

Good afternoon,

The team at the Primary Industries and Natural Resources Curriculum Centre based in Orange NSW wish to submit the attached response to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee Inquiry into Climate Changes and the Australian Agricultural Sector.

Regards
Narelle

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Response to Senate Standing Committee in Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

Climate Change and the Australian Agriculture Sector

Terms of Reference

- i. the scientific evidence available on the likely future climate of Australia's key agricultural production zones, and its implications for current farm enterprises and possible future industries;
- ii. the need for a national strategy to assist Australian agricultural industries to adapt to climate change; and
- iii. the adequacy of existing drought assistance and exceptional circumstances programs to cope with long-term climactic changes.

This response reflects the collective thoughts of staff at the TAFE NSW Primary Industries and Natural Resources Curriculum Centre based in Orange. Input was captured from Lee Hedberg, Jenny Symons, Joan Tuckwell, Joanna Perrett, Julie Fleming and Narelle Campbell.

A general comment is that unlike floods, cyclones and bushfires that have a "wow" factor and capture media interest, the on-going drought due to climate change is a slow degeneration of conditions and falls from the spotlight very quickly. Unless the broader community is aware of the impact of Climate Change, very little empathy will be felt and less support given.

The majority of the Australian population lives on the Eastern seaboard and their limited concept of the drying due to climate change is the need to actually water the lawn. By contrast, for inland dwellers critical questions include how to feed stock, water citrus groves, plant crops and in essence, make a sustainable living off the land.

- i. the scientific evidence available on the likely future climate of Australia's key agricultural production zones, and its implications for current farm enterprises and possible future industries;

The group believes that existing scientific evidence is not readily available to the population generally and recommends that all available data be presented in Plain English. It should be easily understood and contain clear examples of the likely impact of Climate Change on the Agricultural Sector and the communities that support the sector.

- ii. the need for a national strategy to assist Australian agricultural industries to adapt to climate change;

The group believes that a national strategy is critical and that the following should be included in the strategy:

The Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative should be strengthened and extended to years 7 – 12 as well as post secondary education to provide current and future generations with appropriate skills and knowledge to manage and ideally minimise impact with the changes that are predicted. The Initiative should be mandatory and integrated at all levels.

Government assistance should be made readily available to increase the implementation of water efficiency uses including recycling of water in all urban areas: grey water re-use, rain water tanks, dual flush toilets.

Alternate energy sources such as solar and wind should be actively promoted with a view to widespread adoption. The lack of trained solar panel installers must be addressed to ensure ready implementation of alternate energy sources. Included in this initiative should be the retro-fitting of energy efficient lights and dual flush toilets etc to lessen the impact of Climate Change.

Targeted research should gather and provide meaningful data to producers and educators on climate change trends being experienced. The key outcome being the development of specific education programs to assist primary producers to cope with climate change. Such programs must develop the capacity to recognise the need to adopt different cropping regimes and overall, more sustainable farming practices.

Women's networks should be fostered and encouraged to support educational initiatives. Rural wives and partners have developed amazing networks that provide the skills and knowledge for survival. The Tarcutta "Desperate Farm Wives" have shown what can be achieved by sheer determination and foresight.

Contingency measures must be implemented for recovery following the drought when 'normal seasons' return. During the current extended drought many of the communities that support rural and regional Australia have experienced the loss of skilled tradesman to other sectors such as mining. These skills will be needed if Australian agriculture is to re-establish itself with or without climate change.

An increase in Extension services which are an integral mode of delivery to primary producers is required. The Catchment Management Authorities and Department of Primary Industry are providing climate change training to the early adopters. A more flexible approach to extension services that provides access for those who are totally absorbed in the daily tasks of watering and feeding livestock is essential.

Assistance for participants to travel to and from training events as well as the provision of child care are critical elements to ensure that no-one is excluded due to the cost of travel and need for child care.

A sustainable implementation plan that provides long-term support and guidance will be essential.

- iii. the adequacy of existing drought assistance and exceptional circumstances programs to cope with long-term climactic changes

While much of the current drought assistance is in the form of interest free loans, rural communities require more flexible conditions surrounding funding support. Bureaucracy associated with assistance is a disincentive for many desperate men and women who are battling to survive in the harsh reality of 6 – 7 years of drought with no resultant farm income.

Time and effort required to access initiatives such as the electricity payment scheme is excessive and must be facilitated and minimised. Examples abound of farmers giving up in following the application process resulting putting the paper work in a pile among the mounting unpaid bills.