

**Submission
No 22**

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

Organisation: Clarence Valley Council

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28 November 2019

Reference: DWS
Contact person: Des Schroder

Att: Committee Member, Emma Wood
Email: investmentindustry@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Emma

Support for drought affected communities in NSW

The Clarence Valley is not only facing a catastrophic drought but now unprecedented bushfires, which have ravaged over 500,000 hectares of agricultural land, forestry and national parks and these massive fires are still burning as this submission is written. At this point in time over 180 houses had been destroyed and many hundreds of outbuildings and thousands of kilometres of fencing. In addition the mighty Clarence River has stopped flowing now in all its tributaries, this was last seen in the millennium drought of late 1880's.

The consequence of these dual disasters will have long term negative effects on the Clarence Valley community (including mental health) and economy for years to come. The \$350 million beef and forestry industry has been decimated. For instance as reported in the press the famous Yuligbar Station which is 14,000 hectares of which 10,000 hectares of its pastures burnt and is looking to agist 3,000 of their 5,000 cattle. Many farmers are outlaying in excess of \$30,000 a month in stock feed that is getting more expensive and impossible to source. The net result is a massive reduction in stock numbers which will take decades to rebuild. One Local Land Service employee described the fire effect to be like the drought now on steroids. Already the Casino abattoir in the adjoining Richmond Valley Council employing over 1000 is struggling to get livestock.

In addition a large area of native and plantation timber has been destroyed and the impact will take time to be assessed but the impact on the 20 timber mills in the Clarence employing over 1200 people will be major. The dual affect of the drought and the fires is devastating on the National Park estate with major wildlife impacts especially on the koala population. In addition this estate generates significant eco tourism dollars and will impact the 1.2 million visitor \$350 million tourism industry in the Clarence Valley which employs over 1,300 people. Already the fires are keeping tourist away.

In summary the combination of drought and now the massive bushfires will have major economic affects on the Clarence Valley. It is suggested to the committee that an economic and social analysis of these dual affects is undertaken to inform well reasoned policy outcomes not knee jerk political solutions which are bandaids at best.

Investment in long term productive infrastructure like the huge Council road and bridge maintenance backlog could generate significant short term employment but long term productivity gains.

Similarly investment in liveability assets like libraries, galleries, parks are long term investments to attract new business's and help maintain and grow populations. In addition investment in tele-communication towers is crucial in black spot areas, it's a miracle more lives weren't lost in the upper Clarence catchments as no SMS messaging could be carried out due to lack of coverage.

Investment in ecological restoration following the drought and fires is another potential short term employment generator which will pay long term dividends.

In addition our farmers and small business's that support them will need ongoing long term support to recover from indeed extraordinary times. This recovery which will be exacerbated by long term climate change. There is a huge fencing rebuilding task ahead again a potential short term employment generator in its own right in the farm areas most devastated. Although Blazeaid do a brilliant job this fire disaster is well above just one voluntary organisation to respond to this enormous impact on fencing not only on farms but in the National Park and Forestry Estate.

Clarence Valley Council invites the committee to inspect some of the areas which have been devastated by both drought and now fire and hold a session in one of the community halls. Thanks for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours faithfully

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Des Schroder.

Des Schroder
Acting General Manager