



6 December 2018

Dry Conditions Working Group

Representatives from State Government and the State's agribusiness sectors attended the Dry Conditions Working Group on 22 November, 2018.

Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development, The Hon Tim Whetstone, chaired the meeting and opened by discussing his recent regional visits to Robertstown, Cowell and Arno Bay.

The Drought Summit on 26 October in Canberra elicited some good results for South Australia, including \$1 million each for 17 councils under the Drought Communities program, access to the new \$50 million On-Farm Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate Scheme, and more funding for mental health and wellbeing services and programs.

The Minister did note, however, that he had written to and would continue to discuss with Senator The Hon Bridget McKenzie, Federal Minister for Local Government, his request she give more consideration to extend the Drought Communities program to other council regions which are being impacted significantly by drought.

The latest season update from Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) noted daytime temperatures have been above average for the first two months of Spring and rainfall has been below to very below average for much of central and eastern South Australia.

Its report to the Working Group also noted that despite some patchy rainfall during October and November very dry conditions persisted across a large part of South Australia. Its forecast for December suggests above average temperatures and below-average rainfall.

Department of Environment and Water (DEW) spoke to the Working Group, providing latest advice on timing of future water allocations and changes to its abundant species programs.

SA Health spoke to a paper it submitted to the Working Group, outlining improvements to regional and rural mental health services and new grant programs from the local Suicide Prevention Networks and the Country SA Primary Health Network, that are in development.

Working Group members from Rural Business Support (RBS) and the Local Government Association also provided updates.

RBS reported that it's experiencing a 100% increase in its rural financial counselling services compared to same time last year, and that its efforts in delivering the CWA/Red Cross emergency assistance grants were working well.

RBS also discussed its proposal to expand its successful financial literacy program – Farm Strategic Review – to drought-affected producers across sectors. This program works to improve business acumen and support financial resilience and sustainability. RBS noted that it was in talks with



councils to seek their interest/support to consider including the program as part of the Drought Communities funding applications.

The LGA noted the Australian Local Government Association was hosting a conference in Alice Springs, with a discussion paper regarding the new Drought Communities program – and that on the agenda to be discussed was what grant activities/applications have worked and what haven't.

PIRSA provided an update on its communications with banks, and the Working Group held a general discussion regarding ways to share information and improve awareness around the range of activities and services currently available to drought affected primary producers, their families and communities.

The Group agreed to the following actions:

- LGA to distribute the ALGA Discussion Paper on the Drought Communities Program to Working Group, and write to its relevant member councils to encourage them to consider supporting the RBS proposal to expand its financial literacy program, as part of their Drought Communities Program.
- PIRSA to continue to work with RBS to monitor resources and address growing demand for rural financial counselling services.
- PIRSA to review its communication strategy for the Drought Response Program and ensure it is using multiple forms of information and multiple channels to improve awareness of services and support, including providing resources to share across stakeholder databases.
- PIRSA to share information regarding criteria and application guidelines for Suicide Prevention Network grants and Empowering Communities grants.
- DEW to provide a response to Minister's office regarding whether DEW will be using its Dry Allocation Framework should water allocations forecast drop.
- DEW to provide a response to SADA regarding its request to review licence fees.
- PIRSA and BOM to discuss potential role in identifying drought affected regions, including role of US's climate department NOAA.

Member organisations of the Working Group include:

- Primary Producers SA
- Grain Producers SA
- Livestock SA
- Pork SA
- South Australian Dairyfarmers' Association (SADA)
- Horticulture Coalition SA
- Rural Business Support
- Bureau of Meteorology
- Local Government Association
- Department of Primary Industries and Regions SA
- Department of Environment and Water
- Department of Human Services
- SA Health