



ABN 91323005375

## ***Catholic Women's League Australia Inc***

Member Organisation of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO)  
NGO Consultant (roster) status with the Economics and Social Council of the United Nations

### ***"Behold the Miracle of Creation"***

---

#### **Submission from Catholic Women's League Australia**

#### **Future Drought Fund Bill 2018 and Future Drought Fund (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2018**

**January 2019**

**"He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water,  
He brought water for you, out of the rock of flint".  
Deuteronomy 8:15**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Catholic Women's League Australia Inc. (CWLA) is the national peak body representing the League's six member organisations located throughout Australia. We are a Non-Government Organisation and have consultative (roster) status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. We are also a member of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO). One of CWLA's four principle aims is to influence legislative and administrative bodies at all levels of government in order to preserve the dignity of the human person. Many of the members of the CWLA live in regional areas and thus we feel a strong empathy for all Australian farmers throughout this country. We therefore

take this opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry Future Drought Fund Bill 2018 and Future Drought Fund (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2018.

## **2. Catholic Social Teachings**

The CWLA Inc. looks to the Catholic Church's social teaching, which we believe to be a rich source of wisdom and guidance about building a just society and living an ethical life amidst the challenges of modern society. Our social teachings are articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. One important social teaching theme relates to that of the Common Good, which can be explained as "the principle of the common good, to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning, stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people". According to its primary and broadly accepted sense, the common good indicates "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily"<sup>i</sup>. We believe that this principle of Common Good drives our approach towards supporting Australian farmers in this country. We need to focus not only on our own issues in life but on those that affects others, which in this case are Australian farmers. The impact of the drought on the farmers has been devastating and has a long term impact on all Australians. This is reflected in increasing scarcity of resources, as well as increase in prices for goods produced by farmers.

## **3. Human Rights Framework**

The situation with regards to the drought relates to two particular human rights issues: the right to food as well as the right to employment or a livelihood. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at Article 25(1) states that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food". A similar provision is provided in Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

Article 23(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment”. There is a similar provision in Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The onset of drought results in conditions that make it increasingly problematic for farmers to produce food as well as to continue to enjoy their chosen employment of working as farmers. Thus, the right to food is one that affects every Australian, not just the people who produce our food. It is therefore something that has the potential to impact the life of every Australian.

#### **4. The Situation in Relation to Australia’s Drought Situation**

It is evident that the situation in Australia with regards to drought conditions is progressively getting worse. The following article highlights the features of the drought in this country:

This winter was Australia's fifth-warmest winter on record when looking at daytime temperatures, according to the Bureau of Meteorology's winter summary released today. Rainfall was below average, particularly in New South Wales, where it was the eighth-driest winter on record and the driest since 2002. Senior climatologist Blair Trewin said winter was just the latest in a sequence of dry seasons for NSW.

"If we had just had the eighth-driest winter on record on its own and conditions had been okay before that, it wouldn't have anywhere near the impact we are seeing," Dr Trewin said.

"If you look at a slightly longer time range, it has been the driest year to date for NSW since 1965.

"There are areas inland, particularly in the western part of the state, which have had their driest January to August on record."

It has not just been a dry year to date — it has been hot too.

"Nationally, daytime temperatures for the year-to-date are running at their highest on record, at about 1.3 degrees above the long-term average," Dr Trewin said<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-03/warm-and-dry-winter-for-nsw/10188560>

The most obvious victims of the drought are Australian farmers. And it is evident that they need all the support they can get from fellow Australians.

The personal stories that have been reported by the media evidence the human suffering that lies behind the drought, and the human suffering that it creates throughout regional Australia, as described in the article below:

The price of grain is rising. The price of stock is falling. Everywhere is dust, and the trees are dying. You don't hear frogs any more.

South-east Australia is in the grip of a drought worse than many can remember.

Last month was the second-hottest July on record, and the driest since 2002. It continued a 15-month run of below-average rainfall across New South Wales, central Queensland, the north-west of Victoria and into South Australia.

Here, those on the land – cattle farmers, grain growers and others living through the drought – share their stories of anxiety, fear and resilience.

**Lindy Piper, sheep farmer from Coolah, NSW**

*I have lived here since 1982 and there have been some very tough times and droughts, but this is by far the worst I have ever seen our farm. What concerns me most is the widespread nature of it – from where are we to source grain even if we can afford it? We had no harvest last year and none this year along with most other farmers in south-east Australia.*

*We, my husband and kids and I, have worked very hard all our working lives to improve the land and our sheep enterprise. It is very hard to see the state of the land now. Many farmers cannot take a break because of the constant feeding of stock and are pretty exhausted<sup>2</sup>.*

---

<sup>2</sup> < <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/aug/04/australias-drought-crisis-and-farmers-stories-of-anxiety-fear-and-resilience>> last viewed at 28 December 2018.

## 5. Drought Fund

Reports in the media have detailed the plans that the Australian government have with regards to creating a Drought Fund.

The \$5-billion Future Drought Fund will be announced at a national drought summit, which brings together state and federal governments, weather experts, farm lobbyists and charities, in Canberra.

### **Key points:**

The Federal Government will commit an initial \$3.9 billion to the fund, with \$100 million to be available each year from 2020

Money will be provided for community services, research, technology and infrastructure

Legislation to create the fund will need to pass Parliament

The Federal Government will initially commit \$3.9 billion to the fund, which will reach \$5 billion by 2028.

But only \$100 million will be available each year from 2020, with that money being allocated by a board of guardians.

"This funding will support farmers and their local communities when it's not raining," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said.

"It guarantees drought support for the men and women who drive our nation."

Legislation to create the fund will have to pass the Parliament before it can be created.

Provided that happens, the interest gathered from the fund will go towards water infrastructure and drought resilience projects.

The focus will be on farmers, non-government organisations and communities to future-proof themselves to better handle droughts.

Money will be for community services, research, adoption of technology and infrastructure that supports long-term sustainability.

Money for the drought fund, which is modelled on the Medical Research Future Fund, will come from the Building Australia Fund, which has sat dormant since the 2014-15 financial year.

With a focus on future-proofing, it means the fund will sit separate to existing projects and funding that helps farmers when they are in drought.

"The challenges of drought vary from farm to farm, district to district, town to town and we continually need to adapt and build capacity," Mr Morrison said<sup>3</sup>.

It is evident that the purpose of the drought fund is to provide some preventative action to prepare and support farmers when drought conditions prevail. Rather than be reactive to drought this approach ensures that if a drought conditions strike that the funds are already there to provide farmers with the support that they need. Given our experience to date, this appears to be a sensible and precautionous approach to the real probability of this country experiencing even more droughts in the future.

## **6. Recommendations**

Considering the circumstances of the drought, the effects it is having on our farmers and their families as well as the consequences of the drought on our food supplies, it is evident that positive action needs to be taken to address the situation. Farmers need relief from these conditions but we need to find a way that is not solely reactive but also proactive. Funds should be provided to resolve the drought effects in Australia but we need to think towards the future and how we can take preventative action to support similar conditions if they should arise in the future. In a country such as Australia where droughts have occurred in the past with increased frequency it is evident that the likelihood of this situation reoccurring in the future is high.

---

<sup>3</sup> < <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-26/billion-dollar-drought-fund-to-support-farmers/10430148> > last viewed at 3 January 2019.

Thus, creating a Future Drought Fund is, in our opinion, a good idea. It will provide support for farmers in the future when droughts occur and a certain level of reassurance that farmers will not be facing this situation in isolation. The effects of droughts are far-reaching and touch the lives of each and every Australian. It is therefore incumbent on each one of us to contribute to this fund through our taxes and ensure that the farmers can continue to receive the support that they both deserve and need.

We wish the committee every success in its deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Valma Ivory

President

Catholic Women's League Australia Inc.