

# Community experiences of the 2022 eastern Australia floods (January-July 2022)

Natural Hazards Research Australia Webinar

Tuesday 20 June 2023



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for use by study participants







# Support

Health support	Contact numbers	Services
<b>Lifeline</b>	<a href="#">Lifeline</a> Call 13 11 14	National Counselling service
<b>Beyond Blue</b>	<a href="#">Beyond Blue</a> Call 1300 22 4636	National Mental Health and well-being support service
<b>MensLine</b>	<a href="#">MensLine</a> Call 1300 22 4636	National 24/7 online counselling support for men
<b>Lifeline Text</b>	<a href="#">Lifeline Text</a> Call 0477 13 11 14	24/7 Crisis Support Text service
<b>Kids Helpline</b>	<a href="#">Kids Helpline</a> Call 1800 551 800	Counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years
<b>headspace</b>	Contact details: <a href="http://www.headspace.org.au">www.headspace.org.au</a>	A program for youth aged 12-25 experiencing, or at risk of mild to moderate mental illness
<b>Older Persons Advocacy Network</b>	<a href="#">OPAN</a> Call 1800 700 600	Free, confidential and independent support for older people

Flood and storm information and support (Dept of Health and Aged Care) <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/flood-and-storm-information-and-support#mental-health-advice-or-support>

Australian Red Cross – Emergencies and disasters  
<https://www.redcross.org.au/emergencies/resources/>

Phoenix Australia <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/>





# Overview

- Study overview – what we did
- Cross-cutting themes – broad impacts
- Selected findings from the study
  - Before
  - During
  - After
  - Reflections – looking back and looking forward
- Concluding points – challenges and solutions
- Dissemination and next steps – what is happening
- Questions





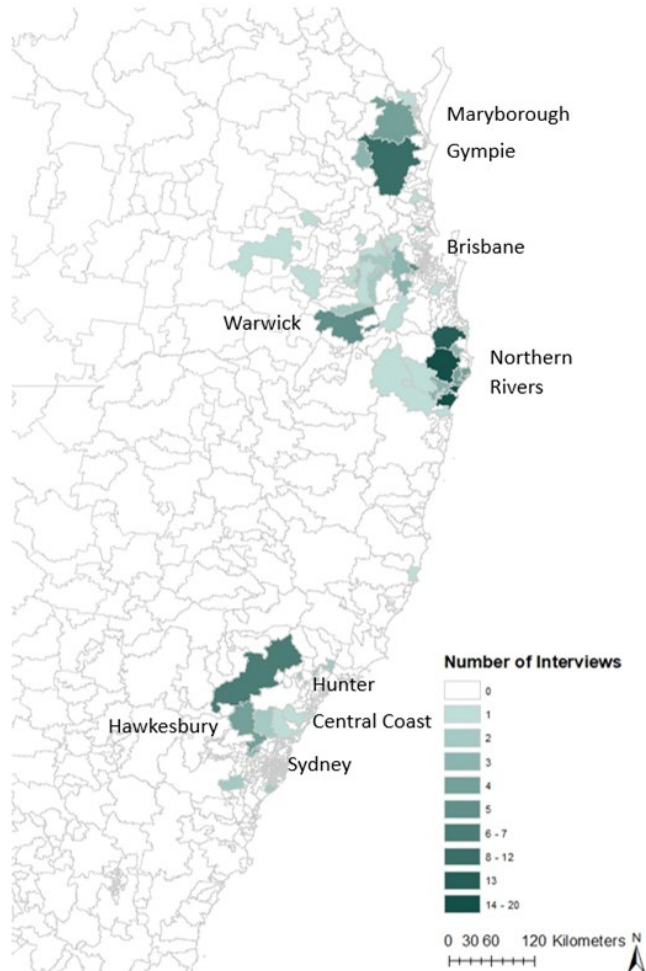
# Study overview

'Mixed methods'  
- interviews and online survey





# Interviews



## → Recruitment

- Recruitment survey
- Social media
- Word of mouth

## → Interviews

- 192 interviews
- 92 QLD / 100 NSW
- 15 Aug – 27 Oct '22

## → Analysis

- Thematic coding (NVivo)

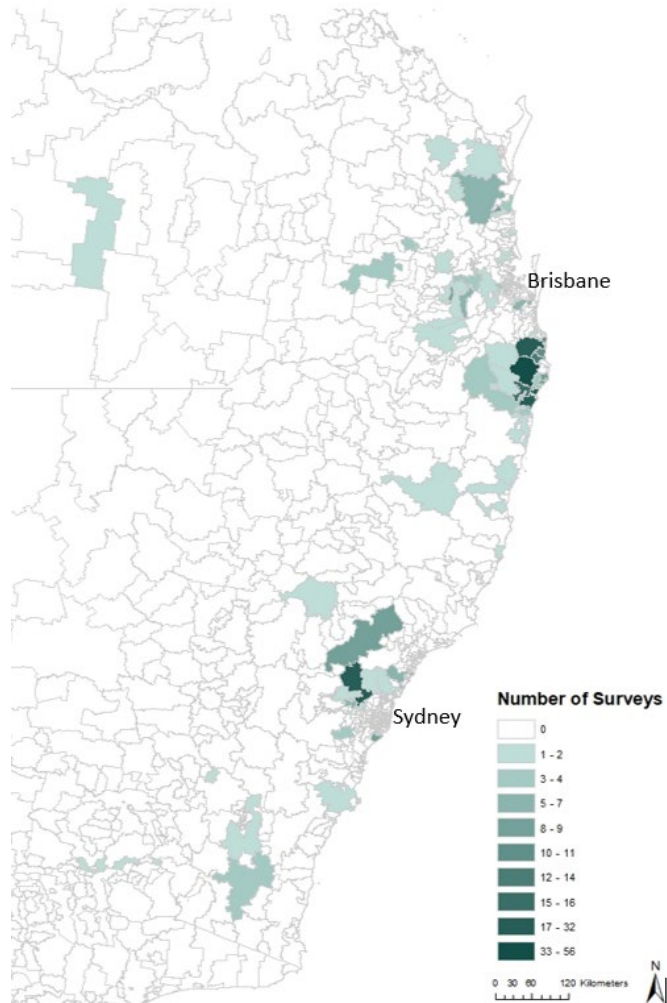
## Interview guide

- Prior experience of flooding and perception of risk
- Information and warnings
- Preparedness and response
- Evacuation and sheltering
- Vulnerability and resilience
- Community champions
- Expectations
- Compounding and cascading disasters
- Recovery
- Adaptation
- The future
- What was learned/lessons for others





# Survey



## → Recruitment

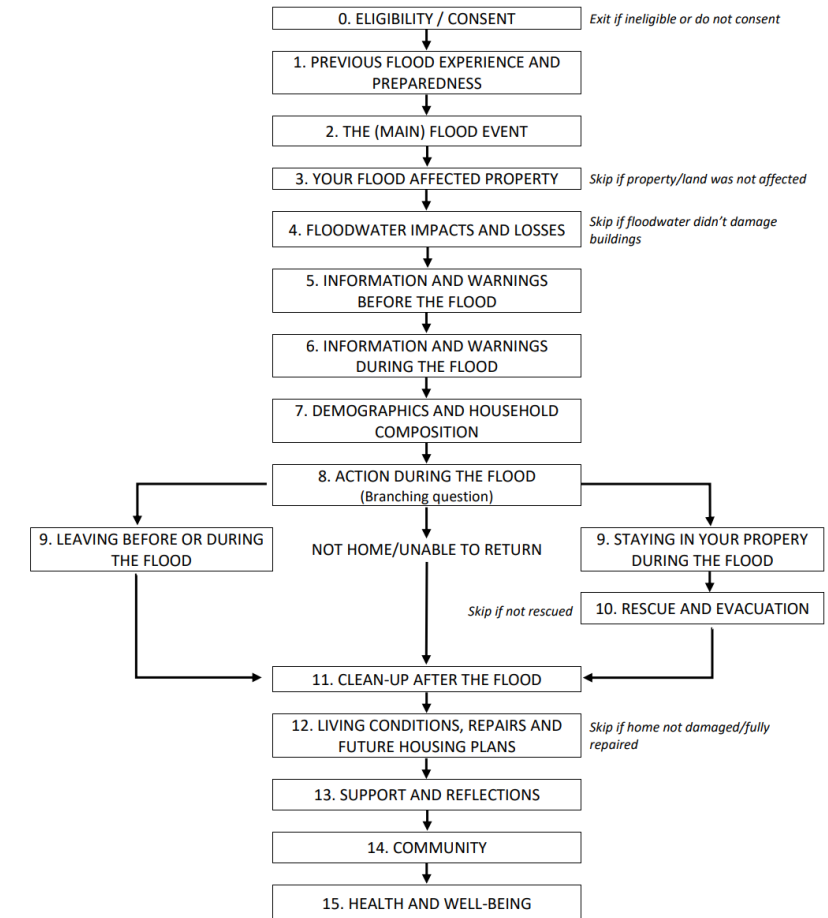
- Recruitment survey
- Social media
- Word of mouth
- Phone recruitment

## → Online survey

- 430 responses
- 24 Nov '22 – 17 Feb '22

## → Analysis

- Descriptive, bivariate (SPSS)







Flooding in the Hunter region, NSW. PHOTO: JONATHAN BENNETT

### Themes emerging from interviews

Thirteen qualitative policy-relevant themes are detailed, identifying problems and challenges that were faced directly by the interviewed resident, their household, or local community members, friends and neighbours. These themes are:

- **Flood data** – issues with accessibility to good quality data, trust in the accuracy of data for local flood risk management, and ongoing flood literacy issues.
- **Localised perspective** – the need for focus at the local level and inclusion of local knowledge. Rejection of official information due to lack of local relevance. Having local knowledge rejected.
- **Dashboards** – issues in the use of local council information hubs.
- **Information expectations** – a need for timely, relevant, and accurate official information, and the move to established trusted community sources on social media.
- **Forgotten people and forgotten places** – a sense of being forgotten, let down, and overlooked during the floods, managing disillusionment, and the role of media.
- **Community responders** – the changing role of communities and integration into emergency management. The good and bad impacts of disaster on communities, and communities planning for future response.
- **Clean-up** – managing the challenges of the clean-up. Renegotiating relationships with possessions, dealing with looting and scavenging, the impacts of untrained and overzealous helpers, and an appeal for support with help literacy.
- **Insurance** – the advantages and disadvantages of insurance in a large-scale disaster. Challenges with claiming, assessment, resolution, rebuilding, and reinsuring.
- **Bureaucracy** – encountering a range of challenges in gaining financial support. Challenges for persistence, connectivity, and documentation in post-disaster settings. Potential for retraumatising effects of repeated lodging of claims and discontinuity in responses.
- **Temporary housing** – managing displacement, being moved around, loss of agency, and being 'homeless'. Caravan living, and issues for people who are homeowners and/or have insurance.
- **Disaster opportunism** – frustration at the perceived financial exploitation of flood-impacted residents and the disaster situation broadly. Scams, rorts, opportunism, and theft.
- **Recovery fatigue** – communities struggling to keep volunteering in recovery support with insufficient resources.
- **Infrastructure, planning, and maintenance in sensemaking** – frustration at the lack of maintenance of stormwater drainage and water and rain gauge systems, and the impacts of planning decisions and infrastructure construction in compounding the impacts of flooding.

*We just started [cleaning up], they were just loading the truck and I'm trying to say, trying to save the most important things, and my husband was supposed to be doing that in the garage, but he was in such a state that he was helping to load the truck! They just threw out everything, and he was supposed to be saying, "No, stop it," but he wasn't capable. And then later on, he's saying to me, "Where's such-and-such?" "They loaded it on the truck." "Why did they load it on the truck?" "Because you weren't capable of stopping it. You were supposed to be directing, and you couldn't do it." The memory's gone of that; it's like childbirth for him – he can't remember what happened*

NSW026

### Localised perspective



Figure 4. Level of agreement in future flood events.

### Clean-up

Advice I received about how to clean up effectively/make the most of my possessions

The speed with which my property was checked

The speed with which my utilities (power, gas, water) were restored

The amount of financial support I received to help with the clean-up

Timing of the financial support I received to help with the clean-up

Advice I received about what to do with my possessions

The time taken about what to do with my possessions

The decision-making about what to do with my possessions

Timing of the decision-making about what to do with my possessions

Information received about what to do with my possessions

Timing of the information received about what to do with my possessions



Figure 5. Satisfaction with various aspects of the clean-up process.

## Community experiences of the January – July 2022 floods in New South Wales and Queensland: Summary Report

The research summarised in this report was conducted by Mel Taylor,<sup>1</sup> Fiona Miller,<sup>1</sup> Kim J. Harriet Narwal,<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Miller,<sup>1</sup> and Madeleine Miller.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Discipline of Geography and Planning, Marketing, and Public Relations, Queensland University of Southern Queensland, QLD, 4-5

→ Policy relevant content

- Evidence-based
- Supporting data
- Implications

→ Three reports

- Summary report
- Main report
- Technical report



# Cross-cutting themes

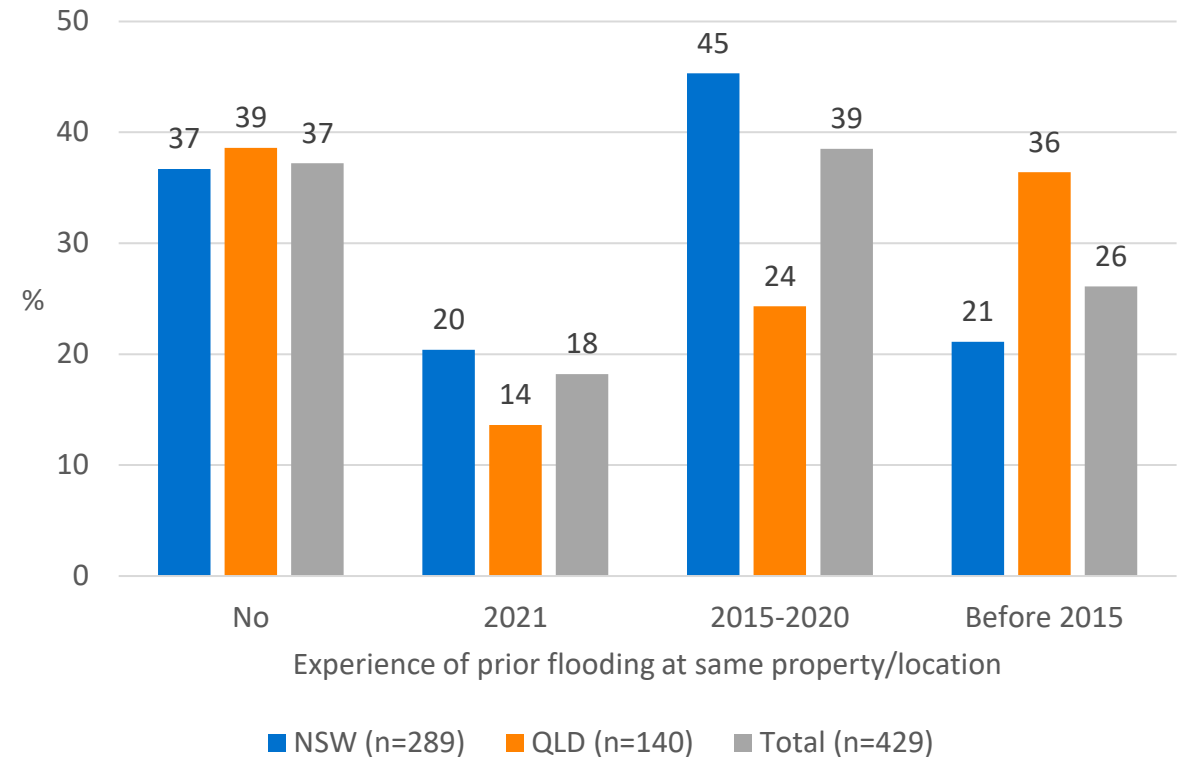




# Cross-cutting themes

- Severity
- Scale
- Timelines
- Compounding, concurrent disasters and climate change
- Vulnerability context

Have you experienced floods previously at this same property/location? (multiple responses permitted)



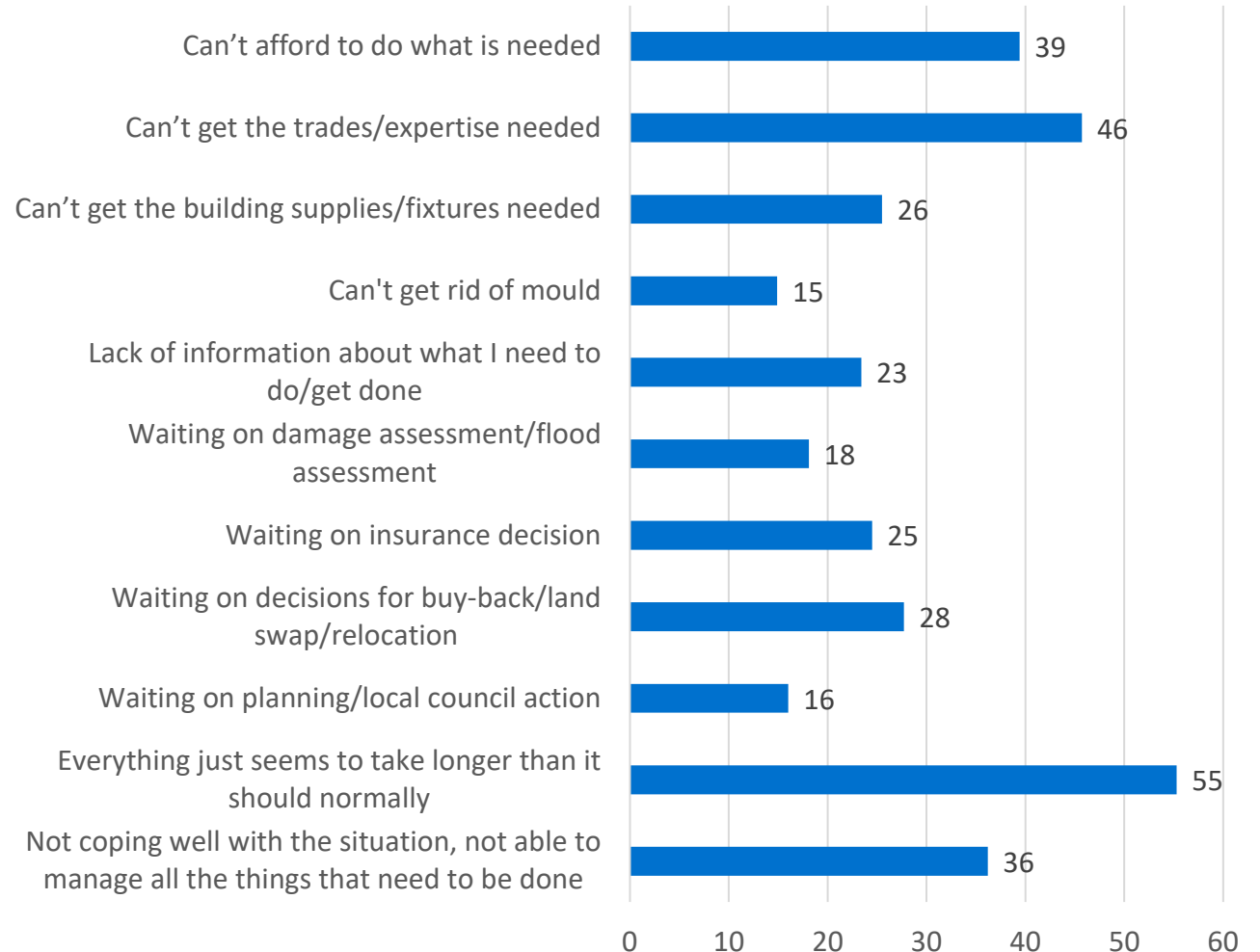
*.. they moved in about six to eight months before the floods and I was speaking with her, and she said when she went to insure her home that the insurance company looked up the location and said, "Oh, it'll never flood there", so she didn't take the flood insurance.*



# Cross-cutting themes

- Severity
- Scale
- Timelines
- Compounding, concurrent disasters and climate change
- Vulnerability context

Challenges facing residents in getting back into living in their home





# Cross-cutting themes

- Severity
- Scale
- Timelines
- Compounding, concurrent disasters and climate change
- Vulnerability context

*“Between Covid and this... and I don’t think you can separate the two because we’re already so far behind the 8-ball when this happened to us. You know, we literally went from “Yeah, we’re going to get freedom” to... we actually stepped even further back than COVID, because being isolated and stuck was one thing, and not going to town and whatever, and uncertainty, then adding this other whammy on... where you just can’t see what your future’s even going to hold for you.”*



# Selected findings from the study

## Before

- Flood data
- Disaster dashboards
- Localised perspectives
- Preparedness





# Flood data and perceptions of risk

*“We were told it didn't flood. Yep. And because mum and dad were over in... Western Australian, which is a long way to travel. They bought this place. But they asked the real estate if it flooded, and they had said "no". And then when I moved in here, people came past; and they were walking their dogs. Obviously, they knew that I had just moved in, "You know this place floods?" I'm like, "I got told it doesn't." And then they said, "It comes up to, like, in the house." So that was a nice little surprise.”*

*“When we moved here, we were advised this was a once-in-a-100-year floodplain which, to me and my wife, wasn't a concern because we were looking to stay here only for about 10 years.”*



# Disaster dashboards

- Appreciation for ‘live’ data – cameras on roads, bridges, gauges
- Lack of awareness of dashboards
- Issues about usability
- Issues not limited to QLD

*“We are really fortunate that the council out here is very good at updating their social media. So that's what I find is the best form of communication as to what's going on; in that council will let you know, if there's predictions of heavy rain and possible flooding, they will inform the community through their social media. They also then direct people to their website where they have what they call a Disaster Dashboard; and through that, you can access things like flood cameras. So, you can see some of the local waterways and what level they are at... I think it's updated every five minutes or something, or two minutes; like, the camera are updated quite regularly online.”*



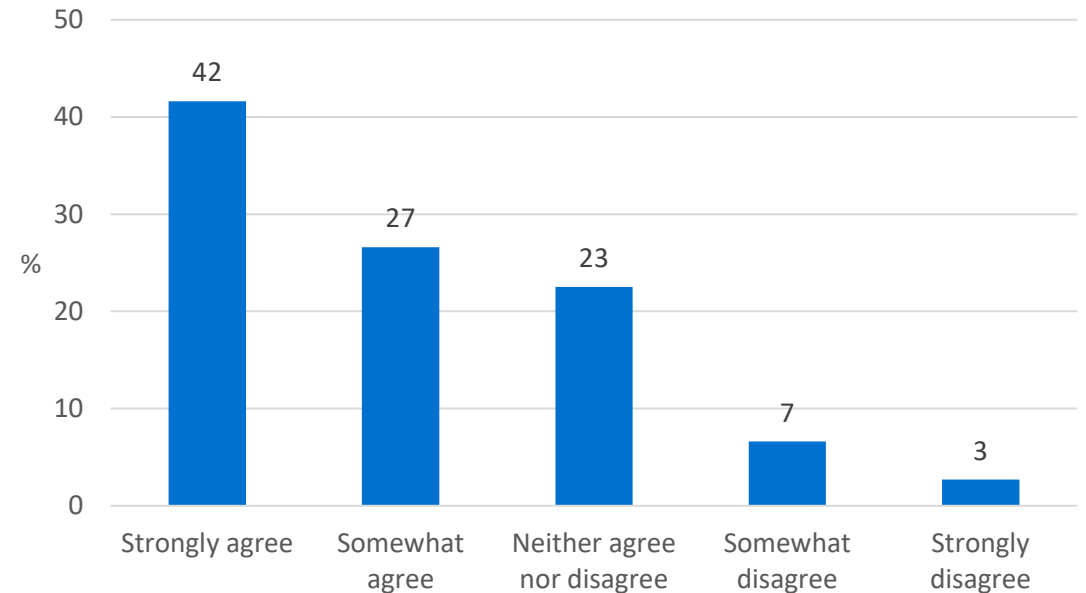


# Localised perspective

- Desire to have information, resources, and response focussed locally
- Local knowledge to be valued and incorporated
  - knowledgeable networks

*Yeah, that [BOM] is good. But it's not relevant. It is good for the broader Brisbane; you know, "It's going to keep raining. Brisbane City gauge might peak at this height." But, yeah, not really what I need right here, right now to make a decision.*

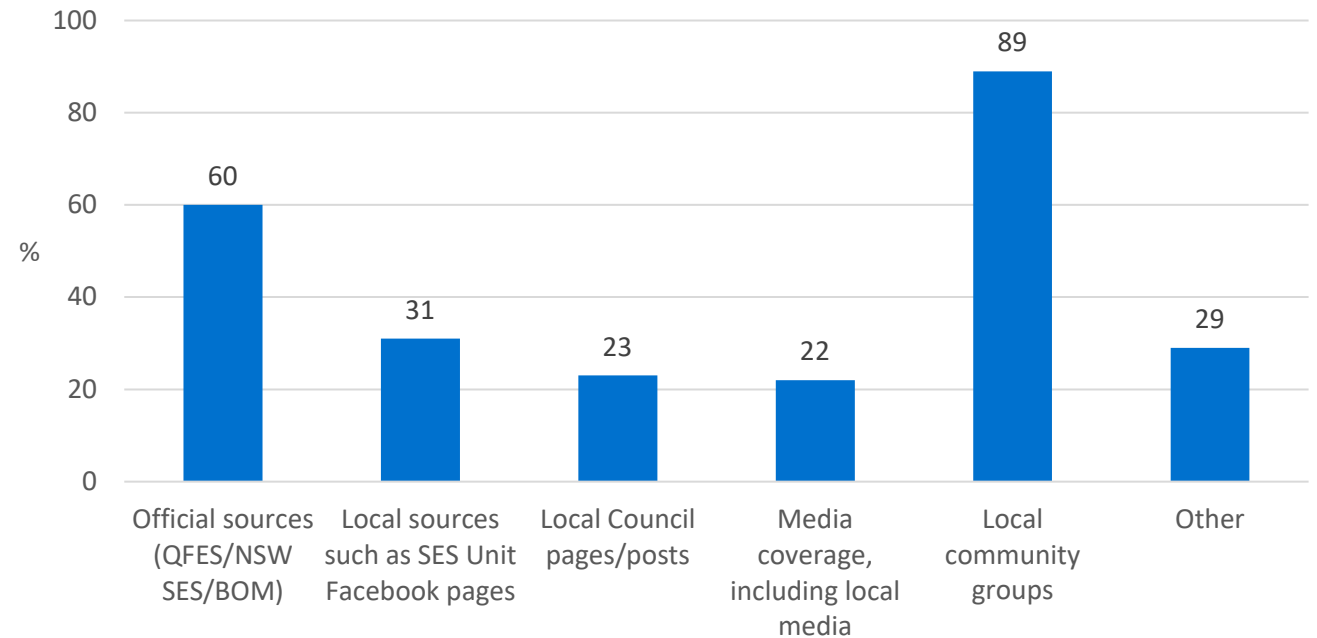
Level of agreement with the statement "I will rely more on local information from community in future flood events"



# Information expectations

- High expectations for local, accurate, timely information and warnings
- Local social media sites were curating information and being increasingly relied on by residents

What were the most useful sources of information on social media?



*“Run by a local community member the Facebook page had 24-hour updates of the unfolding situation prior, during and after. With links to official websites, as well as a large knowledge base of community members from across the region. It also provided the opportunity to interact and ask questions, as opposed to more official updates that often can be ambiguous, not apply to my area, will not reply to questions, and often posted by a state level office with no local knowledge of the area.”*





# Preparedness

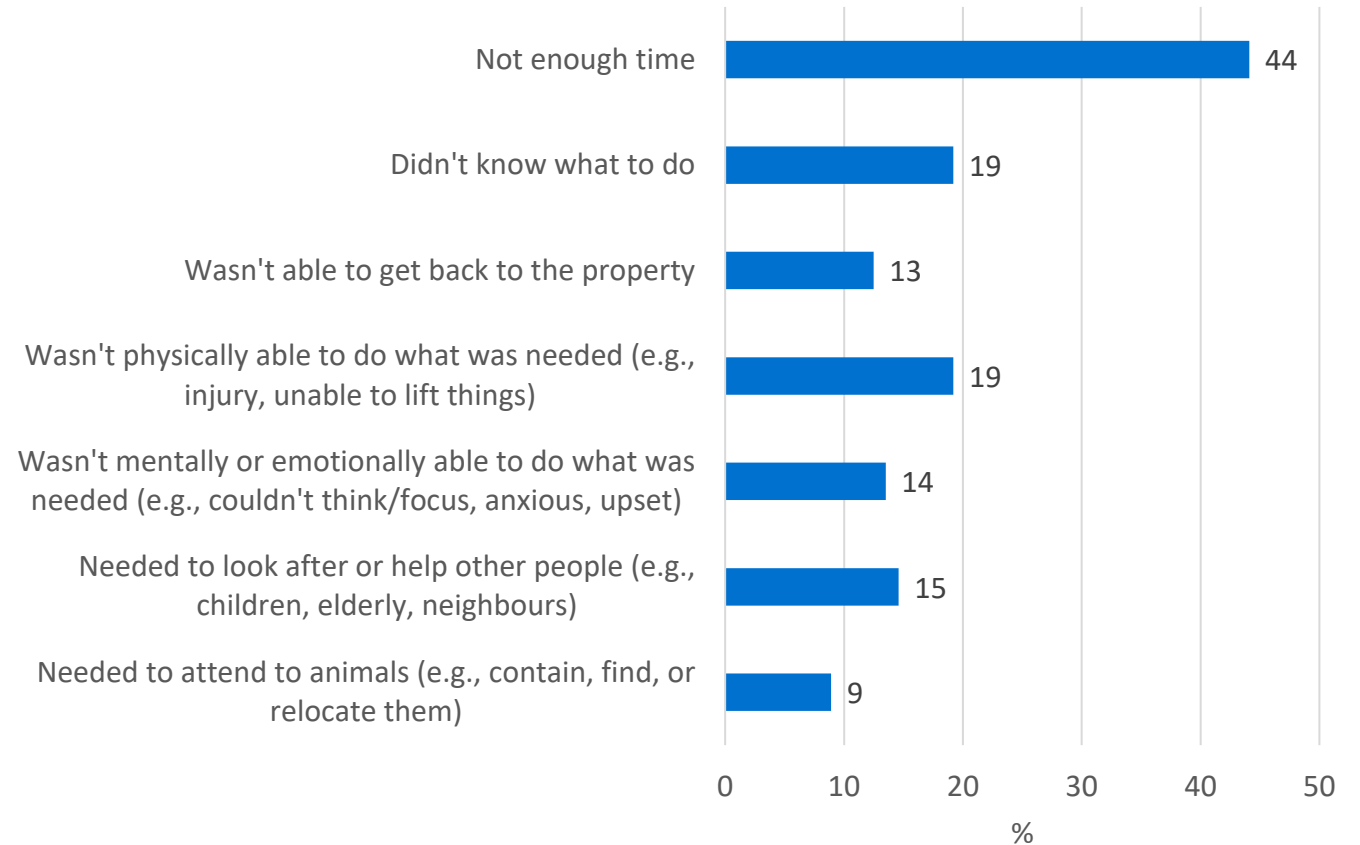
- 31% felt they had done everything they could do to prepare
- Prior flood experience and more time to take action before the flood were associated with higher preparedness

## Preparedness actions

+ charging phones/devices, raising possessions, moving cars, stocking up on food, water, and medications.

- sandbagging around house/doorways, sandbag over drains/in toilets, turning off gas/electricity

Reasons for not being as prepared as you could be?



# Selected findings from the study

## During

- Early warning
- Staying

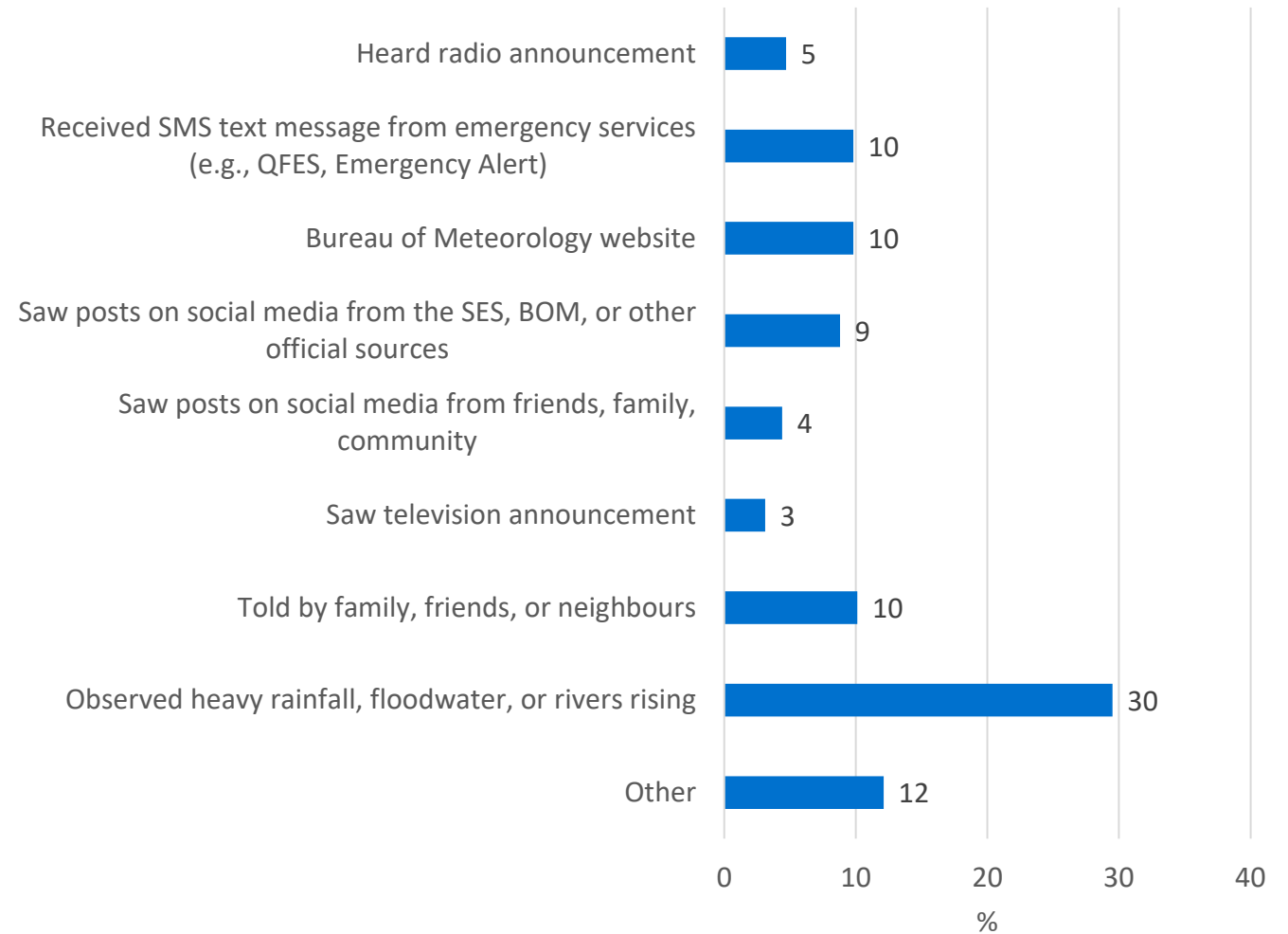




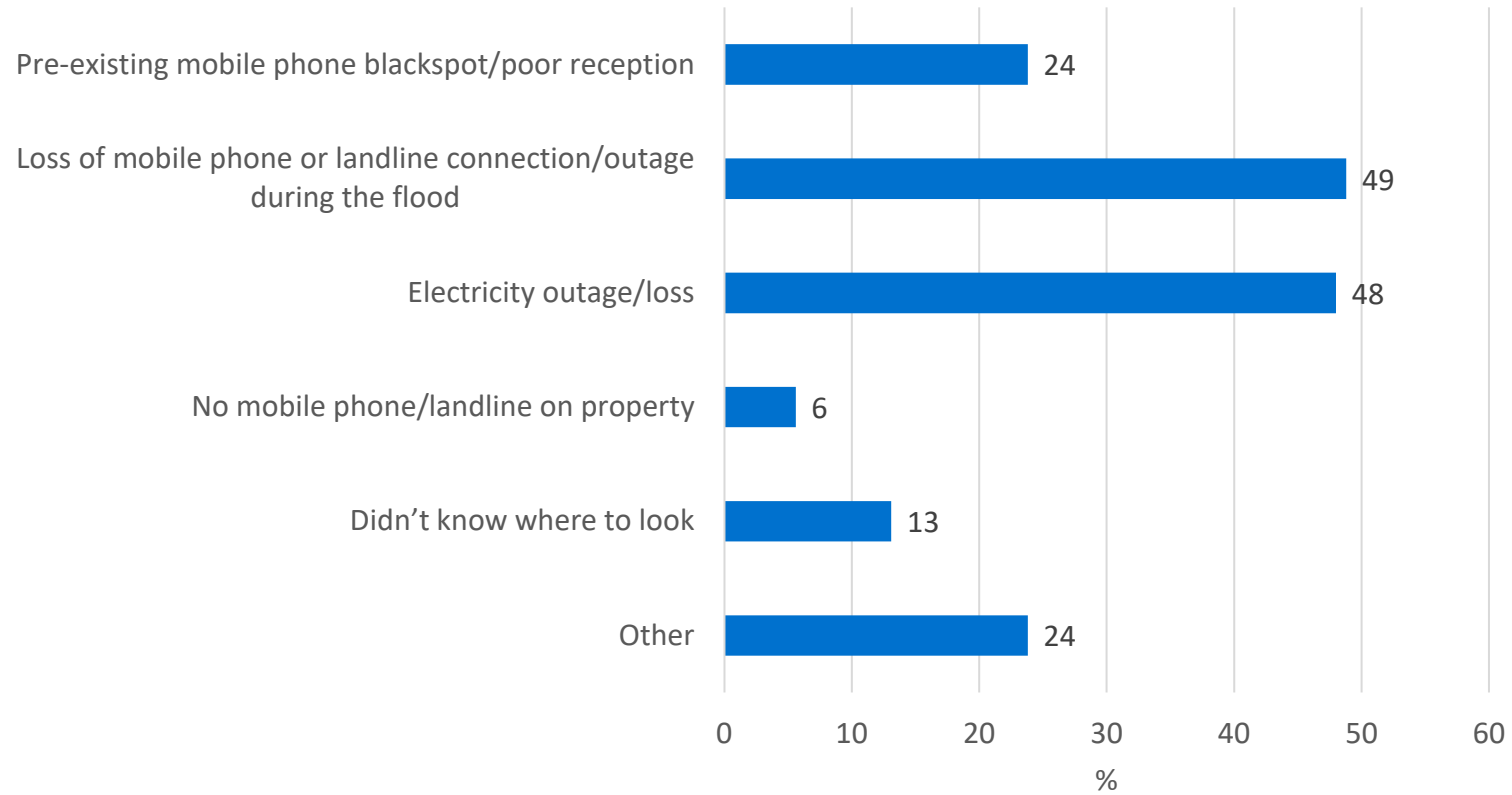
# Early warning

→ After own observations - reliance on neighbours, friends and family (connections), and on social media and SMS (technology).

How did you first find out that your town or suburb was likely to experience flooding? (single response)



# Problems accessing warnings



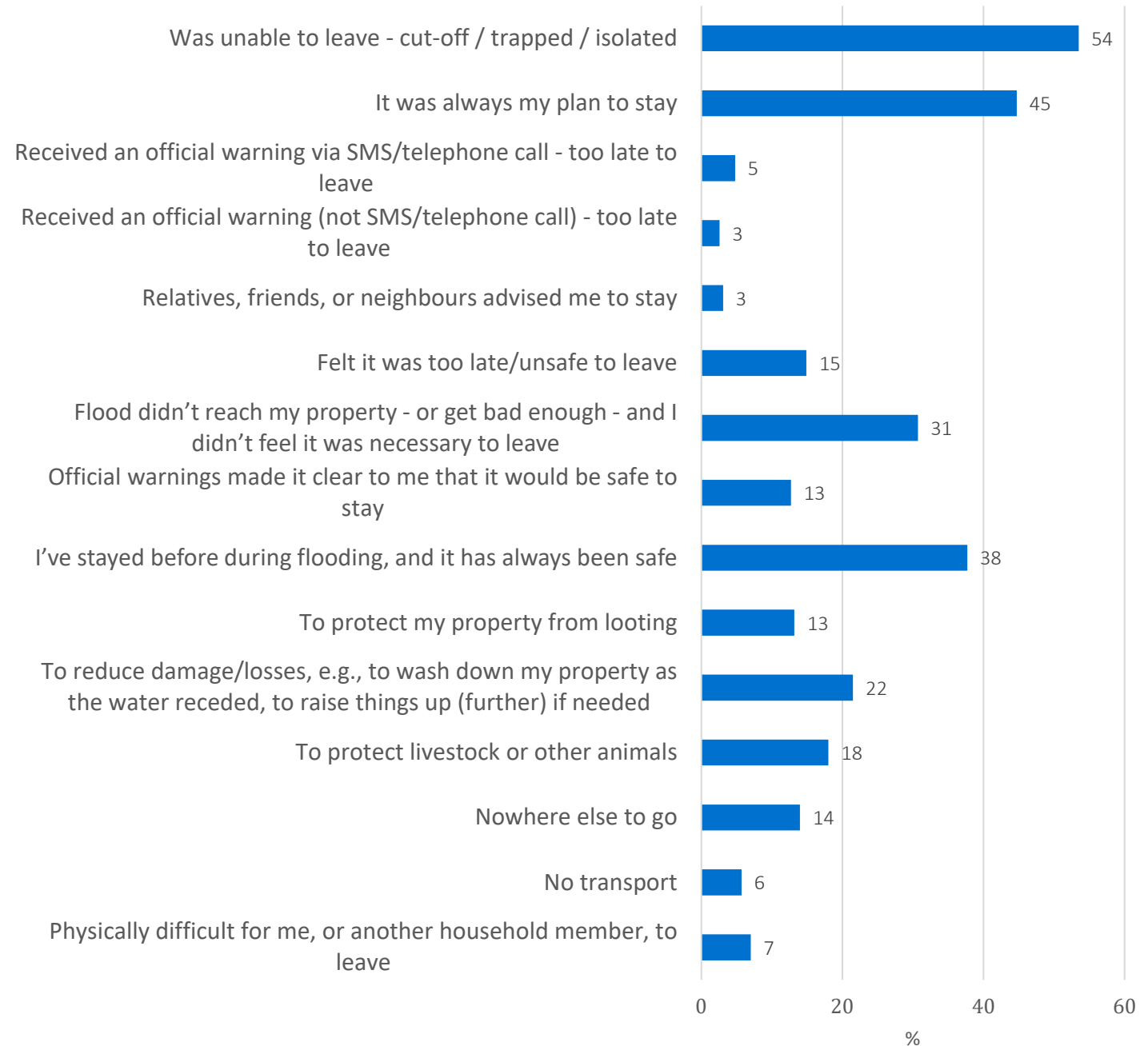
# Sheltering

## → Actions during flood

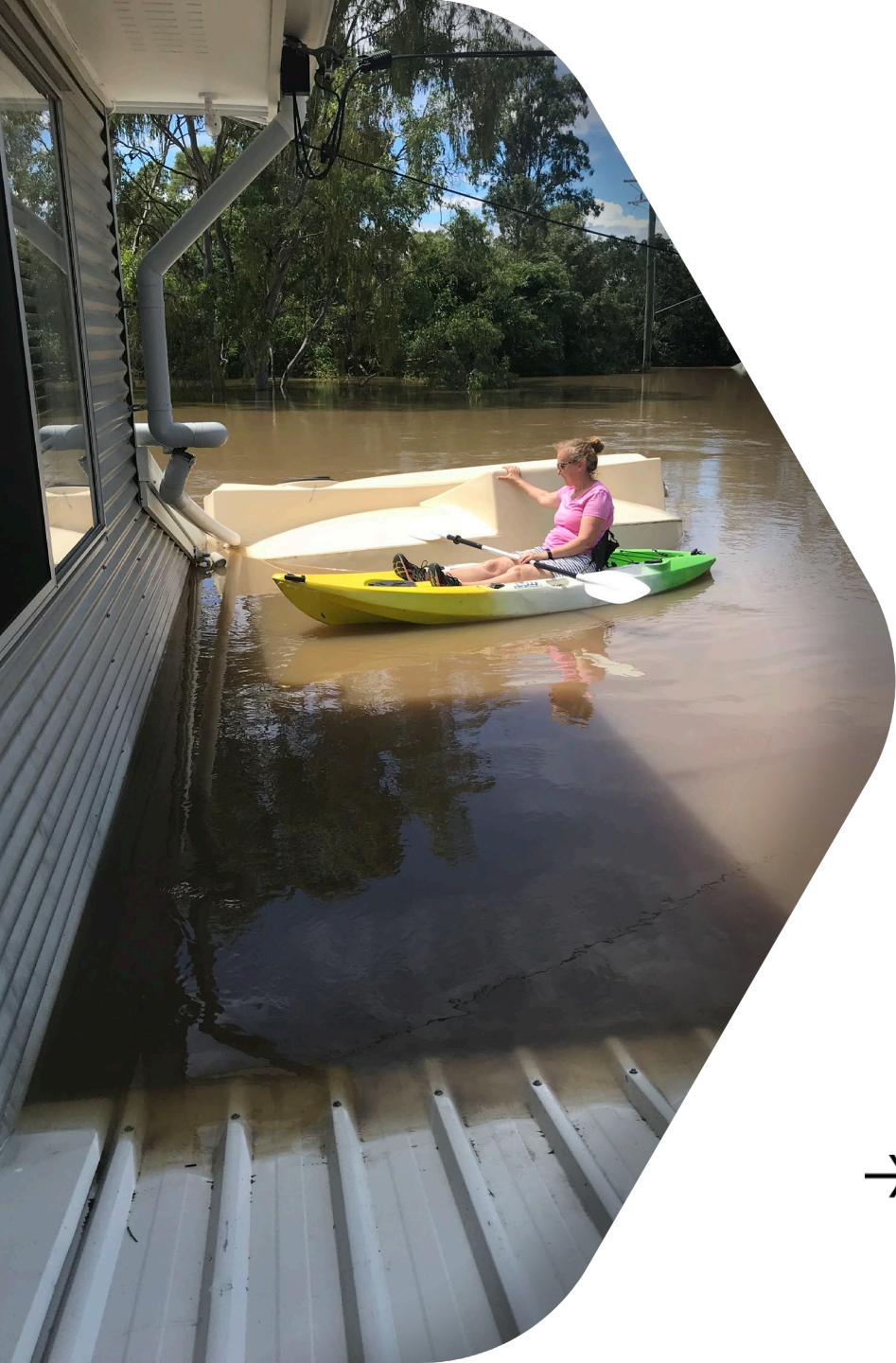
- 9% not home
- 30% left
- 61% stayed/sheltered

## → Of those who stayed

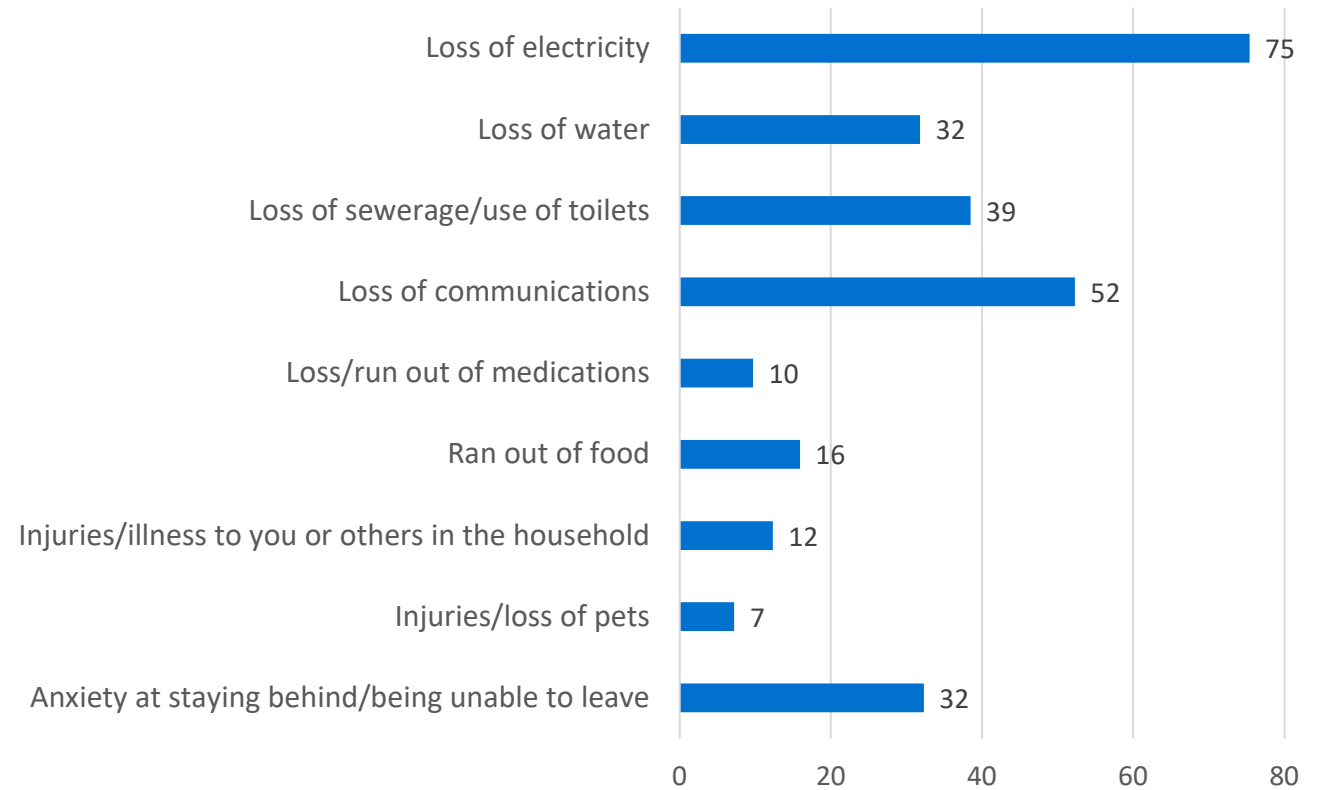
- 20% required rescue







# Challenges whilst sheltering



→ 79% said staying/sheltering was the best decision





# Selected findings from the study

## After

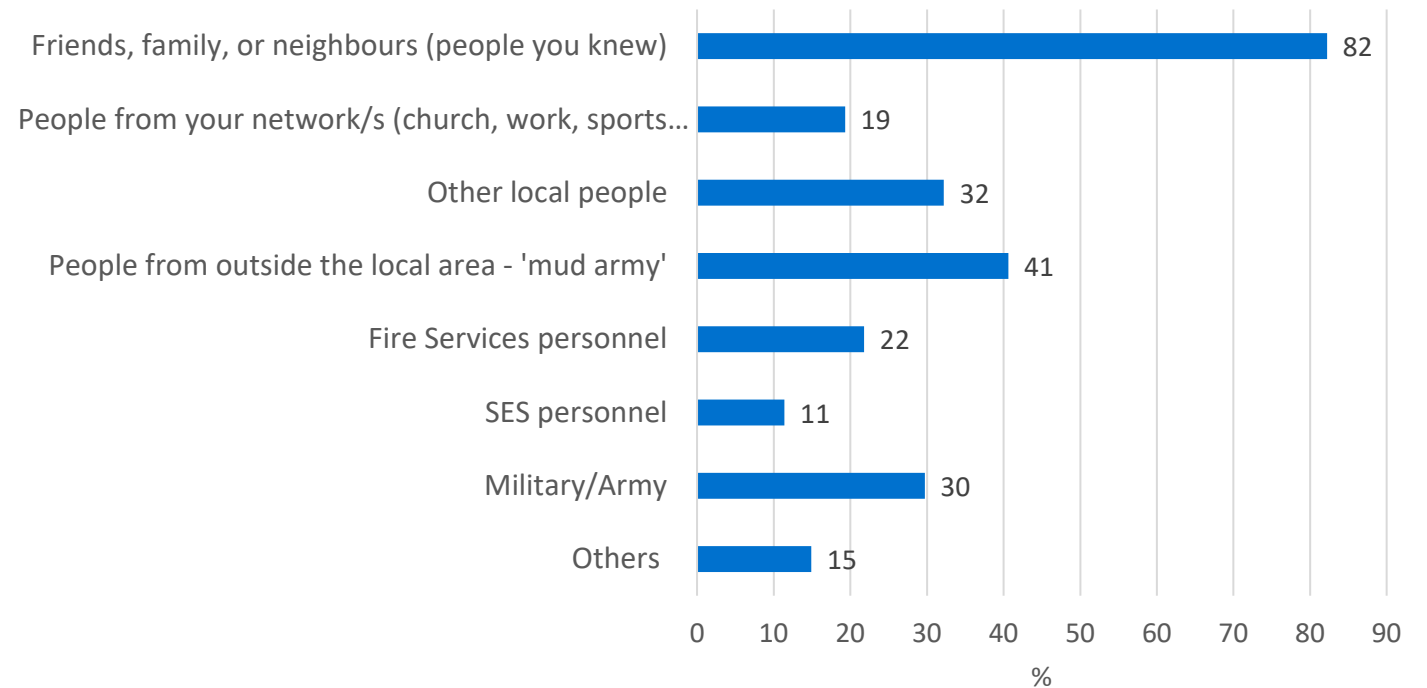
- Clean-up
- Temporary housing
- Insurance





# Clean-up

## Who helped with the clean-up?



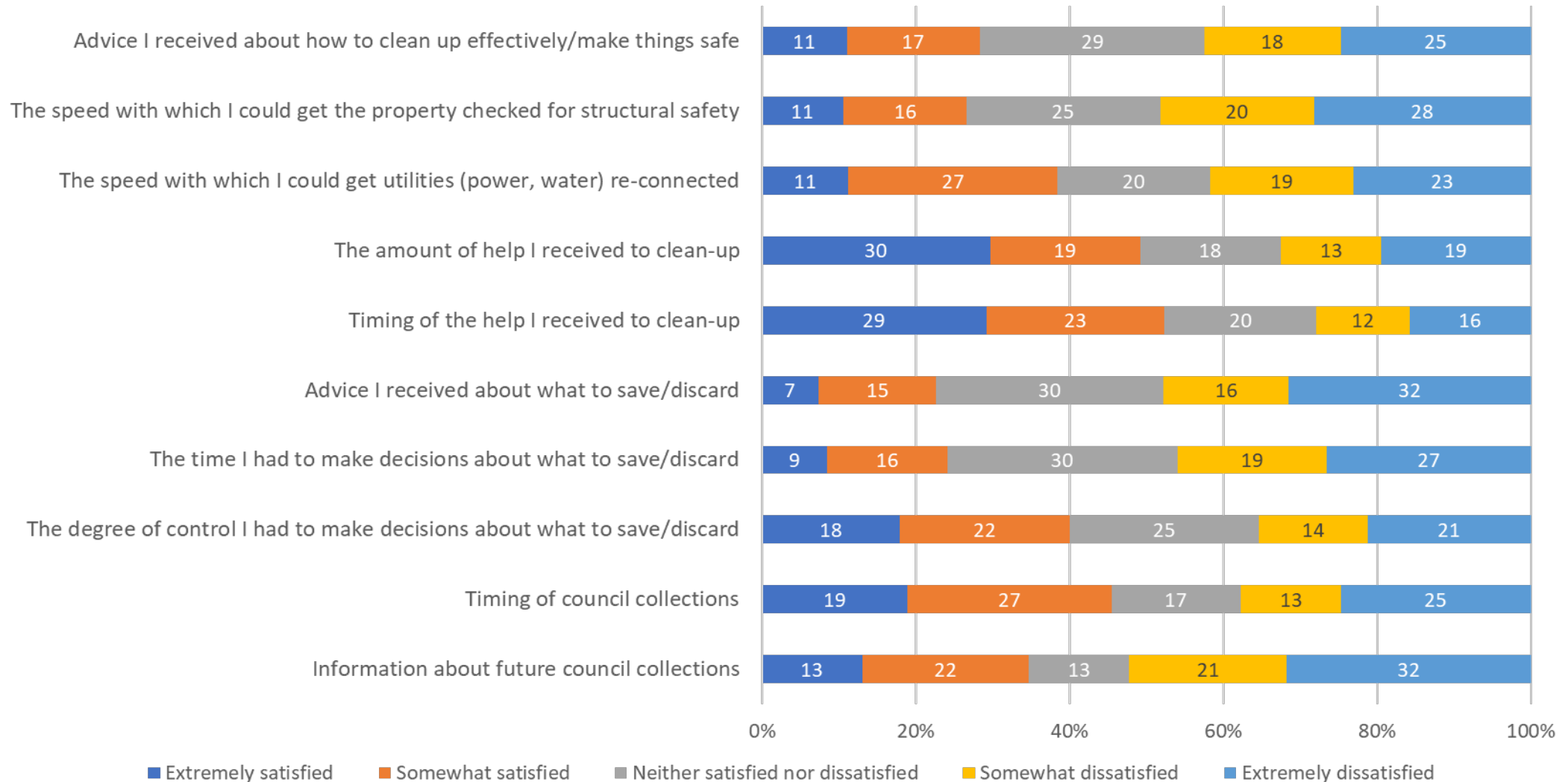
*And then... some people came and took washing; things that were flooded that needed to be washed; that might have been saveable. People took... there was one box of photo albums, an old box of photo albums that got wet. My neighbour across the road took them; and diligently dried them...for the next six weeks*





# Clean-up

Satisfaction with various aspects of the clean-up process



# Clean-up

*We just started [cleaning up], they were just loading the truck and I'm trying to say, trying to save the most important things, and my husband was supposed to be doing that in the garage, but he was in such a state that he was helping to load the truck! They just threw out everything, and he was supposed to be saying, "No, stop it", but he wasn't capable. And then later on, he's saying to me, "Where's such-and-such?" "They loaded it on the truck". "Why did they load it on the truck?" "Because you weren't capable of stopping it. You were supposed to be directing, and you couldn't do it". The memory's gone of that; it's like childbirth for him – he can't remember what happened.*

*So, the amount of people – we actually saw people who had hired trucks, driving through, sifting through our belongings, to take stuff. So they were: the washing machine and the dryer had gone before anybody else had come to collect it. They were taking the electrical cords out of stuff, all the copper. They were just sifting through, picking up stuff that they obviously thought they could make a buck out of.*



# Temporary housing

*... when I first got the emergency accommodation, it was from week-to-week ...and then every time we had to move, I had to put everything in my car and check out at 10:00 and check in at the next place wasn't until 2:00 and so I couldn't work that day, and then one of my kids had to not work that day so we could do it together because not everything fitted in the car; we'd have to take stuff to people's places and leave it. It was like we'd be homeless for that period because really... you don't think about it but the first time it happened... It's like you just don't even believe it's a thing but it is a horrible thing...*





# Insurance/reconstruction

*My manager at work cannot comprehend why, at the moment, she needs me five days a week – I’m working three days a week, I’m taking leave for two because I need some balance in my life to negotiate the insurance stuff, to make the phone calls to get the roof fixed so I don’t work on Thursday/Friday. But every week she has a go at me about it, every week, and I just don’t know. I’m going to go and talk to the counsellor about, “What’s my strategy to just say, ‘You’re traumatising me’. How do I tell her that?”*

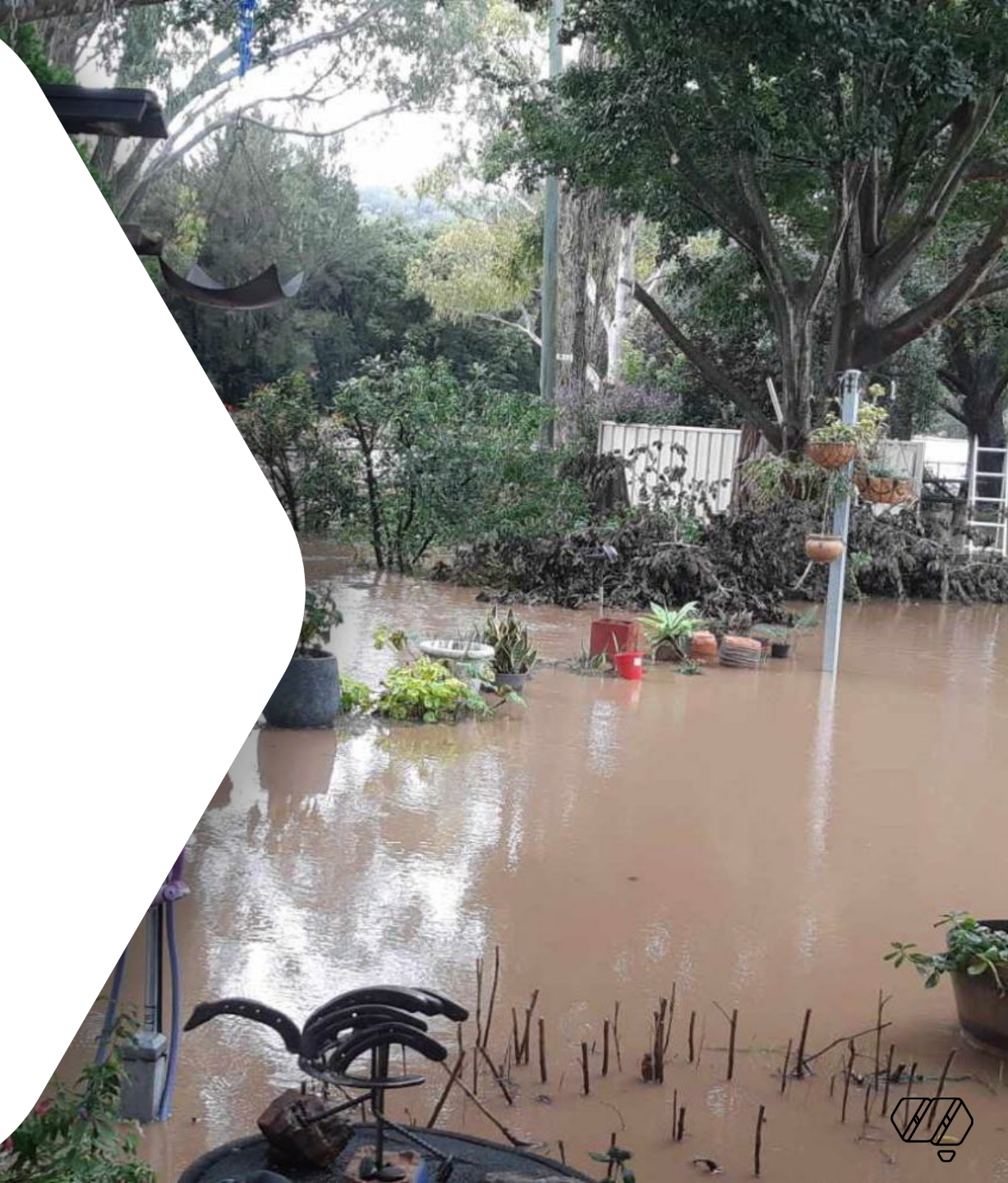




# Selected findings from the study

## Reflections

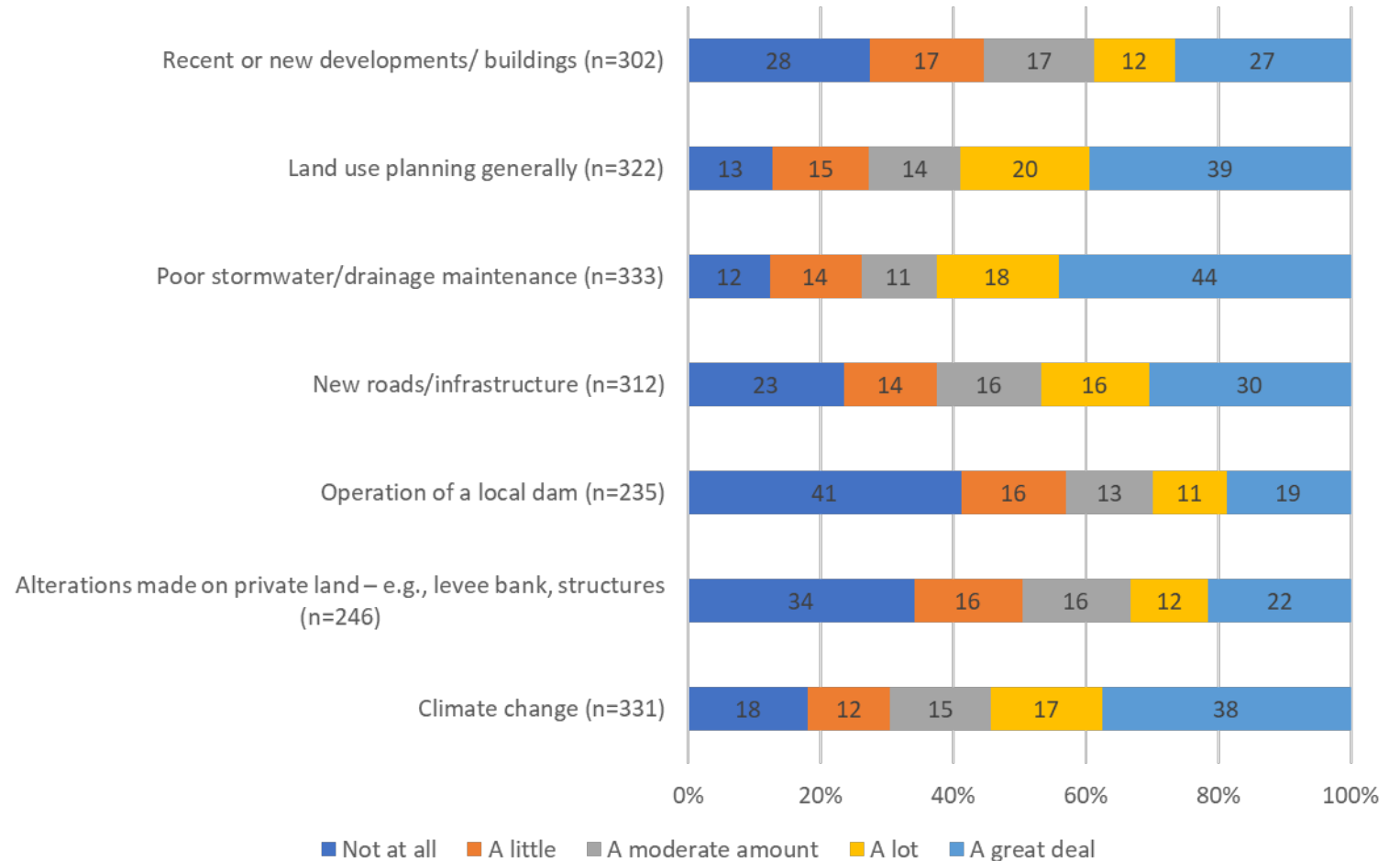
- Infrastructure
- Sources of support and recovery
- The future



# Infrastructure, planning, and maintenance in sensemaking

*Everybody agrees that the dam definitely overflowed and there's this conversation around why, there's a lot of anger about the management of the dam and given the amount of rain that we have been having, surely, it's foreseeable that this could be a problem and why aren't they strategically releasing water to relieve the pressure in the dam.*

How much do you feel the following contributed to the flooding?



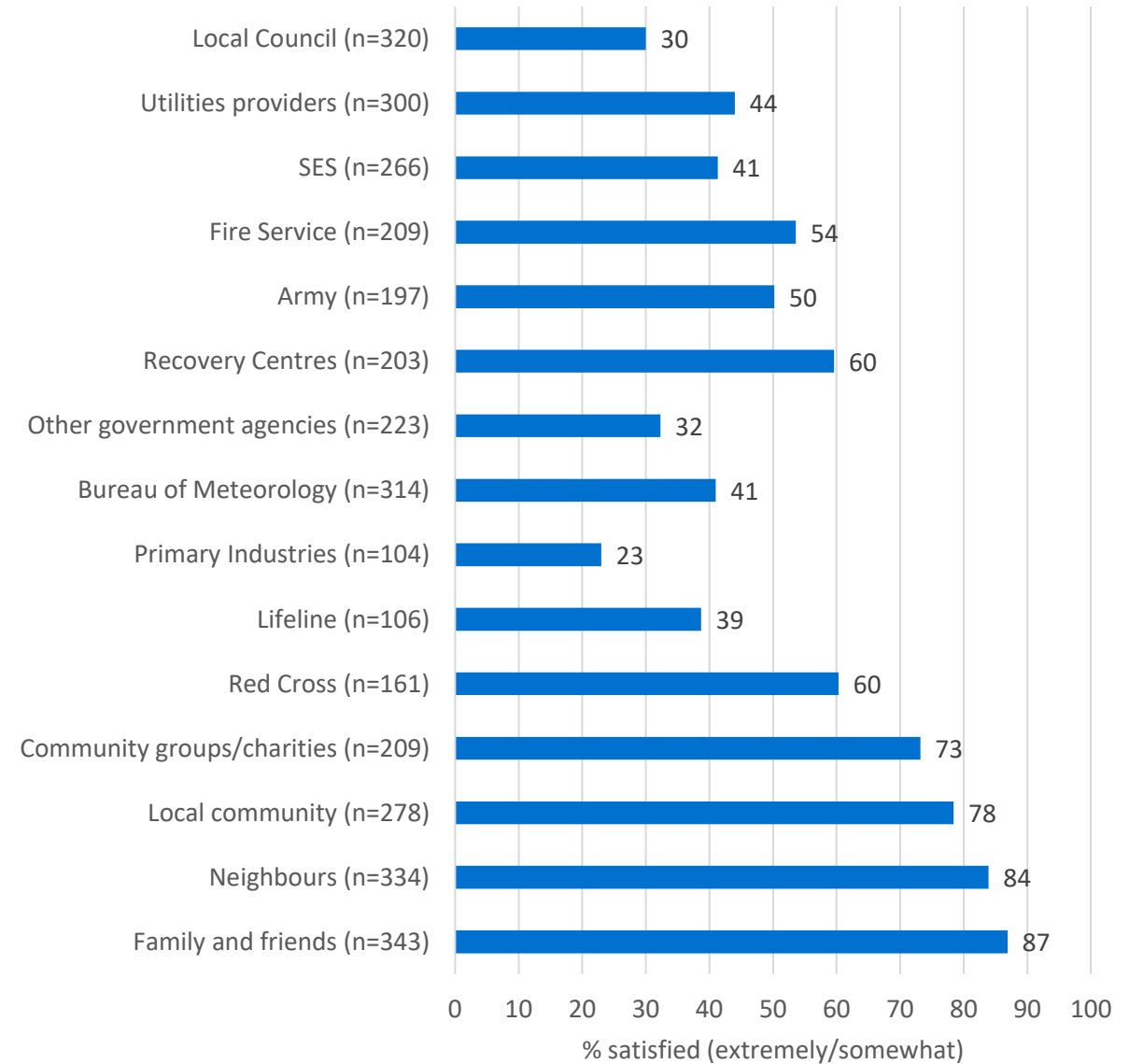


# Sources of support and recovery

## → Analysis of self-rated recovery (level and speed)

- 45.4% - recovery good/very good
- 47.7% - recovery somewhat/much faster than others
- Flood damage in 2022 and less time to take action before flooding (<2hrs) – poorer and slower.
- 45-64 age group – poorer.
- Prior flooding (pre-2022) – better.

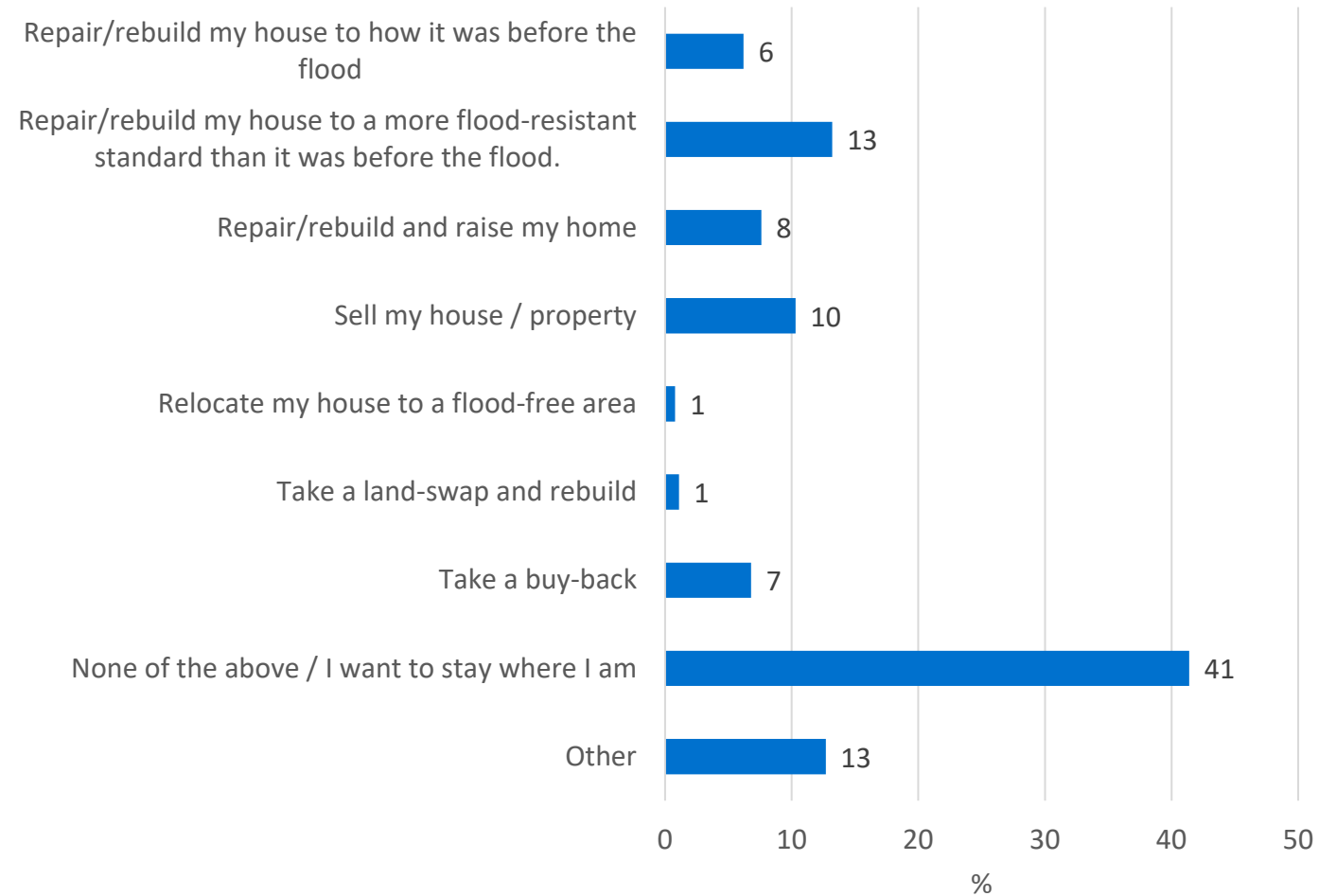
Ratings of satisfaction with support received (n/a responses removed)



# The future

- Many reasons why residents were choosing to stay
- Some had sold up, and some were repairing and planning to sell

Plan for future housing/living





# Concluding points

- Approaches to challenges raised by the research
- Broader challenge areas for emergency management... and beyond!





# Approaches for combatting challenges

- Support connectedness
- Communication
- A need for 'presence'
- Integration and inclusion of communities
- Increased flexibility
- Enhance sense of agency / control
- Remove/reduce the burdens
- Resource local councils
- Use recent experiences in engagement







# Challenge areas

- Loss of trust in institutions
- Navigating the balance of control/power
- Emotional impacts
- More than disaster



# Dissemination and next steps

- Briefings and workshops
- Conferences
- Tailored analysis/support
- Evaluation



Please complete our quick research knowledge and translation survey

**USEFUL,  
USEABLE,  
USED**





# Thank you

→ Further queries:

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- Kat Haynes

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→ Main Report

[www.naturalhazards.com/floods2022](http://www.naturalhazards.com/floods2022)



Research Team

Photograph (left-right): Fiona Miller, Barbara Ryan, Harriet Narwal, Kim Johnston, Anne Lane, Mel Taylor, Dipika Dabas.

Missing: Madeleine Miller, Helga Simon, Harriet Townsend, Philippa Barr.



# Questions

