

Northern Yorke Drought Taskforce response to the Drought Review

Summary

The taskforce is generally supportive of the recommendations from the Productivity Commission and the Social Expert Panel. There are a number of issues including the review of the tax system that seemed to have been overlooked in this paper. The taskforce has provided comments below to support this.

The focus on the support of farming families, farming families and farming communities rather than declarations and lines on maps should result in better outcomes for farming families and communities.

The taskforce is encouraged by the Agricultural Ministers statement recognising the important role of farmers as the nation's food producers and the focus on building policies and programs that support long term sustainability and resilience in farming businesses and communities.

The detail of future support is not clear and is therefore hard for the Northern Yorke Taskforce to assess with lack of detail on future drought support – however the taskforce is supportive of assistance packages for producers to adapt and adjust to climate variability and climate change and support that encourages primary producers to adopt self-reliant approaches to managing risks. The taskforce supports the proposal that a level of mutual responsibility be attached to support programs

A greater focus is required in the area of research, development and extension and the taskforce supports the notion that significant public funding should be directed to research, development and extension to assist farmers prepare for, manage, and recover from the impacts of climate variability and change.

The transition from existing policies to the new program needs to be timely and without confusion, all aspects of the farming business from farmers to financiers will need to be confident and prepared for this transition. There should be no gaps in support or overlapping of programs.

Investment/Tax incentives

The drought taskforce recommends that there be a review of the taxation system for agriculture and implement taxation measures that make investment more attractive and easier e.g. Depreciation schedules accelerated for Infrastructure, Stamp Duty. Compared with forestry 110%

That a Super type scheme be implemented that has increased tax incentives in order to support intergenerational shifts in business.

Recommend a Drought bonds program introduced that can be drawn on during drought. This should be in addition to Farm Management Deposit and viewed as a risk management strategy with distinct tax advantages.

Business Management / Planning

The drought taskforce supports the development of farm business plans and encourages the concept that business plans be a requirement to access future support.

The plans should aim to

- Build the business capacity,
- Encourage and foster better business managers as they support the future of farming and agriculture.
- Implement a risk management approach to business and develop and invest in risk management tools.

Preparedness Measures could include;

Develop and promote case studies as best practice, identify key success factors. Financial Support is given to develop a broad based risk management response. Encouragement and assistance to implement sustainable farming systems, so effects of drought are reduced.

Support for Enterprise changes at farm business level, support to include skills and infrastructure changes.

Support for Enterprise change at whole of farming sector level and planning programs (need to move whole sector forward, not just one section)

Incentive based encouragement

- Incentives for investment in innovativeness, to value add, be sustainable, skill development and training and implementing research.
- Incentives for NRM in good times, encouraging and recognising retrospective activities and could be done through grants or taxation.
- Exit support to allow people to leave with dignity, to include incentives to retrain or acquire employment.

Training and Education

- Increased support for higher education, and continued investment in education and training. Consideration is given to easing the criteria for youth allowance rural students.
- Support continuous training in agriculture through a variety of learning modes, eg small groups, Tafe, Uni's etc

Response Support

The taskforce acknowledges the progress has been made; we are now better at recognising the social aspects of drought e.g. Mental health and have improved access to resources. Future support needs also to recognise the needs of women, young people and children in times of drought.

- Support the early coordination of drought response
- Encourages a Multi discipline approach, health, Centrelink and Counselling
- Supports the clear pathways for referral of services and information.
- Supports modest capacity building for mental health in rural and remote communities, supports timely early intervention approaches, and dependable mental illness treatment and recovery services
- Encourages programs that create resilience in young people.

Longevity of drought. The taskforce supports the weaknesses in the crises model and recommends that it be adjusted to focus on investing in longer term response.

Community Support

The taskforce supports the recommendation that will ensure support of community development initiatives reinforce social changes that will endure. Community development initiatives should have clear objectives aimed at linking farm families and rural communities with various human service providers and/or facilitate clear referral

- Recognise need for community support through small infrastructure support, eg community grants are the grease that makes community work
- Support development of Community Leadership
- Strong networks supported, not necessary group based, encourage connectedness.

The taskforce support for the following recommendations

- Develop policies and initiatives to address trade and other professional skills shortages in farm families and rural communities underpinned by regional-specific research on the location, extent and impact of skill shortages.
- A formative evaluation of the Drought Force program, as well as other employment programs, to encourage people to remain in their local community.
- Promote and educate people on the rewards and risks associated with careers in agriculture and other rural industries.

Supports a Regional Peak Committee

- Importance of having a regional structure in place to enable good coordination, recognise the need for representation and having the right people that are committed and such a group needs to be enduring and supported.
- Each region to have a leadership group that meets regularly (not issue specific)
- Enduring committee ready to activate during events – independent of Government, but working closely with government, led from within the community