

DROUGHT – INDUSTRY RELEASES LIST OF PRIORITY PROJECTS

Increased mental health support, rate rebates and funding and job security for Rural Financial Counsellors and Drought Support Workers have been identified as key drought issues by affected councils, businesses and industry.

The Rural Alliance, consisting of the NSW Farmers' Association, NSW Business Chamber, Country Women's Association of NSW, Local Government and Shires Association and the Australian Livestock and Property Agent's Association, met recently to sift through suggestions floated at the recent Rural Drought Crisis Summit, which was held in Parkes.

NSW Farmers' Association President and Rural Alliance spokesman Jock Laurie says whilst there are many issues facing farming families, businesses and communities in rural and regional NSW, the drought is obviously taking priority.

"Long-term funding for Rural Financial Counsellors and Drought Support Workers, strategies to retain core breeding stock and the need for a 15% rate subsidy are some of the issues we're going to raise with government in coming weeks," Mr Laurie said.

"Communities are at breaking point and the situation is worsening day by day – each week dry conditions continue and this is impacting upon crops and livestock as well as rural and regional communities.

"The Federal Government's \$714 million extension to the drought assistance package will bring substantial relief, and we've written to the Prime Minister telling him that."

President of the Shires Association of NSW, Cr Bruce Miller, who chaired the crisis summit, said supporting drought affected communities would benefit all NSW residents.

"Unless assistance increases to drought affected communities, prices on meat and grains will continue to rise, and you'll see a mass exodus from rural communities to already over populated city centres.

"The Rural Alliance has released this list of priority projects based on suggestions that were floated by people who are affected by the drought or are experts on drought.

"We don't have all the answers, but we're committed to working with government and industry to deal with the current and future impacts of prolonged drought and a permanently dry climate."

Over coming weeks the Rural Alliance will seek meetings with both the State and Federal Governments, the Australian Banking Association, and mental health organisations. Research into the broad impacts of drought will also be carried out.



Local Government
Association of NSW



Shires Association
of NSW



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Fast fact: 40% of the economic activity in regional & rural NSW is generated by agriculture