



Legislative Assembly of New South Wales

# Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development

Report 2/57 – March 2021

Final report on support for drought affected communities in NSW



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# Membership

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## Chair's foreword

I am pleased to present the Final Report for the Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development's inquiry into support for drought affected communities in New South Wales.

The Committee commenced this inquiry in September 2019 at a time when New South Wales was experiencing one of the most severe droughts in our State's history. Today, 9.5% of the State remains drought affected, 4.3% is recovering and 86.2% is classified as non-drought.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst this is good news for our rural and regional communities, the combined impact of the drought, the Black Summer bushfires and now COVID-19 reminds us that more needs to be done to ensure that the State is better prepared to manage the impact of drought and other natural disasters.

Evidence to the inquiry raised a number of issues relating to Commonwealth and NSW Government support measures to assist farmers, businesses and communities impacted by the drought, and we were pleased to learn that the NSW Government supported the recommendations made in our Interim Report. The Government also indicated that work is underway in the three priority areas of critical water security, support for businesses and communities, and on-farm support.

The Interim Report highlighted two issues that we felt needed further examination, namely, the need to ensure reliable and financially sustainable town water supplies and the detrimental impact that drought and other natural disasters can have on mental health. Our Final Report discusses these issues and the action that is currently being taken to address them.

Overall, we support the current investment and response of the NSW Government to addressing the issues raised in both the Interim and this Final Report. However, we stress the importance of investing in preparedness and resilience measures now before we experience the challenges of the next drought. We will be monitoring the Government's commitments in this area and look forward to the government delivering on their plans.

I reiterate the comments that I made in the Interim Report, that without the contributions of the individuals and organisations who gave evidence to this inquiry, our understanding of the issues would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my colleagues, the Deputy Chair, Mr Peter Sidgreaves MP, Mr Clayton Barr MP, Ms Steph Cooke MP, Mr Phil Donato MP, Mr David Harris MP, and Mr Geoff Provest MP for their dedication to the work of this Committee. Finally, I'd like to thank the Committee staff for their work throughout this inquiry.

I commend the report.

**Justin Clancy MP**  
Chair

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Government, Department of Primary Industries, [Combined Drought Indicator](#).

## Summary

We commenced our inquiry into support for drought affected communities in NSW in September 2019 at a time when New South Wales was experiencing one of the most severe droughts in our State's history. It was therefore important for our Committee to find out what support was needed by drought affected communities to help them recover and prepare for the future.

Evidence to the inquiry raised a number of issues relating to Commonwealth and New South Wales Government support measures to assist farmers, businesses and communities impacted by the drought, and the need to not only maintain skilled workers in rural and regional communities but to also provide and promote opportunities for them to obtain new skills.

In June 2020 the Committee tabled an Interim Report with ten recommendations which called for the NSW Government to:

- conduct a review into existing NSW Government support to local water utilities (Recommendation 1);
- examine whether a standardised system of water restrictions should be implemented in New South Wales (Recommendation 2);
- conduct a review of the Integrated Water Cycle Management guidelines and approval process (Recommendation 3);
- encourage the Commonwealth Government to review their Farm Household Allowance, the Drought Communities programs and the Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme (Recommendations 4 and 5);
- review Rural Assistance Authority guidelines to ensure that off-farm income does not unfairly impact on eligibility for assistance (Recommendation 4);
- fund the establishment of resilience officers (drought and recovery) at the regional level (Recommendation 6).

We also recommended that:

- Destination NSW continue its campaign to promote regional NSW as a destination for tourists and events (Recommendation 7);
- the NSW Small Business Commission develop a campaign to promote its resources and support services to regional business communities (Recommendation 8)
- the NSW Government consider ways to include support for regional universities when preparing drought assistance programs (Recommendation 9); and
- the Minister for Transport amend the eligibility requirements for the School Drive Subsidy to include pre-school children who live in an area that is classified as outer regional, remote or very remote (Recommendation 10).

The NSW Government welcomed the findings of the Interim Report, and supported Recommendations 1 to 3 and 7. Recommendations 4 to 6 and 8 to 10 were supported in principle.

The Government Response noted that our Interim Report came at an important time and provided a valuable source of insights to inform the NSW Government's next steps in ensuring the State is better prepared to manage the impacts of future droughts. Many of the concerns and issues raised in the Interim Report are a key focus of current Government policy reforms.

### **Final report**

Particular areas of concern that we wanted to focus on in our final report are the need to ensure reliable and financially sustainable town water supplies and the detrimental impact drought has on mental health.

### **Town Water Security**

In our Interim Report we recognised that access to reliable town water supplies is fundamental to building the resilience of regional and rural communities against significant drought events and other natural disasters.

In its response to our Interim Report, the Government noted that more than \$275 million in funding has been allocated to water initiatives aimed at improving water supplies in numerous towns and communities and that reforms to the water sector were also underway to better support local water utilities and improve water sector performance.

We also noted that the Audit Office of New South Wales conducted a performance audit into support for regional town water infrastructure in September 2020. The Auditor-General reported that the Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment had not effectively supported or overseen town water infrastructure planning since at least 2014.

The Auditor-General's report made seven recommendations, aimed at improving the administration and transparency of the oversight, support and funding for town water infrastructure, and at strengthening its sector engagement and interagency coordination on town water planning issues and investment.

In November 2020 we invited Ms Margaret Crawford, NSW Auditor-General, and Ms Claudia Migotto, Assistant Auditor-General, to brief us on the findings of the audit. We also invited a representative from the Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment (DPIE) to discuss the Auditor-General's findings and other issues concerning town water security in periods of drought.

### **Rural and remote mental health**

In our interim report, we recognised that drought has a detrimental impact on mental health. Additionally, the 2019/20 bushfire season and coronavirus pandemic have contributed to recent financial hardship and social isolation experienced by many in rural and regional communities

In November 2020 we met with representatives from the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, the Mental Health Commission of NSW and the Department of Primary Industries to gain further information on the impact of drought on the mental health of rural and regional communities.

From those meetings, we identified the importance of localised strategies, the need to build skills and resilience, and for the Government to provide ongoing support and resources for

drought affected communities. To support sustainable resilience building in rural and regional communities, we have recommended increased ongoing funding to the Department of Primary Industries' Rural Resilience Program to strengthen their team and provide support to the work that they do.

We also found that there should be emphasis on helping people navigate the various mental health services available to them. We recommend that NSW Health encourage Primary Health Networks and Local Health Districts to work collaboratively in providing mental health support partnerships in rural and regional communities in New South Wales. Such partnerships can provide many benefits to rural and regional communities, namely, assisting people to find and access services available to them.

Overall, we support the current investment and response of the NSW Government to addressing the issues raised in both the Interim and this Final Report and we will monitor these over time. We stress the importance of investing in preparedness and resilience measures now before we experience the challenges of the next drought.



## Findings and recommendations

Finding 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 10

There should be an emphasis on helping people navigate the various mental health services available to them.

Recommendation 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 10

That NSW Health encourage Primary Health Networks and Local Health Districts to work collaboratively in providing mental health support partnerships, similar to the North Coast Collective, in rural and regional communities in New South Wales.

Recommendation 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 15

That the NSW Government provide additional ongoing resources to support the work of the Rural Resilience Program, specifically to increase the number of ongoing Rural Resilience Officers.



## Chapter One – Town water security

- 1.1 In our Interim Report we recognised that access to reliable town water supplies is fundamental to building the resilience of regional and rural communities against significant drought events and other natural disasters.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.2 We made three recommendations calling on the NSW Government to review existing support to local water utilities, including the Integrated Water Cycle Management guidelines and approval processes; and to examine whether a standard system of water restrictions should be implemented in New South Wales.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.3 In the Government Response to the Interim Report, the NSW Government supported all three recommendations. Additionally, the Government indicated that the Interim Report's findings will inform the NSW Drought Plan (the Plan). The Plan will outline the priorities and actions required across the Government to plan for future drought.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.4 The Government Response also noted that:
- more than \$275 million in funding has been allocated to water initiatives aimed at improving water supplies in numerous towns and communities;
  - reforms to the water sector are currently underway, supported by programs such as the Safe and Secure Water Program, the development of the State Water Strategy and Regional Water Strategies, and support for council local water utilities strategic service planning, including drought and emergency response planning; and
  - water sector reform work is also underway to better support local water utilities and improve water sector performance. Additionally, water infrastructure investment, such as the Government's commitment to priority dam projects, is being supported under the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund.<sup>5</sup>

### **Audit into support for regional town water infrastructure**

- 1.5 In September 2020, the Audit Office of New South Wales (the Audit Office) released its report on the audit into support for regional town water infrastructure. The audit concluded that safe and reliable water and sewer

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<sup>2</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 1

<sup>3</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, pp 3,6 and 8

<sup>4</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, pp 2-3

<sup>5</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 3

services are essential for community health and wellbeing, environmental protection, and economic productivity.<sup>6</sup>

- 1.6 Despite water and sewer services being essential, the Audit Office noted:
- In 2019, during intense drought, around ten regional New South Wales (NSW) cities or towns were close to 'zero' water and others had six to 12 months of supply. In some towns, water quality was declared unsafe.<sup>7</sup>
- 1.7 Similar evidence was provided during our inquiry which highlighted the severe water shortages experienced by rural and regional communities during the recent drought. Despite many town water supply systems being designed to be drought-proof, the severity and rapid onset of the recent drought saw storage levels throughout the State rapidly plummet, with some water supplies nearly exhausted.<sup>8</sup>
- 1.8 In November 2020 we invited Ms Margaret Crawford, NSW Auditor-General, and Ms Claudia Migotto, Assistant Auditor-General, to brief us on the findings of the audit. We also invited a representative from the Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment (DPIE) to discuss the Auditor-General's findings.
- 1.9 The Auditor-General reported that DPIE had not effectively supported or overseen town water infrastructure planning since at least 2014. DPIE also lacked a strategic, evidence-based approach to target investments in town water infrastructure.<sup>9</sup>
- 1.10 The audit concluded that a continued focus on coordinating town water planning, investments and sector engagement is needed for DPIE to more effectively support, plan for and fund town water infrastructure, and work with local water utilities to help avoid future shortages of safe water in regional towns and cities.<sup>10</sup>
- 1.11 The Auditor-General's report made seven recommendations, aimed at improving the administration and transparency of the oversight, support and funding for town water infrastructure, and at strengthening its sector engagement and interagency coordination on town water planning issues and investments.<sup>11</sup>
- 1.12 We note that the NSW Legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee reviews all performance audit reports 12 months after they are tabled. Under that review, DPIE will be required to make a submission to the Public Accounts

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<sup>6</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), Performance Audit 24, September 2020, p 1

<sup>7</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), Performance Audit 24, September 2020, p 1

<sup>8</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 1

<sup>9</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), Performance Audit 24, September 2020, p 2

<sup>10</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), Performance Audit 24, September 2020, p 2

<sup>11</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), Performance Audit 24, September 2020, pp 5-6

Committee outlining how they have addressed the Auditor-General's recommendations.

- 1.13 We support the Auditor-General's recommendations and we look forward to the Public Accounts Committee's review of the implementation of the Auditor-General's recommendations.

### **Integrated Water Cycle Management strategies**

- 1.14 Local water utilities (LWUs) are responsible for the planning, pricing and delivery of water and sewerage services in the cities and towns in which they operate.<sup>12</sup> There are 92 LWUs in regional New South Wales with 89 of these exercising their water supply functions under the *Local Government Act 1993*. The remaining four operate as water supply authorities under the *Water Management Act 2000*.<sup>13</sup>
- 1.15 An Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) strategy and a Strategic Business Plan (SBP) are an LWUs main strategic planning instruments. They are designed to plan for the provision of appropriate, affordable, cost-effective and sustainable water services that meet community needs and protect public health and the environment.<sup>14</sup>
- 1.16 DPIE supports LWUs with their IWCM and SBP planning responsibilities through the development of an IWCM checklist which sets out steps to help prepare the strategy. The Department also administers the Best Practice Management of Water Supply and Sewerage Guidelines (BPM Guidelines).
- 1.17 LWUs are required to prepare their IWCM strategy and SBP every eight years on a rotation every four years.<sup>15</sup>

### **IWCM planning and assessment processes**

- 1.18 In our Interim Report we commented that the "one-size-fits-all" requirements imposed on local water authorities through the IWCM guidelines are overly prescriptive and impose significant costs, particularly for small local water utilities.<sup>16</sup>
- 1.19 We concluded that the IWCM guidelines and approval processes for water management programs are complex and restrictive and recommended that a

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<sup>12</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, Performance Audit 24 September 2020, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), p 8

<sup>13</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, Performance Audit 24 September 2020, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), p 8

<sup>14</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, Performance Audit 24 September 2020, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), p 10

<sup>15</sup> NSW Government, Office of Water, [Integrated Water Cycle Management Strategy Check List](#), February 2019, accessed 8 March 2021

<sup>16</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 9

review be conducted with a view to removing duplication and improving timeliness.<sup>17</sup>

1.20 The Auditor-General made similar findings, recommending that by October 2021, DPIE should design and commence implementation of an outcomes-focused approach to its oversight and support of LWUs IWCM planning, supported by:

- clear definitions, assessment criteria, procedures and timeframes for the assessment of IWCM planning instruments;
- accurate data to monitor and publicly report on IWCM planning and implementation status; and
- assistance to LWUs to procure value-for-money IWCM planning services, including enabling joint or regional approaches.<sup>18</sup>

1.21 We discussed the Auditor-General's findings with DPIE and they acknowledged there are opportunities to improve how it oversees the IWCM process and the support provided to LWUs:

The department acknowledges that a greater emphasis on strategic planning for town water supplies is needed and agrees with the Audit Report's findings that there are opportunities to improve oversight of and support for LWU strategic urban water service planning.<sup>19</sup>

1.22 To assist with improving its oversight and support functions, DPIE informed us that the department is establishing the Town Water Risk Reduction Program. Improvements considered by the program will include:

- Partnering with the sector to develop and implement an improved regulatory framework for LWU strategic planning, pricing and major asset approvals that is more outcomes focused, proportionate, transparent, co-ordinated and accountable. This will include substantially revising the department's approach to IWCM strategies and approvals of treatment infrastructure under section 60 of the *Local Government Act (NSW) 1993*;
- Facilitating greater support for LWUs to obtain value-for-money strategic planning services, including through enabling joint or regional approaches and partnerships across utilities and agencies; and
- Continuing to improve coordination between LWU strategic service planning and the NSW Government's regional water strategies to ensure strategies inform each other and align solutions to town water risks.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 9

<sup>18</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, Performance Audit 24 September 2020, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), p 5

<sup>19</sup> NSW Government, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, [Response to questions on Notice](#), p 3

<sup>20</sup> NSW Government, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, [Response to questions on Notice](#), pp 3 - 4

### Support for the preparation of IWCM strategies

- 1.23 In the recent audit, the Audit Office found that DPIE had limited impact on facilitating LWUs strategic town water planning:
- Its lack of internal procedures, records and data mean that the department cannot demonstrate it has effectively engaged, guided or supported the LWU sector in Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) planning over the past six years. Today, less than ten per cent of the 92 LWUs have an IWCM strategy approved by the department.<sup>21</sup>
- 1.24 In our discussions with DPIE, we asked what assistance is currently available to smaller water utilities for them to gain the necessary expertise to prepare IWCM strategies. DPIE advised that the Department's Water Utilities Branch assesses, reviews and provides concurrence to IWCM strategies.<sup>22</sup>
- 1.25 DPIE further indicated that the Branch's regionally based support staff and centralised technical and policy staff 'enables it to provide policy and technical guidance and target its assistance to LWUs that request support, including addressing market, knowledge and skill gaps.'<sup>23</sup>
- 1.26 In addition, DPIE indicated that the re-designed Safe and Secure Water Program (SSWP) now provides co-funding towards the preparation, renewal and/or completion of IWCM strategies. More than 50 LWUs are now part of the IWCM strategy funding stream. DPIE stated that its proportion of co-funding increases with decreasing LWU revenue, recognising the lesser funding capacity of smaller utilities.<sup>24</sup>
- 1.27 We also inquired whether DPIE had considered developing a centralised or regional consultants' scheme to offset the cost to LWUs of engaging a consultant to produce an IWCM strategy.
- 1.28 DPIE recognised that specialist technical consultants can contribute to the delivery of IWCM strategies. However, they emphasised the importance of LWUs having ownership of the planning process to ensure the strategy delivers appropriate services to fit the local context and in line with community expectations.<sup>25</sup>
- 1.29 DPIE indicated that the Town Water Risk Reduction Program will consider substantial revision and improvement of the department's approach to overseeing and supporting IWCM strategies. In this revision DPIE will consider ways to improve the adequacy of services provide to LWUs by the market, where that is required.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, Performance Audit 24 September 2020, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), p 2

<sup>22</sup> NSW Government Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 2

<sup>23</sup> NSW Government Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 2

<sup>24</sup> NSW Government Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), pp 2 and 6

<sup>25</sup> NSW Government Department of Planning, Industry And Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 5

<sup>26</sup> NSW Government Department of Planning, Industry And Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 6

- 1.30 In the audit report, the Auditor-General also recommended that DPIE provide assistance to LWUs to procure value-for-money IWCM planning services, including enabling joint or regional approaches.<sup>27</sup>
- 1.31 In their discussion with us, DPIE acknowledged the benefits from collaboration and coordination among LWUs in regional NSW. DPIE informed us that 'the IWCM Strategy Checklist includes items that promote the identification and review of regional options to facilitate strategic planning across LWU boundaries and/or on a catchment basis.'<sup>28</sup>
- 1.32 In addition, DPIE advised that the SSWP now also provides co-funding to Joint Organisations of Councils towards the development of Regional Town Water Strategies. This might include the exploration of providing town water security across the region and potential water scheme linkages.<sup>29</sup>

## NSW Government water strategies

- 1.33 In the Government Response to our Interim Report, the NSW Government noted that Regional Water Strategies and a State Water Strategy are currently being developed to identify priorities and actions for building resilience of regional towns and communities to adapt to changes in water availability.<sup>30</sup>

## Regional water strategies

- 1.34 Twelve regional water strategies are currently being developed in partnership with water service providers, local councils, communities, Aboriginal people and other stakeholders across NSW.<sup>31</sup>
- 1.35 The following table outlines the release schedule for the draft and final regional water strategies. DPIE noted that timeframes have been adjusted to enable more intensive stakeholder engagement and reflect the impact COVID-19 has had on engagement, particularly with regional Aboriginal stakeholders.<sup>32</sup>

### Release schedule for draft and final regional water strategies<sup>33</sup>

Region	Draft strategy (to be released)	Final Strategy (to be released)
Greater Hunter		2018
Gwydir, Macquarie, Lachlan	25 September 2020	2021
Border Rivers	20 October 2020	2021
Far North Coast, South Coast	30 October 2020	2021

<sup>27</sup> Audit Office of New South Wales, Performance Audit 24 September 2020, [Support for regional town water infrastructure](#), p 5

<sup>28</sup> NSW Government Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 3

<sup>29</sup> NSW Government Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 3

<sup>30</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 6

<sup>31</sup> NSW Government, [About regional water strategies](#), accessed 8 March 2021

<sup>32</sup> NSW Government, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 6

<sup>33</sup> NSW Government, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 6



Region	Draft strategy (to be released)	Final Strategy (to be released)
North Coast, Namoi	Early 2021 (Target: February 2021)	Late 2021
Murray, Murrumbidgee, Western	Mid 2021 (Target: June 2021)	2022

- 1.36 DPIE informed us that the Department has resourced a new branch, Water Infrastructure NSW, to support the implementation of any infrastructure options identified by the strategies. This new branch will oversee the preparation of strategic and final business cases and construction processes and contracts.<sup>34</sup>
- 1.37 The importance of regional water strategies in providing clarity to local councils and communities was emphasised by the NSW Regional Water Supply Coordinator. At the public hearing for this inquiry, the Coordinator commented that drought will return and addressing issues of town water availability and quality remains a key focus of the regional water strategies currently under development:

We are hoping that the regional water strategies will provide some clarity for some councils and people in the regional areas. The focus of those strategies has expanded from just being about security programs to also looking at quality issues. That is a substantial piece of work. Once we get the feedback from the short list that is included in those strategies we will look to the future in terms of funding.<sup>35</sup>

### State Water Strategy

- 1.38 The NSW Government is also developing a 20-year NSW Water Strategy. The strategy aims to guide water service delivery and resource management across NSW and identify key challenges, opportunities, strategic priorities and actions for the whole of NSW. The draft State Water Strategy is currently open for public consultation until 28 March 2021.<sup>36</sup>

### Delivery of water during periods of drought

- 1.39 In our discussions with DPIE, we inquired how the department determines when water cartage to a specific area is likely to become necessary and what support is provided to communities. DPIE commented:

The department monitors the drought risk status of all town water supply systems in regional NSW, using information provided by LWUs. The risk to a water supply is assessed based on the likelihood of a town's water supply system failing - running out of water - and the consequences of this - based on the population of the system. This risk-based monitoring has allowed the department and the NSW Government to respond to drought with technical and financial support for LWUs.

<sup>34</sup> NSW Government, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 7

<sup>35</sup> Mr James McTavish, NSW Cross Border Commissioner and NSW Regional Town Water Supply Coordinator, [Transcript of evidence](#), 15 May 2021, p 9

<sup>36</sup> NSW Government, [Draft NSW Water Strategy](#), accessed 8 March 2021

In emergencies, such as a severe drought, the Water Utilities Branch's regional teams, work with LWUs and provide technical assistance to address urgent town water security needs. This includes providing support to request financial assistance under the NSW Government's Emergency Relief for Regional Town Water Supplies Policy and support to design and implement solutions.<sup>37</sup>

- 1.40 DPIE added that water carting is one of many solutions to immediate water shortages. New bores, pipelines and temporary weirs are some additional solutions.
- 1.41 DPIE advised that water carting is generally the highest cost solution and best suited for small towns of a few hundred people and the Water Utilities Branch provides assistance to LWUs to develop water carting plans that set eligible minimum volume of water required by each community.<sup>38</sup>
- 1.42 Financial assistance to meet the cost of water cartage is administered by the department in accordance with the NSW Government's Emergency Relief for Regional Town Water Supplies Policy.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> NSW Government, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 4

<sup>38</sup> NSW Government, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 5

<sup>39</sup> NSW Government, Department of Planning, Industry & Environment, [Response to questions on notice](#), p 5

## Chapter Two – Rural and remote mental health

- 2.1 In our interim report, we recognised that drought has a detrimental impact on mental health. Additionally, the 2019/20 bushfire season and coronavirus pandemic have contributed to the recent financial hardship and social isolation experienced by many in rural and regional communities.<sup>40</sup>
- 2.2 We noted that those who work to buffer their local communities from the mental and emotional impacts of drought are under increasing stress themselves, and at risk of burnout. However, there is still evidence that communities can be remarkably resilient in the face of ongoing adversity.<sup>41</sup>
- 2.3 In September and November 2020 we met with representatives from the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (CRRMH), the Mental Health Commission of NSW (the Commission) and the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to gain further information on the impact of drought on the mental health of rural and regional communities.
- 2.4 In December 2020 we also received the Government Response to our interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW. We note that in the Government Response, the NSW Government indicated that \$26.3 million has been invested in mental health drought initiatives since 2018-19. These include the Farm Gate Counsellors and Drought Support Workers program, an expansion of virtual mental health services, Aboriginal wellbeing services, an enhancement of the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program and the far West Connections Program.<sup>42</sup>
- 2.5 However, despite this level of public investment, the NSW Government acknowledged that investment alone will not address the challenge of ensuring there is a well-equipped and high performing mental health workforce in regional NSW.<sup>43</sup> In its response the Government outlined a number of strategies it will be focusing on to meet this challenge and these will be outlined further below.
- 2.6 We hope this report and the evidence gathered throughout this inquiry will continue to assist the Government in implementing effective policy responses to address the impact of drought on mental health and wellbeing in regional communities.

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<sup>40</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 30

<sup>41</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 30

<sup>42</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 4

<sup>43</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 4

## Importance of localised strategies

### Finding 1

**There should be an emphasis on helping people navigate the various mental health services available to them.**

### Recommendation 1

**That NSW Health encourage Primary Health Networks and Local Health Districts to work collaboratively in providing mental health support partnerships, similar to the North Coast Collective, in rural and regional communities in New South Wales.**

- 2.7 As we noted in our interim report, local communities are often best positioned to understand the nature and scope of the mental health challenges facing their community.<sup>44</sup>
- 2.8 The CRRMH commented that while rural communities share some similarities, they experience varied adverse events and respond to these events differently. Thus, whole community and place-based approaches are most suitable when addressing mental health in rural communities.<sup>45</sup>
- 2.9 The Commission echoed this view commenting that 'as regions and rural towns are diverse, strategies and solutions also need to be diverse.'<sup>46</sup>
- 2.10 Importantly, the CRRMH stated that while taking a localised approach to rural communities is key, there must also be equal attention provided to ensuring rural communities have access to stable core services. Such core services include GPs, community health teams, and family and carers support.<sup>47</sup>
- 2.11 In 2019 and 2020 the Commission visited rural communities that had experienced drought over several years. The Commission found that the strongest responses to adversity occurred where there were connections between community-based formal services and local community groups.<sup>48</sup>
- 2.12 The Commission further found that many successful initiatives in rural communities were co-created with people with lived experience of mental health concerns, with these people ultimately being involved as leaders or advisors.<sup>49</sup>
- 2.13 DPI's Rural Resilience Program (RRP) also commented on the importance of customising responses to meet local needs and the benefit of employing local

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<sup>44</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 30

<sup>45</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 9

<sup>46</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 2

<sup>47</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 9

<sup>48</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 2

<sup>49</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 2

staff who have trusted relationships within the community.<sup>50</sup> The RRP commented:

RRP staff have also been an important conduit into communities due to their local knowledge and relationships. They have assisted many external service providers who generally struggle to infiltrate the local community...<sup>51</sup>

2.14 We were provided with a number of examples of programs and communities that provide localised strategies and initiatives to address wellbeing and mental health.

### Rural Adversity Mental Health Program

2.15 The Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP) is funded by NSW Health and is managed state-wide by the CRRMH. The program is delivered locally by 19 RAMHP coordinators employed in the nine rural Local Health Districts.<sup>52</sup> The program has been operating in rural NSW since 2007.

2.16 RAMHP's goal is to connect people struggling with their mental health to appropriate services and support. The program has four main strategies, namely, link, train, inform and partner:

- **Link** – provide advice to link individuals who need assistance for their mental health to the most appropriate services.
- **Train** – deliver standardised and tailored mental health training to community members and workplaces
- **Inform** – produce and disseminate information about mental health and available services and resources
- **Partner** – work with stakeholders to create pathways to care and interagency responses to priority groups and issues.<sup>53</sup>

2.17 We emphasise the importance of linking people to mental health services and assisting them to navigate the various services that might be available to them.

2.18 The CRRMH indicated that RAMPH's success is due to the 19 RAMHP Coordinators who live and work in the communities they support. This enables the Coordinators to understand the needs of their communities and provide tailored support.<sup>54</sup>

2.19 The CRRMH further commented that secure funding is also a part of the program's success. Employment certainty assists RAMHP Coordinators to build

<sup>50</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 3

<sup>51</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 7

<sup>52</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 9; Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 2

<sup>53</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 10

<sup>54</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 10

relationships and trust within their rural communities. The most recent funding contract for the RAMHP spans five years.<sup>55</sup>

### Community Wellbeing Collaboratives

- 2.20 The CRRMH, supported by the Commission, conducted a review of collaborative community wellbeing initiatives. These initiatives involve a public health approach that is community led and supported by local government and services.<sup>56</sup>
- 2.21 Examples of communities working together to create a localised response include, [Our Healthy Clarence](#) (Grafton), [Muswellbrook Healthy & Well](#), Lithgow's Mayor's Mental Health Taskforce, and [Mindful Margaret River](#).<sup>57</sup>
- 2.22 The Commission noted that the NSW Government has recently committed \$6 million over three years to establish a further 12 Mental Health and Community Wellbeing Collaboratives across New South Wales.<sup>58</sup>

### Other community led mental health programs

- 2.23 Other community initiatives we were informed of included the Dungog Community Centre's *Horse Tales Hunter Valley* program. This initiative is an equine assisted learning and development program for primary school aged children. The program was set up to respond to trauma experienced by children following floods in 2015. It aims to teach children how to manage their behaviour and emotions through guided experiences with horses.<sup>59</sup>
- 2.24 We also heard about the *We've Got Your Back* program, established by the Royal Flying Doctor Service South Eastern Section in partnership with Lifeline Broken Hill Country to Coast and the Far West Local Health District. Launched in 2019, this program draws upon local 'champions' who are graziers and community members with lived experience of mental health concerns or demonstrated resilience strategies. The champions engage in honest and confidential conversations with people in the community about mental health and the hardships of living in remote areas.<sup>60</sup>
- 2.25 The Commission highlighted that during its Living Well mid-term review,<sup>61</sup> it found that a key feature of successful community networks and partnerships is leadership from both the Primary Health Network (PHN) and the Local Health District (LHD).<sup>62</sup>
- 2.26 One such example is the North Coast Collective (the Collective) which is a 30 member collective jointly led by the North Coast PHN and North Coast LHD. Its

<sup>55</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 10

<sup>56</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 10

<sup>57</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 10

<sup>58</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 4

<sup>59</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 3

<sup>60</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 3

<sup>61</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Living Well mid-term review](#), viewed 2 March 2020

<sup>62</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 3

membership includes people with lived experience of mental health issues, and representatives from public health; local government; community managed providers; education; first responders; drug and alcohol services; and volunteer organisations.<sup>63</sup> The Collective aims to use a collaborative approach to provide better mental health support through improved navigation, reduced duplication, and cross service handover. The pooling of financial resources is also being trialled.<sup>64</sup>

- 2.27 We are encouraged by the range of localised and community led programs and initiatives aimed at supporting mental health. We were particularly interested in the formation of partnerships such as the North Coast Collective. The Collective's collaborative approach to providing mental health support can provide many benefits to rural and regional communities, namely, assisting people to find and access services available to them. We recommend that NSW Health encourage Primary Health Networks and Local Health Districts to work collaboratively in providing mental health support partnerships, similar to the North Coast Collective, in rural and regional communities in New South Wales.
- 2.28 It is also important that these partnerships and the benefits they provide communities are promoted in order to build awareness of what help is available and how to access it.

### Social resources

- 2.29 During our discussions with members of the RRP we discussed the positive impact that seeing a small area of green can have on people's morale and wellbeing during times of drought. This could be the local sports ground or park.
- 2.30 The RRP stated that resilience research indicates that farmers who have good access to social resources, such as sports ground and parks can have improved levels of resilience. However, the RRP acknowledged that watering sporting grounds and parks during drought is a difficult issue and would require consultation with local councils, sporting groups and the community.<sup>65</sup>
- 2.31 The RRP emphasised that it is important for communities to be involved in deciding how limited water resources are best used, particularly in communities where water is extremely scarce.<sup>66</sup>

### Building skills and resilience

- 2.32 As stated in our interim report, we were encouraged by the range of solutions proposed by rural and remote communities to support mental health and wellbeing during periods of hardship.<sup>67</sup> How to further support rural

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<sup>63</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 3; See also: Mental Health Commission, [Living Well Mid-term Review – North Coast](#), viewed 1 March 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 3

<sup>65</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

<sup>66</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

<sup>67</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 31

communities to develop and lead local solutions was an area we explored further in our discussions with the CRRMH, the Commission and DPI.

- 2.33 The CRRMH noted the significant roles within local councils that can be used to promote support networks such as Community Engagement Officers and Youth Support Officers. The CRRMH also identified Rural Support Networks and interagency groups as important tools for sharing information, skills and resources. The CRRMH suggested that the value of these networks is currently underutilised.<sup>68</sup>
- 2.34 The CRRMH also highlighted the work of RAMHP Coordinators and DPI's Rural Resilience Officers in supporting capacity building activities in local communities. CRRMH commented that providing job security for this workforce is critical for building resilience and supporting networks in regional communities.<sup>69</sup>
- 2.35 A focus of DPI's RRP is enabling individuals and local communities to develop their own solutions and skills to better prepare for adversity. The RRP was established in 2014 following the work of the Rural Support Worker program which provided drought support for over 20 years. The RRP forms part of DPI's suite of Business and Social Resilience Programs. Other resilience programs managed by DPI include the Young Farmer Business Program (YFBP) and the Rural Women's Network.<sup>70</sup>
- 2.36 Activities of the RRP which have developed local skills, leadership and engagement include:
- Supporting the development of Women in Dairy by building skills in governance, public speaking and strategic planning. We were informed that after 12 months this group has coordinated state conferences; increased local groups from one to four; and activated support to farmers in the Mid Coast region during the 2019 bushfires.
  - Facilitating workshops to build resilience, confidence and leadership of farming men and women.
  - Subsidising course fees for young farmers to attend additional training in leadership and holistic agriculture. In 2020 four young farmers and one fisher were subsidised to attend the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation's TRAIL program.
  - Supporting the work of Rural Service Support Networks which meet regularly to address the needs of communities.<sup>71</sup>
- 2.37 In the Government response to our Interim Report, the NSW Government indicated that the RRP has engaged with more than 6,500 people and supported more than 200 community resilience building projects per year. Other achievements include establishing 29 Rural Service Support Networks across New

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<sup>68</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 12

<sup>69</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 12

<sup>70</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, pp 1 and 3

<sup>71</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, pp 3-4



South Wales and coordinating drought information events such as DPI's Drought Van.<sup>72</sup>

## Ongoing support and resources for drought affected communities

### Recommendation 2

**That the NSW Government provide additional ongoing resources to support the work of the Rural Resilience Program, specifically to increase the number of ongoing Rural Resilience Officers.**

2.38 A troubling and challenging aspect of providing support for drought affected communities is the real concern that communities never completely recover from drought. The CRRMH commented:

Communities never fully regain or recover from drought as they move from one adversity to another - drought, bushfire, floods, locusts - it is on-going, persistent and cumulative.<sup>73</sup>

2.39 As drought is a reoccurring element of Australia's climate, the emphasis should be on supporting communities adapt to drought as opposed to expecting recovery.<sup>74</sup>

2.40 To effectively support drought affected communities, CRRMH suggests there needs to be support provided across all areas of recovery/adaption including economic, business, social, environmental and emotional. Such support should reach agricultural and non-agricultural related businesses and contain broad definitions of primary producers.<sup>75</sup>

2.41 The CRRMH also supported long term investments of at least five years instead of short term investments. Long term investments provide security and time to build strong foundations of support.

2.42 We heard that the current staff supporting the work of the RRP include five ongoing Rural Resilience Officers, two temporary and two casual Rural Support Workers and an RRP Coordinator.<sup>76</sup> The Rural Resilience Officers are located across New South Wales and the Rural Support Workers are activated in areas impacted by drought or other adverse events. Currently these areas include Bourke, Dubbo, Coonabarabran, Condobolin and Tamworth.<sup>77</sup>

2.43 The RRP highlighted that over the last three years, RRP staff have been intensely focused on supporting communities through drought, bushfires and COVID-19. As

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<sup>72</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 8

<sup>73</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 13

<sup>74</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 13

<sup>75</sup> Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 13

<sup>76</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

<sup>77</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

a result, the RRP team has had to re-direct its focus from long term resilience building measures and activities.<sup>78</sup>

- 2.44 The RRP indicated they would benefit from additional ongoing resources in order to work with communities on longer-term resilience and preparedness.<sup>79</sup>
- 2.45 In our Interim Report we recommended that the NSW Government fund the establishment of resilience officers (drought and recovery) at the regional level. This recommendation was supported in principle by the Government.<sup>80</sup>
- 2.46 The Government indicated that Resilience NSW has launched a pilot program which is funding resilience officers in three NSW Joint Organisations focussed on disaster preparedness. There is also funding for Community Recovery Officers in 22 Local Government Areas for a period of 12 months.<sup>81</sup>
- 2.47 We welcome the pilot program which will provide funding for resilience officers in three NSW Joint Organisations and also the funding for 22 Community Recovery Officers for a period of 12 months. However, we also note the role DPI's Rural Resilience Officers play in supporting capacity and resilience building activities and maintaining rural support networks across New South Wales.
- 2.48 As noted, the RRP currently have five ongoing Rural Resilience Officers, two temporary and two casual Rural Support Workers and an RRP Coordinator. The Rural Resilience Officers are located across New South Wales. We recommend increased ongoing funding to strengthen this team and the work that they do. Providing ongoing resources provides job security for this workforce and will help to attract and retain valuable rural leaders.

### NSW suicide register

- 2.49 During this inquiry we heard that hardships associated with drought and other adverse events are anecdotally leading to stress, homelessness, family breakdown, anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, and in some cases, suicide.<sup>82</sup> We inquired from the Commission on the establishment of a suicide register to assist with identifying any trends and vulnerable groups in rural and regional areas.
- 2.50 In November 2020, the NSW Suicide Monitoring System (the SMS) was launched and its first report on suspected suicides in 2019 and 2020 was published.<sup>83</sup> The SMS is a collaboration between the Ministry of Health, Department of Communities and Justice, the State Coroner and NSW Police to collate

<sup>78</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, pp 6-7

<sup>79</sup> Department of Primary Industries, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 7

<sup>80</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 14; NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 8

<sup>81</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 9

<sup>82</sup> Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development, [Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), Report no 1/57, June 2020, p 30

<sup>83</sup> NSW Health, [NSW Government launches landmark suicide monitoring system](#), Media release, November 2020; Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

information and provide reports on recent suspected and confirmed suicides in NSW.

- 2.51 The SMS produces monthly reports with information aimed at supporting communities, local organisations and government agencies to respond to suicide more timely and effectively.<sup>84</sup>

### **Provision of safe houses and spaces for people experiencing distress**

- 2.52 In our discussion with the Commission we asked about places where people may go when they are experiencing distress. In particular safe spaces or houses which could be an alternative to an Emergency Department.
- 2.53 The Commission referred to literature that revealed that people presenting with mental health issues at Emergency Departments are waiting extended periods and this can exacerbate their mental health distress. In addition, people with mental health issues often have to wait a significant time for an appointment to see a professional.<sup>85</sup>
- 2.54 The Commission commented that some form of interim service provision, such as a safe house or space may benefit people with mental health concerns. The Commission highlighted the United Kingdom's Safe haven café system as a model which offers low-intensity services and information for people waiting for appointments. Such an interim service could also reduce the need for some people to 'step up' their care to the hospital level.<sup>86</sup>
- 2.55 The Commission stated that under the Towards Zero Suicides investment in NSW, funding of \$25.1 million is dedicated to the Alternatives to Emergency Department presentations initiative over three years. Under the initiative 20 new services will be established across New South Wales to provide alternatives to going to an emergency department for people experiencing a suicidal crisis.<sup>87</sup>
- 2.56 We are encouraged by the additional services being established to provide alternatives for people suffering distress. This has particular merit for rural and regional communities where mental health service gaps exist. We are supportive of rural and regional areas being a priority for these additional services. We do stress however that these services are in addition to ensuring that rural and regional communities have access to core health services.

### **Gaps in mental health services**

- 2.57 In their responses to our written questions, the CRRMH, the Commission and DPI provided extensive information on mental health service gaps in rural and regional communities. The following are some concerns expressed to the Commission during their Living Well mid-term review process in 2019-20:

<sup>84</sup> NSW Health, [NSW Suicide Monitoring System](#), viewed 2 March 2020

<sup>85</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

<sup>86</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

<sup>87</sup> Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

- difficulties in finding the right help - navigating the service system
- people having to repeat their story to different service providers because of staff turnover or funding for services ends, which results in the person experiencing a disjointed system
- ongoing staff vacancies in mental health services, especially in rural and remote areas making it hard for a person to get assistance close to home when they need it
- significant geographical distances from hospitals with declared mental health facilities that can provide specialised mental health services
- use of police and ambulance as first responders, who may transport a person experiencing mental health distress to a hospital a long distance from home, and when discharged, the person has limited transport options to get back home
- difficulties in accessing services that were exacerbated for Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, because of challenges in accessing specialist mental health clinical and support workers who are Aboriginal people or of the same cultural background as the person seeking help.<sup>88</sup>

- 2.58 The CRRMH also highlighted a number of mental health service gaps. They indicated that mild to moderate mental health issues are not well resourced in rural areas. They further added that there is a so-called 'missing middle' which include patients whose concerns are too serious for a general practitioner but not serious enough for state mental health care.<sup>89</sup>
- 2.59 CRRMH further emphasised that barriers to access mental health services remain with the cost of psychology services prohibitive for lower social economic groups.<sup>90</sup>
- 2.60 Another key concern raised by the CRRMH was rural workforce challenges. They stressed that recruitment and retention issues remain for mental health professionals in public and NGO services limiting the ability to provide consistent services to rural and regional communities.
- 2.61 Importantly, they also emphasised that rural mental health workers often experience the same adversities as their clients. Without effective support for their wellbeing, they can reach a crisis point or burnout.<sup>91</sup>
- 2.62 As referred to above, in the Government response to our interim report the NSW Government recognised that public investment alone will not by itself address

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<sup>88</sup>Mental Health Commission of NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 6

<sup>89</sup>Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 5

<sup>90</sup>Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 5

<sup>91</sup>Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, [Answers to questions on notice](#), December 2020, p 5

the challenges of ensuring there is a well-equipped and high performing mental health workforce in regional NSW.

2.63 The NSW Government indicated that the NSW Ministry of Health is identifying a range strategies to improve the attraction and retention of a rural health workforce. Strategies include:

- sharing rural health worker stories of career success
- offering career enrichment programs involving secondments to rural areas
- improving onboarding processes to connect rural candidates with the local community and other NSW Government agencies; and
- providing mentoring and support for rural employees with clinicians from metropolitan facilities.<sup>92</sup>

2.64 Further strategies are also being employed by the Department of Education with the establishment of a dedicated fly-in fly-out telepsychology service to provide access to psychology support in rural and remote schools. We were informed that the positions will be phased in from 2021 to June 2023 with an additional 87 support officers and 25 school counselling positions in placed from 2021.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 4

<sup>93</sup> NSW Government, [Government response to Interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW](#), December 2020, p 4

## Appendix One – Terms of reference

On Wednesday 25 September 2019 the Committee resolved to inquiry into and report on support for drought affected communities in New South Wales, including:

- a) population loss and loss of key trades, skills and businesses, and community services such as schools and medical services;
- b) business debt finances and responses of financial companies to the impact of drought;
- c) direct and indirect impacts of drought on businesses and industries;
- d) transition and recovery from drought when drought conditions begin to improve;
- e) preparedness for future drought events;
- f) assessment of current Government programs;
- g) temporary relief from state taxes, charges and levies for drought affected businesses
- h) capacity and coordination of town water supplies and further water recycling opportunities;
- i) particular impacts on Indigenous communities; and
- j) any other related matter.

## Appendix Two – Conduct of inquiry

### Terms of reference

On Wednesday 25 September 2019 the Committee resolved to inquire into and report on support for drought affected communities in New South Wales, including:

- a) population loss and loss of key trades, skills and businesses, and community services such as schools and medical services;
- b) business debt finances and responses of financial companies to the impact of drought;
- c) direct and indirect impacts of drought on businesses and industries;
- d) transition and recovery from drought when drought conditions begin to improve;
- e) preparedness for future drought events;
- f) assessment of current Government programs;
- g) temporary relief from state taxes, charges and levies for drought affected businesses
- h) capacity and coordination of town water supplies and further water recycling opportunities;
- i) particular impacts on Indigenous communities; and
- j) any other related matter.

### Call for submissions

The Committee called for submissions through a media release and wrote to key stakeholders inviting them to make a submission. Information about the inquiry was posted on the Legislative Assembly's Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Submissions closed on 27 November 2019. Seventy five submissions were received from the community, local councils, universities, professional organisations and associations, NGO's and government departments.

A list of submissions is at Appendix Three. Submissions are available on the Committee [webpage](#).

### Site visit and liaison

#### Visit to Orange – 2 and 3 December 2019

In December 2019 the Committee travelled to Orange and met with stakeholders in the region to discuss the impacts of drought on the Orange community.

The Committee held the following meetings and visits:

- Meeting with Mayor Reg Kidd and Deputy Mayor Sam Romano, Orange City Council
- Site visit of MSM Milling at Manildra
- Meeting with Orange Business Chamber and member businesses. The following people were present at the meeting:
  - Ash Brown, President of Orange Business Chamber
  - Amanda Spalding, Amanda Spalding Consulting
  - Rob Campbell, Worrells
  - Daniel McGregor, Wealth Train
  - Bob Holland, Proprietor and Editor Orange City Life

- Darryl Curran, Ecoscape
- Rob Drage, Rob Drage Consulting and Games and More
- Jack Evans, Jack Evans Workwear
- Richard Hattersley, Businessman

### **Video conference with community members from Guyra – 24 April 2020**

On 24 April the Committee conducted a video conference with the following members of the Guyra community:

- Chris Heitbrink, Centre Coordinator, The Hub at Guyra
- Dot Vickory OAM, President, the Hub at Guyra
- Sam White, Partner at Bald Blair Angus
- Kirsty White, Partner at Bald Blair Angus
- Leonie Hawkins, President of the Guyra Evening Branch of the Country Women's Association
- Bronwyn Gills, Brisk Retail Trading

### **Hearings**

The Committee held two public hearings in May 2020 conducted both by video conference. Witnesses included representatives from local council, the university sector and the government.

Appendix Four contains a list of witnesses who appeared at the hearings. Transcript of evidence taken at the hearings are available on the Committee [webpage](#).

### **Interim report**

On 18 June 2020 the Committee tabled an interim report. The Interim Report addressed preliminary concerns and issues raised from the site visits, submissions and hearings. The Committee made 10 recommendations and 10 findings.

The Interim Report is available on the Committee [webpage](#).

### **Briefings**

In September and November 2020 the Committee met with representatives from the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, the Mental Health Commission of NSW and the Department of Primary Industries to gain further information on the impact of drought on mental health of rural and regional communities. Representatives included:

#### **Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health**

- Professor David Perkins, Director
- Dr Hazel Dalton, Research Leader and Senior Research Leader
- Tessa Cummins, Program Manager, Rural Adversity Mental Health Program
- Vanessa Delaney, Senior Development Officer

#### **Mental Health Commission of NSW**

- Commissioner Catherine Lourey, Mental Health Commission of NSW
- Kerri Lawrence, Manager Strategy and Reform



**Department of Primary Industries**

- Mr Brett Fifield, Deputy Director General, Engagement and Industry Assistance, Orange
- Ms Pip Job, Director Engagement, Dubbo
- Ms Amanda Glasson, Rural Resilience Officer, Coonamble

In November 2020 the Committee met with the NSW Auditor-General, the Assistant Auditor-General, and a representative from the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment to discuss town water infrastructure and security. Representatives included:

**Audit Office of New South Wales**

- Ms Margaret Crawford, Auditor-General for NSW
- Ms Claudia Migotto, Assistant Auditor-General for NSW

**Department of Environment, Planning and Environment**

- Mr Michael Blackmore, Director Water Utilities, Water Group

**Government response to interim report**

In December 2020 the NSW Government provided its response to the Committee's Interim Report. The Government supported recommendations 1 to 3 and 7 and recommendations 4 to 6 and 8 to 10 were supported in principle.

A copy of the NSW Government response is available on the Committee [webpage](#).

## Appendix Three – Submissions

<b>No.</b>	<b>Author</b>
1	Mr Grant Mistler
2	Mrs Jane l'Ons
3	Mr Luiz Fernando Pereira Bispo
4	Ms Heather Morris
5	Miss Sherree Molles
6	Mrs Susie Rae
7	Confidential
8	Tenterfield Shire Council
9	New England Joint Organisation
10	Mr Andrew Rawsthorne
11	Confidential
12	Hay Shire Council
13	Lockhart Shire Council
14	Goulburn Mulwaree Council
15	The Hon. John Barilaro MP
16	Namoi Unlimited
17	Ms Abigail Humphreys
18	Central NSW Joint Organisation
19	Confidential
20	Ms Adrienne Shilling
20a	Ms Adrienne Shilling
21	Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman
22	Clarence Valley Council
23	Ms Jodie Pall
24	Northern Beaches Council
25	NSW Government
26	Cotton Australia
27	Gunnedah Shire Council
28	Confidential
29	Confidential
30	Mr David Smith
31	Water for Rivers

<b>No.</b>	<b>Author</b>
32	Forbes Shire Council
33	Cabonne Council
34	Singleton Council
35	Bland Shire Council
36	Confidential
37	Ms Elena Garcia
38	Australian Hotels Association NSW
39	Mr Gill Boehringer
40	Zero Mass Water
41	Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council
42	Western NSW Community Legal Centre
43	The Salvation Army, Australia
44	RDA Northern Rivers and Northern Rivers Joint Organisation
45	Parkes Shire Council
46	NSW Business Chamber
47	Federation Council
48	Charles Sturt University
49	Ms Cate Faehrmann
50	Australian Banking Association
51	Mr Peter Layton
52	Bega Valley Shire Council
53	Ms Prudence Wawn
54	Coffs Harbour City Council
55	Wollondilly Shire Council
56	Name suppressed
57	Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW Inc
58	Narrabri Shire Council
59	Liverpool Plains Shire Council
60	Wentworth Shire Council
61	Richmond Valley Council
62	Moree Plains Shire Council
63	The Australian National University
64	Country Women's Association of New South Wales
65	ClubsNSW
66	Confidential

<b>No.</b>	<b>Author</b>
67	Confidential
68	Country Mayors Association
69	St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
70	Hunter Business Chamber
71	Confidential
72	Robert B. Campbell
73	Jocelyn Christensen
74	Local Government NSW
75	Put Orange First

## Appendix Four – Witnesses

**5 May 2020**

**Virtual hearing via Video Conference room (Jubilee Room), Parliament House, Sydney, NSW**

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Mayor Michael Pearce	Chairperson, New England Joint Organisation
Mr Scott Phillips	Acting General Manager, Uralla Shire Council New England Joint Organisation
Mr David Aber	Interim Executive Officer, New England Joint Organisation
Mr Bryn Griffiths	Associate Director, Communications and Events, University of New England

**15 May 2020**

**Virtual hearing via Video Conference room (Jubilee Room), Parliament House, Sydney, NSW**

<b>Witness</b>	<b>Position and Organisation</b>
Mr James McTavish	NSW Cross Border Commissioner and NSW Regional Town Water Supply Coordinator
Mr Scott Hansen	Director General, Department of Primary Industries, Department of Regional NSW
Mr Christopher Hanger	Deputy Secretary, Public Works Advisory and Regional Development, Department of Regional NSW

## Appendix Five – Extracts from minutes

### **MINUTES OF MEETING No 2**

12.15pm, Wednesday 7 August 2019

Room 1254

#### **Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy, Mr David Harris, Mr Phil Donato, Mr Clayton Barr

#### **Apologies**

Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Geoff Provest, Mr Peter Sidgreaves

#### **Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels

#### **1. Minutes**

Resolved on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Donato: That the minutes of the meeting 19 June be confirmed.

#### **2. Potential inquiry topics**

The Committee discussed a list of potential inquiry topics circulated.

The Committee agreed that the Secretariat will prepare briefing notes on the following areas:

- \*\*\*
- the impact of drought on regional economies
- \*\*\*

#### **3. Next meeting**

The next meeting adjourned at 12.24 pm until a date to be determined.

### **MINUTES OF MEETING No 3**

1.30 pm, Wednesday 18 September 2019

Parkes Room

#### **Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy, Mr Clayton Barr, Mr David Harris, Mr Geoff Provest, Mr Peter Sidgreaves

#### **Apologies**

Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Phil Donato

#### **Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Sidgreaves: That the minutes of the meeting of 7 August 2019 be confirmed.

**2. Potential inquiry topics**

The Committee discussed three briefing notes on potential inquiry topics including:

- the impact of drought on regional economies
- \*\*\*, and
- \*\*\*

The Committee agreed to commence an inquiry into the impact of drought on regional New South Wales, with particular reference to small business, local economies and communities.

Draft terms of reference will be prepared and circulated for discussion at the next Committee meeting.

**3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 1.41 pm until a date to be determined.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 4**

1.35pm, Wednesday 25 September 2019

Jubilee room

**Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Phil Donato, Mr Geoff Provest, Mr Peter Sidgreaves

**Apologies**

Mr Clayton Barr, Mr David Harris

**Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Provest: That the minutes of the meeting of 18 September 2019 be confirmed.

**2. Proposed inquiry into support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

**2.1 Terms of reference**

The Committee discussed the draft terms of reference.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Provest, seconded Mr Sidgreaves: That the Committee conduct an inquiry into the impacts of drought on regional NSW and identify potential government action with particular reference to regional businesses, economies and communities including:

- a) population loss and loss of key trades, skills and businesses, and community services such as schools and medical services;
- b) business debt finance and responses of financial companies to the impact of drought;
- c) direct and indirect impacts of drought on businesses and industries;
- d) transition and recovery from drought when drought conditions begin to improve;
- e) preparedness for future drought events;
- f) assessment of current Government programs;
- g) temporary relief from state taxes, charges and levies for drought affected businesses;
- h) capacity and coordination of town water supplies and further recycling opportunities;  
and
- i) any other related matter.

### **2.2 Call for submissions**

The Committee discussed the proposed list of stakeholders.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Donato: That the Committee call for submissions to be received by 29 November 2019 and write to relevant stakeholders.

### **3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 1.47 pm until a date to be determined.

## **MINUTES OF MEETING No 5**

1.32pm, Wednesday 20 November 2019

McKell Room

### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr, Mr Justin Clancy, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Phil Donato, Mr David Harris, Mr Geoff Provest

### **Apologies**

Mr Peter Sidgreaves

### **Officers in attendance**

Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels

### **1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded Ms Cooke: That the minutes of the meeting of 25 September 2019 be confirmed.

### **2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

#### **2.1 Correspondence**

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Mark Scott AO, Secretary, Department of Education dated 1 November 2019.

#### **2.2 Publication of submissions**



Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded by Ms Cooke: That the Committee publish submissions numbered 1-6, 8-10 and 12-15 in full and that submissions numbered 7 and 11 remain confidential to the Committee and not be published.

### **2.3 Regional site visits and public hearings**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Donato: That, subject to funding approval from the Speaker, the Committee undertake a regional site visit to Orange on 2 and 3 December 2019.

The proposed itinerary for the regional visit to Orange was discussed and the Committee agreed to invite the Mayor and General Manager of Orange City Council to meet with the Committee during the visit.

The Committee discussed undertaking two further site visits in conjunction with public hearings in the new year.

### **2.4 Terms of reference**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Donato: That the terms of reference for the Committee's current inquiry into support for drought affected communities in NSW be amended by inserting after (h):

- (i) the impact of drought on aboriginal communities.

### **3. \*\*\***

### **4. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 1.55pm until a date to be determined

## **MINUTES OF MEETING No 6**

1.30pm, Tuesday 4 February 2020

Room 1254

### **Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Phil Donato, Mr David Harris, Mr Geoff Provest, Mr Peter Sidgreaves

### **Apologies**

Mr Clayton Barr

### **Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels

### **1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Provest, seconded Donato: That the minutes of the meeting of 20 November 2019 be confirmed.

### **2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

#### **2.1 Correspondence**

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Rupert Steel dated 27 November 2019 and 23 December 2019.

## **2.2 Acceptance of further submissions**

The Committee noted the following submissions received since the Committee last met:

- Submission 71
- Submission 72
- Submission 73

## **2.3 Publication of submissions**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded by Mr Provest that:

- submissions numbered 16-18, 20-20a, 21-27, 30, 32-35, 38, 40-44, 46-55, 57-65, 68-70, 72-73 be published in full
- submissions numbered 19, 28-29, 36, 66-67 and 71 remain confidential to the Committee and not be published
- submission 31 be published with redactions to paragraph 6 and 9
- submission 37 be published with redactions to paragraphs 4 and 7
- submission 39 be published but the appendix commencing from page 6 remain confidential to the Committee
- submission 45 be published but the \*\*\* remain confidential to the Committee, and
- submission 56 be published with name suppressed.

## **2.4 Inquiry Timeline**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Provest: That, subject to funding approval from the Speaker, the Committee undertake and conduct the following regional site visits and public hearings:

- Armidale on 16 and 17 March 2020
- Canberra and Yass on 28 and 29 April 2020

It was further agreed that the Committee would conduct a public hearing in Sydney on 15 May 2020.

## **3. General Business**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris: That the Committee thank Mr Donato and the secretariat for organising the Committee's visit to Orange in December 2019.

## **4. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 1.50 pm until a date to be determined.

## **MINUTES OF MEETING No 7**

11.30am, Monday 30 March 2020

Via teleconference

### **Members present**

Mr Clayton Barr, Mr Justin Clancy, Mr Phil Donato, Mr David Harris, Mr Peter Sidgreaves

### **Apologies**

Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Geoff Provest

**Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Donato: That the minutes of the meeting of 4 February 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

**2.1 Acceptance and publication of further submissions**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Mr Donato: That submissions 74 and 75 be published in full on the Committee's website.

**2.2 Inquiry activities**

The Committee noted the prior agreement to postpone the Armidale visit.

The Committee discussed the planned visit and hearing in Yass and the Sydney public hearing.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded by Mr Barr, that the Committee postpone the regional visit to Yass and the Sydney public hearing to a date to be determined.

The Committee discussed options for evidence gathering by remote or other means including:

- teleconference or videoconference with the Guyra Hub, followed by Armidale and Yass;
- publishing of an interim report based on preliminary findings from submissions and research.

**3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 11.52 am until a date to be determined.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 8**

1.30 pm, Friday 24 April 2020

Videoconference

**Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy, Mr Peter Sidgreaves, Mr Clayton Barr, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Phil Donato, Mr David Harris, Mr Geoff Provest,

**Apologies**

Nil

**Officers in attendance**

Clara Hawker, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Jacqueline Linnane, Jennifer Gallagher, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Donato: That the minutes of the meeting of 30 March 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

**2.1 Meeting with representatives of the Guyra community**

The Committee met privately with the following representatives of the Guyra community:

Ms Chris Hietbrink, Centre Coordinator of the Guyra Hub

Ms Dot Vickery OAM, President of the Guyra Hub

Ms Leonie Hawkins, President of the Guyra Evening Branch of the Country Women's Association

Mr Sam White, partner of Bald Blair Angus

Mrs Kirsty White, partner of Bald Blair Angus and member of Northern Tablelands Local Land Services Ladies in Livestock

Ms Bronwyn Gills, proprietor of Brisk Trading.

**3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 3.05 pm until 5 May 2020 at 8.50 am.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 9**

8.50 am, Tuesday 5 May 2020

Jubilee Room and videoconference

**Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy, Mr Peter Sidgreaves, Mr Clayton Barr, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Phil Donato, Mr David Harris, Mr Geoff Provest

**Apologies**

Nil

**Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Jacqueline Linnane, Jennifer Gallagher, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Donato: That the minutes of the meeting of 24 April 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

**2.1 Correspondence**

The Committee noted the following correspondence received:

- Email from Chris Hietbrink, Guyra Community Hub, dated 24 April 2020

- Email from Sam White, Bald Blair Angus, dated 24 April 2020

### **2.2 Media orders for public hearing**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves seconded Mr Donato: That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 5 May 2020, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's guidelines for the coverage of proceedings for committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

### **2.3 Answers to questions taken on notice and additional questions**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Mr Donato: That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and additional questions within 3 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded Mr Barr: That the procedure for additional questions be as follows:

- Members to submit any additional questions to the secretariat within two days of the date on which the transcript is forwarded to the members.
- The secretariat will circulate all additional questions received to Committee members.
- Members may express concern or objection to any additional questions within one working day of distribution of the questions from the secretariat. Any objections that cannot be resolved will be deferred until a deliberative meeting of the Committee.

### **2.4 Public hearing – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

Witnesses were admitted by videoconference.

The public were admitted via the Parliament's webcast. The Chair opened the public hearing at 9.15 am and made a short opening statement.

#### **New England Joint Organisation**

Mayor Michael Pearce, Chairperson of the New England Joint Organisation and Mayor of Uralla Shire Council was sworn and examined.

Mr Scott Phillips, Acting General Manager, Uralla Shire Council was affirmed and examined.

Mr David Aber, Interim Executive Officer, New England Joint Organisation was sworn and examined.

The Committee questioned the witnesses. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

#### **University of New England**

Mr Bryn Griffiths, Acting Associate Director, Communications and Events, University of New England, was affirmed and examined.

The Committee questioned the witness. Evidence concluded and the witness withdrew. The public hearing concluded at 10.46 am.

### **Post-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **1. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales (cont.)**

##### **2.5 Publication orders**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Sidgreaves: That the corrected transcript of public evidence given today be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's website.

##### **2.6 Preparation of Interim Report**

The Chair invited members consider and to advise him and the secretariat of their potential key issues and recommendations for inclusion in the report.

#### **2. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 10.50 am until 15 May 2020 at 11.30 am.

### **MINUTES OF MEETING No 10**

11.30 am, Friday 15 May 2020

Jubilee Room and videoconference

#### **Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy, Mr Peter Sidgreaves, Mr Clayton Barr, Ms Steph Cooke , Mr David Harris

#### **Apologies**

Mr Phil Donato, Mr Geoff Provest

#### **Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Jacqueline Linnane, Jennifer Gallagher, Mohini Mehta

#### **1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Barr: That the minutes of the meeting of 5 May 2020 be confirmed.

#### **2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

##### **2.1 Responses received to questions taken on notice**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Barr: That the Committee publish the response received from the University of New England to a question taken on notice at the 5 May public hearing.

##### **2.2 Media orders for public hearing**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Mr Sidgreaves: That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 15 May 2020, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's guidelines for the coverage of proceedings for committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.

##### **2.3 Answers to questions taken on notice and additional questions**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Barr: That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and additional questions within 3 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Mr Harris: That the procedure for additional questions be as follows:

- Members to submit any additional questions to the secretariat within two days of the date on which the transcript is forwarded to the members.
- The secretariat will circulate all additional questions received to Committee members.
- Members may express concern or objection to any additional questions within one working day of distribution of the questions from the secretariat. Any objections that cannot be resolved will be deferred until a deliberative meeting of the Committee.

## **2.4 Public hearing – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

Witnesses were admitted by videoconference.

The public were admitted via the Parliament's webcast. The Chair opened the public hearing at 11.45 am and made a short opening statement.

Mr James McTavish, NSW Cross-Border Commissioner and NSW Regional Town Water Supply Coordinator was sworn and examined.

Mr Scott Hansen, Director General, Department of Primary Industries, Department of Regional NSW was sworn and examined.

Mr Chris Hanger, Deputy Secretary, Public Works Advisory and Regional Development, Department of Regional NSW was affirmed and examined.

The Committee questioned the witnesses. Evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

### **Post-hearing deliberative meeting**

#### **3. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales (cont.)**

##### **2.5 Publication orders**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Barr That the corrected transcript of public evidence given today be authorised for publication and uploaded on the Committee's website.

#### **4. \*\*\***

#### **5. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 1.05 pm until a date and time to be determined.

### **MINUTES OF MEETING No 11**

9.38 am, Thursday 18 June 2020

Jubilee Room

**Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy (Chair), Mr Peter Sidgreaves (Deputy Chair), Mr Phil Donato, Mr Clayton Barr, Ms Steph Cooke, Mr David Harris, Mr Geoff Provest,

**Apologies**

Nil

**Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Harris, seconded Mr Sidgreaves: That the minutes of the meeting of 15 May 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales – consideration of the draft report**

By agreement, the draft report was considered in globo.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Mr Provest: That the draft report be the report of the Committee, and that it be signed by the Chair and presented to the House.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Mr Provest: That the Chair and committee staff be permitted to correct stylistic, typographical and grammatical errors.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Mr Provest: That, once tabled, the report be posted on the Committee's website.

**3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 9.45 am until a date and time to be determined.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 12**

9.15 am, Tuesday 18 August 2020

By videoconference

**Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy (Chair), Mr Peter Sidgreaves (Deputy Chair), Mr Clayton Barr, Ms Steph Cooke,  
Mr David Harris

**Apologies**

Mr Phil Donato, Mr Geoff Provest

**Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**



Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Barr: That the minutes of the meeting of 18 June 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

- a) Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Ms Cooke: That the Committee conduct briefings with relevant agencies in the mental health sector.
- b) The possibility of receiving a briefing on town water supplies from the Minister for Water, Property and Housing was discussed.

**3. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 9.21 am until a date and time to be determined.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 13**

1.35 pm Monday 28 September 2020

By video conference and in room 1254

**Members present**

By video conference: Mr Justin Clancy (Chair), Mr Phil Donato, Mr Geoff Provest, Mr Peter Sidgreaves (Deputy Chair), Mr Clayton Barr, Ms Steph Cooke

In Room 1254: Mr David Harris

**Apologies**

Nil

**Officers in attendance**

Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Jacqueline Linnane, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Provest: That the minutes of the meeting of 18 August 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

The Committee were briefed by the following agencies:

Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (CRRRMH)

- Professor David Perkins, Director
- Dr Hazel Dalton, Research Leader and Senior Research Leader
- Tessa Cummins, Program Manager, Rural Adversity Mental Health Program
- Vanessa Delaney, Senior Development Officer

Mental Health Commission of NSW

- Commissioner Catherine Lourey
- Kerri Lawrence, Manager Strategy and Reform

**3. \*\*\***

**4. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 3.15 pm until a date and time to be determined.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 14**

1 pm Monday 2 November 2020

By video conference and in room 1254

**Members present**

By video conference: Mr Justin Clancy (Chair), Mr Phil Donato, Mr Geoff Provest, Mr Peter Sidgreaves (Deputy Chair), Mr Clayton Barr, Ms Steph Cooke

In Room 1254: Mr David Harris

**Apologies**

Nil

**Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Jacqueline Linnane

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barr, seconded Mr Harris: That the minutes of the meeting of 28 September 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

The Committee were briefed by the following agencies:

Audit Office of New South Wales

- Ms Margaret Crawford, Auditor-General
- Ms Claudia Migotto, Assistant Auditor-General

NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

- Mr Michael Blackmore, Director, Water Utilities, Water Group

Department of Primary Industries

- Mr Brett Fifield, Deputy Director General, Engagement and Industry Assistance, Orange
- Ms Pip Job, Director Engagement, Dubbo
- Ms Amanda Glasson, Rural Resilience Office, Coonamble

**3. \*\*\***

**4. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 3.30 pm until a date and time to be determined.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 15**

12.20 pm Wednesday 11 November 2020

Room 1254

**Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy (Chair), Mr Clayton Barr, Mr Phil Donato, Mr David Harris, Mr Geoff Provest

**Apologies**

Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Peter Sidgreaves (Deputy Chair)

**Officers in attendance**

In room 1254: Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels. By phone: Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded Mr Barr: That the minutes of the meeting of 2 November 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

The Committee considered draft questions on notice arising out of the briefing held on 2 November 2020.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Provest, seconded by Mr Barr: That the following agencies be sent questions on notice, as circulated, and be requested to respond by Friday 11 December 2020:

- Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health
- Mental Health Commission of NSW
- NSW Department of Primary Industries
- NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.

**3. \*\*\***

**4. \*\*\***

**5. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 12.44 pm until a date and time to be determined.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 17**

9.03 am Wednesday 17 February 2021

Room 1254

**Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy (Chair), Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Phil Donato, Mr Geoff Provest, Mr Peter Sidgreaves (Deputy Chair)

**Apologies**

Mr Clayton Barr, Mr David Harris

**Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels , Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Provest: That the minutes of the meeting of 11 November 2020 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

**2.1 Correspondence**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Hon John Barilaro MP, received 18 December 2020, providing the NSW Government Response to the Committee's interim report into support for drought affected communities in NSW.

**2.2 Answers received to questions on notice**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Provest, seconded Ms Cooke: That the Committee publish the answers received to questions on notice from the following agencies:

- Department of Primary Industries
- Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health
- Mental Health Commission of NSW
- Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

**3. \*\*\***

**4. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 9.36 am until a date and time to be determined.

**MINUTES OF MEETING No 18**

9.32 am Wednesday 24 March 2021

Room 1254

**Members present**

Mr Justin Clancy (Chair), Mr Peter Sidgreaves (Deputy Chair), Ms Steph Cooke, Mr Phil Donato, Mr David Harris, Mr Geoff Provest

**Apologies**

Mr Clayton Barr

**Officers in attendance**

Elaine Schofield, Emma Wood, Cheryl Samuels, Jacqueline Isles, Mohini Mehta

**1. Minutes**

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Sidgreaves, seconded Mr Donato: That the minutes of the meeting of 17 February 2021 be confirmed.

**2. Inquiry – support for drought affected communities in New South Wales**

**a) Consideration of Chair's draft final report**

By agreement, the draft report was considered in globo.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Provest, seconded Mr Harris: That the draft report be the report of the Committee, and that it be signed by the Chair and presented to the House.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded Mr Sidgreaves: That the Chair and committee staff be permitted to correct stylistic, typographical and grammatical errors.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donato, seconded Mr Sidgreaves: That, once tabled, the report be posted on the Committee's website.

**3. \*\*\***

**4. \*\*\***

**5. Next meeting**

The meeting adjourned at 10.03 am until a date and time to be determined.

## Appendix Six – Glossary

BPM Guidelines	Best Practice Management of Water Supply and Sewerage Guidelines
CRRMH	Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health
DPI	Department of Primary Industries
DPIE	Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment
IWCM	Integrated Water Cycle Management
LHD	Local Health District
LWUs	Local water utilities
PHN	Primary Health Network
RAMHP	Rural Adversity Mental Health Program
RRP	Rural Resilience Program
SBP	Strategic Business Plan
SMS	NSW Suicide Monitoring System
SSWP	Safe and Secure Water Program
YFBP	Young Farmer Business Program