

**Submission  
No 61**

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

**Organisation:** Richmond Valley Council

**Date Received:** 29 November 2019

29 November 2019

The Chair  
Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Email: [investmentindustry@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:investmentindustry@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Minister

### **Impacts of the drought in the Richmond Valley local government area**

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development. Council's goal is to provide information on the impact of the drought in the Richmond Valley Local Government Area (LGA) and to highlight ways the NSW Government can assist drought affected communities in NSW.

The Richmond Valley LGA is located in the Northern Rivers region of NSW and covers 3,050 square kilometres of land that extends from the coastline at Evans Head to the foothills of the Great Dividing Range in the west interspersed with prime agricultural land, regional villages, State forests and National parks. The largest town is Casino and our smaller communities include Broadwater, Coraki, Evans Head, New Italy, Woodburn and Rappville with a combined population of over 23,000, with 7.2% of the Richmond Valley population are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Richmond Valley LGA is recognised by the NSW Government as being in drought and intense drought. Department of Primary Industries rainfall data shows the Richmond Valley is suffering from intense drought.

Our economy is highly reliant on agriculture. Many of our farmers are suffering economically and physically due to the persistent and intense drought and as a result, so too is the wider community. Some farmers have had to totally de-stock their properties due to lack of water and feed and have no other means of income.

The Northern Rivers Regional Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022 recognises Casino as one of the Northern Rivers' primary agricultural hubs. In the Richmond Valley there are 8,414 jobs. Food product manufacturing is the largest single employment industry in the Richmond Valley comprising 1,725 jobs or 20% of the workforce. This industry includes:

- Meat (beef and pork) processing,
- Dairy product manufacturing
- Sugarcane milling and sugar manufacturing
- Hide tanning
- Ti tree processing

Combined with the 684 jobs in the Agricultural industry, this accounts for 28% of total employment. The total output by industry of the Richmond Valley is currently \$1.747 billion. Food product manufacturing together with the Agriculture industry account for \$728 million of this output which is over 41% of the total output.



The critical nature of these industries on the Richmond Valley economy cannot be understated and the impact of the drought is being acutely felt.

The Northern Rivers Livestock Exchange, commonly known as the Casino Saleyards, is the regional selling facility for the Northern Rivers. Record numbers of cattle are being seen at the sales each week, but this does not reflect a strength in the market. Low prices are being recorded and this is due to the sheer number of farms which are 'destocking' due to the cost of food and water for their livestock.

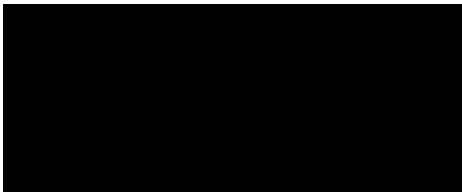
This process of destocking will have a ripple effect throughout the local economy and will have long-lasting effects.

The most genuine way the Government can assist regional economies is by investing in infrastructure and policy that will prepare communities for future drought events. Major water retention and distribution infrastructure investments from Government will build resilience for communities, whilst fast tracking regulatory approvals and financial assistance for farmers to invest in on-farm water infrastructure such as dams and irrigation will enhance and strengthen their future.

Initiatives such as temporary relief from state taxes, charges and levies for drought affected businesses are well received and all play a part in getting businesses through tough times, but the true work will be building resilience for future events.

I would be happy to discuss the matter with you further and can be contacted on either   


Yours sincerely



Vaughan Macdonald  
**General Manager**