

News Release



Two years on: Children and young people in the Northern Rivers are having their say and we need to listen to what they need.

7 March 2024

The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, Zoë Robinson, has today released a Disaster Recovery and Preparedness Report: *Voices of children and young people living in the Northern Rivers*. The report reflects the voices of more than 630 children and young people living in the region, and what is important to them in natural disaster recovery and future preparedness planning.

“Our previous disaster work highlighted the need to provide supports to children and young people at the time of an event, and for years after. I wanted to ensure we were supporting children and young people and that we listened to what they said they needed,” said Ms Robinson.

Since March 2023, the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People’s Recovery Youth Support Services (RYSS) team has been working with children and young people living in the Northern Rivers who have been impacted by the floods.

“The focus of this work has been with children and young people in pod villages, where more than 300 children and young people live. It is important to us that we work with government and community to review the current living situations of these children, young people and families. I have concerns about the ongoing impact on children and young people,” said Ms Robinson.

“Long-term housing remains one of the key concerns for many people living in the temporary pod villages. Children and young people are dealing with stress around what happens next for them,” Ms Robinson added.

The report features recommendations co-designed with children and young people on ways planning can be significantly improved for children and young people living in the Northern Rivers.

Some recommendations include:

- An evaluation of current recovery and preparedness responses which complies with obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- The need for an urgent evaluation into the temporary pod village and emergency accommodation models which considers alternative immediate housing solutions to these models and makes provision for a sustainable transition from pod village and emergency accommodation to long-term solutions;
- The development of a youth led disaster recovery volunteer group in the Northern Rivers that will mobilise young people to be prepared to support communities responding to natural disaster events and support the development of relevant systems, processes and support for the community;
- The importance of embedding sustainable systems of co-design and two-way learning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to build genuine

News Release



relationships and partnerships with Traditional Owners, Elders and community leaders grounded in the principles of local cultural protocols, self-determination and community control;

- An increase in the provision of school counsellors at all schools across the Northern Rivers, and ensure the provision of school infrastructure supports the confidentiality and privacy of students accessing counselling; and
- The provision of funding and resourcing for the increased provision of public transport in the Northern Rivers, which should include funding for private providers of transport.

Ms Robinson added, “The team on the ground in the Northern Rivers look forward to continuing their work in the region. It is essential that we listen to the children and young people who have been impacted by the disaster event and any ongoing work in government, community and business should be informed by these recommendations.”

ENDS

For more information or to arrange an interview with the Advocate for Children and Young People please contact: Anwen Ruttle on 0439 346 249.