

The Drought Review.
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A Submission by.

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HILLSIDE.

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Gary is now a retired 4th generation farmer and has spent much of his time in the past three years helping farming friends and families with drought and have found an administrative night mare. (All on a voluntary basic and sought no financial return for any expense.)

Having had the time, the acknowledge (Having been farming through the droughts and dry years of 1957, 1964 to 1967 ,1977-78, 1981-84, 1990-92.) and the will to examine all aspects of the present situation and how things have been handled.

Apart from belonging to a farming have attended agriculture college.

Martin Grady settled on the Shallhaven river at Braidwood. In 1838 and commenced farming.

His son Michael, moved to Michelago in 1863 and moved to Jingera on the Queanbeyan River 1890's His three sons William, Martin

and John all acquired considerable land holdings (It not family history.)

Martin's son Kevin who in his 96 year can recall vividly to this day and with great clarity the drought years in his time of farming and the floods that almost followed after the breaking of the drought. He also recalls how his mother related to the seasons of her early childhood days.(She passed away in 1976 aged 99 years)

The Grady properties had always been grazing properties principally sheep with some cattle on the southern tablelands.

I, Gary, Purchased a property at Cowra at the end of the 1984 drought to carry on farming activities with sheep and live stock with the intention of preparing for the next drought I grew grain and cutting Lucerne for hay.

I always stored a percentage of production for drought reserves.

Each year building, and increasing storage such as silo's and hay sheds.

Sarah Musgrave's book written in 1926 when she was aged 96 years and revised when she turned 100 years old. She recalls the big drought of 1849 -1852.on the bland and Western, New South Wales when the Lachlan river dried up all the stock not shifted away died of thirst there was plenty of feed but no water. The people also moved away. There was no water west of Bathurst she recalls. In 1852 heavy rains came the Lachlan flooded and Lake Cowel filled to over flowing. In the past 152 years the rain records when examined closely shows 50 odd years have been in drought,With well below average rainfall, 50 odd years have had above average rain fall and 50 odd years have had average rain fall.

The cycles are in about 7to 10 years
The records are there to be read. no guessing with predictions.
There has been a clear pattern over that time of 150 odd years.

The Bureau of Meteorology details the following.

The “Federation Drought”, 1895-1902.

The 1914-15 drought.

The World War 11 droughts 1937-45.

The 1965-68 drought.

The short but sharp -The 1982-83 drought.

(I recall there was a build up to this drought.)

Many times there are years of low rain fall before the drought hits. These years the farming community gets by with less feed smaller crops and dam levels dropping. And finances getting depleted.

These conditions make a bad situation worse when in the grip of drought.

Very important.

I don't belong to any political party, I have no hidden agenda I am not interested in personalities but if they are the front person for the Government, the departments or an organisation, I will tell as I see it or have found it with out fear or faviour.

My sole intention to high light what is going

on and what message is getting to the people who enquire with regard to assistance

The general public hears how much money is been spent by government on drought relief and ask the question with resentment (Why are we loseing our homes?) Many farming families any are completely missing out on any assistance.

The farming community are most grateful to the tax payers and the Government for the huge amount of money spent in excess \$2.5 billion .Dollars by the previous Government and continued on by the present Government. The administrative costs are completely out of hand .

The farming community are good managers have a handle on there affairs, very resilitant and can handle all occasions .

All a farmer wants in drought time is rain to end the drought and financial assistance to see him through the drought and to be able to feed and care for his family.

In drought times it doesn't disccrmate on one's

position as at the moment I will give an example two farmers living almost side by side of equal area

Number one carrying large debt (For what ever reason.)Eligible for Interest rate subsidy and possible house hold support.If the debt is long standing there is every chance ,there has been little or no income tax paid for along time. Much needed assistance.

Farmer number two: carrying no debt runs a tight ship. On a well managed property . Not eligible for assistance of any kind.

It would be fair to say he would have paid a fair share of income tax and kept a good financial position with after tax proceeds. Due to drought his loss of income is similar to Farmer no one .

Old man drought strikes both properties the same . One gets assistance the other doesn't.

The present drought expenditure doesn't directly help the farmer .

1. The amount spent on advertising on television. Almost at saturation point at

one stage on all channels.

2. Print media Half and full pages in most papers both metropolitan and country.

Also in many other publications.

3. The centrelink costs are \$1765 per application. A staff of 300 at Merybough for the drought line operations. and staff around the country many who don't understand the rural situation.

4. The drought buses: (In principal a good idea but the capital cost and cost of manning them the money would be better spent on assistance)

5. One finds there is different criteria in the centrelink legislation than in the Exceptional circumstances legislation. And claims are rejected.

6. The E.C .Relief payments to farmers are paid at the rate of New start and even now there is no circular indicating some various changes to the criteria. and one rings the drought line and still get wrong information.

7. Incorrect and misleading information

has been supplied and people have missed out on benefits yet when the documented evidence was submitted of Centrelinks incorrect information they would not pay the back payment. The only other avenue open is to take the matter to the tribunal .(Application fee applies \$640 all of this to access drought assistance)

7 At these times Farmers don't have the time to be battling the bureaucrats who hide behind a telephone, every chance one will never speak to the same person again.

All the above help takes their toll on the farmer.

Prolong dry weather .

No feed for stock and expense of feeding them.

May be no water and having to cart it.

See his crops die back into the ground.

And the financial loss that entails .

His financial position getting worse by the day to the stage he no longer has the support of his financier.

The toll on his family and love ones becomes so great that he does self harm to him self.

8. With suicide happening to a farmer every 4 days.

This can be totally avoided .

The relief payments made averable at an early date without all the red tape and delay and rejection that happens.

9. There is an easy quick way for assistanc to be distributed.

In 1962 at the slump in wool prices the Government of the day guaranteed a average price of 36 pence per pound for wool. Wool sold at auction account sales prepared by broker a second account sales prepared for Government to the amount of the difference .Government supplies money to broker total cheque sent to grower.

10. In 1974 at the slump in Cattle prices due to over supply and been shut out of markets in Japan.

The government of the day decided an

amount of \$2000 would be paid to cattle producers if they had 80 breeding cows .The Producers made application at the local pastures protection board who verified the numbers to be correct and with in several weeks a cheque arrived in the mail.

11. In the 1981-82 drought the Government of the Day had an Interest subsidy all that was required, a signed form from ones bank.

There was subsidy for 50% of the purchase of fodder, a good help (It increased the price of fodder.) All that was required to claim a refund. was

An invoice with a paid receipt presented to the pastures protection board and a cheque came in the mail.

There are many quick ways to assist farms in times of need with out all the red tape and administering costs.

. There are so many Government charges

(Yes Taxes) Which have no relation to income or productivity :

- Shire rates:(The Victorian government pays 50% of the rates to farmers with E.C.certificates.[The problem with such measures Rates rise]this is only for current rates not for arrears)

Rural lands protection board rates.(the usefulness of the boards is questionable.)

Water Rates:(Irrigation no water available still the charges apply and payment is demanded by law this is almost extortion when no water is delivered. I fully understand if the water is not there it can't be delivered but surely no water charge should apply.)

- Increased purchases of fodder ,cartage stock to agistment, cartage of water(The G.S.T.Tax)This has to be paid at the time of purchase and almost no sales to offset it.
• A big burden when there is little or no income coming in and a very tight liquidity situation exists and there may be no funds available for any purpose.
• (Suggested this money could be rebated

with in 7 days and not having to wait to submit a BAS statement.)

The Water Situation.

Throwing all the money in the world, towards water in time of drought won't produce one extra cup of water.

When living in the country with no laid on water the tank on the house runs dry, you fit a bigger tank or may be two. to see you through the next dry time. One goes around the paddocks .and the dams are drying up with almost no stock water. One cleans out the dam and makes it bigger to get you through the next dry time. Both tanks and dams will fill before the next big dry.

Then we come to the major water storages presantly about 20% full Had those been twice the size with the same the amount of usage the amount of water stores would be 40% of present capacity.

Irrigation water should only be used to produce food and fodder and certainly not fibre.

This is how many areas survived the droughts of earlier years and how water was available in times of drought.

The Irrigation licences of 400 acre feet which changed to 972 Megalitres. the licences were allocated to the property and in many cases only small percentage of the allocation was used and the dams over flowed and the river flushed to the mouth.

When licences became sale able (Hungry Governments could see more revenue from the sale of water.) The purchasers of licences paying from \$380 to \$1900 plus, depending on which river they are situated The purchaser after paying that amount of money will want to use his full 100% of his entitlement. and often transfers the licence up the river and substantially reduces water flow in the river which is environmentally unsound.

Some areas should be limited to spray irrigation only.

Flood irrigation is not always the best way to use water except on rice.

Rice uses high volumes of water but produces more food units per megalitre of water used., than any other crop.

Preperation is need now for the next drought. Immediate steeps need to taken to increase water storages on the main rivers.

Increased on farm storages for stock and domestic.

The future directions can't be derailed by thing's like thretened specices and unrealistic enviromental expectations.

The most dangered species are the family farmers who are needed to feed and cloth the masses. We as a nation are not feeding ourselves up to 80% of food on the supermarket shelves are imported from abroad.

A national disgrace that we as a wealthy nation are purchaseing cheap food from overseas at the expence of The under privilaged and under nurrished .

When we have everthing here in this wonderful country .

Australia's farmers has the capacity and the

know how to feed and cloth the world. Primary industries need good leadership which has been lacking in the past couple of decades as result we have seen a decline in returns to farmers.(Too much advice has been sought listerned to as well as acted upon from acedemics who have not lived or survived in the real world)

The farmer numbers have declined as well as their average age has increased to about 63 years.The women folk on the farms are doing more manual work than any time in history.(Possibly more than in war time) Many woman have had to take work off farm,(Often this reduces the drought assistance or completely excludes them) If the work is averable to help them support the family.

Children attending school have always helping around the farm but these days they are looked upon to help out with the important tasks and families are organising things like shearing and lamb marking at school holiday time.

One of the big thing that has compounded the affect of the drought is the low profitibility in the wool industry,with sheep numbers below 80 million the lowest numbers since the early 1920's.the old saying keep a sheep alive and have a shearing, and one would get a wool cheque which would keep food on the table and the wolf away from the door.

With farmers moveing into other enterprises often in drought time the cash flow is non existant.

Preparing the fodder for the next drought.

This may be more applicable in the pastoral zone and grazing areas.

In some grazing areas the farm debt has increased to a sizable level of almost \$600000 there will be little room for any expenditure in the foreseeable future if they survive .The last thing people want to do is spend money on after a drought is fodder whether it be hay or grain.

The following encouragement would be very

help full to farmers :

The government would forgo tax revenue but not have to pay cash out long term.

The following tax benefits need to apply.

For the building of fodder storage, silo's, hay sheds. 150% tax deduction in the year of erection.(Not writing it off over 40 years.)

150% tax deduction credit for hay, grain or silage put into storage for drought times

150% tax credit for expenses of making hay or silage for drought times.

No tax be payable when used.

Farmers who purchase fodder for storage purposes receive the 50% cartage rebate .outside drought times.

The rebate paid for cartage of stock, water or fodder . Be paid at the same rate on farmers own truck as a carriers truck.(The different rate indicates the old well held belief that farmers work for nothing.)

The most important thing is that the assistance continues well after the drought breaking rain.

Cash flow does not start immediately after the

rain falls could be 12 to 15 months in the case of a crop, up to 12 months for stock may have to wait for next drop of lambs or calves.

The next wool cheque may be months or a year away.

Flocks and herds need to be rebuilt at either a cash cost or can result in loss of cash flow.

I have had contact with the following :

(Intend to make a comment.)

Centrelink; (Many contacts by phone, visits to centres, the drought bus, and on one occasion an officer meet a friend at my home,

I have found on many occasions the officers was not well informed, Some times not

professional [A personal letter sent to couple rejecting a request and the officer didn't have the manners or the courtesy to sign it,] It

seems quite clear no body is responsible or wants to make a decision.)

If a person is not a customer any enquires made for information is not recorded and they won't give a receipt of contact.

Rev. Mark Bateman from Chaplaincy
Australia and I discussed this on his visit
Queanbeyan and he said he has come across
much complaint from farmers across Victoria.
It is often said Staff are inflexible and don't
care.

Many problems exist the best solution would
be to take drought assistance away from
centrelink.(I gave examples of alternatives)
I have had discussions :

The Salvation army

St Vincent de Paul.

Angelar care.

(I feel Drought assistance or help shouldn't
fall on the shouders of charitys.)

Many discussions with the C.W.A. Who
distributed the assistance from the
government and woolworths.(A good job was
done my only concern was that unpaid
invoices had to be submitted people wanting
food had no access(Woolworths money was
distributed using vouchers.)

The N.S.W.Rural assistance authority was
easily approached and handled matters in a

quick and business like manner.

The N.S.W. Farmers were more interested in doing their own thing.

Beyond Blue the office in Melbourne was most helpful and sent me material to distribute.

The Canberra office was unhelpful and not the type of environment a very depressed person would feel comfortable looking for help.

The Rural councilors office Cooma has had some staffing problems on one occasion the wrong advice was given but wouldn't admit to such or supply details that an error had occurred.

I have corresponded with Former Minister McGauran and spoke to many of his staff in both his office and within the department.

He was most greatfull to have had certain things brought to his attention as he thought things were administered differently than what was happening.

I have corresponded with the Newly appointed Minister Mr Tony Burke as early as

29th January 2008 to keep him informed and update him of my dealing on certain matters with the out going Minister.

On the 15th May 2008 forwarded more material to the Minister and now in August 2008 not even an reply.

I have spoken to staff in his office who have given undertakens to have somebody ring back of forward me information or look into certain matters and follow up on certain things.

One girl told me the Minister couldn't do any think about drought relief it was up to Centrelink(I told her I thought the

Government run the country not Centrelink)

I have asked on behalf of some friends to have a meeting with the Minister and that was agreed to and date would be set and I would be let know and I haven't been informed.

One would have to wonder if the messages are being passed to the Minister. And who is dealing with his correspondance.

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WHEN THERE IS PROSPERITY IN THE FARMING SECTION FARMERS SPEND MONEY AND THAT WHAT KEEPS THE COUNTRY TOWNS VIABLE. AND THE PEOPLE WILL BE HEALTHY WEALTHY AND HAPPY.

THE MEMBERS OF THE PANEL.

I have noticed all the members of the panel have held prominent positions within their own organizations which have had access to Governments over the years

While they have been on watch there has been marked decline in the rural areas.

Time is almost up for country people with the next generation conspicuous by their absence.

If this review along with others don't get it right the family farm will disappear.

Corporate farming won't be able to find the man power to carry on operations.