



Submission from Uniting Church in
Australia, NSW/ACT Synod
Rural Ministries
to
Department of Primary Industries
re
NSW Government review of Drought
Policy

cross-cultural

local

outback and

world mission

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The following ideas are submitted for consideration by the NSW Government in future drought policy. Further details can be supplied by contacting any of the names at the end.

1. Farm Family Case Consultants

What is the problem?

There is a wide range of services available to farm families across whole of government, churches and NGOs. The wide range of services available are so scattered and specific that it is beyond the capacity or energy level of people in difficulties to pursue all the assistance needed or available. However the plethora of services can cause an overload for existing services who are trying to stay aware of all that is available and pass the information onto their clients even when it is beyond their existing frame of reference.

Who benefits?

Families directly impacted by changes in agriculture and climate.

Why is it not happening already?

The wide variety of services means that they are all concentrating on specific areas but there is no-one who has responsibility to case manage all the assistance that is available to farming families.

Recommendation:

This is not a new concept. In some areas, for example families with someone who has a mental illness, the whole family case management model has been working successfully. It is proposed that this model be extended to farming families.

Workers should be employed in a reasonable geographic area who have a broad knowledge of what is available in primary production, financial assistance, welfare services, education, emotion and spiritual etc. The focus for the role is in to help farming families manage change in the broader spectrum. They would not only have a whole of government approach but would also work with other service providers from church and non-government organisations. Deterioration of the situation for agricultural families means they needs more than financial help and this need is not being met by people who are restricted by narrow department parameters.

One of the functions of the role may also involve advocacy for the families.

The workers could be employed by a government department or the work could be tendered to other organisations.

2. Building on Community Strengths and Capacity

What is the problem?

As population in rural centers decreases many skills are lost to those who remain. For the survival of these communities it is vital that the skills base does not deteriorate to unsustainable levels.

Who benefits?

All those living in small rural communities and the surrounding areas. The program would be available to local government areas that are primarily rural focused and should be available to those who have a leadership role in a community organisation or local government or are wishing to increase their skills so that they can contribute more.

Why is it not happening already?

There are a number of programs that concentrate on various aspect of community life such as business or health, but there do not appear to be any programs that concentrate on building community capacity in both human and social capitals. This program would be broader than the traditional "Community Development Officer" role.

Recommendation:

The aim of this program would be to develop community leaders who have more skills in capacity building and maintaining resilience in the areas in which they live. It would bring together resources that look to build on community strengths and increase community capacities. It could be focused through local government and integrate other services available.

The model would be a proactive one and use an Asset Based Community Development approach.

Some examples of workshops that could be included are:

- Managing change in the rural environment
- Grant writing for small communities
- Communication
- Community development in the bush
- Men's wellbeing
- Women's wellbeing
- Flexible education opportunities when you live in the bush
- Cultural identity
- Leadership training and equipping

These skills should be delivered over a period of time and could be a combination of private study and group sessions.

Funding for the program should include travel for participants if needed as well as recompense for time spent in training.

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