

**Submission
No 10**

**SUPPORT FOR DROUGHT AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN NEW SOUTH
WALES**

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My name is Andrew Rawsthorne and I am a fifth generation grazier and grants officer based at Trundle in Central West NSW. Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Firstly I applaud the State Government for retaining school teachers and halting retrenchments by Essential Energy in Regional NSW, both are unnecessary and are only kicking the community when it's down while removing services that will be needed when the drought breaks. However I am deeply concerned and frustrated that there is currently no National Drought Strategy agreed upon by both the State and Federal Governments with the roles and responsibilities of both tiers of Government clearly defined. Considering the time, effort and resources put into preparing for the twin threats of both flood and bush fire it defies belief how little policy, strategy and preparation is made for drought. We desperately need a long time strategic approach at all levels of Government to preparing for drought in particular building the resilience and sustainability of agriculture in NSW where we start preparing for the next drought each time a drought ends.

I consider programs such as the Rural Assistance Authority's Farm Innovation Fund as well as tax breaks from the Federal Government to carry out fencing, build dams, silos and hay sheds to be excellent and should be continued. These programs are not only building the sustainability of local farms it's also creating badly needed work for local contractors and businesses. I would prefer this approach to just splashing large cash subsidies and handouts around. I have carried out work on my property with the support of the Farm Innovation Fund including constructing new dams and fencing to improve grazing management that's made a massive difference to my farm. However I would not have been able to access finance for this anywhere else.

I would suggest that this assistance could be expanded to provide low cost or free support for training in business management, grazing management and sustainable regenerative agriculture.

I am concerned how little help there is for families. The Federal Government's Farm Household Allowance has been an epic failure. I know of people suffering from extreme financial stress, one family that has now sold their farm that have been denied access to the FHA. This is not a third world country. Every family should if they need help be able to access help to educate their children, meet basic living expenses and put food on the table. Most of the major banks fail to employ enough staff in Regional NSW meaning there are large delays in accessing support from the banks. It's also extremely difficult to find bank staff these days with any experience in agriculture or agribusiness.

I am deeply concerned by the behaviour of the media and its long term impacts. I am appalled by the commentary in the media about the drought, it's not balanced and it's at best extremely ill-informed and sensational. The media is clearly seeking the most vulnerable people they can find to paint the worst picture possible when there are so many great stories of resilient, innovative farmers and communities coming out of the drought. Here locally we have had the main stream media falsely reporting some communities including Forbes are going to run out of water when Forbes is possibly one of the most drought proof communities in Regional NSW and certainly not running out of water. This is deterring people from visiting and moving to Regional NSW at a time when visitors are needed the most. We need to high light the great stories of resilient, innovative farmers and communities coming out of the drought to offset the tidal wave of negativity in the media.

Droughts are a great time to target feral pest's particularly feral pigs and rabbits. Considering the threat foot and mouth disease as well as swine flu poses to agriculture in NSW now would be a good time to be increasing the control of feral pigs.

Lastly there needs to be a real focus on roads, communications and water infrastructure. Dams play a critical role in mitigating the worst impacts of both flood and drought. The Regional road network plays a critical role in the movement of fodder, grain and livestock during both drought and floods. Mobile phone service and internet access is still a real bug bear in many areas of Regional NSW hampering far too many Regional businesses.

Thank you