



**The Hon. John Barilaro MP**  
Deputy Premier  
Minister for Regional New South Wales  
Minister for Industry and Trade

Your ref: RDOC21/41918

Ms Helen Minnican  
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly  
NSW Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Minnican *Helen*

I am pleased to submit the NSW Government response to the Final Report of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development inquiry into support for drought affected communities in New South Wales.

The enclosed response confirms that the Government accepts both recommendations made by the Committee.

If you require further information on this matter, please contact Brendan Cook, Executive Director Strategy and Policy, Department of Regional New South Wales at



Yours sincerely

  
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## Summary

The NSW Government welcomes the findings of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development's inquiry into support for drought affected communities in NSW (the Inquiry). Since the Inquiry commenced, the Government launched the [Future Ready Regions Strategy](#) - a whole-of-government roadmap to supporting strong, resilient communities in regional NSW. A strategic evaluation of the NSW Government's overall response to drought is also underway.

In addition the NSW Water Strategy is part of a suite of long-term water strategies being developed across NSW to increase the resilience of the state's water resources over the long-term. The [water strategies program](#) identifies policy, planning and infrastructure solutions for each region of NSW and confirms the Government's approach to supporting community drought resilience.

The Inquiry's Final Report builds on the significant findings and recommendations tabled in the Interim Report and makes two new recommendations, both of which have been accepted by the NSW Government.

## Response to the Inquiry's recommendations

Recommendation	NSW Government Response
<p>1. The Committee recommends 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.</p>	<p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>The NSW Government notes the Committee's finding that there should be an emphasis on helping people navigate the various mental health services available to them. Each Local Health District in NSW implements the most appropriate models of care for their communities, and adopts different models based on local collaborations.</p> <p>NSW Health recognises the importance of helping people navigate mental health services in rural and regional communities. To achieve this, NSW Health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• funds the Mental Health Line which offers referrals to local mental health services across the state, and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and</li> <li>• funds the WayAhead Directory (a Mental Health Association NSW initiative) - a comprehensive online database that can be used to find local services, make referrals, and access mental health information and resources. WayAhead also provides phone support for people to navigate the Directory and find the right support.</li> </ul> <p>The Government also invested \$26 million in the Emergency Drought Relief Mental Health Package from 2018-19 to 2020-21, which included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27 farmgate counsellors and drought peer support workers</li> <li>• Six additional Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP) Coordinators</li> </ul>

Recommendation	NSW Government Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations</li> <li>• Community drought events in Western NSW</li> <li>• The Royal Flying Doctor's Peer Ambassador Program</li> <li>• Grants to sporting bodies to deliver mental health projects, and</li> <li>• Mental health training to regional pharmacists.</li> </ul> <p>These partnerships provided services that helped reduce the stigma associated with seeking help in rural areas and provided a soft entry to psychological support services.</p> <p>The NSW Government remains committed to funding several new and existing initiatives to improve mental health supports and access in rural and regional areas of NSW, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$21.15 million for five years from 2021 to the Rural Adversity Mental Health Program.</li> <li>• \$14.8 million for Bushfire Recovery Clinicians, who worked closely with primary health initiatives, community and welfare agencies to provide pathways to care and direct care for people needing specialist assistance.</li> <li>• \$36.4 million over four years for Drought Farmgate Counsellors and Disaster Recovery Clinicians to continue working closely with primary health initiatives, community and welfare agencies, and mental health services to provide direct care and respond to local community needs and issues on the ground. These roles were broadened to reflect the range of issues impacting disaster affected areas, including bushfires, floods and the mice plague.</li> </ul> <p>The NSW Government continues to work collaboratively on planning with Commonwealth Primary Health Networks, Local Health Districts, people with lived experience of mental illness, local community organisations and agencies. Joint regional planning is underway for integrated mental health and suicide prevention services under the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan.</p> <p>These plans provide a regional platform for addressing problems that people with lived experience and their carers and families may face. The key objectives of joint regional mental health and suicide prevention planning is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integrate mental health and suicide prevention services and pathways for people with, or at risk of, mental illness or suicide through a whole of system approach, and</li> <li>• drive and inform evidence-based service development to address identified gaps and deliver on regional priorities.</li> </ul>
<p>2. The Committee recommends that the NSW Government provide additional ongoing resources to support the work of</p>	<p><b>Supported.</b></p> <p>NSW Government committed over \$4.6 billion to the drought response since 2017. This provided immediate support to farmers, families, towns and businesses impacted by drought.</p>

Recommendation	NSW Government Response
<p>the Rural Resilience Program, specifically to increase the number of ongoing Rural Resilience Officers.</p>	<p>NSW Government is also supporting regional communities to improve their economic resilience. The Future Ready Regions strategy committed \$64 million to drive a long-term focus on drought preparedness. Launched in June 2021, it bolsters local support and resources for drought affected communities, and directly responds to the Committee’s interim findings and recommendations made in December 2020.</p> <p>The Strategy confirms support for 14 actions, with 4 newly funded initiatives that have strong stakeholder interest including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$48 million for Farms of the Future program to invest in on-farm connectivity to support ag-tech uptake</li> <li>• \$6 million for the Farm Business Resilience program to provide farm business training to improve resilience</li> <li>• \$6 million to fast-track investigations into new groundwater supplies in western NSW, and</li> <li>• \$4 million for Enhanced Drought Information Systems to provide farms with world-leading weather and climate data for better business decisions.</li> </ul> <p>The NSW Government has also created a dedicated agency, Resilience NSW, to ensure communities devastated by drought, fires, floods and now COVID-19 get help to rebuild and recover, and coordinate access to disaster relief.</p>