

A statement from the NSW SES:

Evacuation warnings and evacuation orders that are issued by the NSW SES are heavily reliant on weather advice and observations provided by the Bureau of Meteorology. The record-breaking floods that occurred in northern NSW were unprecedented in the areas of impact and the amount of rainfall received in these locations.

On Friday 25 February, the briefing the NSW SES received from the Bureau of Meteorology indicated that the Wilsons River at Lismore was peaking at or just below the moderate flood level.

NSW SES preparations were in line with the forecasts and predictions from the Bureau of Meteorology, which indicated minor to moderate flooding for the Northern Rivers region. The NSW SES had deployed resources throughout the impacted areas. Both NSW SES and other emergency services personnel, and their equipment and vessels, were pre-positioned in northern NSW to help with the potential impending weather coming from Queensland.

Community warnings around evacuation rely heavily on both weather advice and observations provided by the Bureau of Meteorology, and flood intelligence that is based on many years of local advice and experience. Members of the NSW SES are a part of these communities, they get up and respond to the needs of others even when their own families and homes may be at risk.

From the beginning of this extreme weather event, there have been more than 2,000 flood rescue requests. While members of the NSW SES sign up to protect their communities, they also need to consider their own safety first. There were times where entering flood waters was deemed unsafe by expert in-water rescue operators.

The NSW SES utilised not only their local fleet of boats, but assets from out-of-area, including those from partner emergency service agencies. There were a number of NSW RFS air assets prepositioned and deployed to respond to requests for assistance. Response efforts were hampered by both the lack of communications in the area and the inclement weather impacting the flying conditions.

There have been communications issues experienced throughout the Northern Rivers region due to floodwaters inundating the local infrastructure, removing power and essential services. Mobile service carriers experienced significant impacts on many of their telecommunications towers.

The NSW SES has received a total of 24,751 requests for assistance. 386 of these requests were for Mullumbimby, including 111 flood rescue requests and 94 evacuation requests.

As of 8am on Monday 14 March, in the areas of Mullumbimby, Mullumbimby Creek, Wilsons Creek, Upper Wilsons Creek, Huonbrook, Main Arm and Upper Main Arm, there were 1,165 total damage assessments conducted, of which 860 were residential. 197 of these have been deemed uninhabitable.