

## Meeting Update - 2 May 2006

### Regional Snapshot

- Whilst there has been patchy rain across some regions of the state, seasonal conditions appear to be deteriorating in many areas, further extending the financial and emotional impacts of the current drought. However, farmers remain hopeful of an Autumn break.
  - 46% of the state is currently 'in drought'
  - 34% of the state is 'marginal'
  - 20% of the state is 'satisfactory'
- Increasing fuel prices and the NSW Government's removal of transport subsidies have been highlighted as key areas of concern across most regions of the state since the last meeting.

### Ongoing Challenges

- Improving access to rural mental health support services remains a key priority for the Network, with strong support for the continuation of the Rural Mental Health Support Line (1800 201 123) as a 'back-up' service 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Approximately half of the Exceptional Circumstances (EC) drought declarations in NSW are due to expire on or before 30 June 2006, with all Network participants expressing concern about the pressures that will be faced by farm families and small rural businesses as a result.
- Mental Health First Aid Training; Farmers Mental Health and Wellbeing Seminars; Farm Family Gatherings and 'Beyond EC' seminars are all proving to be very effective in terms of bringing people together and providing critical information/referral services. A key challenge is ensuring ongoing awareness and support of these essential events.
- Funding uncertainties for Rural Financial Counsellors and Drought Support Workers remain of extreme concern to the Network. The Network has called for ongoing support for these vital support services.

### Key Areas of Activity

- The Network is now working collaboratively with the NSW Government on Blueprint priorities through regular 'roundtable' meetings recently established by the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health).
- The Network is keen to ensure increased awareness of the Rural Mental Health Support Line as a critical support tool for rural communities.
- The Network has identified isolation as a key area of concern, particularly in remote communities, and is working on a range of possible mechanisms to assist in this area.
- The Network is continuing to lobby the NSW Government for continued support for Drought Support Workers to ensure rural communities can be assisted through the very challenging period when they eventually transition out of drought.
- The Network is seeking to develop a central database enabling rural communities to identify when and where mental health first aid training is taking place throughout the state.
- The Network is continuing to grow, with more organisations coming on board in recent months. The Network is also encouraging other states to implement similar Networks.

### Blueprint Update

- Network participants are continuing to implement the key actions outlined in the *NSW Farmers Blueprint for Maintaining the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the People on NSW Farms*. The Blueprint is now available from the Rural Mental Health page at [www.nswfarmers.org.au](http://www.nswfarmers.org.au) or directly at [www.aghealth.org.au/blueprint](http://www.aghealth.org.au/blueprint).

### Upcoming Meetings/Events

- The Rural Mental Health Network will next meet 14 August 2006.

