocating was the suitability of UCC Public School for my son, now 6 and the positive rural environment for our family mentally and physically. I now have a second child 19 weeks old. However the recent events surrounding our current home and school, both due to the road issue affecting us now a number of breaches to our rental agreement and personal concerns, have been far from positive.

Although to date we have made all rent payments on time we have been struggling financially due to a number of setbacks following the move interstate and even though we had saved as much as possible for the transition we had no funds left to start operations for our own business as intended. We are now in a position of relying on government payments. The recent power outage of 6 days followed directly after my fortnightly shopping. This alone broke the minimal budget we had.
As my son turned six on Saturday 9th February and our baby is nearly 20 weeks old the payments we have been living on week to week have just been reduced by over $400 a fortnight.

Due to severe health issues my husband is currently seeing a psychiatrist and is in the process of claiming his super under compassionate grounds as he requires urgent and costly dental work however he has also been actively seeking suitable employment and undertaking odd jobs in order to continue to meet our financial commitments; including rent $600 & car repayments $220 per fortnight.

Prior to the collapse of the road we were seriously considering moving our family out of the valley due to a number of concerns on the property and at the school as well as the financial strain. We now find ourselves unable to leave at all and unable to pay the rent. I have contacted the real estate and advised our situation requesting a rent reduction until the property is accessible again however the owner is not tolerant to our situation at all. We are all extremely stressed and anxious, it is affecting our health, my son has been sick for the past week and my husband and I have lost so much weight our belts do not fit (I don’t own scales).

Please we implore you to recognise the situation people of UCC are in and allow us access to funding to help ease the strain of our situation. Ultimately there is no longer any safe way to access our homes or continue our daily lives.

Regards

________________________________________________________________________________

Account 9: (received 12 February)

I have received 16 emails and phone calls from residents of Upper Wilsons Creek, Huonbrook and Upper Coopers Creek. It is difficult to get details from Wanganui as they still have phone and internet problems. From these communications, I gathered the following information:

Days flooded in or out: 2 to 7

Days without:
- power 4 to 10
- phone 1 to 10
- internet 1 to 11
- water 3 to still no water today

Impacts on:
- income 12 respondents
- mortgage, super, rent, bills 6 respondents
- health issues 6 respondents
- stress and anxiety 9 respondents

Health Issues Mentioned:
- Osteoporosis
- Glaucoma
- Replacement heart valve
- Possibility of stroke
- Possibility of heart attack
- Brittle bones
• Increased dependence on carers
• Cancer
• Access to medications
• Threatened miscarriage

Other specific concerns:
• Now unable to put house on market and downsize
• Children unable to attend school
• Extra travel time to work, shopping etc
• Possible eviction
• Getting teenager to first day at university
• Had no food to eat for 6 days
• House devastated by mould
• No access for machinery for clean up
• Possible need to rent a second place near work
• No feed for livestock
• Unable to register car
• Unable to realize income from rental property
• Deterioration of car

Problems that have arisen for the whole community, some being now exacerbated hangovers from the floods of January 2012 include:
• Loss of refrigerated and frozen food
• Inability to
  o get gas tanks
  o empty septic tanks
  o machinery
• Driveways blocked or washed away
• Things to be repaired, replaced or removed
  o road base
  o gravel
  o solar panels
  o rooves
  o electrical goods
  o generators
  o computers
  o pumps
  o tools
  o fallen trees
  o water lines
In addition, the people of Upper Coopers Creek, which has been closed since February 6th, have to cope with:

- No vehicular access
- Walking minimum of 2 kms each way
- Carrying shopping, even extremely heavy items
- Carrying garbage 2 kms to the bins
- No mail deliveries

The information that was gathered from Wanganui is as follows:

- all associated issues of total road closure similar to Upper Coopers Creek,
- one actual landslip of longer proportion than WC landslip, and another two sections undermined and very vulnerable,
- people had (and may still have) no internet access and some disruption to phone services,
- trees down,
- difficulty in clean up due to not able to get services in,
- residents advised to contact SES but most residents in Wanganui and Huonbrook trying to do their own cleanups,
- Wanganui causeway part way blocked with fallen tree so in another flood will be flooded in earlier,
- another vulnerable section in upper Huonbrook.

Account 10:  (received 12 February; UWC)

My flood impacts in brief were:

- 2 days isolation (floodwaters cutting off the road)
- 5 days no power
- 7 days no internet
  (serious disruption to home and work resulting from the above)
- bad erosion of access track and loss of $1,000 worth of gravel, largely resulting from inability to get machinery across first landslip to fix drains.

Account 11:  (received 12 February; UCC)

My wife & I live at the end of the Upper Coopers Creek Road beyond the land slip.

My wife has three major medical conditions, Advanced Osteoperosis (subsequent spinal surgery), Glaucoma & and an artificial heart valve. These conditions leave her vulnerable to: Heart attack, Stroke and major bone breaks all of which would require fast medical emergency action.

The current situation with the slip has exacerbated our situation, we had our property on the market to sell to move closer to town but clearly that is now not an option for the foreseeable future.
My wife cannot push a supermarket trolley round a supermarket without incurring pain and she certainly cannot push or carry any trolley bag or items across the 100 meters of road affected by the slip.

She finds she can only comfortably drive her own vehicle which is on the wrong side of the slip. We have another car on the far side of the slip which I can drive her to hospital appointments and shopping with.

The point is up till now she has been 75% dependent on me and the slip situation has now made her 100% dependent on me.

We had looked to achieving a retirement fund out of the sale of our property which in the current market admittedly was going to be tight but in this situation it is now untenable.

I also find us in a situation where I cannot actively look for work either.

I hope our situation stresses the need for council to rectify this situation as quick as humanly possible and provide any assistance that state of federal government makes available.

________________________________________

**Account 12:**

(Received 12 February; Huonbrook)

* At our place at Huonbrook - loss of power for four nights, loss of phone one day, unable to get to work 29/2/13 or notify work of same, no internet for 10 days, four trees down in house paddock but no damage to buildings, loss of some fridge contents.

* I've received some reports from Upper Huonbrook:
  - BS – tree on shed, approx 30 mature gums down on fencing,
  - D's – had up to eight trees on house,
  - JB – many trees down in paddock, unable to do the work of chainsawing,
  - JB – tree on house, damage to solar panels and house.

* I took four phone calls and had a further five discussions with residents from Wanganui re landslip resulting in total closure of road affecting approximately 15 households, trees down with difficulty in cleanup due to restrictions of landslip. Anxiety and stress in regard uncertainty about length of road closure.

________________________________________

**Account 13:**

(Received 12 February; UCC)

To whom it may concern,

We live in Upper Coopers Creek and we are affected by the landslip.

I am a Registered Nurse who works in Lismore Base Hospital and I work 4 days a week to be able to pay off our mortgage. At the moment I need to take the risk of walking across the road closure to be able to go to work. I cannot afford not to go to work and I want to be able to go home to attend to our nearly 5 year old son. We don’t have and cannot afford an alternative place to live.

Since the road closure our son has not been able to go to school.

I hope you do understand that this situation gives us a lot of concerns,

With kind regards,
Account 14: (received 12 February; UCC)

Dear sir sirs ms,
re - hardship incurred as to road slip and closure Upper Coopers Creek Road at the age of 62 (single) with a concurrent daily medication.

The distance between parked car locality approx 2 KM grocery weight has to be minimised as well as carried.

Supplementary to pension hand made leatherwork and three markets a month one in particular requiring a 3 am start. Resultant tiredness will undoubtedly have an impact on sales, ability as well as earlier start and finish allowing for distance having to be walked.

Some difficulty assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely,

Account 15: (received 12 February; UCC)

I would like to re-iterate on my behalf and the residents of the valley the utmost seriousness of the situation we face, not only in the management of on going living requirements but also the future recovery and rebuilding of the access to Upper Coopers Creek.

Whilst the management of the current immediate needs is underway, I would like to make the following points:

1. First and for most the residents of the valley require a safe walking track to their cars on the town side of the slip. There is little reason why this should not be achieved within the month.

2. Replacement of the road on a 'like for like' basis is exactly the shortsighted approach that has contributed to this disaster. 12 years ago the same thing happened and the 'like for like' repair was clearly not adequate.

3. Time schedule of the recovery is very important, there are residents who hoped to sell their properties to fund retirement, they are not young and their future is now in the balance. There are people whose properties are held on mortgage and if they cannot meet their payments their home is at risk, but then since it is not saleable in this situation this puts mortgage providers in a situation too.

4. It is important that the residents are made aware of all the 'due process' departments and directions involved in all governments local state and Federal in this situation

Whilst I am fully aware that these things take time to assess, react to, and finance I would expect the residents of Upper Coopers Creek to hear of, at least a proposed schedule of action within 14 days of the engineer’s initial assessment.

Yours,

Account 16: (received 12 February; UCC)

I would like to let you know that the recent slip on Upper Coopers Creek road has caused me considerable hardship already and if this situation continues a great deal more.

I have no access.

I am unable to leave the valley for work or for grocery shopping or petrol, gas, and other provisions.

I live alone and only have one car so I am forced to walk the distance burdened with provisions unless I happen by chance to get a lift.
I hope you can help.

Cheers,

____________________________________

**Account 17:** (received 12 February; UCC)
The road closure has resulted in my daughter to be unable to move for Uni. She was unable to take half of the things she needed and those things that she was able to take she had walk the 2 km to the car on the other side (eg Fridge, suit cases etc). She was also unable to get in and out of the home to prepare things she needed (Centrelink, school books etc). This has been a serious inconvenience and has made an important time in her life very unpleasant.

____________________________________

**Account 18:** (received 12 February; UCC)
I have suffered hardship due to the storms from ex cyclone Oswald and am now trapped and isolated in the Upper Coopers Creek valley due to complete road closure. Hardships include loss of food from 6 days power failure, lack of food, gas, fuel, and medical supplies, garbage disposal. I am suffering from breast cancer, severe osteoporosis and need to get medications and attend regular Doctors appointments. My teenager is due to start university in Armidale on Friday. The hole valley is suffering hardships ... please help us with some emergency funding.

____________________________________

**Account 19:** (received 12 February; UWC)
I'm a member of the Wilsons Creek Landslip group on Facebook, keeping abreast of it since my friend doesn't do Facebook. Here is her list of the difficulties they faced:

- We were without power for 5 days and didn't have a generator
- Without phone for 1 day
- Without internet for 9 days
- No hot water for showers
- Road cut off for 2 days
- A fridge and freezer full of food that had to be chucked out

Cheers,

____________________________________

**Account 20:** (received 12 February; UWC)
In all my years as a traveling businessman and as a photojournalist, having endured hurricanes in the USA, typhoons in east Asia, and the monsoons in India, I have never experienced, nor felt such helplessness and impending doom, as I did huddled up with my wife and small children, during the night of 27th January 2013 at our home in Upper Wilsons Creek, NSW 2482.
We had already been without power & internet for 24 hours (they would remain off for 10 days), and the phone connection was touch & go. We were cut off from all but 4 other properties, and would remain cut off from our nearest town, Mullumbimby, for over a week. In the last remaining hours of light on the 27th we had kept the kids in the car where thankfully we had been able to keep their minds at bay with a DVD, while my wife & I had run around our property frantically shutting things down, lifting things off the floor, bolstering doors & windows, and making sure all our animals were safe.

It was clear that we were in for a long night, and as night fell, we had no choice but to throw our arms in the air and fall upon the mercy of the Gods, in the hope that we may ride through this storm safely. The storm was so powerful that any thought we might have had to stay up & fight seemed futile. We were to endure whatever may befall us.

Of course with no electricity & moonlight, it got very dark very quickly. We returned to the house and ate from our rapidly thawing freezer. Luckily we have a gas stove and oil lamps, so a warm meal to keep our strength & spirits up was a well-deserved consolation.

Then the four of us (my wife, kids aged 8 & 6, & myself) along with our 2 cats retired to our bedroom to attempts to sleep. The kids were petrified, and I kept telling them that if they slept it would all appear to pass faster. My words were easily said, but sleeping was quite out of the question. None of us slept all night. So much debris was hitting the house & the windows bulged under the pressure of the wind. The roof rattled uncontrollably. I was convinced we were going to lose the roof, or windows, or that a tree branch of something would cause major damage to our house. The noise was deafening. Wind was hitting the house in all directions, simultaneously. We all just lay there for hours clinging to each other. I got up several times, but mostly to settle my mind. I couldn’t see anything outside but a bit of pacing seemed to help.

At first light I looked from our veranda to see trees everywhere, a huge 17ft trampoline that was anchored, all our garden furniture that had been ‘battened down’, gone or trashed, two large anchored sheds lifted off their footings and slammed into the rainforest like a scene from The Wizard of Auz. Everything previously inside the sheds was gone, destroyed, or soaked through. Four large branches hit one of our cars that had been reparked in open space for safety, but we had not anticipated the strength of the winds to carry such large branches so far. However, we were safe, and with first light, just knowing that despite the damage, we could see what was going on now, my exhausted and petrified family managed to get a few hours’ sleep. It was clear that the first day of school was not happening now, and my daughter's important appointment at Tweed Hospital for a crushed & broken finger (caused days before in the lead up to the storm when a tree branch fell on her) was not going to happen. She was going to be without essential treatment & antibiotics for another week.

I did not sleep. I went out to survey. The rain was so hard it felt like a sand-storm, stinging me as it hit. For the first time in an adventurous life, I saw rain almost hit the ground, and then fly up again because of the wind. The rain was falling in all directions. The wind was all over the place. At one point I saw our mulberry tree blowing so hard in one direction that it was coming apart (mulberry is a very flexible wood), yet banana trees 3m from it were blowing hard in the opposite direction. The ornamental plant between them was uprooted & twisted. It was clear that we were experiencing a tornado of sorts. I have experienced them in the USA & South America, and what we got was at least as bad, especially since we are in a rainforest and there is quite simply more debris flying around, and more to uproot.

The creek had come nearer the house than at any time I have previously experienced in 12 years at our property. Two of our three paddocks were now rivers, and the main paddock was slowly inundating. Our large barn, normally 40m from the creek, and at least 4m above the waterline, was literally 6 inches from the breached creek. I applauded the mercy of the Gods. In a brief moment of light relief I saw a blue armchair high in a tree. Only winds can cause this. I wish I’d had my camera for this surreal scene, but my camera would have been yet another victim had I been foolish enough to carry one. It was dangerous being out, but I have considerable experience of self-preservation in threatening situations. As a photojournalist I covered extreme situations like wars & earthquakes.

(DD roadslip accounts, page 16)
By mid-morning the winds had dropped significantly, although the rains persisted & the creek wax & waned, almost reaching the barn, then dropping back again. It is interesting that when I walked right up to the water’s edge near the barn, not even the mice & other wildlife were scared of me, following me over a fallen gutter to dry ground rather than run away from a human.

That day I managed to visit several houses we had been locked in with by the floodwaters. In one, three grown kids were enduring the storm since their parents weren’t able to get home from an Australia Day event that weekend. Their phone line had been brought down by a huge gum which had almost split the phone pole down the middle. Their frantic parents had called us and my first mission was to reach them. Their driveway was a mess – dozens of trees down and huge cracking sounds as I walked up. One had to be very aware and ready to run at any moment. Luckily they were fine, but had also spent the night petrified. The daughter had slept under a table because she was certain a tree was going to fall on the house.

Three neighbours did get trees on their houses, and one car was also crushed. Years of work, energy, and investment in people’s properties were trounced in one night, and tears flowed profusely. On Tuesday the rain stopped, and the valley resounded with the sounds of chainsaws & heavy machinery as the community effort kicked in. We would still be isolated from the rest of the valley for another 2 days, but enough know-how & machinery exists in the valley to at least deal with immediate necessities, and dangers.

After the failure of our business in May 2012, we are re-establishing as an internet business with the help of Newstart and Nortec. We were of course hit particularly badly since we had no internet for nearly 2 weeks, and were unable to get to Centrelink. Of course everyone was very understanding, including the ATO (we missed an old GST monthly payment) and the Commonwealth Bank (we missed a mortgage payment because no income or internet – the first mortgage payment we have ever missed). Because the area has been declared a natural disaster area by the state, we have been able to get an extremely good response from everyone we let down, but that having been said, we still now have arrears that we will have to face eventually. Insurance goes so far, but the excess hurts, especially when you are on Centrelink payments.

Federal recognition would make a huge difference to everyone in the valley. The added outside focus on the trauma we all suffered, as well as the additional funding, would expedite the recovery of a beautiful and well-loved valley and its people who are a credit not only to Byron Shire, but to the whole of Australia.

Account 21: (received 12 February; UCC)

The trouble is that I am spending what should have been my introduction to an Early Childhood Bach. Ed. on trying to reach nearly every corner of the globe on our current situation at Upper Coopers Creek; result: nothing.

Please can you try to make all levels of gov. realize that there are babies, families, workers, etc., in this valley; and that we all feel rather isolated at the moment.
I am seriously considering just spending my entire day on contacting newsagencies around the country; people 15km away did not realize what a ‘pickle’ we are in, and I think the sooner we let them know, the better.

This farce has gone on for too long: the passage from the state back to Byron Shire.

There has not been a single issue of resupply.

The really tragic thing is that people welcomed, and trusted, Rachael - then she was ripped away from us. I think that was the second big mistake, after the first, of making no attempt to communicate with residences about the imminent road closure. If it goes through now, there is an extra hurdle for you.

We are all quite resilient, however there are issues for some people.

I find it quite weird that council don’t seem interested in children: of course we are going to cross the slipway to buy milk for our children.

There is so much for council to learn about in the case of emergencies, which I find it hard to believe they have not absorbed in the past.

You must, for example, be aware that you are manning the slipped section of road 24 hrs/day, yet we are not allowed to cross to earn an income or study.

A simple footbridge would reduce our stress enormously; I was pushing my daughter on a trolley on top of an esky full of food across the slipway, dropping pieces here and there - STRESSFUL, going back for lost thongs. The workers were helpful.

I do not want to put extra stress upon anybody, but I begin to doubt the sincerity of councillors and their integrity, when all we asked for in the interim, knowing it was a long-term job, was for a Baileys (or other) bridge to be set up. I have been advised this could occur within 24 hours.

For our social, emotional and intellectual needs, we require a temporary (or permanent) RTA - leased FOOTBRIDGE.

Please give it to us. We have lost enough already.

Thanks,

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Account 22: (received 12 February; UCC)

I live with my partner and our children. We have been cut off from the world by a landslip, which has made the road not only not safe to drive on but we can’t even walk out of Upper Coopers Creek Road. We as a community have had a meeting with all the Heads of Departments like the SES, Police, Mayor of Byron, Geo scientists, they came by Helicopter.

We all know there is no quick fix to the problem but what are we suppose to do. I can’t afford to pay a mortgage and rent at the same time. I can’t even get out to work unless I take my life in my own hands and walk across a road that is closed to pedestrians. It sounds dramatic but I need to survive.

There are the obvious supply problems – gas, food, fuel, medicinals, kids to school, waste disposal, animal feed and so on but if you can’t go to work how are you supposed to pay for that anyway. I’m not sure where to turn and guess what I can’t even sell.

All the best,