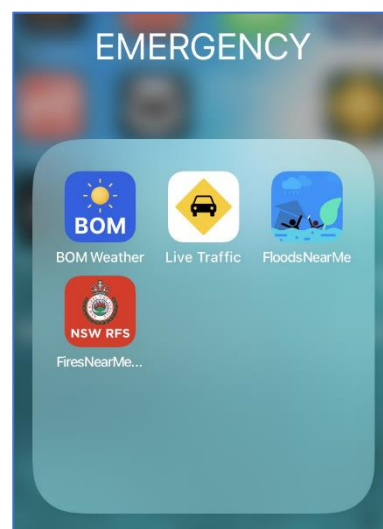


# Four essential emergency apps for any safe drive around NSW

Brian Ralph

Five weeks ago my wife and I undertook a two week driving trip around the NSW Central West and Riverina Regions which can only be described as definitely far more exciting than originally envisaged. The main reason we returned home safely was through constant monitoring of three of the four 'emergency' apps I have on my phone. These four apps\* are:

- **Live Traffic** (NSW Department of Transport) provides incident information for Sydney and Regional NSW including crashes, breakdowns, fires, floods, snow, public events and roadworks.
- **Floods Near Me** (NSW Public Works) brings together flood-related information in NSW and provides the user with tailored warnings re river levels, flood levels, roads closed and water over the road.
- **Fires Near Me** (NSW Rural Fire Service) provides warnings and incident information about all known bushfires and grass fires across NSW.
- **BOM Weather** (Bureau of Meteorology) gives you the most accurate weather information at your fingertips, including current weather conditions, forecasts, warnings and radar images.



\* It's also important to note that all these sites can also be accessed via the internet on your laptop. The other site I have also definitely bookmarked on my laptop is the NSW State Emergency Service website (<https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/>).

The first stage of our original plan was to meet up with a couple for a weekend away in Carcoar and Orange to celebrate three 70<sup>th</sup> birthdays this year (I was the 'old' person who missed out), then have lunch and celebrate a 79<sup>th</sup> birthday in Orange on the Monday with a second lovely couple, before driving to Mudgee to have lunch with another group of friends on the Tuesday. Then it was off to Grenfell to meet up with a fourth couple with whom we'd booked a five-day Murray River paddle-steamer trip at Echuca the following week. Our plan was to quietly drive down to Echuca, do the paddle-steamer trip and then return home.

But it was not to be that easy. The weekend we'd chosen to have Saturday lunch in Carcoar and then stay in Orange was also the weekend of the Bathurst Races, and there'd been significant flooding of the Macquarie River at Bathurst reported in the days before we were due to leave. Checking my apps in the days before we left, we decided to leave one day early and travel from Sydney south via the Hume Highway to Yass, then up to Cowra for the night. There were no water problems on that drive – a very different story to the floods that later swept through Boorowa and Cowra.

Lunch at the Antica Australis Restaurant in Carcoar was fantastic (a real dining experience – you must go there!) and then it was off to Orange in what was now driving rain (excuse the pun). Our friends offered to lead the way, but instead of going via the main highway, their GPS took us via every muddy dirt road it could think of along the way. Our first taste of excitement! Little did we know it was not to be our last.

After a lovely three days in Orange it was time to travel to Mudgee but my apps told me that north of Mudgee the Wellington-Gulgong road was closed due to flooding, and south of Mudgee the Mudgee-Lithgow road was closed due to a landslide. The only way in and out of Mudgee was through Sofala via Bathurst. Luckily our Mudgee friends decided they needed to do some shopping in Bathurst that day, and as a result we were able to have lunch in Bathurst.

That night we stayed in Canowindra, prior to our arrival in Grenfell the next day. Although one road west of Canowindra was flooded, the others were open and so we successfully stayed our pre-planned night there without incident. Once again this is a very different story to the floods that subsequently swamped many houses, including the shops in the main street of Canowindra, only a few weeks ago.

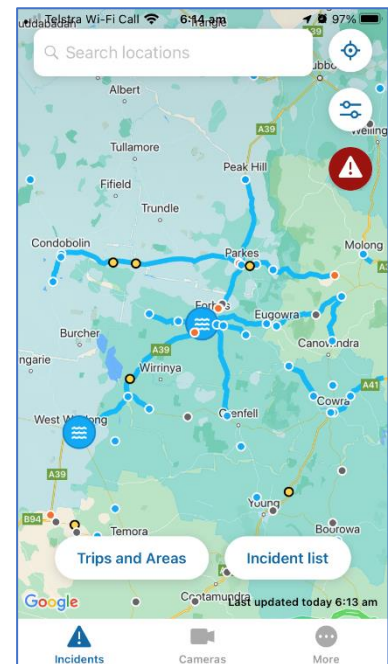
Arriving in Grenfell safely we then set off for Jerilderie two days later, planning to arrive in Echuca on the Saturday afternoon before the cruise on Monday. We had remained in contact with the paddle-steamer people over the previous few weeks, who told us they were very closely monitoring the Northern Victoria flood situation and the proposed flood levels on the Murray at Echuca-Moama, and that on present indications the cruise would still go ahead.

Our trip to Echuca was without incident except for numerous big potholes and the road being closed just south of Narrandera due to flooding, but we were diverted across to a detour that successfully got us through this tricky area very quickly.

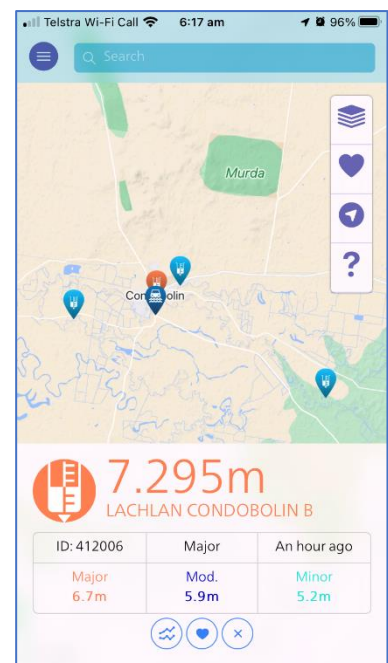
Arriving safely in Echuca about 1.30pm on the Saturday, with very little evidence of any flood problems along the way, we checked into our hotel but decided not to unpack our gear before we had lunch. Walking down the street, we turned a corner and were suddenly confronted by about 30 SES/Army/civilian volunteers madly filling sandbags and building a sandbag wall along the back of the shops that backed onto the Campaspe River, one of the main rivers directly affected by the current Northern Victoria flooding. They were obviously expecting big things to be happening here at some stage in the future – and wow, it was very big when it came!

About 4.00pm we were still wandering around the old 'Port of Echuca' historical area when an emergency message suddenly came through on our phones. It said, "EVACUATE NOW for FLOODING in parts of Echuca and Echuca Village. EVACUATE NOW to high ground. Follow SES advice. Listen to radio. More info [www.emergency.vic.gov.au](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au)."

About five minutes later we received a call from the paddle-steamer people saying that given the changing predictions for severely increased floods levels along the Murray, they were very sorry but they were cancelling the cruise that was due to happen on the Monday, due to safety concerns.



**Live Traffic App:** Screenshot of the Forbes area in the Central West on 14Nov22 showing extensive road closures due to flooding (blue lines), specific flood sites (blue dots), road hazards (yellow dots) and roadworks (red and black dots).



**Floods Near Me App:** Screenshot of the Condobolin area on 14Nov22 showing the water level of the Lachlan River at Condobolin at major flood level (the orange water level numbers reflect the orange 'Major 6.7m' text below that), flooded roads (dark blue 'flooded car' icon) and water levels in nearby creeks (teal icons).

After a little bit of quick decision-making and checking of my emergency apps, I was able to book a motel in Deniliquin for that night and we immediately checked out of our Echuca hotel and headed off asap. Echuca-Moama has subsequently experienced its third highest flood on record, along with the extreme devastation and great human suffering that this sort of event brings with it. As I write my story today, the water is still only just starting to recede.

\* Please spare a thought for all those wonderful, hopefully resilient people who have experienced severe flooding throughout NSW and the rest of Australia on any number of occasions over the last few years. It has been a disastrous, very challenging time for many.

We were to eventually get home via Hay and Griffith, checking the emergency apps every morning and afternoon to help us in our decision-making as to where to go and where to stay next.

These apps were directly responsible for us having a safe trip and I would strongly recommend you install these apps if you're thinking of doing any drive around NSW. You never know what can happen!

### **Contributor details**

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Brian was Principal of Auburn GHS (1992-2002), NSWSPC Futures Principal (2003), Secondary Principal seconded to the Secondary Education Directorate (2004-2005) and Principal Liaison Officer Strategic Initiatives Directorate/Student Engagement Directorate (2006-2009). He is a Life Member of the NSWSPC and is also the coordinator of the NSWSPC Retired Principals' Network and NSWSPC Principal Futures Website.