

Following up from the Productivity Commission's roundtable meeting in Roma today, I would just like to forward some of my comments for consideration.

Please be advised that these are my personal views and do not reflect the views of my employer.

Point form of my summary discussion points:-

- Policy conflicts that result due to recommendations of the report should be avoided where possible, this is both across federal government policy as well as between tiers of government ie state and regional governments. In the same vein, efforts to reduce or eliminate current policy conflicts with respect to Drought policy should be pursued.
- Processes to build resilience in businesses susceptible to the negative impacts of extreme climate variability should help people understand and quantify the "Vulnerability" of their enterprise capital (social, financial, environmental etc) to such risks is important. Through awareness of ones' capital mix that may or may not be susceptible to the impacts of extreme weather events, capacity to adapt and better manage change and associated risks is improved or more effectively focused on those parts of the mix which need it most – the most limiting factors. (Current work from Dr Rohan Nelson, CSIRO is promising on this front but investment in the deployment and building capacity of personelle to assist in delivery of this type of approach is a key risk for this research in terms of it leading to effective adoption by the grass roots enterprises it is aimed at.)
- Criteria associated with the definition of drought needs to be clear and objective. The extent to which land capability and land condition assessment criteria may assist in a separation of weather events and management impacts on a landscape could be further investigated. If this type of approach was adopted in some form in drought policy, complementary measures towards ensuring that this was an industry derived metric that could be applied within a landscape could greatly enhance the degree to which eligibility for support or targeting for areas of extension could be determined.
- Resourcing and investment in extension services/personelle through multi agencies – not just state government DPI's etc. Innovation in agricultural extension does exist in the private sector and/or community organization such as producer co-operatives, catchment management, regional NRM bodies etc. Funding uncertainties can undermine the stability of staff in these roles in regional and rural areas. The influence of government in providing opportunities to also build resilience into these associated support agencies that help deliver public good objectives such as improved natural resource management could see many more multiple outcomes that improve the resilience of agriculture and rural communities.
- Agricultural extension expertise is diminishing at a significant rate without defined opportunities for the next generation to gain from the decades of experience and expertise which is/has retired from the front line of agriculture. Succession in agricultural extension is done poorly with opportunities for mentoring, particularly staff in isolated locations and/or in different agencies/businesses, very rarely recognized nor seen as a possibility that requires investment and support. The industry as a whole loses this knowledge when an extension officer retires, not just that particular region where an extension officer serviced, but across that industry sector where they have developed specialized skills/expertise. This reduces the opportunities for agriculture to build resilience, in particular the next generation of primary producers and land managers as knowledge is lost.
- As a complementary measure, the emergence of "Ecosystem Services" and identification of the role of market based instruments (MBIs) to foster stewardship of our landscapes where the opportunity exists could be considered as an approach to assist in building resilience in agriculture. Not all landscapes are viewed equally, and ensuring that metrics to assess and quantify the values in our landscapes which require public investment to support private management is an opportunity for investment that could deliver multiple outcomes to the community and the landholder. Building capacity of landholders to understand and participate in these types of programs could be enhanced, as well as the capacity for these MBIs to be deployed by various agencies.

- More emphasis for agricultural industry research and development to have on ground links with producers to enhance adoption. This would help mobilize practice change towards current recommended practice by landholders, due to increased ownership of the research. This would also be a step towards building resilience across all aspects of an agricultural businesses' capital base as the capacity to interact with and respond to research is improved. This may include mandatory deployment strategies as part of research projects that have investment that links to extension providers more formally through existing networks eg NRM, Co-ops etc. Research for improved agricultural practices and management should also where possible ensure economic assessment of viability for adoption of practice is included as part of the project.

Once again, thank the Productivity Commission for making the time to come to Roma, we do appreciate this opportunity to meet face to face on this issue.

Kind Regards

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