

SUBMISSION TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

17-12-08

To whom it may concern.

Thank you for the work already done and for the opportunity to respond. Since the beginning of this drought, together with another in the district we have been in the front line of organising meetings in our district with centerlink, social workers and dept.of Ag officers to inform people of the assistance available and since then have been involved with the RLPB, ENRAC and liased with politicians and with affected producers in an unofficial way.

Before the election I rang Mr. Burkes office to enquire as to their policy should they win the election. I was told that they were going to **help us adapt to climate change**. My reply was, "**How are we going to do that until we get over this drought.**" While basically nothing seems to have changed I would like to address a few issues.

Preparedness for drought. /Adaption to Climate Change.

While this area has experienced drought before, the duration has only been a couple of years and we have always had provision for that. As always in a dry time we sold all cattle in the first year and fed ewes with stored grain. No one at that time was forecasting an ongoing drought. We continued to feed for a couple of years after that but it became evident that we could not continue and reduced sheep numbers and stopped feeding.

Pre drought, in an attempt to diversify, increase productivity and to drought proof ourselves we bought a property in a grain growing area not knowing that it too would be drought affected in later years.

During this time we **have** begun adapting to climate change. Mother nature is a great educator. We have

Sold all cattle

Reduced sheep numbers

Commenced rotational grazing

Changed the breeding line to a line that is better at food conversion

Increased lambing percentages due to the more robust sheep line therefore enabling us to sell excess stock

Share farmed the grain property to reduce risk and

Sunk a bore to pump water to troughs

Recovery

Having implemented these initiatives we still have a long way to go.
We all know what happens when infrastructure runs down.
The most important and most expensive items will be:

The restoration of our pastures with drought tolerant grasses.

Application of fertilisers

The re planting of trees lost during the drought,

Land care work (fencing off gullies and creeks.) addressed in last submission

Sheep yards, sheds, fencing and other infrastructure needs to be maintained

We cannot afford to do these while continuing to meet other commitments.

Drought Assistance

The assistance has been of immense help.

I noticed in the last quarter that had it not been for agriculture the nation would have slipped into recession. Does not this say something about the importance of agriculture?

Agriculture has been in recession during this drought and we have been assisted. That has been great. Now that the nation is in danger of going into recession, bucket loads of money is being poured into the economy and we do not hear anyone complaining and we recognise the importance of this cash flow to the economy. We do not hear anyone complaining that the producer of "Australia" recieved forty percent of a hundred and fifty million to make his movie and yet for those producing food for the nation and trying to protect the environment, it is not considered necessary to assist them to recover from these disasterous years beyond providing someone with a job to tell us what to do. We have one son who has a degree in agriculture, is a consultant in animal nutrition another who has done farm management and another who is a plant mechanic. All sadly now work off farm. These young men and many like them also have skills and knowledge that have been passed down several generations. Knowledge that cannot be learned from a text book. Are they going to be lost forever?

We have had a block of land on the market which failed to get a bid at auction and very little interest since. Two other properties in the district also failed to get a bid. This is in an area relatively close to cities. **Has anyone considered the impact that the withdrawl of financial assistance to agriculture is going to have on the economy?** The number of rural properties on the market state wide that are failing to attract interest is frightening. With some form of continued financial assistance coupled with the lower interest rates we feel that many of these viable farms would be able to move forward.

Should all financial assistance be stopped, then the word that most use to describe the situation is "scarey" We feel that we are at a cross roads for agriculture. Those of you who are making the decisions can either make or break agriculture. I do not envy you making the decision.

FMD's

We have not had had money in FMD's as once we completed school fees we started paying into superanuation however that has been put on hold during this time.

It appears that in the past the grain growers have had more opportunity to invest in FMD's than grazing families. We find it appaling if people have not utilised these deposits and instead have claimed assistance.

Succession Plan

A succession plan has been in place but has had to be deferred because of inability to contribute to superanuation during the last eight years,

Food Security

Is food security important to our nation? It is to European nations who after the war said they would never go hungry again. They now value their farmers and support them. Are we going to support them further by either importing their produce or importing from countries where quality control is questionable to say the least? We are an island and that has advantages as far as disease is concerned but has a disadvantage in that should shipping lanes be disrupted and we are relying on imported produce at a time when there is a world food shortage then we are in trouble.

**Question Do australians want disease free food?
Are Australians farmers valued?
Do Australians want Agriculture in Australia?**

Thank you for your interest and time spent on this commission

GJ & PC Hallam (Lexo P/L)

