

## **A statement from a spokesperson for the Department of Defence:**

Defence received a request for support to New South Wales (NSW) flooding from the NSW Government through Emergency Management Australia (EMA) on Monday 28 February 2022. At this time, four helicopters from the Army Aviation Training Centre, already working in support of QLD state government and emergency services, shifted focus to northern NSW. That same day (28 February) Defence assigned six more helicopters, which became available for tasking from 01 March 2022, to support search and rescue and evacuation operations in northern NSW.

Since 28 February 2022, Australian Defence Force (ADF) helicopters have rescued or evacuated more than 100 people across QLD and NSW, 59 of which were in the Northern Rivers region.

ADF helicopters have provided food drops at the request of civilian agencies throughout the region, including to isolated and indigenous communities that were otherwise unreachable. These operations have been conducted in partnership with local State Emergency Service (SES) and state government agencies including NSW Police and Ambulance services.

On 04 March 2022, ADF helicopters delivered food supplies to the residents of Mullumbimby and, when road access opened later that day, ADF personnel delivered water in support of SES. On 05 March 2022, ADF helicopters, coordinated by the Rural Fire Service, delivered food and infant formula to Upper Wilson's Creek.

ADF helicopters have assisted in transporting critically ill patients to local health care facilities, surveying flood extent and damage, locating isolated areas and transporting ADF, SES, Police and Ambulance personnel throughout the region.

Since road access opened to Mullumbimby on 04 March 2022, ADF personnel have been providing assistance to the community in support of SES, including the delivery of water. On 08 March 2022, Defence contributed more than 600 personnel to the Byron Bay and Tweed Shire Council, of which about 150 were sent to Mullumbimby including general duties soldiers, engineers with plant equipment and reconnaissance specialists. Defence personnel have been assisting Mullumbimby with curb to truck debris removal in the township, reconnaissance of roads up into Upper Palmwoods, Huonbrook, the Pocket, Main Arm and Upper Main Arm.

In close consultation with the local community, the ADF has also conducted a clean-up of the local schools, Mullumbimby High School, Mullumbimby Primary School, Upper Main Arm Primary School and continue to work with local authorities to identify and prioritise tasks.

While Defence's early support focused on immediate life-saving efforts in response to the rapidly developing emergency, severe and hazardous weather conditions did, on some occasions, prevent ADF helicopters and aircrew operating safely.

The speed and severity of the conditions that have impacted large parts of the East Coast have proved to be an obstacle for everyone, not just the military. Defence is proud to assist communities in need, and to see and work with members of the community supporting each other in a variety of ways, in response to this emergency.

Following every emergency, there are lessons to be learned in relation to Whole of Government preparedness and crises response. Defence will work with State and Federal governments and partner agencies to prepare for future challenges.