

Molong lawyer Kirsty Evans (centre) with Heba Elkurdi (left) and Sally Brazier, two of the business owners she assisted after the 2022 floods.



A FAIR FIGHT

COUNTRY LAWYER KIRSTY EVANS FOUGHT INSURERS FOR TWO YEARS AFTER FLOODS DEVASTATED HER LOCAL COMMUNITY IN MOLONG, NSW.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY MONIQUE LOVICK

WHEN TORRENTIAL RAIN KEPT Kirsty and Tom Evans awake one fateful evening in November 2022, they knew it meant disaster for their small community in the Central West region of NSW. “Lying in bed that night listening to the rain, we had this sickening feeling in our stomachs because of how much rain we’d already had in the past month,” says Kirsty, 39. “We woke to see what is usually a trickling creek overflowing into our crops. I knew if we could see that much water from our house, the rain would have had a devastating effect in town.”

Kirsty, a director at legal firm Cheney Suthers in Orange, and farmer Tom, 37, live on a 243-hectare cropping and livestock property just outside Molong with their three children, Sonny, eight, Henry, six, and three-year-old Edie.

A quick check of social media later that morning confirmed Kirsty’s worst fears: many of the small businesses in Molong’s main centre had succumbed to floodwaters overnight – and unfortunately it was a similar situation across the district, with the towns of Eugowra, Cudal and Canowindra also affected.

Determined to help her neighbours and friends, Kirsty sprang into action. “I started texting members of the community, reaching out with an offer for them to send me their last insurance policy,” she explains. “I’m a lawyer and a farmer, so I thought the best way I could assist was to lodge insurance claims.”

With the full support of her colleagues at Cheney Suthers, Kirsty initially took on 12 pro-bono cases, including that of Heba Elkurdi, owner of community gym Downtown Fitness.

“It felt like a tsunami had hit,” says Heba. “With water levels reaching nearly two metres, the gym experienced total devastation.”

Heba recalls seeing 100-kilogram treadmills tossed across the gym floor and equipment covered in thick silt and mud. “The smell was overwhelming,” she says.

The effects of the flood were twofold for Kate Redfern and Sally Brazier, owners of cafe and lifestyle store Lime and Stone. “Not long before the flood, we tipped our entire savings into purchasing our first commercial building,” says Kate. “We spent months, and a small fortune, painstakingly renovating the old store into a beautiful, light-filled space.”

The week the flood hit, Kate and Sally were due to fit out their new venture, having just taken possession of a truckload of new equipment and building materials. “We lost it all,” says Sally. “Our buildings and all our equipment and stock were ruined.”

Meanwhile, a second wave of devastation hit when every insurance claim that Kirsty submitted was rejected, either in whole or part.

“We were a community on our knees,” says Sally. “As the list of insurance knockbacks kept rolling in, it was heartbreaking. After months of roadblocks from the insurance companies, Kate and I were completely fatigued and wanted to give up, but Kirsty was our voice when we had nothing left to give.”

Continuing to fight for the local business owners for two years, Kirsty managed to successfully appeal all the insurance rejections, with most claimants finally receiving the full amount they were due. “I’m very proud that we’ve been able to return a million dollars

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KATE REDFERN, CO-OWNER OF LIME AND STONE

in insurance proceeds, which my clients were entitled to, back to the community,” Kirsty says.

For most of Molong’s residents, the 2022 flood threatened both their lives and their livelihoods, but Kirsty’s steadfast commitment to helping the town regroup and rebuild has left a profound impression all round.

“Kirsty championed the cause of my gym and the entire community,” says Heba. “Her dedication has left an indelible mark, and her leadership has rekindled my inner spark.”

Kate agrees: “Without Kirsty’s help, the reality is many businesses would not have reopened, and Molong as we know it would not be the same.”

A local hero through and through, Kirsty says her inspiration to keep going came from the tenacity of the locals she was trying to assist – resilient women like Heba, Kate and Sally.

“I will be forever grateful for the people in my community,” Kirsty says. “I’m so inspired by their resilience and ability to get the job done. Playing a small part in helping this town return to its best has been so rewarding.” *CS*
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