Emergency Preparedness at Bullinah AHS

Dr Monica Taylor and Dr Natalie Lindsay

AH&MRC
Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW

Deadly Doctors
FORUM 2025

Disaster Recovery – The Bullinah Experience

- **Ballina and Cabbage Tree Island flooding event – March 2022**
- **Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred – March 2025**

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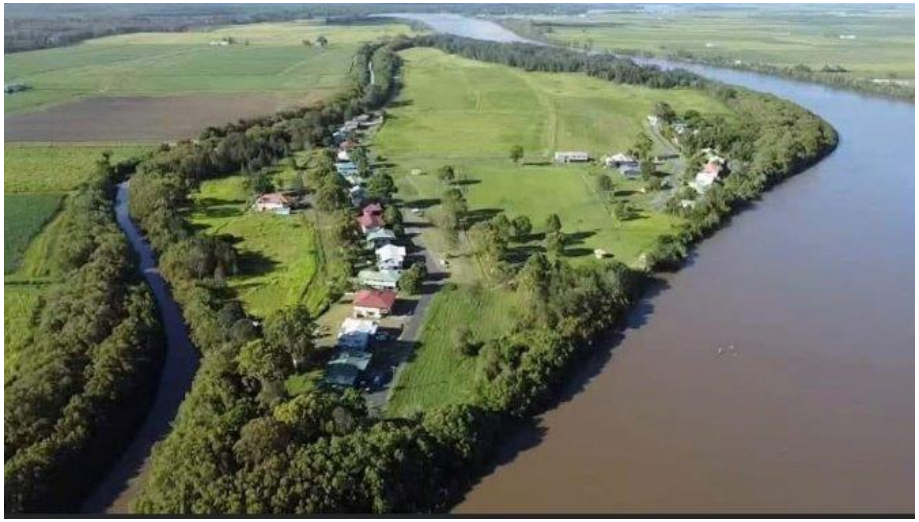
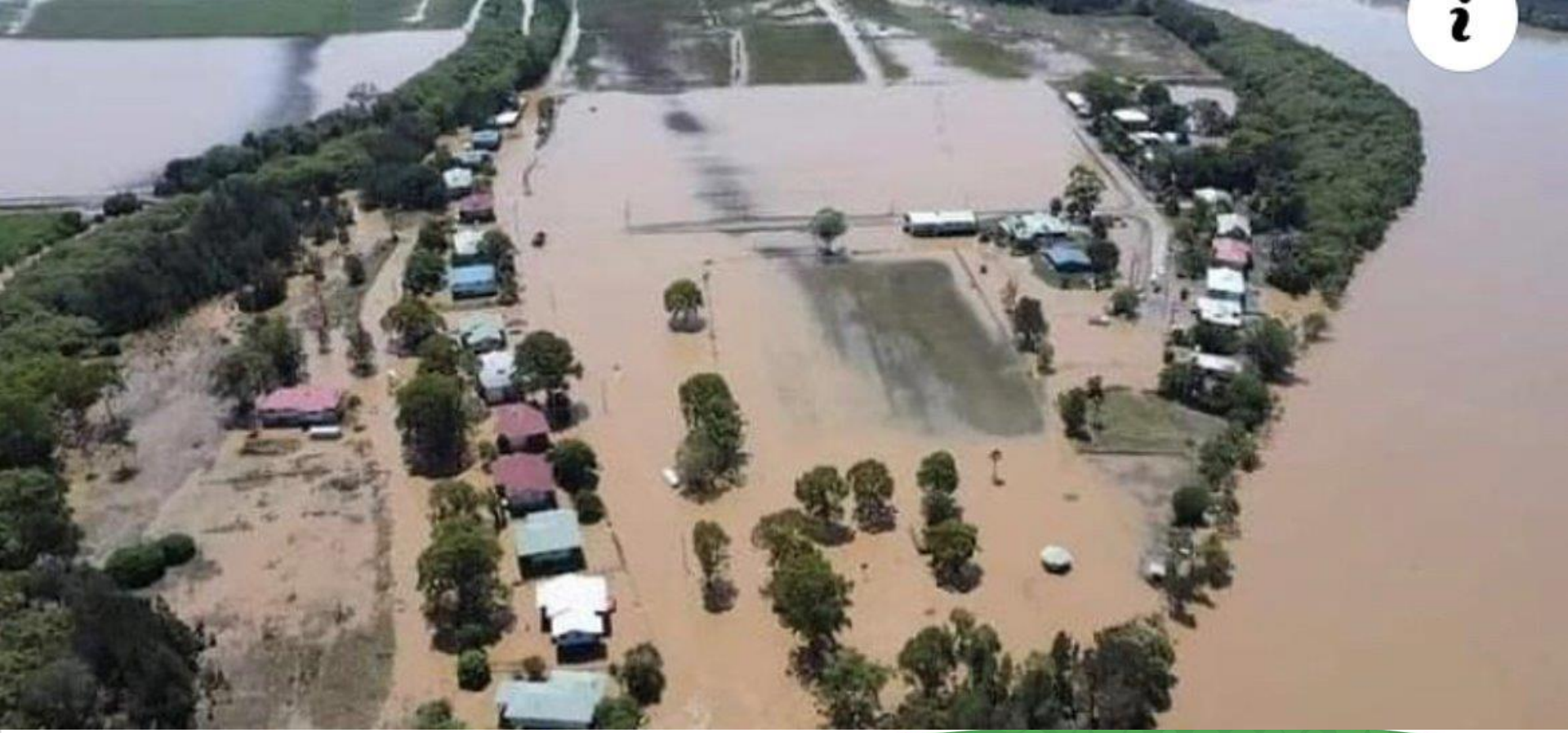
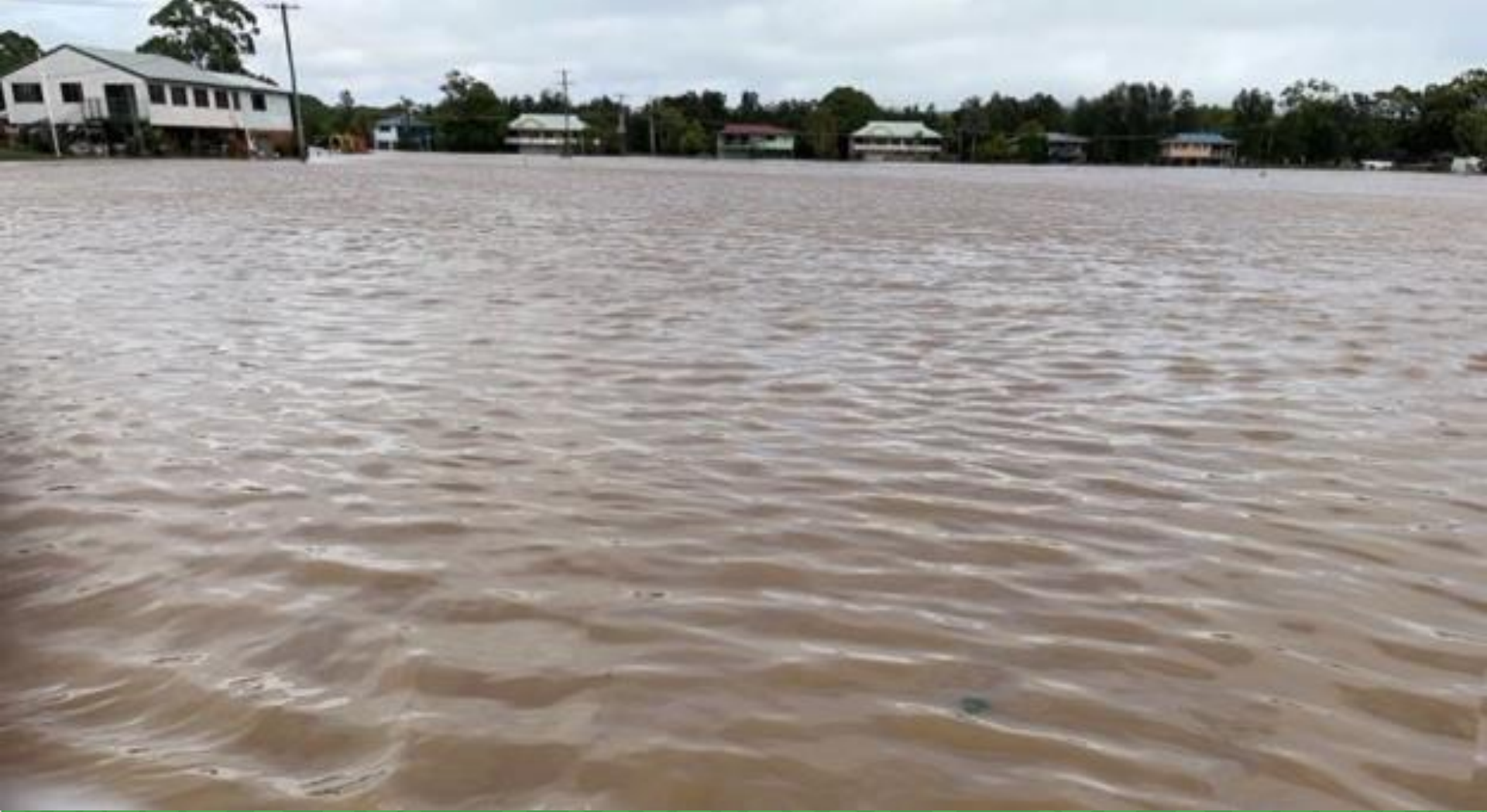
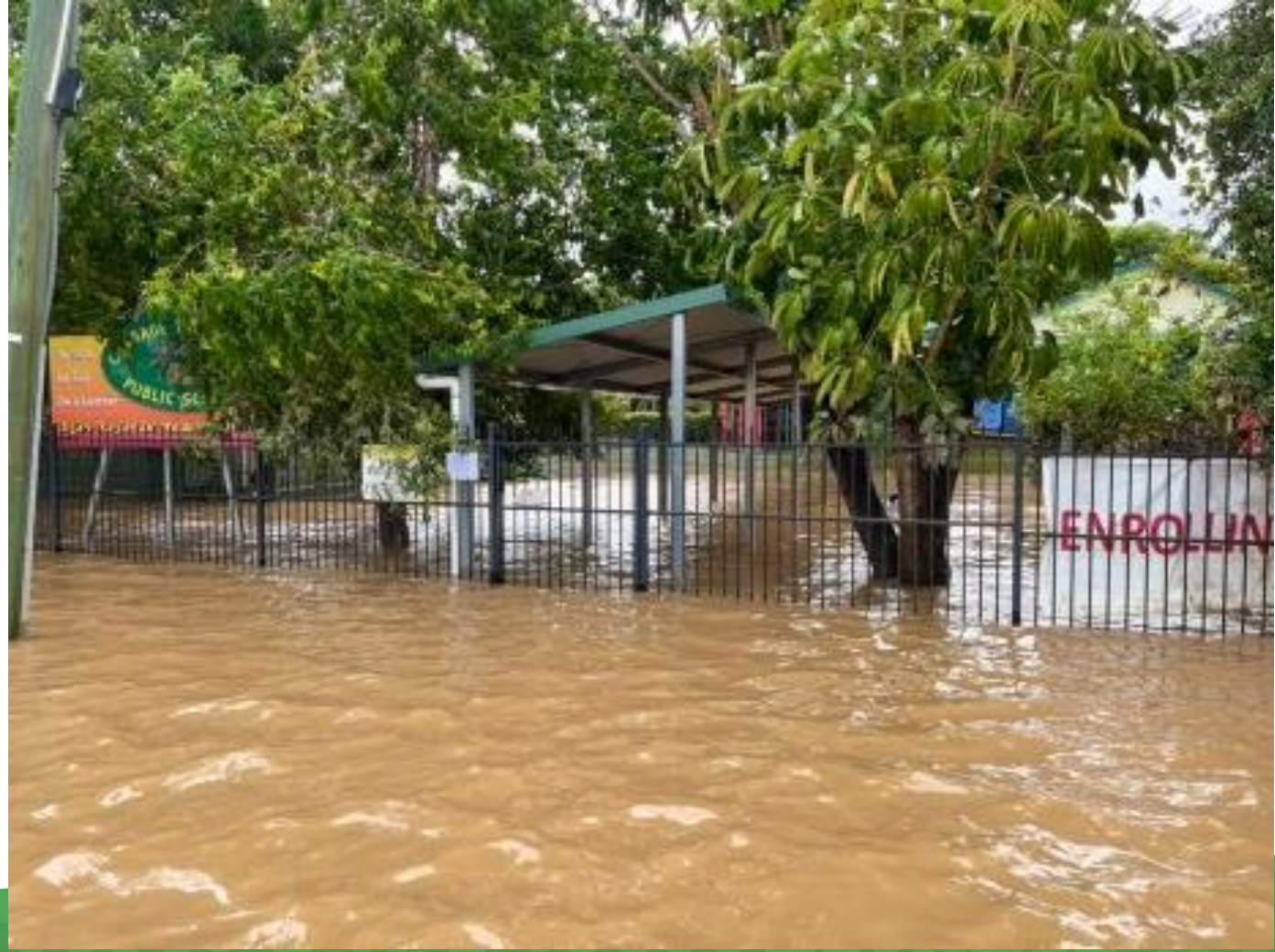
Cabbage Tree Island - Cabbo



- Small river community
- 26 houses, school, health post, community hall and art room
- 130 community members



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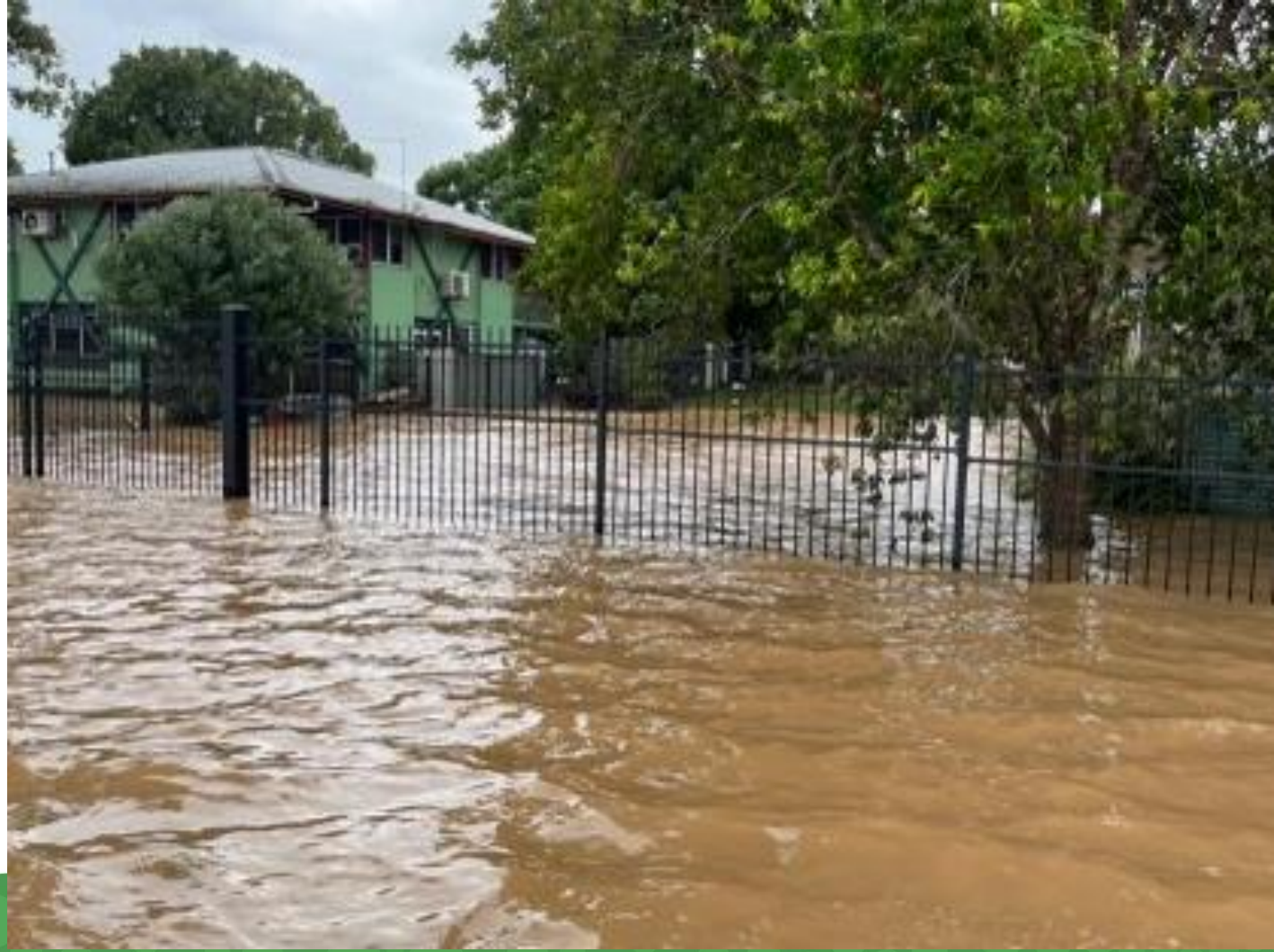
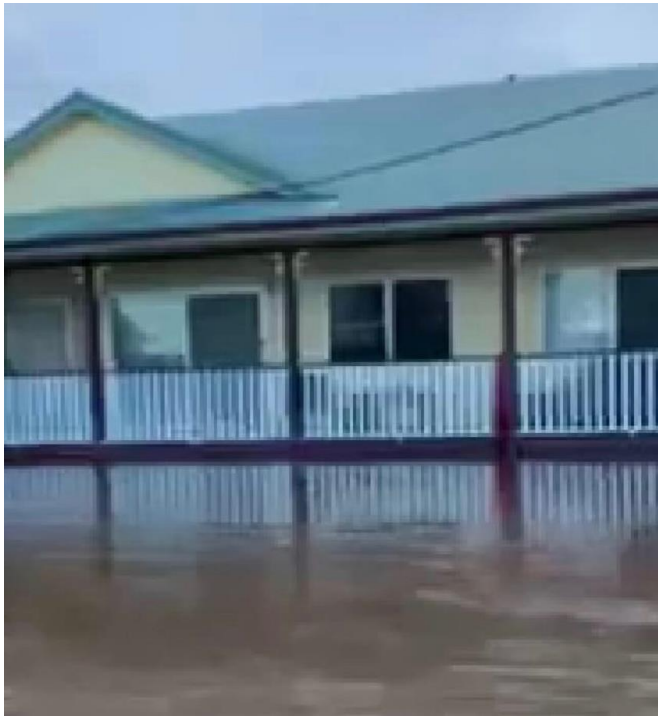
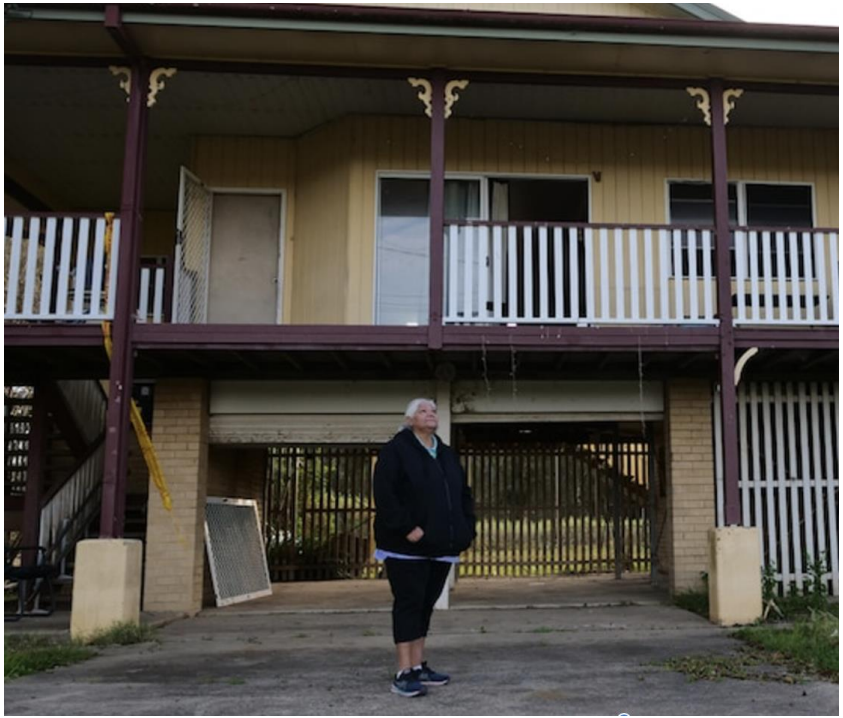
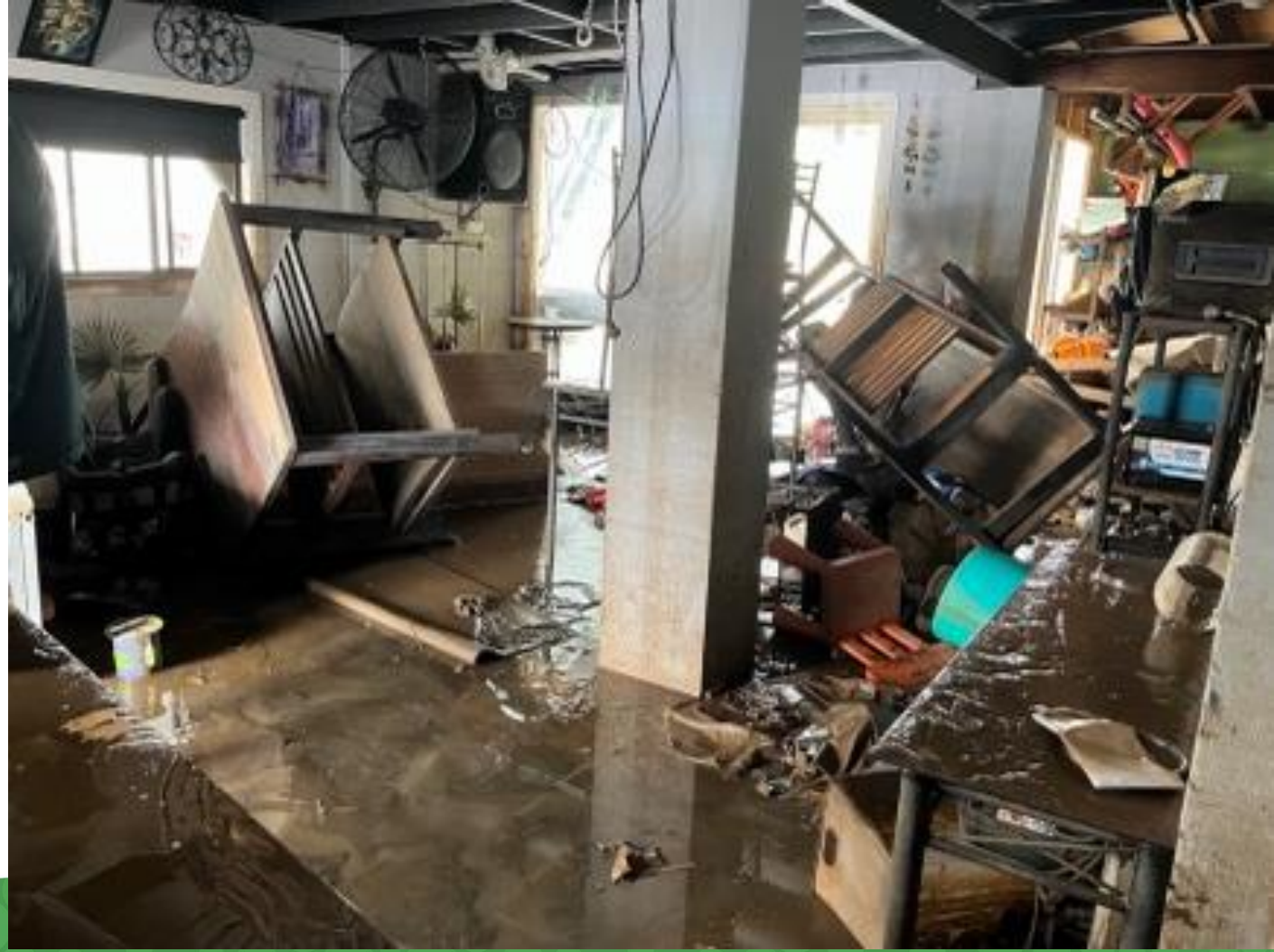
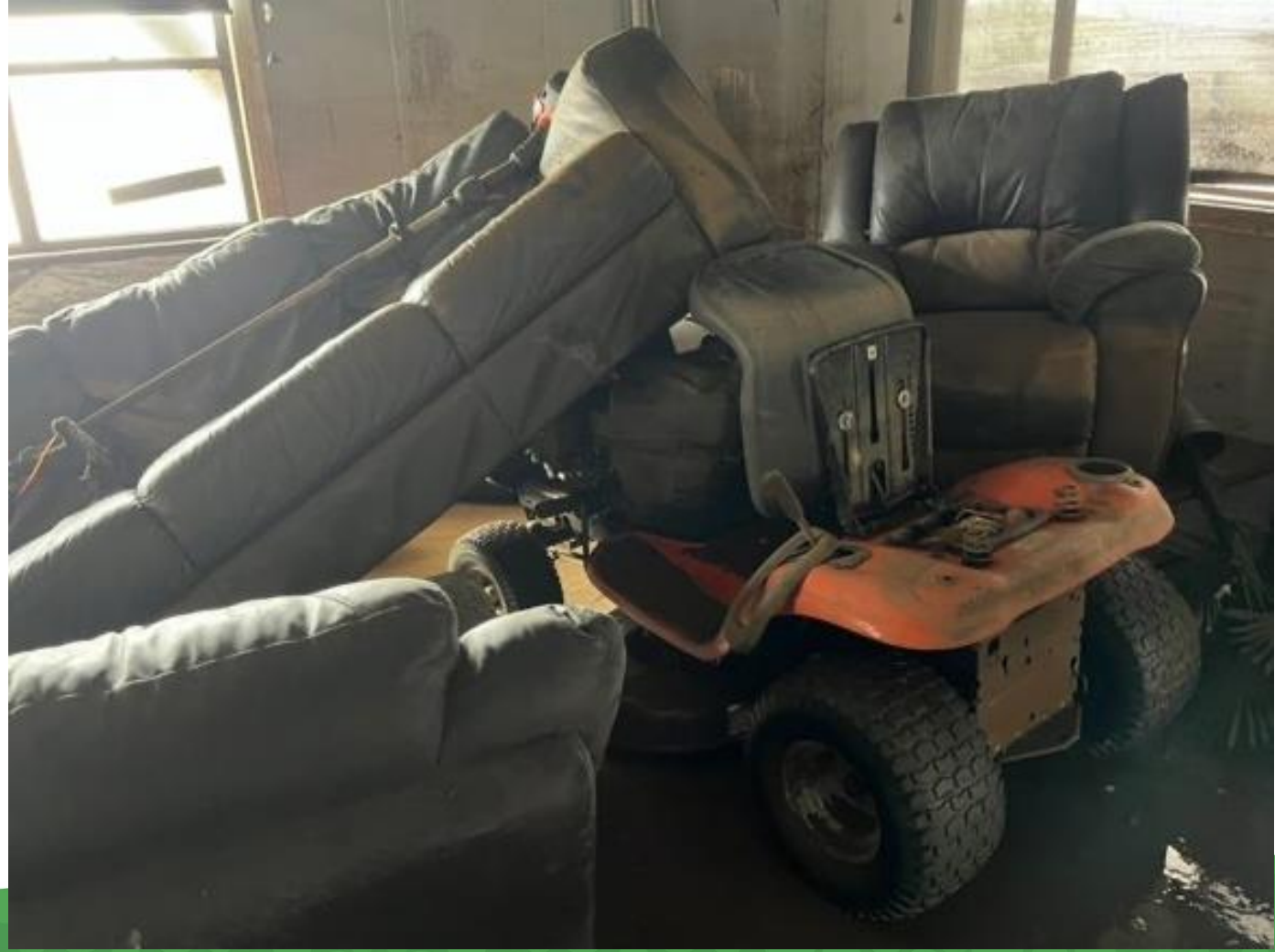
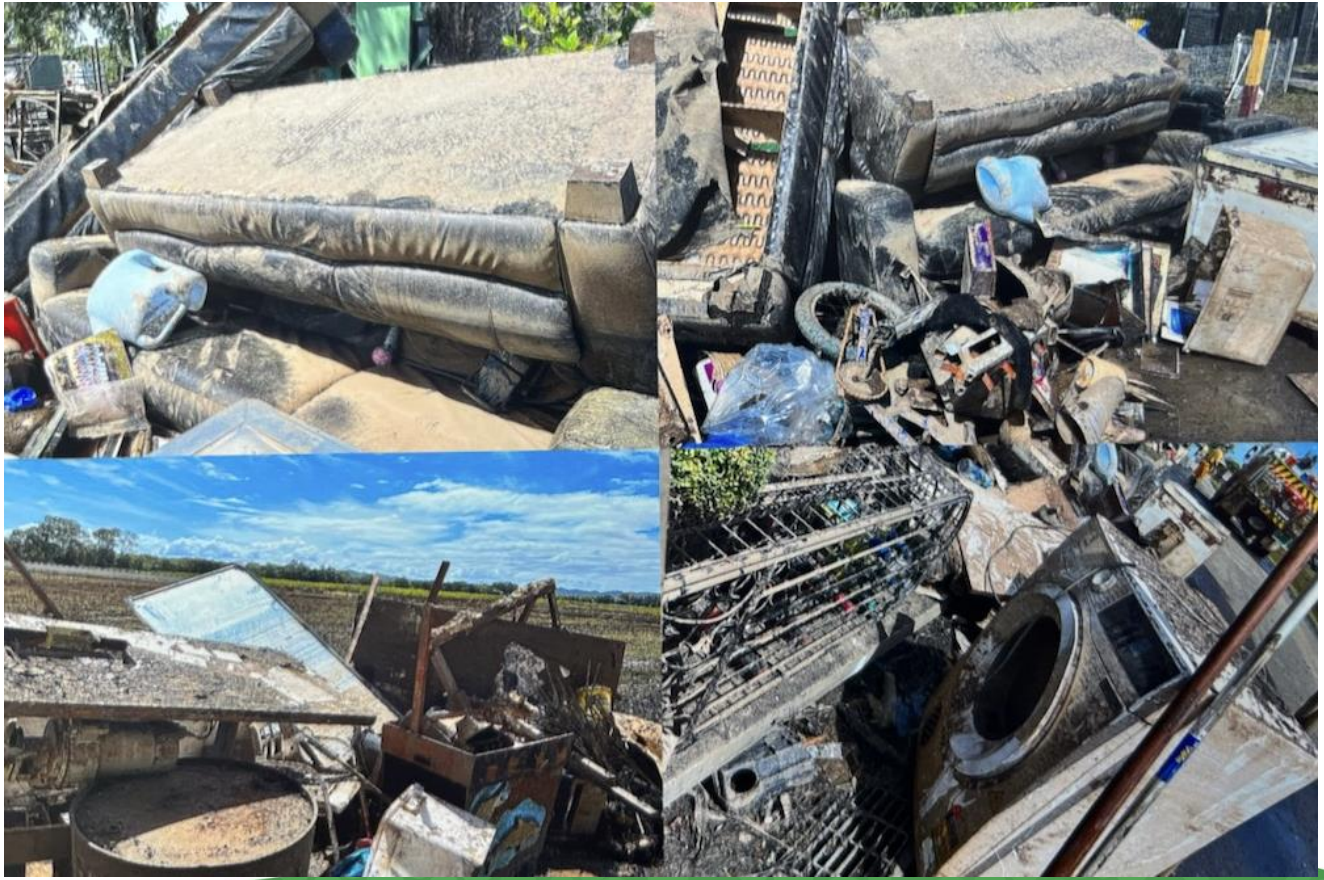




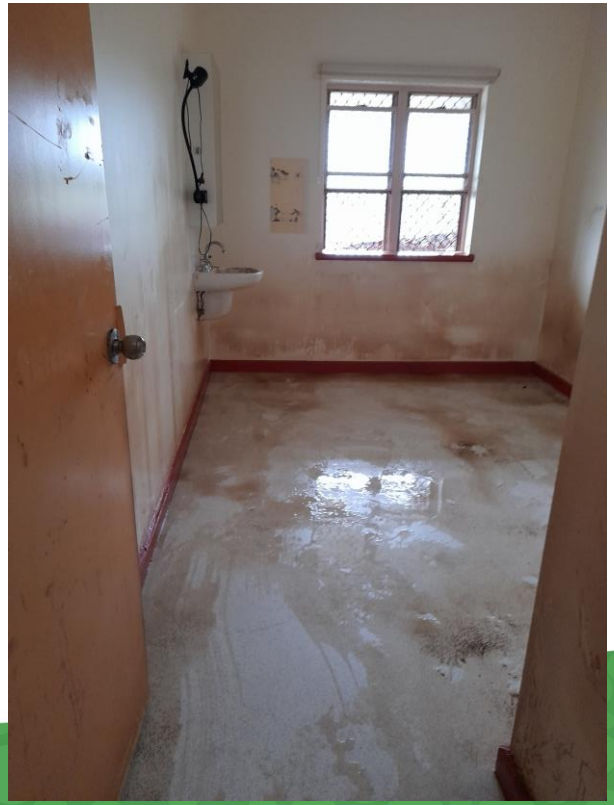


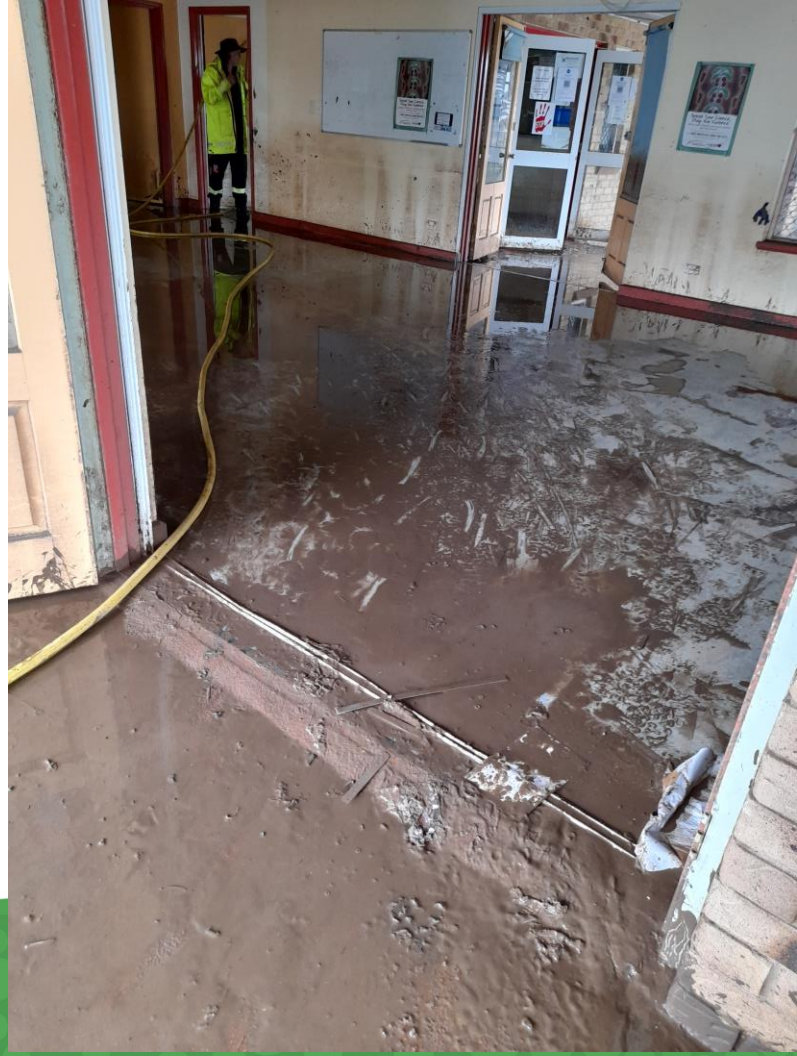






Health Post





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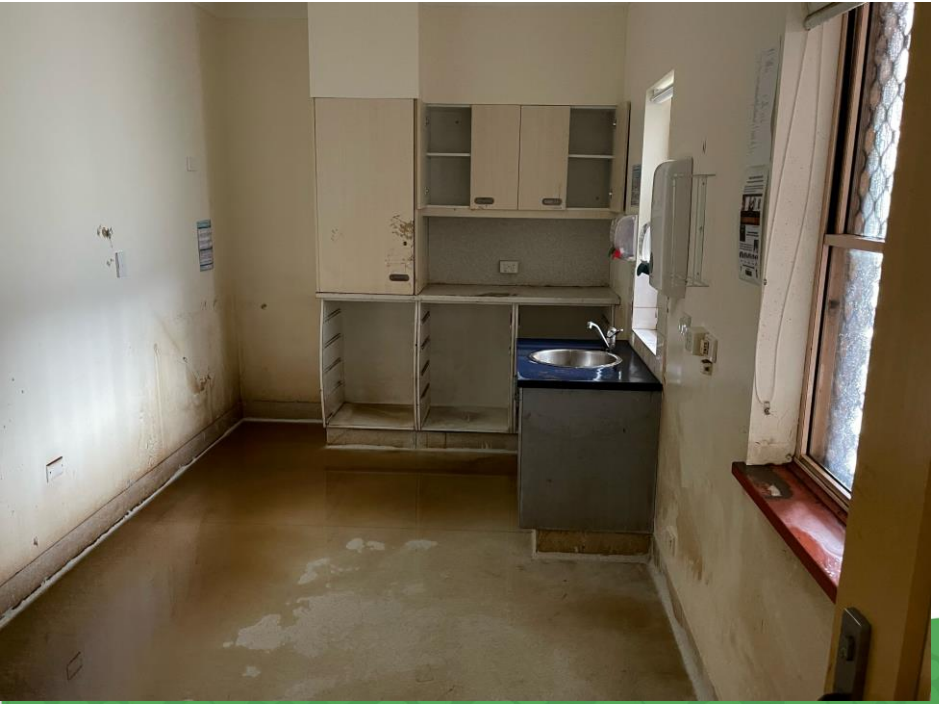
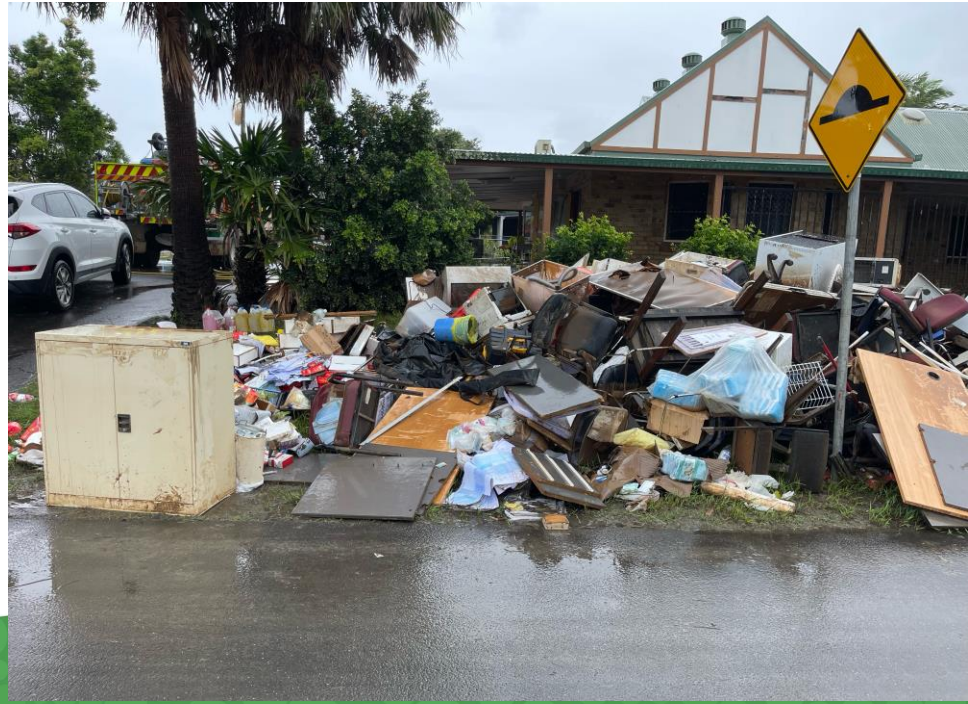
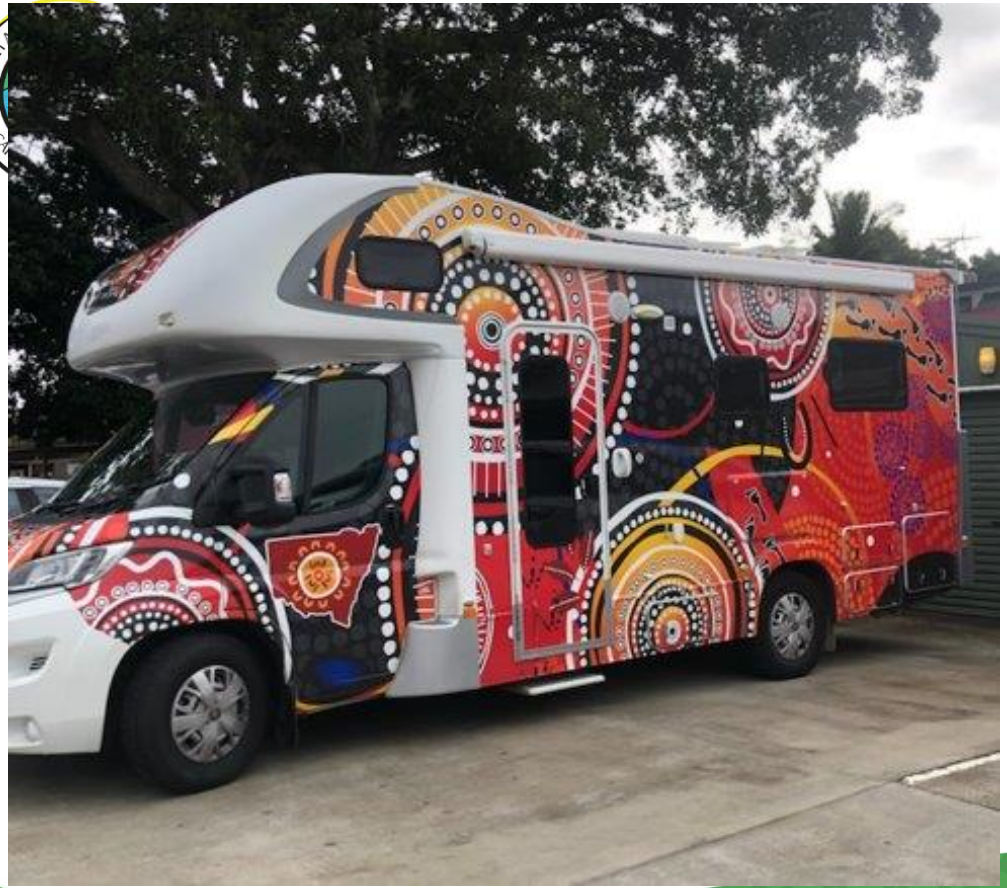
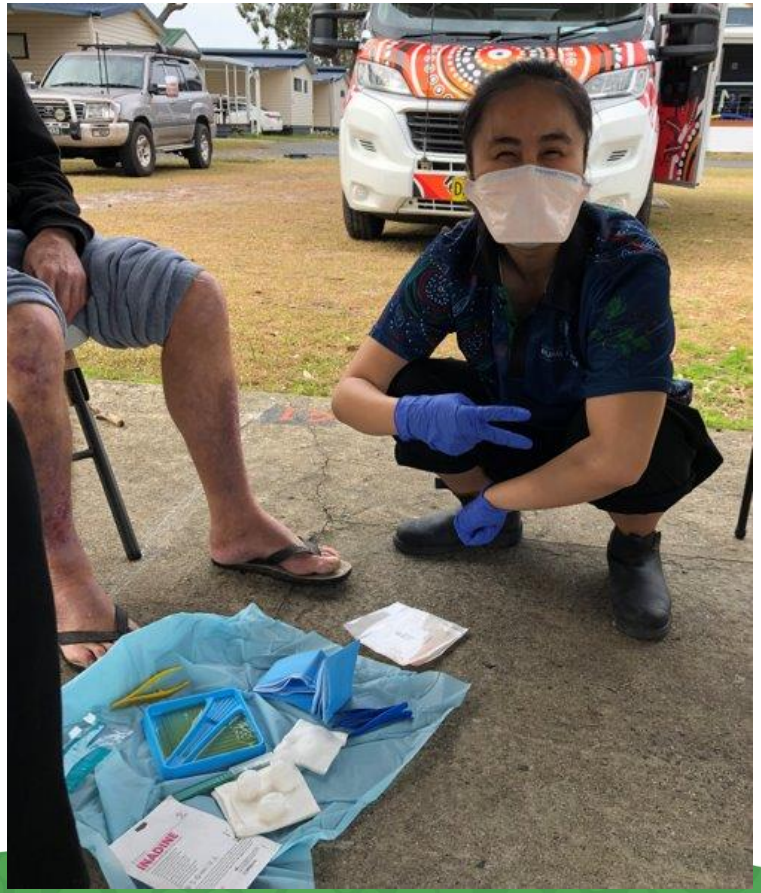




Initial Challenges

- Telecommunication issues – no mobile phone reception for one week – no ability to telehealth, morning huddle at Evac centre
- Server down – no access to medical database, local pharmacy flooded – no access to pharmacy records or medications
- Bullinah main medical site flooded – no access to medical equipment, staff homes flooded, limited staffing due to road closures
- Teams doing outreach/home visits/developing maps of community whereabouts

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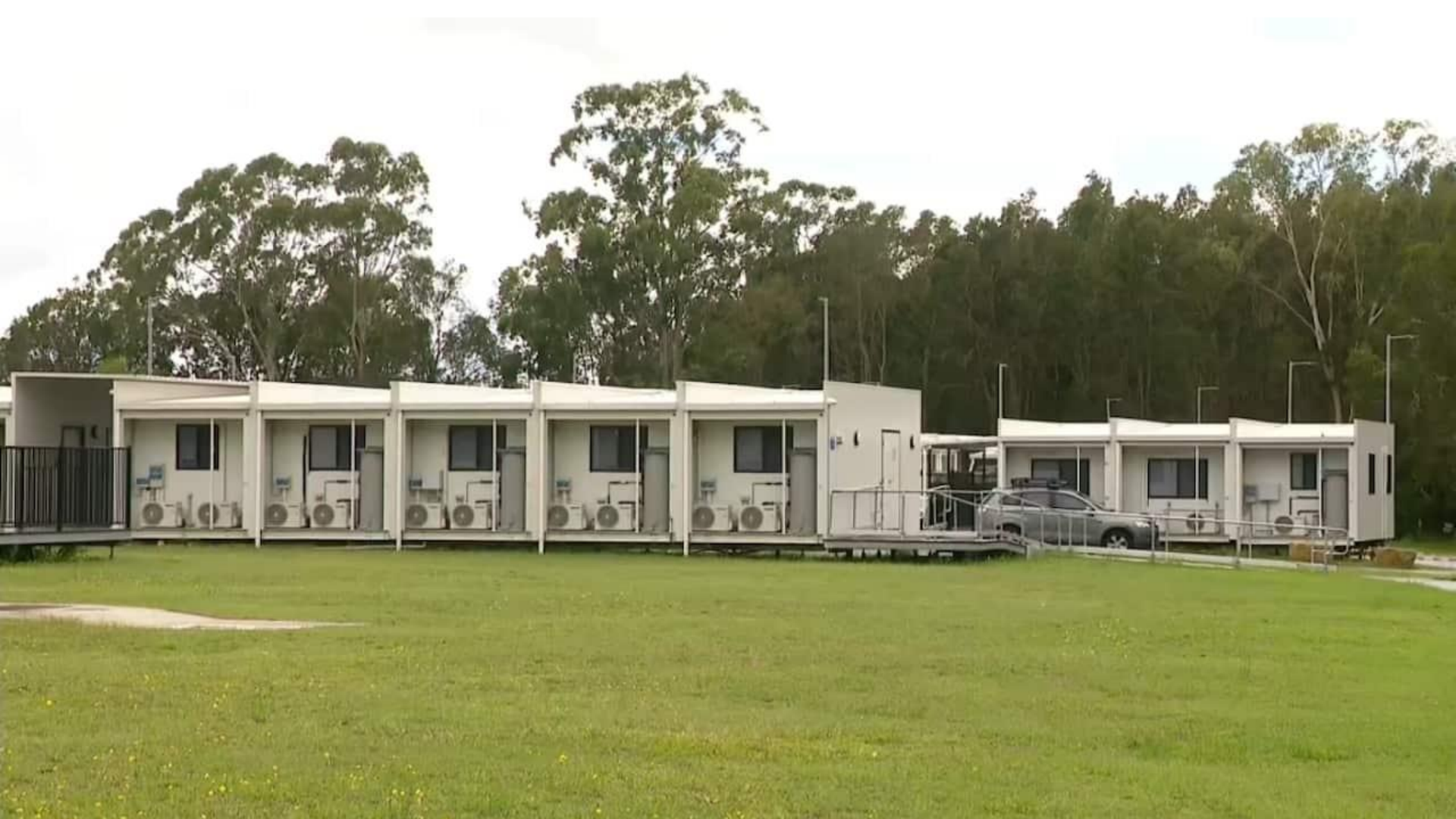
Outreach Challenges

- Meeting the community needs across several locations
- Ensuring equity of care across displaced community
- Lack of space, staff and resources - reduced ability to deliver chronic health care
- Lack of psychological services – limited psychology available, social worker overloaded – this is an ongoing issue

Ongoing Challenges

- Commitment from the government to rebuilding of homes and infrastructure on the island
- Temporary housing at a community pod in Wardell - still 3 years post flood
- Timeframe for move back to island still uncertain – but renovations of buildings have commenced finally and due for completion mid 2026




Range of studio, 1 bedroom, 2/3 bedroom and 3/4 bedroom units
School
Site entrance
Communal and medical facilities
Bath Street
Wardell Sporting Recreation Club

Health Challenges

- Increase in psychological distress - trauma from floods and ongoing displacement, community tension
- Insomnia - noise
- Anxiety and depression - increase in suicidality
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Increase in behavioral disturbance in children, school disruption initially, now cramped, noisy accommodation
- Increase in drug and alcohol use - access increased, coping mechanism?
- Reduced presentations for chronic disease management

Ex-Cyclone Alfred – March 2025

- Community again asked to relocate by SES as pod village deemed not cyclone rated – very last minute, but some warning
- 70 per cent of residents in the pod village moved to nearby evacuation centres – many refused this time – no beds or food at evac centre
- Still chaos but more organised with delivering Webster packs, checking in on vulnerable palliative patients and ready with medical equipment

Disaster Planning: - What we learnt

Planning for business continuity

Decision making around clinic staying open or closing – and if closing, who and how will we work remotely

Hard copy of staff lists/phone tree

Consider other potential clinic premises if infrastructure is damaged e.g. community halls - huddle location?

Consider staffing (reduced capacity is likely) - working in small teams

Practice information – can it be backed-up daily and stored off-site on laptop?

Remote access for staff – what IT and physical infrastructure is required (set up early!)

Understanding local services and their capacity – pharmacies, land council, PHN, hospitals, etc

- **Planning for loss of utilities and telecommunication**

Phone lines down for weeks - WhatsApp group
Power disruption - ?solar/diesel generator for vaccine fridges

- **Planning for high risk or vulnerable patients**

Palliative, dialysis dependent, psychologically vulnerable
Delivery of webster packs or hard copy of medication lists
Evacuation plan, plan for continuity of care

- **Respond and Act**
  - Consider the need for evacuation
  - Divert practice phone lines to the emergency back-up telephone
  - Communicate with patients via social media, practice website, local media
  - Medical kits ready at different homes to deploy to evacuation centres
  - Chain of command for communication – clinical staff – admin staff – management
  - Registering and liaising with services running evacuation centers to facilitate care for AMS patients
  - Access to patient records and documentation of care

- **Infrastructure and contents protection**

  - Cyclones: remove debris, fit windows with shutters or screens, tape windows
  - Floods: ensure equipment is not on the floor, secure objects, sandbag the clinic
    - Designated person/team for this??

Are We Ready for the Next Emergency?

Panel discussion on public health emergency preparedness

Nicole Turner, Dr Monica Taylor, Dr Natalie Lindsay and Dr Kerry Chant

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Afternoon Tea Break

(30 minutes)