

Audit report documents Australian governments' betrayal of 2022 flood victims

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Flood recovery programs that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese promoted in 2022 as the “biggest ever” have failed to provide a single replacement home or housing lot for devastated victims in northern New South Wales (NSW), according to an audit report.

The February and March 2022 floods that hit the regional city of Lismore and other parts of the Northern Rivers region claimed at least 13 lives, left 4,055 properties declared uninhabitable, and damaged a further 10,849.

In October 2022, Albanese and then Liberal-National Coalition NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet visited Lismore together to attempt to appease angry residents over the lack of government assistance. They announced a “Resilient Homes” scheme to buy back, lift or repair flood-damaged homes and promised to provide \$1.5 billion for it if necessary.

This week, a performance audit by the NSW auditor-general of the joint federal-state \$880 million Resilient Homes program and the \$100 million Resilient Lands program said neither had delivered on their promises. Most damningly, of the 4,382 homes or housing lots promised through the programs, zero had been delivered as of March 31 this year, four years after the catastrophes.

The report attributed the failures to the lack of a “business case or cost-benefit analysis” followed by delays, poor planning and administration by the NSW Reconstruction Authority (RA).

But the real responsibility for the betrayal of the victims lies with the federal and state governments and the capitalist profit system they enforce, which has dictated the circumstances of the disasters, from the lack of preparation for such climate change-driven extreme weather events to the soaring cost of housing, fuelled by profiteering property developers.

Across the six local government areas impacted by the floods, 6,700 homeowners initially expressed interest in buy-backs. But the residents' discontent only intensified in mid-2023 when the federal and state governments, now both Labor since Premier Chris Minns took office in NSW in March that year, halved the scheme from the promised \$1.5 billion and cut from 6,000 to 2,000 the initial promise of homes being eligible for buy-back, raising or retrofitting.

Then the buy-back number was cut further to 1,345 houses in December 2024, and to 1,000 houses in August 2025. As of March 31 this year, only 793 buy-backs had been finalised.

The buy-back scheme has also left a swathe of empty homes in Lismore, some of which squatters occupied because of the lack of affordable housing across the region, which has one of the highest homelessness rates in Australia.

The slashing of the buy-backs was meant to be partly offset by a rise to 600 in the number of “resilient measures” grants, such as subsidies to either lift homes above flood levels or renovate them to supposedly withstand flood damage. As at March 31, however, just 54 resilient measures activities had been completed out of an expected total of approximately 420.

The auditor-general made limited recommendations, none of which address the underlying issues. The report recommended that the RA find ways to accelerate the delivery of sites to which flood-affected people can move by September. Yet just nine of the 12 locations identified by the RA are due to be completed by the end of 2027, with the remainder planned to be completed in 2028.

Moreover, many of the flood victims cannot afford to move to these locations, or do not want to be dispersed to different areas. The audit report revealed that

approximately only 17 percent of the approved buy-back participants were interested in buying the housing lots on offer.

The report acknowledged that a severe housing shortage existed even before the 2022 floods, especially for large families, older people and people with disabilities, as well as a lack of affordable rental accommodation, and that addressing this crisis had been dropped from the objectives of the program as early as May 2023.

The report recommended that by June next year the RA should finalise and implement plans for land left vacant by the buy-back scheme. In a statement, Reconstruction Authority CEO Kate Fitzgerald said the RA accepted the findings and was acting on its recommendations. This is not the first such audit report, however, and nothing has substantially improved.

In February 2024, the auditor-general delivered a damning report on the inadequate provision of emergency and temporary housing after the floods, and the lack of long-term plans to help tenants move out of temporary housing villages. “The current housing supply gap in the Northern Rivers is estimated to be upwards of 24,000 dwellings,” it stated.

One day before the release of the latest audit report, federal and state Labor ministers tried to undercut it by again promising a bright future. In a joint media release, the federal Emergency Management Minister Kristy McBain said: “The Albanese and Minns governments are continuing to work constructively through the Resilient Homes Program to help ensure Northern Rivers and Central West communities thrive in their recovery.”

Vicki, a Lismore resident, told the WSWs she concurred with the audit report. She said the results were “felt daily by those of us remaining who despair when we see the empty blocks where there were once homes that housed people who were part of an engaged and vibrant community. What happens to those residents who have chosen to stay?”

Political conclusions must be drawn from these experiences. While pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into military spending on AUKUS submarines and other preparations to join US-led wars, particularly against China, Albanese’s government is selling out flood victims. It is also approving new fossil fuel projects and failing to seriously address climate change,

making cyclones, floods and other catastrophes, such as bushfires, rising sea levels and droughts, more likely globally.

Every development in the ongoing flood response disaster has confirmed the verdict made by the Socialist Equality Party in its statement in 2022 that the floods had further demonstrated the indifference of governments—both Coalition and Labor—for the health, lives and livelihoods of ordinary working people:

“Every aspect of the floods crisis—from the lack of preparation and warnings to people, to the inadequacy of basic infrastructure and support services, and the lack of assistance offered to the hundreds of thousands of flood victims—is the direct result of the subordination of society to the dictates of private profit.”

This statement is well-worth reviewing. We outlined a socialist perspective, including “a vast expansion of paid civilian emergency and health services to respond to crises such as fires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic” and “an international, scientifically-based plan to halt and reverse global warming.”

We concluded: “The floods crisis, like the bushfire catastrophe and the COVID pandemic, demonstrates the need for the total reorganisation of society on a socialist basis so that it is planned rationally and democratically to protect health and lives, and meet social need.”



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