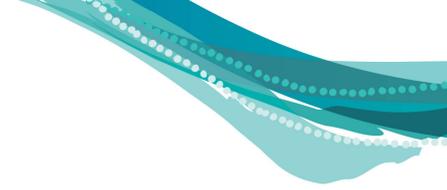


Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland

2014 – 2015:

Sandy Paton





DROUGHT AND POVERTY IN CENTRAL WESTERN QUEENSLAND 2014 -2015:

“You can’t live without hope things will change for the better”

Colin Hay: ‘Next Year People’

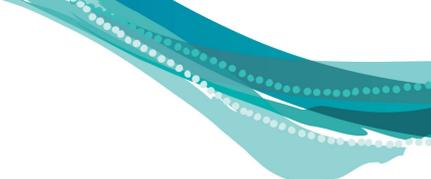
Introduction

In Anti-Poverty Week 2015, this short report reprises *“Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland: Regional Development Area Fitzroy Central West”* published in 2014. It will further examine the reality of extended drought and the flow on impact for the communities and people already struggling, after yet another 12 months without rain. The area covered includes the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Banana, Central Highlands, Gladstone, Barcaldine, Barcoo, Blackall-Tambo, Diamantina, Longreach, Winton and parts of Woorabinda.

This 2015 report revisits some of the key themes from the 2014 report, but will also explore actions and issues that have occurred since mid-2014.

Information provided draws on local anecdotal and empirical evidence from people living with drought, support workers and the broader communities; government, industry and media reports and existing research on the impact of drought.





Background

There are a range of factors that contribute to the economic vulnerability of primary producers and rural communities when drought strikes. These differentiate them from other businesses experiencing liquidity and viability issues.

Generally in most drought declared areas primary producers are also feeling the brunt of kangaroo and wild dogs in pest proportions; ongoing demands of livestock management without incoming revenue; the variability of drought cycles; a flow on impact from the ban on live cattle export and the declining value of rural property balanced against debt drawn down in better times.

Rural and regional communities are also vulnerable to the impact of drought, as the small businesses that underpin their economic health and social cohesion are by their nature dependant on the viability of the local primary producers who make up a majority of their clientele.

In March 2015 the Courier Mail reported that farm income for the preceding 12 months was “expected to have declined in all regions, with a possible exception of the wet coastal strip.”

It quoted National Farmers Federation President Brent Finlay saying that he “expected farm income this year to be cut across the board, with sheep and cattle graziers particularly hard hit due to a lack of pasture.” Also noting: “Small town businesses were suffering, residents were leaving towns to look for work and councils risked losing staff” and “The worrying thing is that they don’t come back.”

The longer a drought continues, the more evident the negative flow on impact on primary producers, rural contractors, small business and the community becomes: impacts that affect the economic health and social cohesion of whole communities.

Factors contributing to an economic crisis in the bush

Drought itself is a complex, “wicked” problem with more than one contributing cause. Some of the key factors linked with drought and complicit in the financial downturn in rural and regional areas are explored below.

Kangaroos

Currently there is disagreement about actual numbers of kangaroos in regional Queensland. Data from the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage shows roo populations have actually declined after a peak in 2013, dropping from 26.3 million in 2013 to 22.5 million in 2014, a decrease of close to 15 per cent.

Yet Queensland senator Barry O'Sullivan and Industry identity Mr. John Kelly chief executive of Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia both claim kangaroo numbers are out of control, despite the Departmental data.

"They are in absolute massive plague proportions on all the reports I've received," Senator O'Sullivan said.

Mr Kelly supports this view, noting: "Current populations are as high as they've ever been,"

Further complicating the matter, the Department website acknowledges that the model used to estimate its current figures is based on a 'small sample area and the reduced sampling effort is reflected in a conservative quota'. Conservation organisations and the kangaroo meat industry also hold differing views on kangaroo numbers.

Kangaroo numbers do rise and fall depending on rainfall. Unfortunately the ongoing rainfall shortage is continually forcing the surviving 'roos to seek artificial water sources (i.e. such as dams, troughs and open bore drains) and any remnant of stock feed, or to congregate around rural towns, taking advantage of surviving gardens.

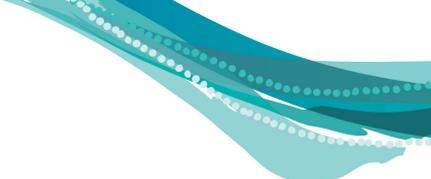
This places additional pressure on primary producers as well as local authorities and police who accept the responsibility of ending the suffering of dying animals and removing the dead animals from roads and public areas.

In March 2015 Longreach residents reported "'skin and bone' kangaroos starving to death and too weak to move".

Chad McLachlan who is employed by Longreach Regional Council speaking with the ABC in March this year, said that although kangaroo numbers in the area had increased over recent years, there was now not enough feed or water for them all.

Dams that were full five years ago and supplied abundant livestock are now graveyards, surrounded by the bones of wildlife that became trapped as they risked their lives to try and access rapidly diminishing water.

Longreach grazier Peter Clark also reported that: "I go to one dam that has been dry for a while, I most probably shoot 10 there around that trough every time I go out, that can't get up."



Mr Clark has culled thousands of 'roos this year alone under damage mitigation permits from the Queensland Government but indicated even that, has not controlled the population enough to prevent some from starving. He added that the kangaroos are also still breeding even during the drought.

Mr Clark said that future management practices needed to ensure sustainable grazing in the region. "We have increased the waters to such an extent that the [kangaroo] numbers have increased so high," he said. "Years ago - when the country was first developed, there was nowhere near this number of kangaroos. We have created the environment for them to increase to such numbers, we have to come up with some plan to manage the problem."

Effective management of kangaroo numbers will need addressing well beyond the drought. Currently however, although themselves impacted by drought, the 'roos still survive in large enough numbers to continue to have a negative impact on the carrying capacity of the land and the economic viability of producers and rural communities.

Wild dogs

A 2013 report by Australian Wool Industry (AWI) Limited estimated that wild dogs cost the Australian economy at least \$66.3 million per year. The term 'wild dog' is used by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) to collectively refer to "purebred dingoes, dingo hybrids, and domestic dogs that have escaped or been deliberately released". In Queensland wild dogs contribute to the economic, environmental and social problems - especially for agricultural businesses.

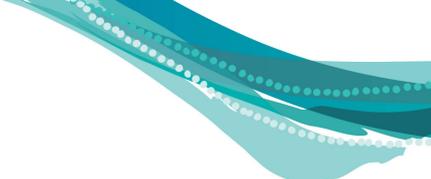
A range of approaches have been used to try and control dog numbers, including: baiting, shooting and trapping. In the last three years a single professional trapper caught 850 dogs on a western Queensland syndicate of eight properties, covering an area of about 150,000 hectares.

In the 2014 Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland Report it was noted that cluster fencing, as a control measure for dogs, was generating much debate. Two approaches received support: one was the cluster fencing of groups of properties; the other was a multi-shire dog fence enclosing around 8.5 million hectares. The second approach which had industry support was voted down by the majority of shires that comprise the Remote Area Planning and Development Board [RAPAD] and covers the area concerned.

In May RAPAD Chairman and Mayor of Barcaldine Regional Council, Rob Chandler, said the State Government had refused to fund any proposal unless both groups came together around a single plan. The two camps came to a consensus consisting of both cluster and linear fencing in parallel, to close off the mixed grazing country of central west, taking into consideration the strategic value of linking clusters together, with strategic linear fencing.

In July 2015 RAPAD approached both State and Federal Governments asking for \$7 million to develop the Queensland Cluster and Strategic Fence Plan.

Currently the Queensland Cluster and Strategic Fence Plan is still in the hands of both the State and Federal Agriculture Ministers and the regional central west wild dog control fence proposal is being developed through consultation.



Concurrently in April 2015, the State Government agreed to fast track its election commitment of \$5 million for wild dogs and feral cat control. In late August, Agriculture Minister, Bill Byrne advised the ABC that after considerable consultation, the money was “now ready to hit the ground” to implement baiting and trapping programs.

At this stage, the negative impact of wild dog populations on drought stricken properties is still seen as a major issue.

On property work may still be required to maintain remaining livestock welfare even as the income earned from the property declines or is non-existent.

Primary producers who are lucky enough to still have stock on their properties, as the drought moves into its third consecutive year, are juggling the conflicting priorities of earning an income and the ongoing demands of property and livestock management. This necessity to provide ongoing care for animals severely limits the potential for livestock managers to seek work off property. Where properties are run by couples, one partner may seek off farm earned income, however this can also add to the stress factors already imposed on a relationship, by the drought.

Very few properties have been able to continue to employ staff, and where they have, it can come at a high cost. A story that highlights the interconnection between property downturn and struggling communities, is the Doneley family property near Barcaldine. Owner Paul Doneley used to run 15,000 sheep and 1,200 cattle. Stocking rate in April 2015 was 3,000 sheep and 250 cattle maintained by feed trucked in from NSW. With numbers at this level Mr Doneley believes it will take at least three years after the drought breaks, before he makes any income. He is now working as a builder in Barcaldine so that he can maintain the services of a valuable employee.

“If we lost him, we’d never get someone as good,” he said. “And he’d leave town, so that’s another family we’d lose from the area; we’d lose three kids from the school, and that’s almost the school bus run gone.”

The variability and time frames of drought

The Office of Climate Change notes that: “Queensland’s rainfall varies substantially from year to year and decade to decade. El Niño and La Niña events explain about 25 per cent of these variations. Tropical cyclones and variations in coastal wind direction are also important drivers of rainfall. There is no clear long-term trend in annual or seasonal-mean rainfall in Queensland over the last 100 years—the period for which we have reliable rainfall records.”

Professor Will Steffen in his 2015 report for the Climate Council, “Thirsty Country: Climate Change and Drought in Australia” indicates that climate change is aggravating drought circumstances in Australia because of changes in rainfall patterns and the flow on effect of increasing heat, resulting in severe droughts occurring more often in future.

He cites the International Panel on Climate Change warning that there is an over 90 percent probability that warm days will increase and cold days will decrease in Australia. In addition, there is a probability of longer warm spells and heat waves occurring across the continent, with the anticipated increases in heat compounding existing drought conditions in Australia.

Impact of ban on live cattle export

The suspension of live animal exports for several months in 2011 had a catastrophic effect that is still impacting on many central western Queensland primary producers today. The arrival of drought, came at a time when producers were still recovering from a severe and unexpected loss of income, were sometimes overstocked owing to the unexpected market closure and were unable to offload stock locally at viable prices due to lack of rainfall and pasture shortages. Cattle prices dropped as low as \$20 a head for some stock, while the cost of transportation to the point of sale could be \$50 or \$60 per beast.

As a consequence, many producers have gone from one crisis situation to another. In August 2014, the Honourable Bruce Scott, Federal Member for Maranoa, noted “There is no cash out there. These are pastoral properties with bills still to pay and a limited capacity to continue to borrow”.

Cattle prices have risen in 2015, however as many central western properties currently have either reduced stocking rates or no stock at all, there has been little or no benefit to producers in this area. Additionally, should prices hold, they will have to pay top price to restock.

Declining land values

The Valuer-General’s 2015 Property Market Movement Report did not specifically focus on central western Queensland however it did find that through-out Queensland, sales in rural markets were limited, with ‘continued static to softening of land values within the grazing, horticultural, small crop and dryland farming industries.’ It further noted that the widespread and long-term impacts of drought resulted in restrictive financial policies across all rural industries.

It further indicates that the recent weakening of the Australian dollar and the strengthening of beef commodity prices may not be seen in the marketplace for some time, noting that the grazing market is at the lower end of its market cycle and has probably plateaued. Therefore the trends are for prospective purchasers to remain cautious and that this will continue until there is an improvement in the weather and more trust in the economy.

The Valuer-General’s 2014 Property Market Movement Report cited in the 2014 - Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland Report had specifically evaluated the LGAs of Barcaldine; Barcoo; Blackall Tambo; Diamantina; Longreach and Winton and indicated that in the western pastoral zone, the market peaked around 2008 and has since fallen back to around 2005–06 value levels. That sentiment is re-confirmed in its 2015 Report.

It should be noted that sales of rural land purchased for the purpose of mining or extractive industries are not used to set the statutory land values of rural land. This market activity has now declined due to the slowing of the resource sector and rural landholders are now the major influence in the respective markets.

Debt and asset ratio

Declining values for both livestock and land have placed many landholders in the position where the value of their assets is less than the value of debt drawn down in better times, making continued operation unviable.

A classic example of the impact of this reduction in property values is demonstrated in the experience of Charlie Phillott, a central-west grazier. Charlie, 87, purchased Carisbrooke Station in 1960 and had not missed a mortgage payment, however following a devaluation of his property by the ANZ bank, he was evicted in March 2014, after being deemed an "unviable risk". Charlie who is well respected in the area for his sound land management practices found himself penniless.

In December 2014, the federal MP for Kennedy, Bob Katter, convened the "Winton's Last Stand" meeting in Winton to bring together those impacted by the drought and their supporters. Dr David Pascoe, who by attending the meeting had become aware of Charlie's story, posted an open letter on Facebook citing: "corporate terrorism; our own Australian people are being bullied, threatened and abused by both banks and mining companies until they are forced off their own land." It was viewed by approximately 2.4 million people.

As a result of this social media storm, the ANZ Bank allowed Charlie access to Carisbrooke as a caretaker. He no longer owned the farm. On July 12th 2015, Channel Nine's Sixty Minutes programme feature Charlie Phillott's story. However in August, following the publicity and a face to face meeting with an ANZ executive, the bank revised its decision, and returned the property to the Phillot family, along with substantial compensation. The story of the fightback and the victory can be found at:

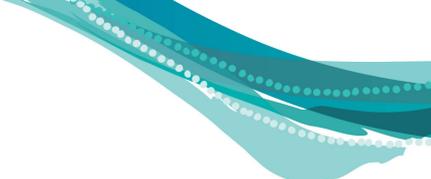
<http://www.9jumpin.com.au/show/60minutes/videos/4346408065001/>

Following the Winton meeting the ANZ also declared a 12-month moratorium on new repossessions or foreclosures in drought-affected parts of north and western Queensland and northern NSW. This moratorium was extended for another 12 months. However many people, including Pascoe believe that the evictions continued after the moratorium began. Currently there are a number of producers who are still having ongoing issues with banks and are considering a class action.

Bob Katter advised The Age in April 2015, that in Queensland 'more than 60 per cent of farmers are in serious trouble and could be foreclosed on this year or the year after'. He went on to note that he believed that there was duress and inducement in most cases of eviction.

In June 2015 a joint parliamentary committee began investigations into these issues of land and business devaluations triggered by the global financial crisis (GFC), drought and the decline in the cattle market following the live export ban that left borrowers with reduced equity in their properties and higher loan-to-business value ratios. There have been claims in some instances banks and other lenders used security revaluations to decrease the loans, engineering defaults to force property sales despite the depressed market conditions or drought, even when borrowers had never missed monthly repayments.

Further, although \$100 million is now available in the federal government's Drought Recovery Concessional Loans Scheme, the banks have to consent to producers with mortgages, accessing those loans.



And – when rain finally does come, it is likely to initially cause further distress. Grant Maudsley, Agforce general president, recently said “drought breaking rain would damage the brittle landscape and be of little short-term benefit to farmers who have already sold off their livestock.” Noting that the major difficulty arising will be the need for landholders to convince banks to extend them bigger loans to buy back the sheep and cattle needed for restocking.

Flow on effects for local small business

Small business plays a major role in the economic health and social cohesion of all rural and regional communities. A study “*Key Statistics: Australian Small Business*” undertaken by the Australian Government Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research in 2011 and using figures from 2008-2009 indicated that 22 per cent of small businesses in Queensland were associated with agriculture and 20 per cent were service focused. This makes around 42 per cent of businesses in rural communities very susceptible to reduced spending during drought.

The 2014 Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland Report documented the consequences of drought and reduced primary production on “all the chains surrounding it, whether they are helicopter musterers or livestock transporters or the general store that sells the graziers’ groceries,”

In April 2015 the Courier Mail reported that Bill Ringrose a Longreach accountant with a clientele of graziers and businesses across much of the central west, indicated that last year businesses were facing a 30 to 40 per cent reduction in turnover. This year, he put that figure between 50 and 60 per cent, noting that this was due to the flow on effect of agricultural businesses experiencing a financial downturn due to drought.

Further, the results of a survey involving more than 12,000 people, undertaken by the University of Canberra and released in June 2015, captured the impact of extended drought on regional communities. The survey (which also looked at communities affected by the mining downturn) noted ‘high levels of psychological distress and low levels of life satisfaction in communities where drought has dragged on or mining jobs have gone.’

The research found that in areas where drought was prolonged, it wasn't just primary producers who were experiencing difficulty. Dr Jacki Schirmer lead author of the report, said that by the third year of drought the effects are really expanding. She explained that in the first year producers often keep on spending, whilst they endeavoured to keep going; in the second year, spending declines and businesses feel the impact and by the third year the whole community is suffering the consequences of the drought.

With about 80% of central western country destocked and producers struggling to save every cent, contract workers have been finding it particularly difficult to obtain employment. Understanding the need to keep the contractors in the industry and the flow on impact for the local community should they leave, the Longreach Baptist Church has developed a project which can both assist contractors find work, and ease the financial burden for primary producers. Using funds provided for drought support and working with Peter Whip, a grazier and agribusiness consultant in the area, the Church put together a scheme that offers to pay 40 per cent of the cost of a contractor, with the producer required to pay the 60 per cent balance, providing a valuable incentive for producers to keep employing contractors in this tough time.

When announcing the Australian Government’s Assistance package in May 2015, then Prime Minister Tony Abbott confirmed that “When the farmers have problems in farming communities, everyone has problems.”

Social Impacts of Drought

The social impact of drought is felt both throughout the event and following it. The more extended a drought, the greater the pressure placed on those experiencing it. As previously noted, families and communities living with drought are facing devastating change, experiencing loss of livelihood, and facing challenges of loss of lifestyle and identity.

The 2014 Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland Report noted that conversations with people living in the drought impacted areas indicate that as expected, the social impacts of drought in these areas are similar to those documented in existing research literature.

For landholders, managers, farm workers and contractors in the region these have included:

- a slide into poverty and in some cases bankruptcy
- capital purchases, and maintenance of equipment and infrastructure can be postponed – sometimes with consequences that impact on farm safety
- families faced with decisions about whether to continue to farm – even where the property has been in the family for generations
- limited available finance forces difficult decisions about prioritising personal and farming expenditure
- an increase in stress and other negative health impacts
- an increasing need for off-farm income
- difficulty in accessing off farm employment
- forced separation, as one partner moves to take up employment elsewhere
- women and children taking on additional work on-farm as outside labour hire is unaffordable
- the daily necessity to feed and water livestock keeps people close to home, restricting opportunity for both outside work and recreational activities
- intergenerational conflict
- marital conflict
- social isolation
- restricted educational access for children - this is not limited to the ability to pay for the travel and fees related to boarding school, university or other education away from home; families have reported not being able to afford to send their children into the in-reach activities associated with Distance Education
- ageing couples remaining on farm and delaying retirement
- drawing down on their 'Super' to keep animals fed
- the death and injury of livestock caused by wild dogs also has an emotional impact on producers who whilst already under stress from the drought are further distressed by seeing their livestock suffering

For small business and the community as a whole, social impacts included:

- population decline especially amongst younger people
- lower levels of community and personal resilience
- reduced access to services
- a decline in social capital reflected in lower social participation
- increased job losses and/or reduction of working hours in small communities affected by drought
- closure of non-essential businesses such as shops selling high end home wares; cafes and restaurants
- businesses staying open but reducing their stock options
- expenditure on business improvements and new equipment being put on hold
- the pool of volunteers in the larger communities is reduced because landholders with limited access to funds for travel need to remain close to home

Assistance Available

Most government and not for profit assistance programs available to landholders and those impacted by drought in 2014, have been extended.

In May 2015 the Federal government committed another \$333 million as part of expanded drought support. The funding included \$35 million to stimulate local economies in the drought affected communities and regions; \$25 million for pests and weeds; and \$20 million for mental health and counselling services.

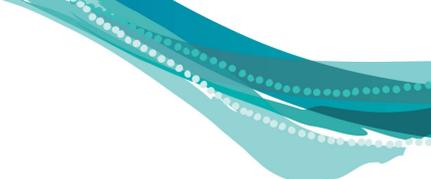
The Queensland Government also continues to offer support for drought affected producers. The Queensland Government Business portal provides a one-stop link to the assistance available. See:

<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industry/agriculture/rural-disaster-recovery/drought-assistance/additional-assistance>

A more extensive list of support options can be found as an Addendum to this Report. Eligibility criteria may apply to some categories of assistance.

In the third year of the drought there has been a growing awareness from the broader community that the “charity model” of support is not a good fit with the usually resilient and independent people of the bush.

The value of social support is being increasingly recognised. For example, Aussie Helpers which assists with delivering fodder and other practical support into communities such as Longreach, and visits properties they are helping to talk with landholders. When visiting people if they notice someone who may need support, they can request permission to connect them with Optum, a worldwide health and wellbeing company. With the backing from Lions International, Optum can give them a phone call at home at night, and where needed, a psychologist can be flown into Longreach and be taken out to the property and treat the person on farm.



In July 2015 thirty three Country Women’s Association (CWA) ladies from across Queensland undertook a 3,000 kilometre, 7 day bus trip; talking to people, raising the profile of the CWA Public Rural Crisis Fund, spending money in rural communities and seeing first-hand where support is needed. Highlighting the growing recognition of the interconnection between rural producers and local small business, the CWA fund “aims to help families and communities affected by drought through the form of grocery store gift vouchers, store credit, or payment of accounts,” State President, Robyn McFarlane said. Noting that it is really important to keep the shops open in local areas - “We [CWA] have a great saying, ‘send money not stuff’,” Ms McFarlane said. In the last twelve months the CWA Public Crisis Fund has distributed \$30,000 every month to drought affected communities.

Emphasis has shifted to encouraging people who want to give, to resist the urge to make bulk purchases on the coast and instead find ways to purchase supplies to distribute to drought communities, from businesses operating in drought communities. For example, CentacareCQ Diocesan Director Dr Ricki Jeffery said it was important for her team to think socially, not just economically. “It would have been really easy for us to stock up in Rockhampton or Emerald before driving out to Longreach to launch the “Drought...what next?” exhibition, but we opted to purchase drinks and other event supplies from local businesses, because we know that the financial impact felt by farming families flows onto those businesses.”

2015 has also seen a strong drive to help support the struggling economy of rural communities by encouraging tourism to drought stricken areas. In May 2015 the Queensland Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk launched the “*Live Australia’s Story*” tourism brand in south–east Queensland, encouraging people to travel inland and stay longer in smaller communities, see the reality of the impact of droughts and connect with new experiences from ‘spotting Australian wildlife, to sleeping under the stars, dinosaur discoveries, kayaking in the stunning gorges, to learning about Australia’s heritage or attending an Outback event.’ A range of interesting itineraries can be found at www.outbackqueensland.com.au

Some rural landholders are also tapping directly into the tourism market, as a source of income. For example, since 6,000 hectare Lara Station, near Barcaldine, opened its gates to campers in 2014 it has hosted more than 700 caravans. Owner Jodie Jarden says the station’s wetlands fed from a single historic bore on the Great Artesian Basin provides a welcome green oasis and a refuge for wildlife.

Large local events are also being used to draw people inland. Renown singers Paul Kelly, Troy Cassar-Daley and Dan Kelly featured in a drought relief concert at the Stockman’s Hall of Fame in Longreach on 25th September. The event was being held in conjunction with the Longreach Cup and the Longreach Jockey Club's 125th anniversary celebration on September 26. The concert aimed at drawing people to the outback and stimulating the economy, however it also be a fundraiser for the Western Queensland Drought Appeal Committee.

The Winton Outback Festival, also held in September, was another strong tourism drawcard.

Unfortunately, the traditional May Harry Redford Cattle Drive in the Aramac area had to be cancelled in 2015 due to the ongoing drought, with flow on impacts for the local economy.

Barcaldine Mayor Rob Chandler said tourists helped small towns and small businesses to survive during drought and noted that although the country was at its worst, rural resilience was on show.

Factors that limit access to support

As noted in the 2014 Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland Report, despite the range of supports and assistance packages now available in drought declared areas, there have been some inhibitors to people actually receiving assistance.

Examples included:

- The Farm Household Allowance, equivalent to the New Start allowance, and requiring the completion of more than 20 pages of forms.
- Slow rural internet access may further limit the capacity for people to complete these forms online.
- Producers with more than \$2.55 million in assets, not being eligible for the allowance devised to provide “basic survival” support. (The asset value for the majority of grazing properties and broad-acre farms is believed to be around \$2 million.)
- Strong anecdotal evidence of people being reluctant to seek Centrelink Payments (particularly in the first years of this current drought)
- In some cases, off farm assets such as a second home to enable children to attend a town school, or superannuation, made people ineligible.
- A majority of support targeted land owners – not employees, contractors or small businesses

In a similar vein, a comprehensive Survey Report released by industry body, AgForce, in May 2015 found that:

- Two-thirds of primary producers in drought declared areas had not sought Farm Household Allowance or concessional loans. Forty four per cent believed they were ineligible.
- Four in five of those who responded to the question on Farm Household Allowance believed that the process was difficult, complex and repetitive: one in five had problems with poor internet or payments arriving late
- Only fifty per cent of applications for Drought Concessional Loans were successful
- Generally, producers identified a preference for the interest rate subsidies of the past over the current loans, with any advantage thought insufficient to offset the risk to ongoing relationships with financiers, whilst some lenders did not support applications.
- Queensland Government programs were more successful with 74 per cent of Drought Recovery Assistance Scheme applications and 92 per cent of Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate applications, getting up.

More detail from the report can be found at: <http://www.beefcentral.com/news/agforce-members-say-qld-drought-worst-in-living-memory>

In small communities, drought workers also report that many “rural families really struggle emotionally with accessing local charities as the staff are sometimes their peers and it is a pride thing.” However it has been noted that people “are happy for me to be an advocate for them – I am constantly saying “wait – there are groups in town who can help get your Telstra, Rego or Ergon account paid” “Can I take that bill off the fridge?”... Usually the response is”I had no idea that was happening - you sure can.”

Ongoing stress places an ever increasing strain on the social and emotional wellbeing of those affected.

Current Reality

Weather

In September 2015 more than 80per cent of Queensland was drought declared, with indications of a lower than normal probability of rainfall extending at least until March 2016.

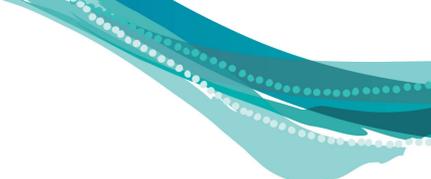
In line with the Queensland Government's drought policy of self-reliance, primary producers are being encouraged to adopt risk management strategies to reduce the impact of the drought on their properties. Where properties are already struggling owners are advised to seek appropriate assistance. (See Addendum: Drought Support Available)

As previously identified, the impact of drought does not end with good rainfall. Pasture has to regrow, livestock fatten and breed, new stock may need to be bought in, crops sown, grown and harvested and all successfully marketed before any income is returned to the producer.

The human face of drought and poverty

Given the current indicators it is probable that the drought may continue into 2016 in many central western areas. Even if good rainfall does occur, recovery from drought itself is a slow process. Despite the assistance available, community feedback continues to indicate that the drought is having a profound effect on the daily lives of rural people. This is reflected in anecdotal evidence and media reports such as the comments listed below:

- *"The things we've had to do on a daily basis at times have been horrific ... Sadly there are women out there on properties by themselves dealing with unbearable pressures while also trying to smile and make out all is OK, to shield the kids."* Shelly from Barcaldine speaking to the ABC
- *"They (kangaroos) are just knackered – with the drought and everything. It is the same as everybody, the humans are the same, we are just knackered from the drought."* Chad McLachlan Longreach Regional Council employee speaking with the ABC.
- *"How pathetic it is when we produce enough red meat to feed 1,100 people for a year but earn so little we have to survive on hand-outs."* John Hall from Longreach speaking with the ABC.
- *"We have a number of employees that we will have to put off at the end of April if no rain event happens."* Rick from Boulia, speaking with the ABC
- *"We have seen more drought than we knew existed, and more depression in towns than we knew existed,"* Phil Susman visiting Lara Station from Victoria speaking with the ABC
- *"I don't save up for a rainy day, I save up for the next drought"*
Grazier [Pauline Fegan](#) speaking with The Courier Mail
- *This drought is different because it isn't really about the drought. This drought is different because people don't see a way back.* Ben Callcott from Charters Towers, speaking to ABC Rural
- *Our youth are slowly losing the ability to be children. Many kids are in a constant state of stress, worrying whether their properties will have to be sold".* Longreach State High school Captain, Joshua Keene to the Courier Mail.



A graphic visual display of the reality of a more than usually prolonged decline in rainfall is presented in the CentacareCQ photo exhibition: “Drought – What next?” These images display the barrenness of the landscape and the toll on people living through a long term drought. Since December 2014 the exhibition has been touring Queensland to raise awareness and garner support for central western communities. The images can be viewed online at <http://annesusesmith.com/drought.php>

With the country bare, stocking rates are now either very low or non-existent, and the request for support from drought workers, has changed in nature over the last 12 months.

Currently, demonstrating the strong connection between landholders and their stock, even as they struggle to survive, fodder for horses is in demand.

“If you could get us some hay that would be the best ever as our family is very close to the horses and we do not want the drought to take them as well.” Grazier to drought support worker - Longreach.

In this particular instance two agencies partnered to organise to provide credit into an account at a local produce company to provide 5 round bales of hay and an extra \$200 for dog biscuits and horse pellets etc.

Addressing mental health in drought affected areas

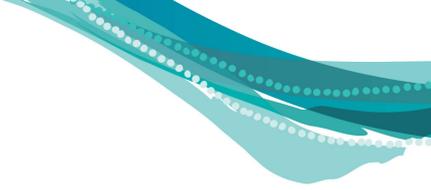
The results of the University of Canberra 2015 survey previously mentioned, and involving more than 12,000 people in Central Queensland and central western New South Wales noted ‘high levels of psychological distress and low levels of life satisfaction in communities where drought has dragged on or mining jobs have gone.’

Young people, under 30, recorded poorer wellbeing than older people in the same regions, with 18-29 year olds less likely to feel part of their community, and not wanting to stay in rural areas.

However, the research appears to still be out on direct links between drought itself and poor mental health and suicide in rural communities.

The 2008 study “Social Impacts of Drought: Review of the Literature” for the Australian Government Bureau of Rural Sciences, noted there is some primary evidence linking suicide to drought in New South Wales, with an 8 per cent rise in the long-term mean suicide rate being associated with a decrease in precipitation of about 300 mm . This study did identify that there are gender-related aspects to living with drought, as men and women reflected their experiences differently.

A 2015 study by Natalie Thompson, Priority Research Centre for Gender, Health and Aging flagged that there was still limited research exploring the relationship between drought specifically (not just rural life) and mental health. This particular project assessed the impact of drought on the mental health of Australian rural women.



The research reviewed 6,664 women from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH), born between 1946 and 1951, living outside major cities and perceived to be vulnerable to the adverse effects of drought. Participants received five surveys between 1996 and 2008, assessing mental health and a variety of other health, behavioural and demographic variables. The data were linked to information about drought for their area of residence. Whilst the drought experienced varied over the time of the study, 'no relationship was found between drought and mental health. This was the case both for the overall findings, as well as among the groups considered to be vulnerable.' The study suggests that drought does not contribute to poorer mental health among mid-aged Australian women. As with the 2008 study which noted differences between the responses of men and women to drought, it indicated that additional research is needed to see if these findings apply to men, as well as to women of other ages.

Documented research, previously undertaken and including the 2008 study, identified isolation as a contributing factor in rural suicide. The isolation caused by the reluctance of producers to spend on non-essential items like trips to town or a social or community event, is an added burden on those already coping with debt, dying stock and no income.

Speaking on ABC Radio's Country Hour in July 2014, Sabina Knight, Director of the Mount Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health and a member of the expert panel established by the Federal Government to conduct the review of the social impacts of drought in 2008, indicated that community events were found to be an effective method of supporting good mental health and building community resilience in drought affected areas.

The Australian Government's Enhanced Social and Community Support Measure funds ongoing social and community support to assist farmers, their families and drought-affected communities who are experiencing family relationship issues, distress or mental illness. The Department of Social Services provides funding to [Suncare Community Services](#) for Community Mental Health Services and to [CentacareCQ](#) for Families and Children Activities in the central western areas. The Department of Human Services funds drought coordinators.

Ways forward

As of September 2015 the majority of the Queensland's Central West region remains in drought. Nevertheless, there are strategies available that can enable communities to move forward.

The Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper released in July 2015, identified drought as the major challenge for producers that has a substantial impact on 'agricultural output, productivity and farm incomes.' Under 'Priority 3: Strengthening our approach to drought and risk management' government has set aside funding under two key strategy areas:

Preparing for drought

- \$3.3 million to give farmers more accurate, more local and more frequent seasonal forecasts.
- Immediate tax deduction of the cost of new water facilities for farmers and depreciation of capital expenditure on fodder storage assets over three years.
- \$29.9 million over four years for farm insurance advice and risk assessment grants to help farmers evaluate options.

In-drought support

- Up to \$250 million in Drought Concessional Loans each year for 11 years.
- \$22.8 million to increase Farm Household Allowance case management for farmers.
- Increased financial counselling services and improved access to community mental health.
- Farmers in drought can access their Farm Management Deposits when needed, without losing tax concessions.
- Additional advice and help from the Australian Taxation Office.
- \$35 million for local infrastructure projects to help communities suffering due to drought.
- \$25.8 million over four years to manage pest animals and weeds in drought-affected areas.

Producers can use a number of these new, practical approaches not only during drought, but also to address other risks.

For more information about how producers can strengthen their approach to drought and risk management see [Chapter 3 of the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper](#).

Most recently, at The Sunday Mail's Bush Forum in Longreach on September 26th 2015 Federal Attorney-General George Brandis indicated that the Commonwealth Government would introduce a series of tax incentives for primary producers who invest in building new predator proof fences.

Additionally, at this forum Deputy Premier Jackie Trad and Opposition Leader Laurence Springborg committed to both sides of the Queensland Government working together to support those communities affected by "the worst drought in history".

Ms Trad noted that a \$125 million of Queensland Government grant funding was now ready to be rolled out on over 40 projects, to support 26 drought declared communities.

Government is only effective in supporting industries and communities to survive drought events when it addresses matters holistically. The strategies utilized by both state and federal governments need to continue to dovetail and not overlap.

Sustaining Existing Community Resources

As in 2014, anecdotal feedback from landholders, councils, small business and support workers across drought declared areas, is that whilst all support is welcome, support that taps into and value adds to existing community resources is the most needed and the most appreciated.

Examples include:

- funding for existing local support organisations to expand their services, rather than bringing in outside providers
- distribution of gift cards and vouchers that can be used with local small business, rather than bring in products from outside the community - food, toiletries, and items like dog food can be purchased even in small communities and this may make the difference to a business remaining viable or going under
- Ventures that attract tourism into small communities.

Additionally, where practical, support that contributes to keeping employees on properties and puts infrastructure projects into droughted areas will contribute to population stability and community sustainability in the long term.

Closed shops, reduced business opening hours, limited stock, cancelled events or a reduction of support services further create a community sense of despondency

Be Prepared

Acknowledging that drought has had an ongoing impact on land management in Australia since settlement and will continue to do so, remains an important step in allowing people to move forward. It enables them to recognise that they need to prepare their land, their livestock, their business, their communities and themselves for the next inevitable decline in rainfall.

Ms Vicki Burden, a Longreach grazier told the ABC in April 2015 that she believed that 'governments at all levels needed to look beyond the short political cycle and focus on developing long-term plans.' "I think we'd like to see more long-term planning around infrastructure and economic sustainability in the region, something that gives a basis for us to be able to plan our own investment future, our own capital expenditure," she said.

However, planning needs to occur at both the micro and macro levels, with government, industry, producers, small business and local government working together. As previously noted, the Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper includes strategies and funding for drought preparation as well as support, for people currently affected.

The Queensland Government's Business and Industry Portal has a [Planning for Drought](#) Page to assist producers, and the site also provides links to current support available.

The industry body Agforce also has up-to-date planning and support information available on http://www.agforceqld.org.au/index.php?page_id=34

In the long term, producers, businesses and the broader community need to be better prepared financially, physically and mentally to cope with inevitable drought events. However it needs to be acknowledged that in extreme events additional assistance may be required.

Build Resilience

Resilience is frequently simply identified as the capacity to “bounce back” from a negative experience. However real resilience also requires the abilities to think positively, anticipate and plan for the future, respond proactively, seek out opportunities and undertake actions that will make a meaningful change.

Previously undertaken research indicates that community events are an effective method of supporting good mental health and building community resilience in drought affected areas. During the current drought, service providers also identified that providing support at community events, rather than holding mental health workshops, was a more effective process. It has been noted that local events “are the hub for the year and the one opportunity for people to get together. The social interaction and coming together as a community is really beneficial for everyone involved.”

Formal training that increases the capacity of both professionals and the community to identify and support those experiencing mental health challenges is probably best delivered into communities, prior to drought or major stress events. However additional support may be required following major or prolonged events, such as an extreme drought.

Organisations that already exist in communities, such as churches, agricultural organisations, QCWA, arts groups, sporting organisations, etc. should be encouraged and resourced to support a regular calendar of interactive local events that are consistently available; enabling meaningful connections and relationships to be established and available during drought times.

Individuals and communities can contribute to building their own resilience, and need opportunities to do so before a crisis such as drought emerges. During the Queensland Governments ‘Charleville Round Table’ on rural and remote mental health in 2014, the concept of a “tool kit” that helps local communities put strategies in place so that they are better able to help local people cope with the on-going impact of the drought was developed. The concept was developed as a result of concerns raised by community leaders and rural service providers. The ‘tool kit’ would include the development of a mechanism which can be put in place to enable and require that State (and preferably Commonwealth) governments consulted with the local communities when resources were being allocated. The “tool kit” will enable effective planning and the effective use of available resources to support communities as the impacts of drought and other significant events impact the mental health of communities and the individuals within those communities.

An initiative that continues to encourage communities to build their own resilience has been developed by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR). The program called Tackling Tough Times Together (TTTT) has made funds available to support drought affected communities in NSW and Queensland to access the resources they need to support one another through drought. Funding supports community based activities that help to relieve current stressors and symptoms, and build capacity and resilience for the future.

More information can be found at http://www.frrr.org.au/cb_pages/tackling_tough_times_together.php

Industry Leadership

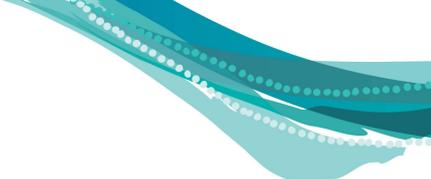
Proactive Industry leadership continues to be essential in establishing a more sustainable future for Central Western Queensland. In this drought some areas have used Community Forums to explore ways of addressing the issue of inevitable prolonged periods without rainfall, and provide some leadership and direction, now and into the future.

The value of the beef industry 'renewal summit' held in Longreach in August 2014 was highlighted in the 2014 Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland Report. This summit aimed at “bridging a farming business into the next rain event” and ideas put forward included:

- Exploring diversification; from selling produce to financing the business and coming up with a regional brand, with farmers being better organised and business savvy to work with foreign investors.
- A proposal to learn from New Zealand: New Zealand's primary industry works together more cohesively than the Australian industry.
- The need for Australian producers to develop a resilient farming system that allows for the bad seasons, along with the good.
- The necessity of maintaining relationships with key stakeholder following a business crisis with a focus on communication and building relationships
- Kidworth Case study which required participants to identify ways of changing the operating environment of the imaginary Kidworth Station, which has been experiencing the difficulties of drought, depressed stock prices, debt, and lower land values and destocking, over the past seven years. They were asked to review Kidworth's financial downturn and scrutinise its business strategy enabling it to move into 2015-16 with a positive operating environment.

As previously mentioned, the December 2014 'Last stand at Winton', forum was organised by Federal MP Bob Katter and his son, State MP Rob Katter. This forum was called to highlight the huge debt burden that many graziers are now carrying as a result of the devaluation of their properties following the ban on the live export market, the global financial crisis and the drought. It identified the need for effective policies from both government and the banks and raised concerns about the large number of people who fell outside the eligibility criteria for financial support. There was also concern expressed that in the next 12 to 18 months, when the interest payments of people who haven't had any cash flow fell due, the rural crisis would worsen.

There were differing opinions about how many graziers were actually being forced off their properties, at that time. However as a result of this meeting and the subsequent social media campaign, referred to earlier, the ANZ Bank did recommence negotiations with grazier Charlie Phillott, and further implement a moratorium on all forced farm foreclosures in drought-affected west and north Queensland and northern NSW until January 2016. ANZ also offered financial assistance to farmers wanting to relocate off their land because of unmanageable debt, and increased funding for financial counselling aimed at towns badly impacted by drought.



At the “Getting a Grip on Drought Forum” in Longreach in May 2015 locals described the reality of the drought experience, and sought solutions in an interactive discussion with a panel consisting of Senator Barry O’Sullivan, Queensland Agriculture Minister Bill Byrne, and industry group AgForce president Grant Maudsley.

Topics discussed included:

- The effectiveness of Government assistance: both Senator O’Sullivan and Mr. Byrne believed that their governments were already providing adequate assistance.
- The reality of the debt crisis: the panel was hopeful that the banks would continue to work with landholders.
- The future of agriculture: a new wealth fund was proposed, however Senator O’Sullivan noted that new programs required new money.
- Keeping the community and the next generation in the bush: keeping the community together is important and the decline in government workers in rural areas has had a negative impact
- Western Queensland needs a tourism push: Government was asked to foster more people to moving west.

At the end of the evening, ABC reporter Lydia Burton said that: “The crowd left seeming proud that their voices had been heard and hoping the drought was a little better understood.”

On 31st of August 2015, Rob and Bob Katter, in conjunction with Katter’s Australia Party MP, Shane Knuth, called another public meeting, as a follow up to the 2014 Winton meeting. The “Debt Crisis Summit” in Charters Towers, although outside the central west region, again discussed issues directly impacting on many producers and rural communities. **Topics included:**

- The rural debt crisis
- The need for a rural construction board
- Greater support for drought affected communities

On the 1st September Premier Palaszczuk also visited Charters Towers to listen to the concerns of local people.

The most recent of the community forums directly focussed on the central west was the Sunday Mail Bush Forum held in Longreach on September 26th - 2015, with the five local priority concerns highlighted at that time being:

- The need for cheaper power
- Better telecommunications in rural areas
- Controlling wild dogs
- Addressing mental health
- Greater scrutiny of the banks

These types of forums provide an opportunity to identify concerns, seek solutions in conjunction with people of influence, to engage in constructive and strategic thinking in a supportive environment and to bring forward local leadership.

Conclusion

The longer the drought continues, the greater the emotional and financial pressure it imposes on people in affected areas. Even the most resilient are tested. The long term survival of both producers and their communities continues to depend on appropriate support in the present, and strategic forward thinking and leadership, now and into the future.

When the drought does break, it will be still several years before most producers receive an income flow. Most will be starting from scratch, with a need to restock, and they may also be dependent on banks for favourable refinancing. High cattle prices and low land values further complicate financing decisions.

Additionally, good rain may open the rural property market to “bargain hunters”, putting pressure on banks to foreclose and sell properties. Hidden poverty will be present in rural communities for several years.

The factors that mitigate the impact of drought remain the same, regardless of the length of the drought itself. These are:

- being well prepared for the inevitable
- building resilience in people and communities
- learning from past and current experiences
- state and federal government support that is timely, strategic and accessible
- approaches that encourage people to come together and build social networks of support
- sustaining existing resources in the community
- Industry leadership
- diversification

As advised in the 2014 Drought and Poverty in Central Western Queensland report, the effective implementation of these mitigating strategies can only be achieved when Federal, State and local governments, industry and business leaders, landholders, service providers and other stakeholders work together collaboratively, to achieve a sustainable agricultural industry and thriving rural communities.

Albert Einstein reminded us that: “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them”. So, whilst drought still remains an inevitable part of Australia’s weather patterns, we must change our thinking about how we manage our land and unpredictable weather patterns, and support people through extreme events, if we are to keep people out of poverty.

Steps in a positive direction in 2014-15 have been:

- Increased awareness of the impact of drought on small rural businesses and communities, as well as producers, with
- greater focus on channelling support dollars directly into rural communities (rather than sending in goods that can be purchased there) – it is rain, fodder and dollars that are in short supply
- Tourism strategies and events that attract people to visit droughted communities
- Community Forums that raised public and political awareness of the reality of the drought and sought ways forward
- Continued support from both the Australian and Queensland Government
- Recognition in the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper that funding needs to be set aside for both in-drought support, and planning and preparing to better manage future drought events.

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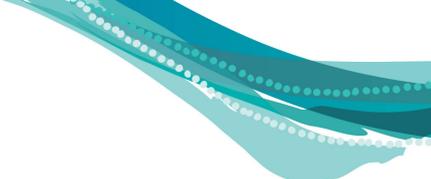
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Addendum.

DROUGHT SUPPORT AVAILABLE

There are a number of assistance programs available to landholders and those being impacted by drought. Eligibility criteria may apply to some categories of assistance.

Australian Government

National Drought Program Reform

Since 1 July 2014 a [new national approach to drought programs](#) has been in place. The new approach replaces the Exceptional Circumstances arrangements and focuses on encouraging farmers to prepare for and manage the effects of drought and other challenges. The new [Farm Household Allowance](#) is the Australian Government's main contribution to reform. See the [Drought assistance contacts](#) for links to state and territory initiatives.

The *Farm Household Allowance (Centrelink)* is available as part of the Federal Government's Drought Assistance package, however farmers do not have to be drought declared to apply. There are off farm income and net assets thresholds that apply.

The aim of the programme is to assist with basic living costs during financial hardship, until the property returns to profitability, or applicants find off farm employment. For more information and application forms visit

www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/farm-household-allowance or call their Drought and Farmer Assistance Hotline on 132 316

Drought Concessional Loans are available to assist farm businesses recover from and prepare for future droughts and return to viability in the longer term. Under the scheme, the Australian Government will provide Queensland with \$100 million for the provision of Drought Concessional Loans in 2013-14 and 2014-15. For more information please see [Drought Concessional Loans Scheme](#)

Farm Finance Concessional Loans Scheme closed on 30 June 2015 in all jurisdictions

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) is providing assistance to primary producers through a variety of drought services, including financial assistance, livestock nutrition and animal welfare information, business-management strategies, support for water infrastructure and assistance to help reduce the impact of pest and feral animals. There is also [drought assistance information](#) available from DAFF's website or by phoning the drought hotline 1800 025 656.

Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development (RAPAD), is auspicing the Federally funded Rural Financial Counselling Program for Queensland's Central Southern Region. This is delivered through the registered business Rural Financial Counselling Service Queensland - Central Southern Region. More information on financial counselling can be found at <http://www.rfcsqcsr.com.au>

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is assisting people impacted by drought by providing an extension on time to pay tax owing, or negotiate payment by instalments, without incurring interest charges. Information on these and other taxation measures and concessions available can be obtained by phoning the ATO on 13 11 42

Queensland Government

Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS) was established by the Queensland Government to assist graziers manage their livestock during drought and to help in the restoration of that resource after drought. DRAS is administered by primary industries officers located with DAFF in Brisbane.

DRAS provides freight subsidies on the transport of fodder and water during the drought; the transport of animals returning from Agistment and animals purchased for restocking after the drought and rebates on water infrastructure purchased for emergency animal welfare needs.

DRAS application forms and information can be found at <http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/environment/drought/assistance/dras> or by phoning DNRM on 13 74 68 or going to www.dnrm.qld.gov.au

The Queensland Government's Business and Industry portal provides a number of links to support for primary producers affected by drought.

https://www.business.qld.gov.au/search-results?query=drought+assistance+for+primary+producers&num_ranks=10&tiers

The Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) in conjunction with DAFF has a drought assistance package covering a range of supports around vehicle loading permits, registration of vehicles, stock grazing, water carting and drought permits. More information can be found by phoning 1800 025 656 or at <http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Community-and-environment/Community-engagement/Natural-disaster-and-drought-assistance.aspx>

The Home Energy Emergency Assistance Scheme provides one-off emergency assistance towards home energy bills for eligible households. Information on the scheme can be found at

<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/cost-of-living-support/home-energy-emergency-assistance-scheme/>

Find out the latest information about [drought declared areas](#) .

Additional Support Available

Local Community Service Organisations, Volunteer Groups, Church Groups and Service Volunteer Organisations Clubs in many communities are also providing support for drought affected communities.

The *Western Bush Bible* produced by the Rural Financial Counselling Service and Suncare Community Service Drought Relief Program provides information and contact details on many of the assistance programs available in the Central Western Queensland area including:

- Federal and state government programs
- Queensland Country Women's Association Public Rural Crisis Fund
- Farmers Card
- Royal Flying Doctor Service Social and Emotional Well Being Program
- Anglicare Central Queensland
- Aussie Helpers
- Telstra Assistance
- CentacareCQ – Drought Support Program
- Suncare Community Services Drought Relief Program
- Trade Support Loans
- Legal Aid
- Sporting Shooters Farm Assist Program
- After Hours Mental Health Crisis – 4920 6100 – available 24/7
- Off the Track Training
- Other Regional Services
- National and State-wide Social and Support Services.

The Western Bush Bible is available at

<http://www.qmdc.org.au/publications/download/2141/website-pdfs/western-bush-bible.pdf>

Churches, Services and Volunteer Groups

Funds from church and religious organisations and service and volunteer groups with both broad outreaching networks and a strong local presence in many towns, have been channelled into support for communities (not just for those affiliated with these organisations.) Hay deliveries, gift cards and gift parcels of food and toiletries are amongst the distribution processes.

Industry bodies such as Agforce, Future Beef and National Farmers' Federation have information on drought support available on their websites.

- Agforce: http://www.agforceqld.org.au/index.php?page_id=34
- NFF: <http://www.nff.org.au/read/4417/nff-drought-relief-package.html>
- Future Beef: <https://futurebeef.com.au/knowledge-centre/drought/>

Beds for Bush Kids, established by the Longreach School of Distance Education (LSODE) P & C Tourism Committee aims to support drought-affected remote families with some of the costs of distance education. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-07/hope-beds-for-bush-kids-campaign-will-help-mini-schools-qld/5724656>

CWA Public Rural Crisis Fund was established to help women and their families in crisis, whether from natural disaster or personal crisis. One hundred per cent of every donation goes directly to helping the recipients recover, rebuild and get ahead. A donation also sends a very important message that someone cares. Practical assistance is given in the form of grocery store gift vouchers, store credit or payment of accounts. No cash payments are made. By helping in this way, not only is the recipient assisted but the money stays in the local community. Every little bit helps, with donations over \$2 tax deductible. To make a donation, [click here](#).

If you urgently need financial assistance, please complete this form.

As well as access to local and face to face services, additional ongoing support for families can be found by contacting the following organisations:

- The Australian Centre for Agricultural Health and Safety provides a website at <http://www.aghealth.org.au/pressures> which contains checklists and support information related to farm business, family farms and personal issues to support people on the land
- Rural Mental Health Support Line 1800 201 123
- Lifeline : 13 11 14 or to access a data base for where to go for help see <http://www.justlook.org.au>
- Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800 or <http://www.kidshelp.com.au>
- Beyondblue 1300 22 4636 or <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>

Drought Angels is a project of The Chinchilla Family support centre a not for profit organisation. 100% of funds raised and donated go to helping farmers and rural communities.

<https://www.facebook.com/519529671494691/photos/a.519554668158858.1073741827.519529671494691/755819367865719/?type=1&theater>

Aussie Helpers supports farmers.

<https://www.aussiehelpers.org.au/about/> CALL US: 1300 665 232

Support to build resilience

Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal.

Priority is given to organisations run by, and based in the regions over those delivering services to, but not based in the listed regions. Projects led by local communities are also given preference.

The Objectives of the program are to:

- Enhance the mental health and wellbeing of drought-stressed rural and remote communities
- Reduce social isolation by facilitating strong social cohesion and connection
- Build community capacity to cope now and in future droughts

Grants of up to \$10,000 are available across most of Queensland. A small number of grants valued at up to \$50,000 are also available for larger-scale projects that have a broader impact.

Funding is to enable community based activities that both help to relieve current stressors and symptoms, but most importantly, build capacity and resilience for the future. They may also be used to support activities that engage people in being active, exploring options and creating something that will stand the test of tough times.

The Queensland component of the program is funded by the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation.

Other resources to assist in building community and individual resilience include:

<http://www.community.gov.au>

An Australian Government website that provides a directory of information on services and useful websites. Directories include: For Community Groups; Community Development; Community Information and Services; Get Involved; Internet Tools and Tips.

<http://resilnet.uiuc.edu/index.html>

Resilience Net provides information to assist children and their families overcome adversity.

<http://resilienceinstitute.com.au>

The Resilience Institute provides consulting, assessment and training to assist individuals and organisations develop resilience.



Centacare *CQ*

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