



Review of issues impacting businesses in the Central West with a focus on those impacted by flooding.

Purpose

Over a 2-week period in May 2023, in person interviews were conducted with 80 business owners in Blayney, Canowindra, Cowra, Eugowra, Forbes Cudal and Molong. The purpose of the visits was to ascertain:

- Current state of business recovery 6 months on
- Issues impacting recovery.
- Their thoughts for the future
- What advice, workshops and webinars would assist in the recovery.

Interviews and findings

While all of the towns were impacted by the flooding 6 Months ago, **Eugowra** is the one most impacted. At this point, the butcher, Pharmacy, Newsagent and mobile café are operating (Repair and restoration work is occurring in the café) – along with the motor mechanic, The hotel is yet to reopen. Residents are being accommodated in temporary modular housing. An opinion each from the Butcher and Pharmacy concluded: “If the people stay, then I have a viable business”.

Businesses in lower parts of **Molong, Cowra** and **Canowindra** were most impacted with structural damage and undermining of foundations. Uncertainty remains for the future of two buildings in Molong- The sweetness café and across the road where the Carpet store used to be. Similarly, there are 2 buildings in Canowindra` yet to re-open and 2 in Cowra – while open for business - are being assessed for refurbishment works. The impacted businesses in **Forbes** are open and operating with the replacement of critical equipment.

There were minor direct flooding impacts in **Blayney** – mainly access, road closures and transport delays. **Cudal** experienced flooding both on the main st as well as the industrial area. The industrial complex is operating. Structural damage to buildings in town are being addressed.

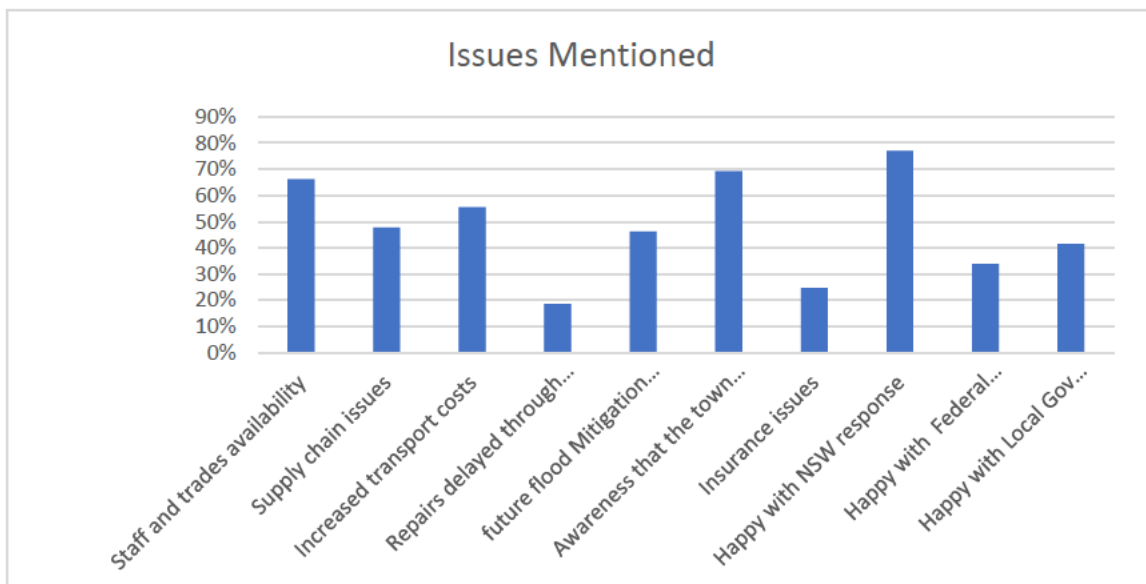
The overall mood across the Central west is one of “getting on with it”. There is an optimism that the issues can be addressed with time, planning, commitment and coordination.

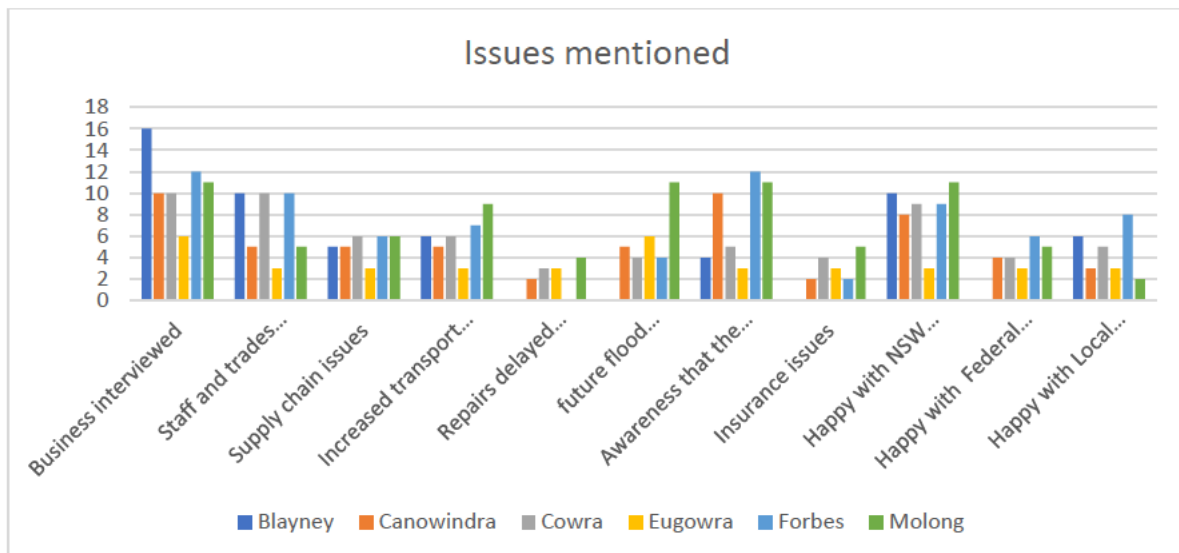
Across the board, the following issues kept coming up;

1. Availability of qualified trades and difficulty in recruiting staff.
2. Concern that the wider community feels that the towns are still “closed”.
3. The perception that one road closed means all roads closed.
4. There is a feeling of survivor guilt that is diverting customers to other towns.
5. Increased cost of doing business – Fuel, Transport,
6. Concern that mitigation planning is lacking clarity and an underlying fear that flooding may occur again if nothing is done.
7. While most businesses are coping and optimistic now, they are concerned about the next 6 months’ cash flow and profitability given current fiscal and monetary conditions.

Frequency of Issues Mentioned

1. Staff and Trades availability 43%
2. Supply Chain Issues 31%
3. Increased transport costs 35%
4. Repairs delayed through funding shortfall 18%
5. Future flood mitigation concerns 46%
6. Insurance issues 25%
7. Happy with NSW Response 77%
8. Happy with Federal funding model 35%
9. Happy with Local Gov response 42%





Town by town

Blayney: Staffing and energy costs were raised with an added concern for the unavailability of housing to support the needs of the current and future community. A shortage of trades people to attend to maintenance, re furnishments and rebuilds has delayed some businesses in updating their premises. Concern from some at the length of time to have DA's resolved. Transport delays and costs were raised as well as the overall look of the main st. Awareness of the full range of goods and services available in Blayney was raised by some.

Cowra: Trade in the main street is steady although there is a concern that locals are not fully aware of the range and scope of goods and services available in the town. There are many empty shop fronts -both in the main st and the arcade. A combination of relocations and rental costs for start-ups. Flood damage in the lower parts of town has impacted the caravan park as well as the business in the industrial area. Again, finding trades to refit commercial kitchens, rewiring, stabilizing foundations, and general upgrades is delaying full recovery. The Federal Gov recovery program is a reimbursement scheme. Some businesses do not have access to funds to undertake the repair work.

Canowindra; Businesses experiencing an uptick in trade. Key issue is streetscape appearance and the lack of a cohesive and funded town marketing plan. Flood issues abated – although a few stores are closed on the low-side – still under repair. A recent unannounced visit by a motorist club caught the town by surprise with arrival coinciding with a planned power outage. A pro-active awareness campaign – in conjunction with NSW tourism, Orange 360 may be a solution.

Eugowra; Butcher has re-opened. Pharmacy re-opened. (Has had a break-in). Mobile café very busy with Hi-Viz patrons. Pub not open. Newsagent/supermarket is open – still refitting and recovering. Housing PODS coming online. Biggest issue is communicating directly with Banks, Insurance, Telcos.

Forbes: Most business “getting on with it” Council very supportive and proactive. There is a notable drop off in visitor traffic. The concern was voiced that “a road closure means all roads closed” to visitors. More direct control of road closure advice by local authorities was suggested. Staff shortages are a concern especially in trades. Transport costs are a concern as are concerns for a lack of a mitigation plan to avoid future inundation issues.

Cudal: Most flood damage was in the low side at the fuel stop and workshops. Spoke to the owner who is very positive and has all the businesses up and running. Repairs and refurbishment of impacted buildings on Cargo Rd are underway in Cudal- again access to trades is an issue. New Horse and Country clothing store has opened – very busy. Owner underestimated the trade he is experiencing. A new specialty café is under construction – held up due to asbestos removal and nearby flooding.

Molong. There are many issues at play. The first is the concern about full attention being given to stormwater mitigation from the drains “backing up” from the creek. The second is a drop off in visitor walking traffic with the caravan park being moved to the showground. There are three buildings that have had significant damage during the last inundation. Uncertainty exists on the rebuilding of the “carpet store” (the business has relocated further up Bank st). The owner of the Sweetness café building has yet to decide to proceed with the plan to develop a restaurant in the building -given the probability of future flooding. Future parking and traffic flow issues were raised with the planned installation of trees along the centre of Bank st. Local and visitor awareness of the range and scope of goods and services available was also raised.

Recommendations

For most towns, recovery is well underway. The next six months will be critical in maintaining the rebuild momentum. The possibility of exhaustion and burn-out by business owners is very real. In many cases we heard business owners say they will not survive another flood physically or mentally.

It is recommended that the following be undertaken:

1. Consult with local business chambers, Councils and regional marketing groups in:
 - a. developing a “we are open” campaign targeting the local and regional community as well as the visitor market.
 - b. Undertaking appropriate streetscape improvements
 - c. Road closure notifications to be more timely and clear- with local sources having a greater input.
2. Consult with Local Government on communicating mitigation plans to businesses to build confidence for future investment and growth plans.
3. Develop in person workshops with a focus of:
 - a. Re-evaluating business models based on the changed market – especially looking at trading hours for those in the visitor market.
 - b. Review core market for each business in relation to the town and surrounding community –
 - c. Integrate the individual plans with the “we are open” marketing.
4. Set up one -on one advisory meetings to:
 - a. Construct 6–12-month cash flow forecast.
 - b. Develop individual strategic business and marketing plan for each business.
 - c. Provide guidance in implementing the plan.
 - d. Follow up with regular review and support.

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