

# Water Story Series Q&A: Sarah Macoun and Andrew Gissing

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This [National Water Week](#), HopgoodGanim Lawyers have partnered with [Caxton Legal Centre](#) for a Justice in Focus: Water Stories series. Through interviews with guest speakers, we explore multi-disciplinary responses to environmental disasters and climate change in Australia, particularly in Queensland and Northern New South Wales.

In this interview of the series, HopgoodGanim Partner [Sarah Macoun](#) speaks with Andrew Gissing, CEO of Natural Hazards Research Australia.

**Watch the full video**



## Quotes - Andrew Gissing, CEO, Natural Hazards Research Australia

"Whenever I think about my experiences with floods, it's the smell. Every flood has the same smell. It's the smell of the mud and the moment you hop out of the car in a flooded area, there is that wet muddy smell that is all too familiar from each flood."

- *Andrew Gissing on his personal experience with floods*

"Really one of our biggest challenges in protecting people around flooding is ... encouraging people not to enter floodwaters. ... What we know about people entering floodwater is that it's really an entrenched behaviour. People who have grown up around floods or experienced floods before seem to be quite comfortable with entering floodwater but they often also find floodwater difficult to judge and there are, you know, some uncertainties there.' How fast is the water going? How deep is it? Though people might attempt to measure these things, what may sometimes be misunderstood is just how little a misjudgement of the situation might actually cause a really a poor outcome, you know, needing to be rescued and, you know, unfortunately too, as I've mentioned there, you know, having fatal outcomes as well."

- *Andrew Gissing on his experience with human behaviours during floods*

"The challenge there for traditional emergency services is, how you embrace that and also, how you make it safer ... I've watched videos of some of the community's responses there and some of these people that came to the rescue of others, they very much almost came to peril themselves on numerous occasions, be it powerlines, capsized boats, etc. So, you know, people risked their lives to do that but how can we embrace that community behaviour and how can we also look to make it safer in the future as well?"

- *Andrew Gissing on embracing community response to disaster and risk management*

"One is climate change, the frequency of climate extremes is changing. Expecting to see more frequent climate extremes in the future. We know our atmosphere can also hold more water as well. So, again, all impacting on the ability to generate floods, particularly, you know flash flooding. The other thing is about our exposure. So, our disaster's been shaped about where we build and there - disasters don't really happen if you don't have the intersection between extremes and exposed elements. So, the more that we can build smarter in terms of where we build and how we build, the lower exposure we will have to future natural disasters as well. ...things like the complexities that infrastructures and systems which are - and new technologies etc. All those are also going to have an influence on the future and shape our future catastrophes."

- *Andrew Gissing on the forces shaping future catastrophes*

"In terms of the way that we need to be focused on catastrophic flooding, it's embracing more of a whole community approach. So, we know that emergency services will be overwhelmed during these events. We know that we need to be working and, research is showing this, that we need to be working more and more with community groups. So, these are the groups that we've seen stand up during recent floods, that have taken leadership roles and have suddenly opened evacuation centres that are providing recovery support services without even being asked, initially, after events. There's a need to coordinate that energy but there's also a tremendous opportunity to capture that capability. The same with businesses. Like, how can business play a bigger role after disasters and during disasters and before disasters as well, in terms of their capabilities to enhance community resilience

and respond also."

*- Andrew Gissing on the role of community and business in disaster response*

"Flood plan risk management is really, really important because it's about the way that we look at the flood risk. So, both in the terms of the risk that we're faced with today in terms of where populations are, where business centres are, where agriculture, infrastructure... Looking at future risks and looking at the existing risk is really important. We have huge legacy risks of poor development decisions in the past. You know, we still have, you know, businesses and homes that can be flooded, you know, really really regularly in Australia. You know, less than once every ten years, some locations. So, these are highly vulnerable centres so, the question is from a flood plan risk management perspective, what should we be doing in these areas? What are the highest priority areas across our nation to be investing in flood mitigation and what are the most cost effective ways of reducing that risk also."

*- Andrew Gissing on the importance of flood risk management*

...there can be voluntary purchase programs, structural works there in terms of, flood levies, retention basins, dam raising or new dams etc to capture floodwater... then nonstructural measures like community engagement, educating people more about their flood risk, flood warning systems which we know have a lot of benefit in reducing damages and enhancing, you know, public safety there as well. Also, lifting homes, raising homes to reduce flood damages as well ... We're seeing that in Queensland right at the moment with the Queensland Government programmes around retrofitting homes. You know, using more flood resistant materials in in home design such that you're not seeing the same level of damage occurring post future floods and we're reducing that flood damage bill ... There's a wide range of measures and the key thing is tailoring those measures to the individual communities and the circumstances of that and involving communities too in the decision making about what measures are best for them."

*- Andrew Gissing on the variety of options for flood mitigation and the importance of involving communities in decision making*

The views expressed in this interview are personal views and should not be taken as legal advice.

## **What is the HopgoodGanim and Caxton Legal Centre Water Series?**

The [HopgoodGanim Lawyers](#) and [Caxton Legal Centre](#) Water Stories series focuses on learnings and responses during recent flood events in Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Across the series we are shining light and provoking wider conversations on land and water management, disaster planning and response. By sharing the water stories of our guest speakers, we hope to better understand our collective responses and preparedness for environmental disasters. This Justice in Focus series will continue across each day of [National Water Week](#) and aims to generate discussion that encourages human-rights centred approaches and forward thinking that incorporates the many voices and stories about people, places and our connection to water.

## **About the speakers**

A Partner in HopgoodGanim Lawyers' Planning and Environment team, [Sarah](#) has extensive experience in the areas of planning approvals and litigation and dispute resolution, together with many years of expertise in environmental legislation and policy. Through her planning work, Sarah has developed a keen interest and detailed knowledge of natural hazards and risk management, with a particular focus on flood.

[Andrew Gissing](#) is the Chief Executive Officer of Natural Hazards Research Australia. He is an emergency management and resilience expert, bringing a long history in the emergency management sector as both a practitioner and researcher.

## **Pro Bono services, HopgoodGanim Lawyers**

HopgoodGanim has a [Pro Bono strategy](#), which is focused on delivering long-term changes in three impact areas: First Nations communities, Environmental disasters, and Domestic and family violence.

Learn more about [HopgoodGanim's Pro Bono services](#), and connect with our [Head of Pro Bono, Leanne Collingburn](#), for more information.

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