

# Inquiry into the role of government in assisting Australian farmers to adapt to the impacts of climate change

## Submission by South West Climate Change Forum

SUBMISSION NO: 6

**Summary** – It is important that all levels of Government understand the impacts of climate change. It is equally important for all levels of government to empower farmers, farmer based organisations and their networks to work together with all levels of government by:-

- Providing suitably qualified and experienced personnel and resources to focus on suitable climate change adaptation strategies and activities;
- Integrating climate change adaptation strategies as a necessary part of organisational planning and decision making processes and activities
- Ensuring all levels of Government are united, educated and equipped to assist and empower the farming community with climate change information and support mechanisms;
- Identifying local issues with farmers and farmer networks to offer the appropriate level of support by the appropriate level of government. E.g.: local, regional, state and federal Government;
- Actively seeking and empowering the development and provision of solutions and support with a continual monitoring, evaluation and improvement program;
- Developing and offering meaningful support and solutions to other farmers and farmer stakeholder networks and;
- Seek to provide relevant research, development and demonstrations into mitigation and adaptation at a regional level and provide the necessary extension needed to get the practical application out to farmers

A network in south west Victoria called the South West Climate Change Forum have developed a model to assist the rural community, including farmers and farmer networks with the aim to achieve such outcomes. The success of the group has resulted in the integration of the SWCCF to inform and work with local, regional and state government departments and authorities to commence and progress climate change adaptation strategies throughout Victoria's South West.

The SWCCF model as a trusted source is well documented and may be used to assist Government and other regional communities to develop their model to integrate climate change adaption into their representative organisations and farming communities.

### Background

- The South West Climate Change Forum was voluntarily formed in August 2007 to help south-west Victorian primary producers adapt and prepare for changes in climate and climate variability.
- The Forum membership consists of a unique group of agricultural industry and planning groups including the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority, Department of Primary Industries, Wannon Water, South West Sustainability Partnership, Barwon South West Rural Women's Reference Group, Southern Farming Systems, WestVic Dairy, Seafood Industry Victoria, Green Triangle Regional Plantation Committee and Central Highlands Agribusiness Forum.
- The Forum is recognised and supported by Local, State and Federal Government organisations including Shires in the South West Region, the Department of Primary Industries (Victorian Climate Change Adaption Program-VCCAP), the Department of Planning and Community Development, the Dept of Human Services through the three Primary Care Partnerships in the region, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Deakin University, SW TAFE, CSIRO, the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), Land and Water Australia, the Bureau of Rural Studies and Primary Industry Research and Development Organisations.

(Refer to Network Diagram below)

- The task of the South West Climate Change Forum is to collect, collate, analyse and disseminate consistent and credible messages on climate change, thereby ensuring the primary production sector has access to the

most up to date and relevant data for their specific operation. This data includes R & D from its member groups and VCCAP. The outcome of this task is to also reduce confusion and misinformation in the region.

- The structure of the South West Climate Change Forum enables it to respond and act with the speed, agility and adaptability needed for it to keep abreast of changes related to climate change and to achieve its goals.
- Funding from the Department of Fisheries and Forestry in 2007, allowed the Forum to deliver a start up project with a range of funding avenues since aiding the roll out of activities to farmers and rural communities.

### **Activities Undertaken**

Development of a whole of community approach to reaching farmers and farmer networks has been undertaken and includes:-

- The development of a regional and primary industry specific database – using reputable research and information (VCCAP, CSIRO, etc) as basis for the trusted and reliable information source
- Engagement at community level – schools, community groups and individuals in a project which gets people to share what their thoughts on climate change will mean to their lifestyle, rural business and community through photography and discussion.
- Engagement at service provider level – agronomists, stock agents, merchandisers, vets etc who interact with farmers on a day to day basis. This has included seminars, workshops and newsletters which have been well supported. This helps to ensure consistent messages about climate change adaptation & mitigation in the region
- Interaction at farmer level by going to where farmers gather at field days and through producer based networks already established. This has included talking to them one on one or small groups and providing printed information.
- Undertaking a communication campaign across the board using our website, newsletters, print & radio to deliver messages on climate change and opportunities to find out more.

### **Results**

The SWCCF has become a trusted source for farmers and government bodies alike. It is also considered a catalyst and an excellent vehicle for stakeholders, including climate change researchers, to reach the rural sector of the community. Since August 2007, the SWCCF has:-

- Achieved a strong profile in south west Victoria.
- Developed extensive networking and support from partners; agencies and groups who now make contact with the SWCCF before developing or embarking on delivery of programs and projects into the region to farmers with a climate change element. This is aiding in more partnerships being developed between groups, more even spread of activities and better advertising and knowledge of projects and programs.
- Reached over 8,000 farmers, foresters and fishermen with climate information specific to their needs
- Supported & developed partnerships to deliver projects & information from a wide range of sectors including health and the Country Fire Authority and this depth of networking is beyond that of many agencies and groups.
- Received initial start up funding of \$120,000 DAFF 07/08 & hope to get further funds via FarmReady round 1 in 2009.
- Built on the achievements from the 07/08 projects resulting in a further \$42,000 invested in the Forum by local agencies & groups in partnership to deliver projects in last 6 months.

More recently, the SWCCF has been invited to join the Barwon South West Regional Managers Forum Climate Change Working Group under the direction of the Victorian State Government Ministerial Taskforce and Interdepartmental Committee (IDC), recognising the importance of this group in assisting a whole of government approach to tackling climate change throughout the region.

## Conclusion

- Ground up approach works well in delivering information about climate change and managing climate variation. Industry based groups and networks can deliver climate change messages more efficiently and effectively as already have close contact with farmers and have developed a reputation as a reliable information source including strong results in regional research and development.
- There are already networks and industry groups in existence, with proven track records in engaging primary producers which need further government funding and continued support from government agencies to be effective in aiding the industry to deal with the physical, policy and peripheral effects that climate change and variability will bring.
- SWCCF provides a network model that can be replicated on the basis that many primary industries have similar issues regards water, soils, mitigation etc. With many farmer based groups only having a small staffing base, a regional representative group with staff devoted to working on climate change across a range of industries is very effective and supports a regional response and collaboration.
- A regional approach aids the coordination of activities and messages both across the region and between industries.

## Contacts

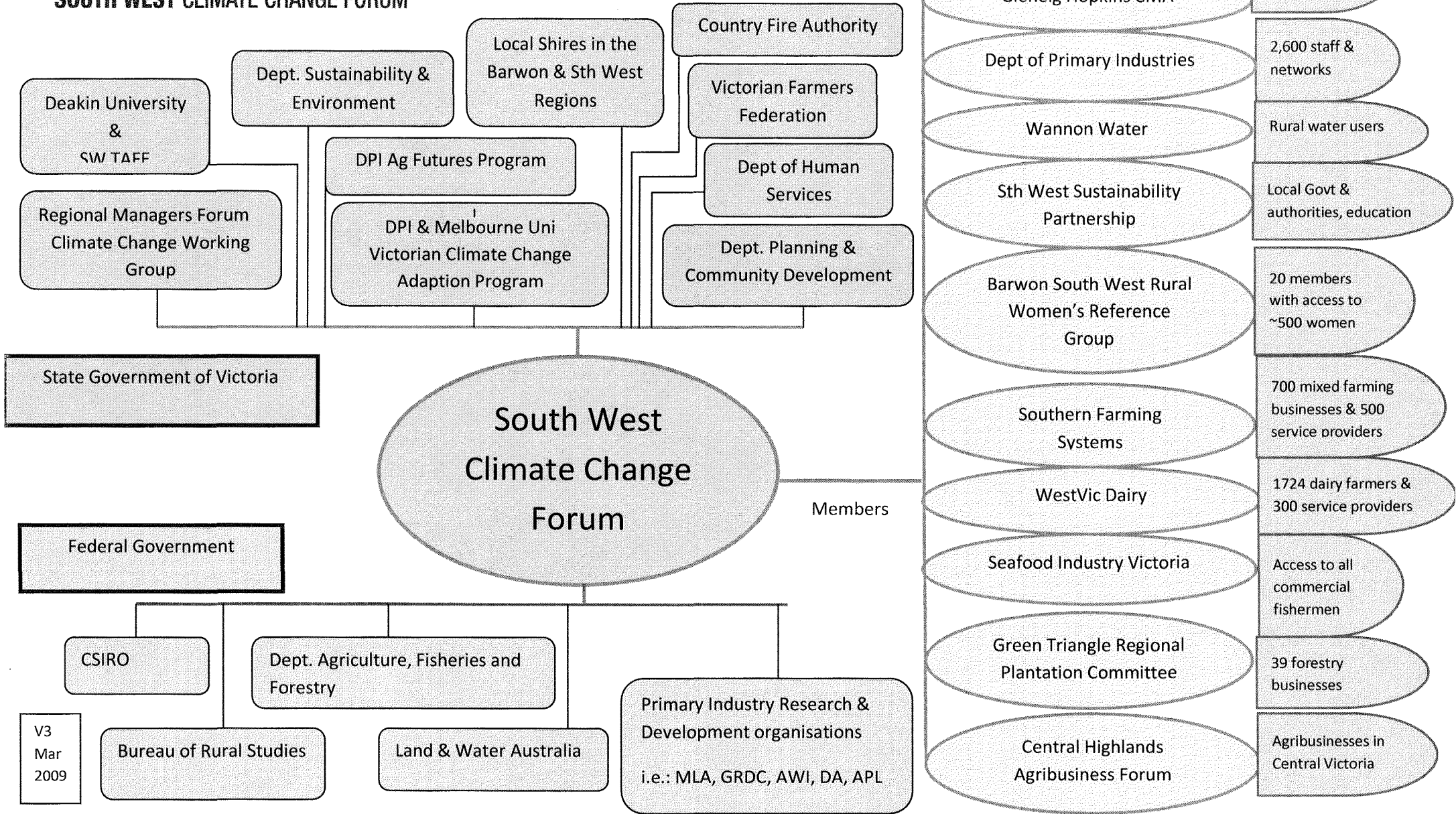
Chairman: Ron Page [ronpage@uprimus.com.au](mailto:ronpage@uprimus.com.au) 0419 306 482

Projects Manager: Karen Wales [Karen@swccf.com.au](mailto:Karen@swccf.com.au) 03 5562 0021 / 0408 998 244

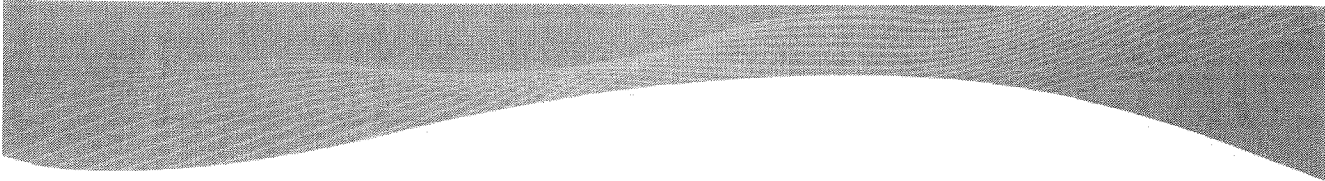
Website: [www.swccf.com.au](http://www.swccf.com.au)

Attachment: SWCCF Pilot Case Study July 2008. PDF

## Network Diagram







# SWCCF

## SOUTH WEST CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM

### Pilot Case Study

---

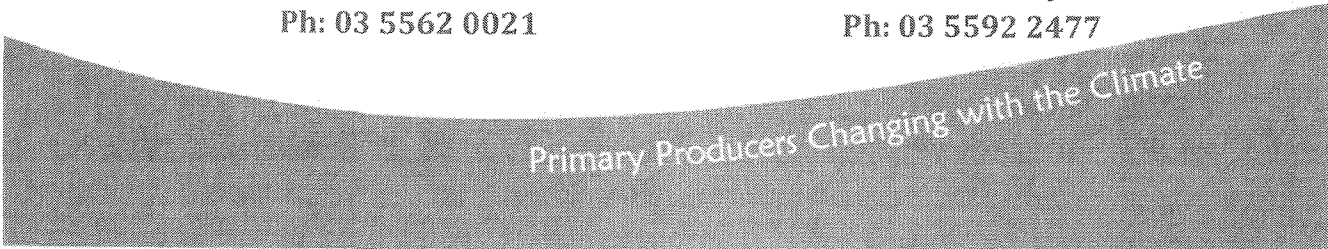
How, within nine months, a few passionate farmers, fishermen and foresters were chosen by State Government to be the regional lead agency working with primary producers on climate change because, they built a distribution system (the Forum) to provide 8,000 other producers with climate change information that they could understand and was regional and industry specific.

June 2008

---

Contacts: Karen Wales, Project Officer  
[karen@swccf.com.au](mailto:karen@swccf.com.au)  
Ph: 03 5562 0021

Mike Weise, Project Manager  
[Mike@westvicdairy.com.au](mailto:Mike@westvicdairy.com.au)  
Ph: 03 5592 2477



Primary Producers Changing with the Climate

## Executive Summary

South West Climate Change Forum (SWCCF) was established in August 2007 to provide a distribution system to link primary producers and their industries in the south west to context specific climate change information. The Forum designed and now operates a flexible delivery model that will remain relevant to the target audience over time as new climate change issues arise such as carbon trading schemes and policy changes.

This model of cross industry collaboration to collate and disseminate climate change information and coordinate activities and events has worked well. Industries and agencies have welcomed an independent and “neutral” body which was initiated and is driven by the grass root members. The strong outcome achieved by the Forum is a result of active networking and developing partnerships. The Forum has engaged directly with two thousand primary producers (25% of the total) and forty two different groups across south west Victoria. SWCCF has achieved the status of lead agency in the region through providing value to partners and only operating where genuine gaps in climate change services exist.

## SWCCF: Regional Action on Climate Change Steering Committee

WestVic Dairy	SWCCF Chairman	Ron Page
Southern Farming Systems	Committee Member	Mark McDonald
Seafood Industry Victoria	Committee Member	Andrew Levings
Green Triangle Reg. Plantation Comm.	Committee Member	John Kellas
Central Highlands Agribusiness Forum	Committee Member	Laurie Norman
Barwon SW Rural Women’s Ref. Group	Committee Members	Cath McFaul / Cath Jenkins
South West Sustainability Partnership	Committee Member	Barrie Baker
Glenelg Hopkins CMA	Committee Member	Richard Murphy
Corangamite CMA	Committee Member	Steve Cameron
Wannon Water	Committee Member	Brad Henderson
Dairy Australia	Committee Member	Cathy Phelps
WestVic Dairy	SWCCF Project Manager	Mike Weise
WestVic Dairy	SWCCF Project Officer	Karen Wales

## Background

The South West Climate Change Forum (SWCCF) evolved from discussions within the Western Victorian dairy industry about the lack of planning by dairy farmers for climate change. It was felt that this was due to the large range of often conflicting messages about climate change they had to process and what was available had no real regional or industry context. Other primary industry groups in the region and associated agencies were experiencing similar issues and the subsequent lack of action at the enterprise level. Many of the industry groups and authorities expressed an interest in forming a group to address this challenge.

Inquiries into what information were available led to contact with the Victorian Climate Change Adaption Project (VCCAP) run in conjunction by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and Melbourne University. VCCAP was looking for a focus region for research and to develop a relationship with groups representing many stakeholders. The formation of SWCCF helped VCCAP choose south west Victoria as its study region for modelling the biophysical, social, economic and policy aspects of climate change.

The first meeting of interested parties in June 2007 culminated in the formation of SWCCF. At the table was representation from water authorities, catchment management authorities, the main regional primary industries- dairy, seafood, timber, cropping and livestock -plus groups with an interest in sustainability. The group agreed that the aim of the Forum would be to collect and collate climate change data, analyse it and disseminate consistent messages back to rural Victorians in the south west.

In September 2007, SWCCF applied for funding from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to undertake a project with three principal aims:-

- ❖ Support the operations of the SWCCF in the establishment phase and provide an effective and coordinated facility to undertake activities to improve access to and development of regionally relevant understanding of climate change impacts;
- ❖ Promote cross-industry dialogue and planning to address both short-term responses and long-term planning issues associated with climate change, and
- ❖ Undertake a pilot case study for a regionally focused and cross industry collaborative approach to communicating climate change for potential replication in other agricultural regions nationally.

Since the Forum's inception, partnerships have developed with other groups managing drought recovery, rural health and community building initiatives that are now moving towards preparing their clients for the effects of climate change.



## Methodology

- Establish links with and develop a network of agencies and industry groups associated with primary producers to encourage consistent and regionally relevant climate change messages to be disseminated. Develop partnerships to deliver extension using established networks and publications.
- Contact all regional, state and national industry bodies and research and development agencies to source information already available that is applicable to regional industries and the region.
- Design, create and populate a database of climate change material that is relevant, regionally based and is delivered in the context required by the target audience.
- Research the format and delivery method required by primary producers for climate change information.
- Identify leaders and connections which influence primary producers; establish their climate change information needs and develop their capacity to determine the significance of climate change implications on their specialist area. Build leaders' confidence to share this knowledge with their colleagues, clients and associates.
- Identify key events which attract large numbers of your target audience in order to provide one on one interaction and distribution of climate change information
- Partner with organisations in your network and identify their events at which the Forum could add value and provide climate change / sustainability material.
- Develop a list of speakers with expertise on aspects of climate change and contacts who have access to suitable material, news and upcoming events. Publicise this resource to potential users.
- Establish a professional identity for the Forum by developing a logo, letterhead and a brochure on the groups aims and activities
- Collect documents and if necessary develop your own material to serve the audience's needs and distribute it at events and through established networks directly to the target audience.
- Develop a communication plan to include all written, spoken, and electronic interactions with your audience and maximise media opportunities to promote the Forum and involvement in events.
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan to manage performance.
- Develop and maintain a regional climate change website that provides browsers with the Forums outputs. Ensure it is regularly updated so remains relevant and topical with the evolution of the issues around climate change including the physical predictions, possible opportunities and adaptations plus appropriate policy changes and peripheral issues (i.e. market expectations).

## Results

Through a well planned development of networks (see diagram) and partnerships, the SWCCF has developed a reputation for achievement and credibility amongst primary producers and the wider community in south west Victoria. Of significance to the Forums success is the link to VCCAP for support and access to experts, data sources and research results. Partnering agencies have provided a connection with and membership of the Regional Managers Forum Climate Change Working Group\* which recommended that the Forum be viewed as the 'peak body' for the delivery of climate change information to primary industry in the region. This has encouraged agencies and groups to advise us of extension activities planned with climate change as a component. This allows for coordination to minimise duplication and provides opportunities for partnerships and synergies such as maximum utilisation of speakers and experts while in the region.

SWCCF has been successful in being able to directly speak to more than 500 primary producers at industry field days and more than 2,000 rural people connected to primary production through workshops and forums over a four month period. Leaders and service providers were identified and provided with information that has improved their capacity to talk about and consider the affects of climate change in their business and has provided legacy action.

With the use of articles, media (TV, radio and print) we estimate that information on climate change specific to the region and primary production has reached most primary producers in the south west.

A database, available on the website, has been created that allows access to regional and industry specific climate change information plus the latest relevant news and events to attend. This gateway makes it simple to search for climate change information, including practical adaptation advice, with all the links and data easily found. It is expected that the information provided to primary producers by SWCCF will lead to climate change factors being integrated into enterprise level planning and decision making.

Go to [www.swccf.com.au](http://www.swccf.com.au)

\*Regional Managers Forums (RMF) operate over six geographical areas in Victoria. The RMFs have been operating for three years aiming to facilitate cross-government working relationships. The role of the RMF is to add value, prevent duplication and ensure a government pathway through red tape (e.g. Exceptional Circumstances rate payments). The RMF is comprised of the executive directors (or equivalent) for each government dept (DPCD, DPI, DSE, DOECD, DOI, DHRD and DHS), the CEOs for each Local Government Authority, EPA, Vic Roads, VicPol (Justice), the two CFA regions and the CEO of G21.

## Key Findings

- Most government agencies and industry groups associated with primary production were looking for leadership on climate change and welcomed a grassroots driven organisation to take responsibility for the delivery of information to their members and stakeholders.
- A single entity collating and coordinating climate change information for primary producers that's relevant to the region and its primary industries provides a conduit for information and funding from government agencies. It helps minimise duplication, encourages cooperation and partnerships and creates a high profile hub for the members involved.
- SWCCF is viewed by stakeholders as agile, motivated and proactive which has contributed to the support the Forum has won.
- There was little primary industry specific information developed (in mid 2007) by industry groups at state and regional level which producers could access to obtain relevant information.
- Networking and partnering is a necessity to deliver events that attract participants
- There is a wide range of understanding amongst primary producers of how climate change may potentially influence their business. This includes knowledge of the predicted physical changes to climate (i.e.: warmer temperatures, changes in rainfall), policy decisions at state and federal level plus peripheral influences such as market forces (rising interest in carbon miles etc)
- Primary producers spoke to Forum members about their scepticism and confusion around climate change due to the number of inconsistent messages being received (mainly from the media). If one aspect didn't sound or feel right to them then it was easy to dismiss many of the messages about climate change as their framework for understanding wasn't complete.
- Even if primary producers are sceptical of the physical aspects, they acknowledge they will have to contend with the policy and peripheral aspects around climate change. They may position their businesses to adapt to these aspects in the near future once they are made aware of them, and then think through the options and opportunities and finally developed actions.
- Rural community leaders are already highly time committed and stated they prefer to obtain information on climate change through established networks & specifically targeted e-mails.
- Service providers (financiers, consultants, vets, agronomists etc) were looking for reliable information on climate change and often felt they knew as much or less than the farmers they were talking to on a daily basis. Two specific conferences for service providers and leaders were well received and attended (95 participants). A follow up survey a month after the conferences showed that 91% of respondents had since spoken to clients about climate change since and 64% had considered the effect of climate change on themselves personally and / or their business.

## Recommendations

- Recognise that the issues around climate change are rapidly evolving and therefore keep plans flexible and frame it as a journey not a destination.
- Plan for increasing demand for information as Emission Trading Schemes and policy developments come through. This will require a huge extension effort and groups such as SWCCF will be well placed to become the main distributor to primary producers in the region.
- Plan for the development of a database of all relevant field and laboratory R & D relevant to the audience and region. This would enhance extension of the results and centralise climate change and sustainability research and development information for primary production in the region.
- Network extensively across all main primary industries to understand their interest and need for forming a group to coordinate and collate climate change in regards to information, activities and events.
- Actively encourage involvement and support from water and natural resource management bodies, shires, regional agencies and other climate change groups who interact with your target audience.
- Share resources, minimise duplication and maximise the opportunity to deliver multiple outcomes and information by partnering with other groups for events. This way you do not compete for primary producers' time and increase the reasons for them to attend.
- Establish connections with climate change experts, researchers and agencies. Use their resources to help find data that is regional and relevant to either adapt or pass on unaltered.
- Develop your group's identity with an inexpensive logo, banner and letterhead. Print material for circulation at events onto letterhead so they can be easily fine tuned to the target audience and be updated as information evolves. This way you will not be left with large numbers of commercially printed handouts or brochures that could be obsolete within a few months.
- Produce regionally relevant, succinct and consistent messages for the main primary industries which include the predictions, likely impacts and opportunities from climate change plus possible adaptation strategies to manage the changes.
- Cover the policy and peripheral issues around climate change as primary producers may have to adapt to these before they have to adapt to the physical climate changes.
- Develop a website that provides the browser with industry specific, simply written relevant material. Update it regularly as material and news becomes available and advertise events to attend.
- Monitor and evaluate your progress to ensure you are on track and achieving the outcomes identified at the start. Review outcomes as the group evolves and audience needs change.

## Conclusion

With a few passionate visionary people who actively attract other like minded allies who want to encourage action on climate change, it is possible to develop and operate an organisation (the Forum) to deliver industry relevant, regional climate change information. The key is building relationships with groups and agencies that share your aims; can provide access to their resources and networks and are convinced you exist to help them get their results.