

Media Release

Monday 29 September, 2008
PR/179/08



Rural mental health high on drought agenda

The NSW Farmers' Association says it's eagerly awaiting the release of the findings of the Federal Government's review of the social impacts of drought, with the Drought Expert Social Panel due to submit its report to Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Burke, tomorrow.

NSW Farmers' Association President Jock Laurie says the Association lodged a detailed submission in response to the social impact assessment, part of the national drought policy review.

"The Association has put forward a range of ideas aimed at addressing the ongoing challenges facing mental and physical health, families, education and training, community development and sustainability, employment and professional development and social support services," Mr Laurie said.

"Whilst many reviews of drought policies and programs have been held in the past, this is the first review that the Association is aware of that provides an opportunity to better understand, and seek to resolve, the often devastating impacts of drought from a social perspective," he said.

The issue of drought and mental health will also be discussed by the Association tomorrow, when the Rural Mental Health Network meets in Sydney.

The Rural Mental Health Network is a group of agencies and individuals who share a common goal to improve the mental health and the wellbeing of farmers and farming communities.

With the rate of suicide among farm workers more than double that of the rest of the population, the Network aims to identify practical solutions to help address the ongoing mental health crisis in rural communities.

"While recent rain has been a very welcome relief for some, the drought and high debt levels continue to contribute to the ongoing pressure faced by farmers," said Mr Laurie.

"While we look forward to the findings of the Drought Expert Social Panel and the drought policy review, the Rural Mental Health Network will continue its solutions-focused approach to helping rural communities," Mr Laurie concluded.

The Rural Mental Health Network will meet at the NSW Farmers' Association office at 66 Goulburn Street, Sydney, from 10am to 2pm tomorrow. Media are welcome to attend.

Contact:

Amanda Barwick (Media Manager) 0428 400 736

Ruth Redfern (Media Officer) 0429 990 218