

Rangelands Drought Taskforce response to the Drought Review

Summary

The taskforce is cautiously supportive of the recommendations from the Productivity Commission and the Social Expert Panel. In its original submission the taskforce suggested; that future government policies should be guided by the underlying principles

- policies do not distort existing market forces,
- that they support a viable pastoral industry and viable outback community businesses
- Assist in developing a broader base of economic activity in rural regional and remote areas
- Encourage a sustainable balance between Natural Resources and economic development
- Recognise the importance of supporting vibrant and sustainable communities to deal with needs of the region.
- Income support for families is retained in a basic safety net system.

The focus on the support of farming families, farming businesses and farming communities rather than declarations and lines on maps should result in better outcomes and the taskforce having had difficulty in providing the data required supports this recommendation.

The taskforce is encouraged by the Agricultural Ministers Recognition of 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.

General support is given to the proposal of assistance packages for producers to adapt and adjust to climate variability and climate change and that encourage 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. The taskforce encourages the implementation of policies that reduce the impediments to succession planning.

A greater focus is required in the area of research, development and extension and supports the notions 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 taskforce recommends that a particular focus be on alternatives and opportunities in carbon trading and broad assistance for diversifying.

The Rangelands would like consideration to be given to raising the cap for assistance in the pastoral area to \$5 million with a phase out at \$6 million in recognition of the difference in the size of properties to dryland farming.

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

The taskforce recommends the following Support measures:

- Strategies that allow diversification of businesses, investment in good years
- Support for structural change during good years
- Training for land managers in better pastoral management, business management, best practice measures, benchmarking, challenge current thinking
- Support for value adding into the food chain to maximize production returns
- Improve monitoring capabilities to increase data collection, e.g. weather monitoring points
- Ongoing support for programs that assist in reducing impact of drought, e.g. pest management in outback.

Facilitate Regional Restructure and “Rethink”

- Review of sustainability across all industries
- Development of sustainable systems/options
- Development of alternative enterprises, eg. Stewardship, management for conservation
- Encourage private and corporate investment in pastoral properties.
- Utilise existing community structures to develop regional peak community groups, these need to be enduring with a mix of community leaders, independent of Government but given some support by government.
- Life after farming be promoted, and challenge community perceptions. Promote custodianship
- To enable a sustainable agriculture industry to be maintained in regional Australia the supporting infrastructure needs to be upgraded and maintained
- Equity and access to services continue to be issues that challenge and impede the pastoralists in the Rangelands.