

not **IF** ...
but **WHEN**



Supporting
Queensland
Communities
Plan for the
Challenges of
Drought

JUNE 2021

"Round here you just have to expect drought. I guess, with drought, it's more the case of not if we'll get one but... when we'll get one... and for how long?"

'Lisa and Peter'*¹, Graziers, near Longreach

¹*Not their real names

Foreword

The Red Cross Drought Resilience program was first envisaged in 2018 after the Red Cross ‘Help Aussie Farmer’s Drought Appeal’ drew attention to the deep, ongoing impacts of drought across Australia. At the time, farmers and the communities who depend on them were enduring a prolonged, intense, year-on-year drought – one that some have called ‘the worst drought in living memory’. Through this program, we have worked closely with communities, supporting them to manage aspects of wellbeing that come before, during and after dry times.

The program has worked across four states to address the psychosocial impacts of drought, support Australian communities through the current drought, and build resilience to future droughts and other slow-onset disasters by striving for three goals:

- Community leaders/volunteers and existing and new service providers and partners (inclusive of Australian Red Cross staff and volunteers) have enhanced capability and capacity to address the psychosocial needs of drought-impacted communities
- Drought-impacted families and communities are supported by a range of needs-driven services to better manage psychosocial impacts
- Improved policy and practice to reduce the psychosocial impacts of a changing climate

As part of the third goal, the Red Cross team in Queensland has worked to bring drought and its impacts to the forefront of thinking in the State, through the development of this discussion paper. To that end, the Red Cross team travelled thousands of kilometres, held dozens of interviews and informal discussions with people in multiple local government areas across the State. They met with a wide variety of people including mayors, miners, farmers, shop and restaurant owners,

nurses, doctors, First Nations leaders, council staff, financial counsellors, government experts and other key community leaders. All of these individuals contributed valuable and diverse views and we thank them for their generosity.

It is our hope that this discussion paper will educate readers further on drought and its impacts in Queensland, amplify the voices of community members, and contribute to the development of practical policies and models of community-led drought resilience, relief and recovery for Queensland.




Andrew Coghlan
Head of Emergency Services
Australian Red Cross

Acknowledgments

We were generously given time by a long list of interviewees and informants (hopefully most of them are named in the appendices). Many of them took valuable time out from far more important tasks to speak with us. We have respected people's wishes for anonymity and so, in many cases, we have not attributed comments to them specifically and referred to them by generic labels or pseudonyms. However, special thanks should go to the Red Cross Queensland Drought Management Framework Reference Group:

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KEY POINTS



- The ‘drought space’ in Queensland is crowded – and could get more crowded in the future.
- Australian Red Cross has a unique ‘auxiliary’ role with government in dealing with disasters, and wishes to build on their experience to contribute to discussion and reform about drought – hence this Discussion Paper.
- As well as a Rapid Review of available documents and resources, we conducted a number of field trips to 10 local government areas (LGAs) in Queensland. We spoke to 103 people through semi-structured interviews... and chatted to many more.
- Drought has a variety of different types of impacts – hydrological, agricultural, economic... as well as environmental, social, cultural, wellbeing and ‘psychosocial’. These all need to be taken into account when preparing, planning, responding and recovering from drought.
- It is these ‘external’ factors, combined with the ‘personal’ capacities, culture and social support of the person or community that affects their ability to deal with the impact of drought and determines their ‘wellbeing’.
- By and large, the current drought response, relief and recovery programs in Queensland are “working okay” but could be improved to include more community planning, ‘preparedness’ and capacity-building for ‘resilience’.
- Most local people are not so interested in ‘definitional distinctions’ between drought and ‘disasters’ or ‘policy debates’, but they are interested in seeing some reform. People are interested to see the outcomes of recent reviews (e.g. Queensland Drought Program) and the progress of recent developments (e.g. the establishment of the National Resilience, Relief and Recovery Agency).
- There is a widespread recognition of the need for more practical community-based planning for drought Resilience, Relief and Recovery (‘RRR’) planning.
- We offer a proposed outline – designed for Queensland – of a community-led model of Drought (and other Adverse Events) ‘RRR’ planning.

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Introduction – The Crowded 'Drought Space' in Queensland

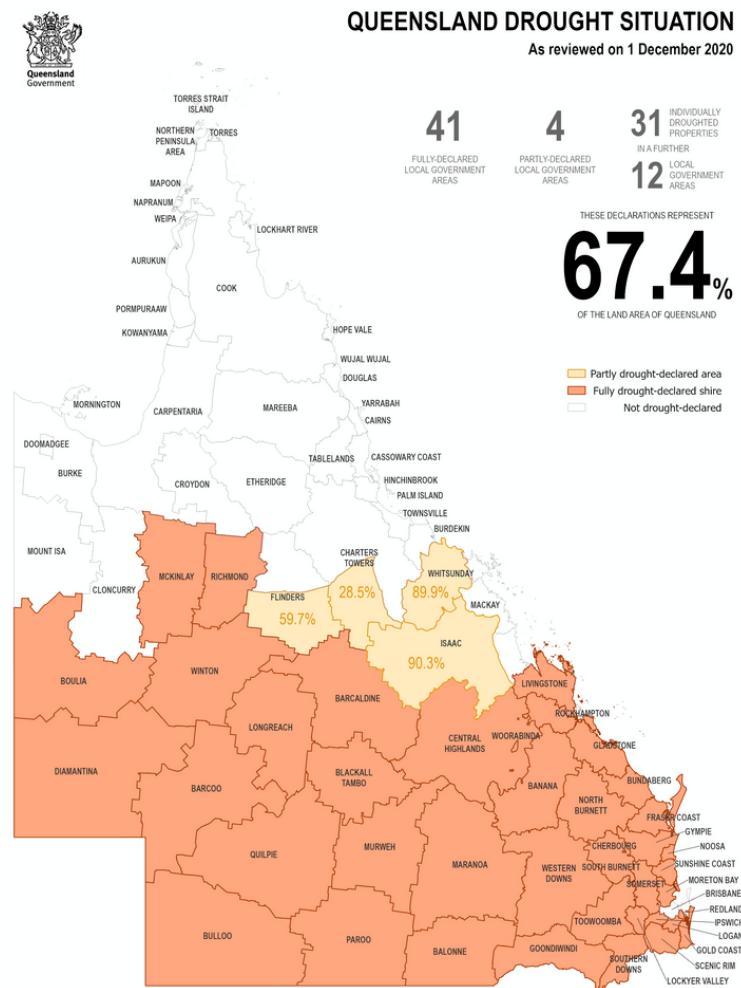
The State of Queensland is no stranger to drought. There are ancient First Nations peoples stories that talk about the dry times and what happens to people, animals and country. Early colonial accounts record the devastating effects of repeated droughts in Queensland through the 1800s and it was the most badly affected Australian state during the so-called 'Federation Drought', that saw no significant rain between 1895 and 1902. However, many people in Queensland are calling this current drought "the worst"... and the experts agree.

Professor Roger Stone is the Vice-President of the United Nations' World Meteorological Organisation and also Director of the Centre for Applied Climate Sciences at the University of Southern Queensland. He says the current drought is "far worse".

"In terms of intensity and severity, for southern QLD and northern NSW, this is the most severe in recorded history".

Prof. Roger Stone, USQ

There is no universally-accepted definition of drought. The Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) suggests that "Drought is a prolonged, abnormally dry period when the amount of available water is insufficient to meet normal use" and "Put simply, drought occurs when there's not enough rain".[1]



Source: The Long Paddock | www.longpaddock.qld.au

The BOM keeps a close eye on rainfall patterns and provides information about rainfall deficiencies and water resources, but it is the Queensland State Government through its Local Drought Committees (LDCs) and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) that officially 'declares' droughts in Queensland.

The Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries makes area or shire drought declarations based on the recommendations of the Local Drought Committees (LDCs) and DAF can also make Individually-Droughted Property (IDP) drought declarations.

Once the drought has been officially ‘declared’ then both the Commonwealth and State governments begin to implement ‘Drought Preparedness, Response and Recovery’ programs targeting people and properties in the drought-declared areas. Since the 1930s, both tiers of government have developed and operated a wide range of ‘Drought Response’ programs across drought-declared areas as well as designating them as eligible for other, more generic programs. These programs are managed and overseen by a variety of government agencies and through a series of complex inter-governmental agreements – the overarching being the National Drought Agreement 2018 (NDA) which makes it the shared responsibility of all parties for "...developing, designing, implementing and funding drought preparedness, response and recovery programs that are consistent with the NDA".[2]

Many of these programs were originally focussed only on relief for ‘farmers’ (and with an early emphasis on graziers) but in recent years have been expanded slightly to include programs that are aimed at supporting drought-affected rural businesses and rural communities as well as an increasing focus on improving general community mental health and ‘wellbeing’ in rural areas.

Nationally, the value of all the Commonwealth programs alone is so far claimed to be worth more than \$8 billion[3] since the turn of the century. In Queensland alone, the 2019 Independent Panel Drought Program Review (Queensland)[4] estimated that “...Including broader assistance measures, more than \$670 million has been spent by successive Queensland Governments on drought relief over more than five years”.

Whilst, as a nation, Australia’s climate and rainfall is often described as “extremely variable”, the State of Queensland has also earned itself the inglorious title of “The Most Disaster-Prone State”. Hence, many of the communities in Queensland’s drought-declared areas also often have to deal with (and sometimes concurrently) a range of other ‘disasters’ and ‘natural hazards’.



These can include: floods, cyclones, bushfires, heatwaves, hailstorms, earthquakes, floods, landslides, meteorite strikes, storms, storm surges, tornadoes, tsunamis and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government responses to ‘Disaster Events’, along with the complementary ‘Disaster Recovery’ assistance packages are managed through a complex suite of agreements and programs shared between the Australian Government and the states and territories.

Emergency Management Australia (EMA) coordinates the Australian Government’s physical and financial support for disasters and emergencies. Funding support is supplied through the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).

However, in 1989, the Australian Government removed drought from the list of ‘eligible disasters’ covered by the national disaster relief arrangements of the time and drought continues to be excluded from the DRFA. Currently, at the national level, drought response is managed through separate programs predominantly administered through the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications.



State and territory governments manage disaster and emergency responses in their own jurisdictions. In Queensland, disaster response is governed by the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA) and the Disaster Management Act 2003. Disaster recovery and DRFA reconstruction programs are managed by Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA). The Queensland Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors has responsibility for a smaller, state-funded relief program of State Disaster Relief Arrangements (SDRA).

Hence, at a state level in Queensland, 'Disaster' programs are predominantly overseen by the QRA, whilst 'Emergency' response is led by the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES)... and specific 'Drought' programs are managed by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF).

Recent state and Commonwealth reviews have recommended a number of changes to encourage more consistency in management approach. However, the three-tiered government management of all sorts of natural challenges – whether they be 'hazards', 'disasters', 'events' or 'emergencies' – is still complex and sometimes confusing.

The recent drought has also seen an increase in the number of charities and charitable programs targeting drought-affected farmers and rural communities. By the end of 2018, it was estimated that over \$50 million in 'drought' donations had been collected by just some of the largest registered charities – including the Red Cross. On top of this, the popularity of social media has led to a growing number of personal donations to smaller, 'crowdfunded' drought appeals launched on platforms such as Facebook. Also, many existing 'humanitarian' organisations (some faith-based) have recently decided to focus some of their efforts and allocate resources from their generic programs specifically towards programs with drought-affected communities.

There is no doubt at all, that both the donors and organisers of these charities are well-meaning and compassionate. However, over the course of this latest drought there have been various stories of lack of coordination – between charities, local communities and all three tiers of government – leading to ineffective, wasted, (and sometimes inappropriate) donations.

These issues were raised by the previous Coordinator-General for Drought, Major-General Stephen Day.[5] He suggested a role for government in facilitating "...charity coordination efforts" and that "...charity and not-for-profit service coordination should be included in drought plans developed by local communities".[6]

In Queensland, it is evident that the so-called 'Drought Space' has indeed become crowded and comments from many sources suggest that there is a clear need (and opportunity) for better coordination between all stakeholders.

The Human (and other) Impacts on Drought

Drought and drought impacts are really two sides of the same coin. We cannot fully understand drought without also understanding its impacts, which can affect all parts of our environment and our communities.

US National Centers for Environmental Information, 2021

Just as there is no universally accepted definition of drought, it is also evident that there are many different ways to describe and measure the costs and community impacts of drought.

The BOM describes four typographies of drought: 'Meteorological drought' (lack of rain), 'Hydrological drought' (low levels in rivers and dams), 'Agricultural drought' (reduced agricultural productivity), and 'Socio-economic drought' (the effects throughout the wider community). There are obviously agricultural and economic impacts, but droughts also impact the natural ecosystems and the human populations in many ways. As well as the 'Economic' impacts of drought it is important to clearly understand the 'Natural' and 'Human' impacts of drought.

When it comes to measuring the economic impacts of drought, different organisations use a variety of methods to calculate the economic impacts of drought – but there is no doubt it is costly for us all. Not only is there the loss of income and costs borne by water-dependent primary producers, but also there are the 'flow-on' economic effects to other rural businesses, banks and then also on to the wider business sector and the community at large... and then there's the cost of 'Drought Relief'.



It is not possible to accurately determine just how much the ‘Drought Relief’ – funds that are spent on specific ‘drought-related’ or more generic support programs – actually costs as a portion of government expenditure. However, with the hindsight of experience from previous droughts, Australia’s leading financial forecasters estimate that this latest drought will have been not only one of the most severe, but also one of the most costly to the national economy.

The Commonwealth Bank estimates that the current drought could cut the GDP by between 0.5 per cent and 0.75 per cent, or between \$9.5 billion and \$14 billion. Much of that will be borne by rural communities.

Sydney Morning Herald, Nov 3, 2019

It may seem obvious, but water is essential for our natural ecosystems and all the life forms on our planet. Human habitation around Australia has always been determined by (and dependent on) access to water.



Whilst many may say that there are parts of Australia that have always endured long periods without rain, a recent report by the Drought Coordinator-General’s office says the evidence indicates that the length and severity of droughts is getting longer and more severe, and the drought-affected regions are getting larger in area.

"As a consequence of climate change, drought is likely to be more regular, longer in duration and broader in area".

(former) Drought Coordinator-General, Stephen Day

Drought, and especially prolonged drought, can cause extensive damage to natural environment and ecosystems in many ways. Plants and animals (both native and introduced) depend on water for their survival. Whilst many Australian native species have adapted and developed survival strategies, when a drought occurs – especially a prolonged drought – water and food supplies can be so threatened that the habitat is destroyed. Sometimes the damage is temporary, and the habitat, food and water supplies return to normal when the drought is over. But in some cases the damage to the environment is permanent. For instance, in the Murray-Darling Basin, the ‘Millennium Drought’ was associated with a noticeable decline in water bird, fish and aquatic plant populations[7] and also the death of iconic species of trees, such as the river red gum, over extensive areas.[8]

Drought can have a vast array of impacts on natural species: e.g. loss and/or destruction of fish and wildlife habitat; lack of food and drinking water for wild animals; increase in diseases; altered migration patterns; reduced populations (and even extinction) of flora and fauna. Also, there is often degradation of natural landscapes and damage to country: e.g. wind and water erosion of topsoils; in-

creased siltation in rivers and loss of wetlands; reduction or disappearance of water sources; increased damage from bushfires; and a decrease in soil quality.

All of these ‘naturally-occurring’ impacts can be exacerbated by the presence of humans and their introduced plant and animal species, as well as the effects of their habitation, agricultural and farming practices. Where there is also poor management of country and natural resources, overstocking on grazing land, overuse of natural water sources... all these have a disastrous and well-known ‘amplifying’ effect on the already-existing natural impacts of drought.

As a humanitarian organisation, the Red Cross has a primary focus on the impacts of drought on people. However, the measurement of the ‘human’ costs and impacts of drought is also complex and difficult. There is no definitive classification of the human impacts of drought, and as with other areas of impact there are still complications of definition and meaning. Researchers have drawn from a wide range of taxonomy, including categories such as: ‘well-being’, ‘health’, ‘livelihood’, ‘amenity’, ‘social capital’, ‘culture’, ‘resilience’ and ‘attitude’.

“You can see it in people’s faces – when the country is stressed they are stressed... and when the country gets real crook... so do they”.

Farmer, near Charleville

Droughts have been called “an enduring feature of the Australian landscape”, and iconic images of parched and drought-ravaged country, along with the sturdy beasts and stoic people that live on it, are broadcast around the world and etched deeply into the Australian cultural psyche.

In Queensland, whilst stoicism, and silent, gritty determination are enduring character traits that folks “out West” are sometimes proud of, there is lots of evidence that they are doing it tougher out there due to the drought.

The most recent report from The Australian Institute of Rural Health[9] has already documented that “...on average, Australians living in rural and remote areas have shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury and poorer access to and use of health services, compared with people living in metropolitan areas”. They do however, carefully point out that these poorer health outcomes in rural and remote areas may be due to multiple factors such as: “...lifestyle differences and a level of disadvantage related to education and employment opportunities, as well as access to health services”.

So even before considering the impacts of the drought, it seems the health of our rural communities is more precarious. Surprisingly, many rural folk also don’t get enough exercise. Apparently, they also tend to eat more vegies but less fruit than their city cousins, and they are more likely to smoke more, drink more alcohol and sugary soft drinks, and have higher blood pressure. There is varied evidence of other social/health problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and stress-related illness. All of this is compounded by the issues of remoteness and poorer access to health services.

It is generally reported, particularly by the media, that the drought has caused an increase in rural suicides. The evidence to support these claims is still not clear. Researchers from Deakin University recently published a paper[10] looking specifically at farm-related suicide deaths in Australia. They concluded: “Rural Australians are more likely to suffer from a range of chronic health conditions and are at greater risk of accidental death... including an elevated suicide rate... than those in metropolitan settings”. Whilst the research can’t demonstrate evidence that drought is the reason for increased suicide levels, it is undoubtedly that the health and wellbeing of rural people is certainly more “at risk” during drought periods.

These health issues are added to a wide range of other ‘human’ and ‘social’ issues faced by rural individuals and communities. Along with the ‘normal’ social problems such as crime, and local disputes, Australia’s rural communities – particularly farming communities – are also shrinking. The trends towards larger commercial agricultural enterprises (and the demise of family-run farms), increased operating risks (both market and ‘natural’ risks), as well as the uptake of agricultural technology, has both reduced the required workforces in the sector and made the viability of small-scale farming less attractive.

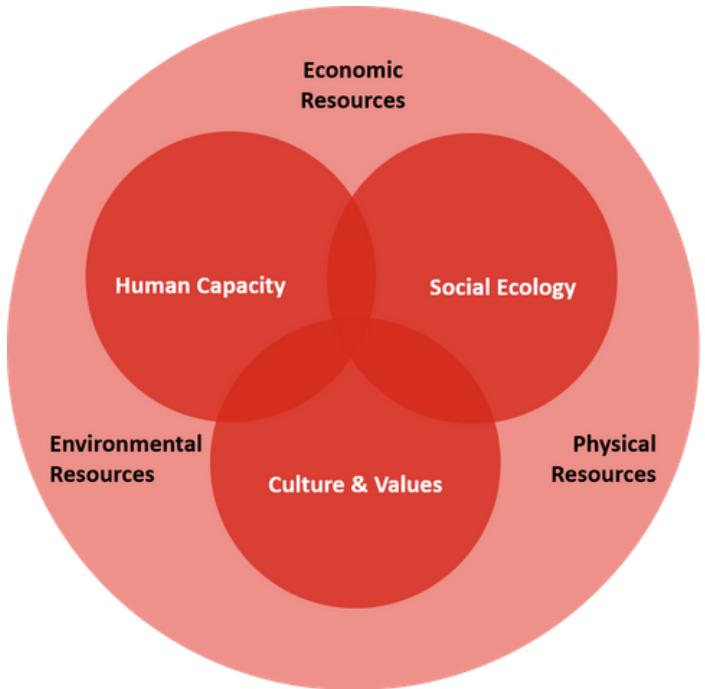
Rural communities must tackle the ‘typical’ problems, such as an ageing rural population – with many young people leaving to seek alternative lifestyles, education, work and amenity in the coastal regions and larger cities. Those rural areas with more diverse employment opportunities tend to attract (and retain) larger and more diverse populations but the figures clearly show an average population decline in rural areas. All of these factors, as one observer commented “...really tear at the social fabric of rural communities”.

It is important to point out that the ‘human’ impacts of drought are often interdependent on, and interrelated to, the economic and natural impacts of drought. For example, Australian Red Cross has a particular focus on the ‘psychosocial wellbeing’ of individuals and communities.

“The term ‘psychosocial’ refers to the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimension of a person, where each one influences the other” and “...reflects something all people share”.

Australian Red Cross: Psychosocial Framework

This best illustrated by the following diagram:



Red Cross: Psychosocial wellbeing-conceptual framework[11]

In the diagram, you can clearly see how the individual and/or community attributes of ‘Human Capacity’, ‘Culture & Values’ and ‘Social Ecology’ interact with the resources (Economic, Environmental, Physical) from the surrounding context. It is this combination of factors that determines ‘psychosocial wellbeing’ in individuals, as well as groups and communities. By way of explanation:

Human Capacity...

refers to a person or group’s physical and mental health; their individual’s knowledge, capacity and skills, and their experience of ‘resilience’.

Social Ecology...

refers to social connections and support available, including relationships, social networks, and support systems for the individual and the community.

Culture and Values...

refers to cultural norms, behaviours and values that typical for individuals or communities. These are linked strongly to the value systems in each community, which also determine individual and community expectations about ‘how to behave’.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that the impacts of drought are not neatly divided between economic, environmental and physical impacts. The reality is a much more complex interrelationship between external factors and the capacity (or 'resilience') of individuals, families, and communities to deal with them. Drought impacts people in different places in different ways. Therefore effective drought responses must balance between the principles of equity and fair entitlement to drought relief, and the understanding that needs and priorities differ from community to community and region to region... and sometimes from farm to farm.

This recognition of the diversity and complexity of drought impacts (even across Queensland) has been a theme in both government reports and a factor in decisions regarding the allocation of government resources and funding towards tackling drought impacts. Rural health and 'wellbeing' issues – particularly mental health – have received much more attention and resources in the last decade. A relatively small but increasing number of programs have recognised the importance of communities identifying and prioritising the impacts of drought that are most significant for them and also funding events that build social cohesion (social ecology) as well as individual and community 'resilience' to drought.

Whilst these new programs and resources are welcomed, especially the emphasis on proactive planning and resilience, it has also increased the number of government, non-government and charitable organisations working in the 'Drought Space'.



Red Cross Queensland and Drought – The Origins of this Project

Ever since its foundation in 1919, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (more commonly referred to as the Red Cross) has often played a key role in responding to disasters around the world. The Australian Red Cross, as part of the global International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, has a unique, legal mandate to support public (government) authorities in an ‘auxiliary role’. The role is empowered through law and the Australian Red Cross is recognised through a Royal Charter. This relationship, as an independent but ‘auxiliary’ partner to all levels of government in Australia, underpins much of Australian Red Cross’s key role in “...preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters”.[12]

As a humanitarian organisation, the Red Cross mandate during disasters and emergencies is to care for and support the wellbeing of those affected. In Australia this kind of disaster relief

role has been evident since 1955, when the worst floods on record devastated NSW and Red Cross responded. These days, in particular, the Red Cross emergency services program aims to support individuals and communities to cope with and manage the ‘psychosocial’ impacts of emergencies.

In recent years, Australian Red Cross has become a familiar and often welcomed participant in disaster response. Both nationally and through its state branches, Red Cross delivers a range of services to both the people in need and also other support agencies (through ‘Supporting the Supporters’). Red Cross services and support have included: raising money through fundraising campaigns; providing local and high-level strategic advice on various topics; providing personal support and relief to people and communities impacted by disasters; distributing supplies; and also providing training, coaching and First Aid (including ‘Psychological First Aid’). In Australia, since 2016, all of their work before, during and after disasters has been guided by the Red Cross Psychosocial Framework,[13] and this has seen their activities organised around on ‘preparedness’, ‘response’, and ‘recovery’.

The Red Cross’s experience with these types of ‘rapid-onset’ disasters – e.g. flood, cyclones, earthquakes, severe storms etc. – has given them a wealth of invaluable field knowledge and experience, and so, in recent years, the organisation has sought to find ways to utilise this valuable resource through other channels. To this end there has been an increased participation by Red Cross in high-level policy discussions and also the production of various discussion papers. Until recently however, their efforts were not focussed on the issues of drought in Australia.



In 2018, Australian Red Cross noted the groundswell of public support during their Red ‘Help Aussie Farmers’ Drought Appeal and realised the need for a longer-term program to achieve strategic outcomes. So with the assistance of corporate sponsorship, the Australian Red Cross Drought Resilience Program was born in 2019. Importantly, in the same year (2019), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies released their report: ‘The Cost of Doing Nothing – The Humanitarian Price of Climate Change and how it can be avoided’.

The priorities and recommendations adopted worldwide from that report created both an urgency and opportunity for Red Cross to work more closely with all levels of government, non-government organisations and other stakeholders to apply a neutral, humanitarian and community ‘lens’ to drought, and work towards embedding these perspectives more broadly in policy and practice.

The Australian Red Cross Drought Resilience Program[14] is currently offered in four states and it offers:

- Training for communities, organisations and service providers on; Psychological First Aid, Supporting the Supporters, Communicating in Communities Under Stress, Resilient Leaders, and Farm First Aid.
- Guidance for communities, organisations and service providers through a specialist support network and a mentor program.
- Resources and publications such as; webinars, podcasts, and a wellbeing planning tool, community messaging and publications.
- Community support through psychosocial support and outreach services.

With the support of the Chair of the Reference Group (Collin Sivalingum – State Manager, Emergency Services) the Red Cross Queensland State Drought Coordinator, Dave Brown, set about conducting a brief Queensland needs assessment[15] in December 2019. He spoke to a range of non-government organisations and a number of state government



Australian Red Cross: Drought Resilience Program

January 2021

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agencies. From their collective input it was evident that the “lack of collaboration and coordination of services” was a significant issue that was recognised by all. With this in mind he established the Queensland Drought Management Framework Reference Group.

In early meetings, the Reference Group members[16] confirmed the importance of planning, collaboration and coordination for drought – particularly at a local community and regional level. It was noted that, to date, there is not a clear management framework that assists Queensland communities with drought planning, response and recovery. For other ‘rapid onset’ disasters, the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA) were commended as a good model that offered a ‘systematic approach’, and some Queensland organisations had been advocating for the ‘integration’ of drought into the QDMA.

The Reference Group felt that further work was needed to explore the key elements and ideas for a workable Local Drought Management Framework in Queensland. The research and development of this Discussion Paper was thought of as a good place to start.

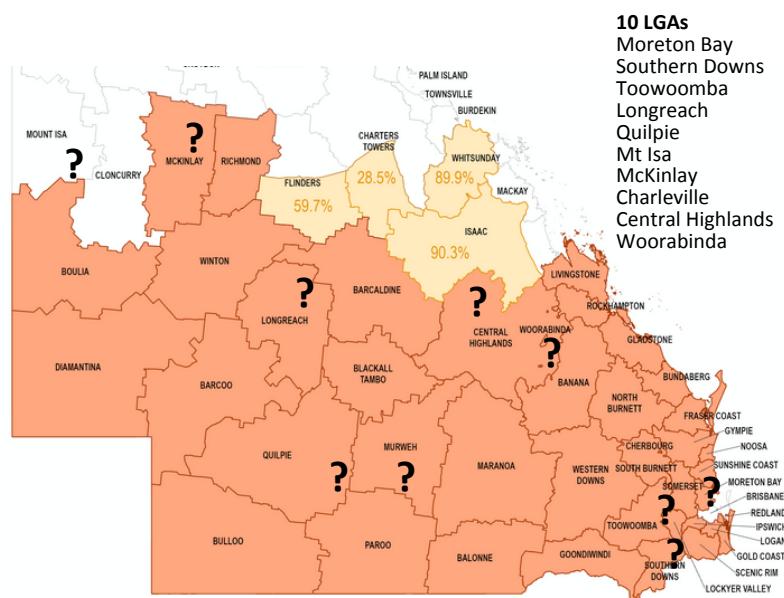
Methodology – Our Journey

Early meetings of the Red Cross Queensland Drought Management Framework Reference Group agreed that the focus of our research would be to capture the voice and perspectives of the community and stakeholders. We noted that it had been reported by many ‘providers’ (including members of the Reference Group) that “lack of coordination and collaboration” was a problem. However, we were keen to find out if that was also the experience of people and communities living and working in the drought-affected areas?

It was decided to utilise three integrated approaches: (1) a Rapid Review of key documents and reports; (2) Field Trips to selected locations; and (3) Clarification meetings with key agencies.

We chose a qualitative and narrative research approach. We wanted to listen to the stories and comments from local people in their own words and then see how they 'matched up' with statements and directions from key agencies. Like much of Red Cross's work, this approach emphasised the human elements... people talking to people... and watching and listening. This is (and always was) a project to develop a discussion paper – a project meant to promote discussion.

The Rapid Review of key documents and reports confirmed that this issue of “[lack of] coordination and collaboration” was frequently mentioned. So too, was the absence of a practical and effective model of community drought planning. We found few examples with any clear guidance for initiatives to improve local drought planning and ‘resilience’. Depending on the perspectives of the authors, there were also a range of other issues and questions highlighted by the Rapid Review that we incorporated into our field research questions.



The Project Reference Group selected 10 Local Government Areas:

- Moreton Bay Regional Council
 - Southern Downs Regional Council (Warwick and Stanthorpe)
 - Murweh Shire Council (Charleville)
 - Longreach Regional Council
 - Mount Isa City Council
 - McKinlay Shire Council (Julia Creek)
 - Quilpie Shire Council
 - Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council
 - Central Highlands Regional Council (Emerald)
 - Toowoomba Regional Council

Mount Isa was included in order to gain a perspective from a 'dry but not drought-declared' area, and Moreton Bay was included to give the important perspective for an 'urban yet still drought-declared' area. In each field trip location we watched and listened and chatted as much as possible.



We conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals and sometimes small groups, but we also chatted to locals and simply ‘had a look round’.

It was important to us to do our best not to ‘impose’ – we had been correctly warned that many people were ‘drought fatigued’ and simply exhausted from not only dealing with the effects of the drought but also with never-ending stream of people coming to ask them how the drought was affecting them. There was also a need to be mindful of the restrictions and sensitivities due to the Queensland COVID-19 responses. So we did our best to ‘tread softly’. But people were typically generous and gave us their time freely. We had over 100 semi-structured interviews and informal discussions... as well as countless, brief ‘chats’ with business owners and local people that we met on our travels. We met with mayors, miners, farmers, shop- and restaurant owners, nurses, doctors, First Nations leaders, council staff, government workers, financial counsellors... all sorts of people. Due to the vast distances to be travelled, and the remoteness of some of the people we wanted to talk to, we sometimes still needed to conduct phone interviews even from the field locations. As is often the way, one discussion typically led to a recommendation for another (“you know, you should talk to...”). And we drove – hundreds and hundreds of kilometres

– getting a real sense of the distances and remoteness experienced by communities in a state the size of Queensland. Time after time, we shielded ourselves from the searing heat and (like everyone else we met that day) gazed hopefully at some small clouds in the distance. Not once during our field trips did it rain.

The findings that we share in the following sections are based on our notes and records, but hopefully they carry the voices of the people we spoke to and weave their stories into the fabric of this report.

Findings – What we Learned



The Stories and Impacts of Drought are Different Everywhere

and that's important

1

Drought impacts in many different ways – and those differences show up within Australia, across Queensland, between regions, communities... and even between neighbours on individual properties. Drought can both unite and divide communities and it can just as easily earn you a comforting arm around the shoulder as it can spark bitter debate.

The stories of drought varied from place to place and it depended who you talked to. In some places drought was all about water; in others it was about lack of rain; in others it was about what it had done to individuals; in others what it was doing to the community... and in some places they simply didn't want to talk about the drought anymore.

"I am sick to death of talking about the bloody drought... so... how's that COVID going over there on the coast?"

A Pub 'regular', Quilpie

Even the Meteorological and Hydrological impacts of drought can vary. In the Granite Belt, Stanthorpe and Clifton, they are still having to cart drinking water in by the truckloads every day. But in Quilpie we were initially puzzled by the ironic claim that "we have plenty of water, but the drought is killin' us" – Quilpie has bore water but no rain to grow feed for livestock.

In other areas, access to bore and irrigation water is creating divides between 'haves' and 'have-nots' in the local community. In many parts of the Darling Downs water restrictions have become the 'new normal' but in other places around the state we were dodging the spray from sprinklers in the early mornings and evenings.

In Queensland, drought can cause all sorts of damage. People told us how drought can 'aggravate', 'compound' and 'magnify' other problems. On agricultural properties it can further expose pre-existing issues such as: poor land and soil management; overstocking; ineffective weed and pest management; poor maintenance of machinery and infrastructure and general problems with business and risk management. All of these can overlay on underlying issues of: lack of secure income; servicing large debts; issues arising from remoteness and isolation; lack of local services (especially health and education).

Drought hurts the country itself, and even traditionally dry country starts to become damaged by prolonged drought. An Aboriginal Elder showed us how the recent drought badly affected the mulga they had always traditionally used to make boomerangs, causing cracks in the normally iron-hard timber. In some places, we drove past land now infested with prickly acacia or opportunistic mulga, and often inhabited by feral pigs and dogs – land that was now broken and unmanaged because people said the owners found it more viable to simply sell the land rights for carbon sequestration or just "lock the gate and walk off". Some locals cursed them for "giving up" and others praised them for making a smart business decision.

When drought bites hard into the country it can kill even the native grasses, strip off the topsoil, bake the land hard, and dry up the dams and the natural watercourses – so much that in some places they were now worried about the flood damage they would suffer if they did get big rains. In a few places we saw evidence of the ‘green drought’ – places where there had been a little amount of light rain that was just enough to support odd patches of short green grass and weeds... perhaps, they said, for a few weeks.

Drought kills animals – both wild and domesticated. Many people told us sad stories of them or their neighbours having to shoot stock that were “just too far gone” and no longer worth transporting to market. But equally often, people might click their tongues and tell scolding tales of neighbours with dying stock on drought-ravaged country and how they “...told ‘em to get rid of that stock ages ago”. Some property owners even talked of one part of their property being “...like a desert”, but other sections being “good as gold”. The bigger stations and larger pastoral companies told us they have long been moving stock around from one piece of land to another as “it’s never drought everywhere at the same time”. But this drought defied the norms and was different – it not only had affected both northern and southern regions of Queensland, but in 2020 the COVID-19 border restrictions created difficult issues around travel of stock or feed over state borders.

The people in Queensland’s drought-affected communities are no strangers to hard work and challenges. Such small rural communities in Australia (usually defined as those with populations of approximately 50,000 or less) have already been enduring a variety of major existing (and well-documented) challenges: limited access to services; changing climates and rainfall patterns; shifts in markets and commodity prices; major changes in the practices and skills required for ‘modern’ and sustainable farming practices; the demise of

smaller family-run farms; and the general demographic changes in rural communities. But, as one local shop-owner said so succinctly “the drought just makes everything so, so much worse”.

Particularly from farmers and rural workers, we heard stories of how the drought can just “...add more and more weight” to the personal burdens faced by folks living in rural areas, and compound what are already the effects of: poor health; loneliness; loss of ‘identity’ and ultimately... sometimes... an overwhelming sense of hopelessness.

“People are more likely to kill themselves when they lose all hope. The drought doesn’t make people commit suicide... but if the drought makes you feel like there is no hope... no possible way out of whatever dreadful situation you’re already in... then you might decide the best solution is to take your own life”.

Station owner, near Longreach

It has been already reported by a number of public agencies,[17] that “...those living in remote areas are 1.9 times more likely to die by suicide than those living in urban areas... these rates increase [along with] increases in



remoteness". One recent study,[18] found an increased relative risk of suicide of 15% for 'rural males aged 30-49 year' attributable to drought, although they also suggested that "results are conflicting".

All of these stories and all of these lived experiences of so many impacts of drought, at first seem confusing and present a policy challenge. How to devise a system for better drought response and improved coordination when drought can impact different individuals and communities in so many different ways? The variety and array of program responses from both government and non-government sources may be confusing and complex, but isn't that the only way to deal with the large differences in the way that drought impacts are perceived and felt?

A number of people made strong comments about how they wished that communities were supported, encouraged and even 'allowed' to select local indicators and articulate just how the drought impacts them most. They didn't talk about a process led by meteorological science – not a process where drought is only measured by 'millimetres of rainfall' and 'previous deciles'. One well-respected rural health advocate complained about the "map-driven delivery of programs and services" to communities within the drought-declared areas. She noted that, whilst they were grateful for the allocation of resources, the priorities were usually set by the program providers with little flexibility for communities to plan and select their own.

We found strong support, even enthusiasm, for the idea of developing and using 'local community indicators' for drought – indicators that reflected the impacts as felt by local people. Whilst people talked about the need for accurate and reliable 'scientific' indicators of drought, they suggested that these kinds of indicators were more for use by government or even some farmers. But for the broader community they felt it would be more productive to also have indicators that were meaningful to them. There was a lot of talk about understanding local priorities – "what's most important 'round here" – and little enthusiasm for comparison with other places. As one local Mayor said "It's different everywhere – we're not selfish but what's most important to us is how the drought hits us here".

"Look I am not saying it's a 'one-size-fits-all' approach every time, but many of the programs often chase objectives and deliver services in the same way across vast areas of Queensland... it would be much better to let people have more local choice".

Community Health Network Member



KEY POINTS

- Drought has very different impacts in different regions and communities – even in Queensland.
- These differences need to be taken into account when planning and prioritising relief and response.
- There was strong support for the development of a far more varied set of drought indicators – including social, wellbeing, environmental and cultural – that could be used for local/regional planning and decision-making.
- People felt they should be guided by a balance of external 'scientific' indicators and local 'subjective' indicators.



The Process for Queensland Drought Declarations and the Work of the Local Drought Committees (LDCs) could do with Reform

2

but it's not the biggest issue

The current ‘Drought Declaration’ process for local government areas in Queensland is managed by Local Drought Committees (LDCs) who then recommend a decision to the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries for final approval. The LDCs are made up of local primary producers, representatives of industry organisations (of the various agricultural industries in that particular area), and local DAF officers. All discussions by the LDCs are confidential and the non-government members sign a confidentiality deed. Decisions for ‘Individually-Droughted Property’ (IDP) drought declarations, however, are made by DAF Extension Officers. An IDP declaration does not require Ministerial approval.

The most recent Review of Queensland Drought Programs[19] reported that “most submissions identified that there was currently a lack of transparency and consistency in the process”.

When we spoke to local people, whilst they might wryly smile and often made jokes about the “dark arts” practised by the “secret drought committee”, they understood the need for member’s anonymity and privacy in the work of LDCs, given the ramifications and consequences (especially financial) of their decisions and drought declarations. However, they often argued that the process of LDC decision-making, as well as being ‘mysterious’ didn’t appear to be based on a consistent nor understandable ‘checklist’ of considerations.

“It would be good to know how they make their decisions... exactly what kinds of things they consider. Unlike the way the Disaster Management Committees work, there doesn’t seem to be a clear framework or any way for the local community to formally provide input or understand the LDC process”.

Council Disaster Coordinator

This was just one of many instances where there was an urging for more processes of open community planning and decision-making around drought. It was pointed out, “if these people are chosen because they’re meant to be local and technical experts, then why can’t we openly use their knowledge and expertise as part of local community drought planning?”

The Queensland Drought Program Review has recommended: “By 30 June 2021, the current LDC system and declaration process be reviewed and restructured into a new system for declarations that will be based on the transition to a more objective, science-based, multi-layered framework utilising publicly accessible indicators, and maintaining appropriate local input”.



Our findings would suggest that communities in Queensland that are (or are likely to be) drought-affected, will welcome any changes that make the drought declaration process more open and allow for a more balanced combination of external ‘science-based’ inputs and ‘appropriate’ local inputs.

However, reform of the current LDC process in Queensland did not seem to be a critical or ‘hot topic’ on most people’s minds. Our conversations in many places seemed to indicate that most local people (not working for government or representative organisations) were more interested in the outcome – the drought declarations and therefore what consequent support would be available to them – than the details of the decision-making process.



KEY POINTS



- We found that the current systems of drought declaration and the processes of the Local Drought Committees (LDCs) were “not a big deal” to the people we met. They were far more interested in the outcomes.
- People understood the need for anonymity amongst LDC members but also felt there could be more transparency and consistency in how the LDCs made decisions.
- The idea of developing and utilising new systems for drought declarations (including a ‘drought severity index’) was regarded with interest.
- There was strong support for a more participatory system of drought declaration with more ‘local input’ from a variety of sources.

The Current Drought Response Arrangements and Programs are “Working Okay” in Queensland

3

but they could do much more to support community planning and resilience

Prior to the 1970s, Australian drought response programs were often about attempts to ‘drought-proof’ agriculture by improving the practices and infrastructure for water management and irrigation. Government projects such as the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (commenced in 1912) sought to divert water from local river and creek systems for the purposes of irrigating food production. In Queensland, two major examples are the Burdekin River Irrigation Area and the irrigation schemes that draw from the Great Artesian Basin.

In 1971, drought was recognised as a ‘Natural Disaster’, and support for those affected was to be provided under the joint Commonwealth-state Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA). This ended in 1989 when drought was removed from the list of ‘eligible’ disasters covered by the NDRRA. From that time on, drought support was (and is) provided through a suite of Commonwealth and state response and recovery programs – currently under the overarching guidance of the National Drought Agreement (NDA-revised in 2018). The new 2018 NDA is based on commitments made by leaders at the National Drought Summit and “...focuses measures across all jurisdictions on bolstering risk

management practices and enhancing our long-term preparedness and resilience”. The Commonwealth drought response programs are outlined in the Australian Government Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan (DRRP), which lists nearly forty “Australian Government measures and programs that support resilience and preparedness”. These include \$100 million per year for programs from the \$5 billion Future Drought Fund.

As well as overseeing the processes of ‘drought declaration’ in Queensland, the state government also provides its own suite of ‘Drought Assistance Programs’. At the time of writing, a review of the current processes for Queensland drought declarations (including the development of a more holistic ‘drought severity index’) and a review of the Queensland Drought Management Framework and the Drought Program are currently underway.

Program Participation and Performance

In general terms, most people we spoke to told us that most of these programs (both Commonwealth and state) are “working okay” in Queensland.



There were occasional complaints of: confusing eligibility criteria; slow processing times; and the enduring complaints of “mindless bureaucracy” and “endless bloody paperwork”. But mostly people seemed to say it was working okay. No-one we spoke to complained that there were not enough funds. It seemed evident that recent efforts to ensure that potential program recipients (especially ‘farmers’) were aware of what drought programs were available, and what support they were entitled to, had been successful. Most people seemed to know about the drought programs and how to apply for support. An overarching observation was that many rural households seemed to know less about ‘generic’ government support services such as the Queensland Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme, the Farm Household Allowance or the range of Centrelink support schemes.

Everywhere we went people told us about all sorts of different programs – and mostly in a positive light. There were issues related to eligibility that occasionally rankled – some schemes distinguished between ‘primary producers’ and ‘hobby farmers’ and some people told tales of being “unfairly excluded for doing the right thing” because they were deemed ineligible due to the level of ‘off-farm income’ that they earned. However, contrary to the general stereotype of reluctant, proud farmers eschewing any kind of government support, our findings showed that most people in the drought-affected areas we visited knew their entitlements and were keen to access them. One farmer suggested that the local feeling in their community was “you’re a mug if you don’t”.

Access to Program Information

Some earlier government reports had indicated that dissemination of program information was a problem, but recent efforts to improve access to program information seem to have been successful. From our findings, it seemed that people successfully found out about programs from a variety of sources: media, social media, newspapers and television, local government staff, outreach workers, doctors, community meetings and especially Rural Financial Counsellors.[20] Local councils especially, often facilitated community events such as “10 Minutes with a Master” (where community members got 10 minutes each with a representative from a wide variety of support programs), or information stalls at



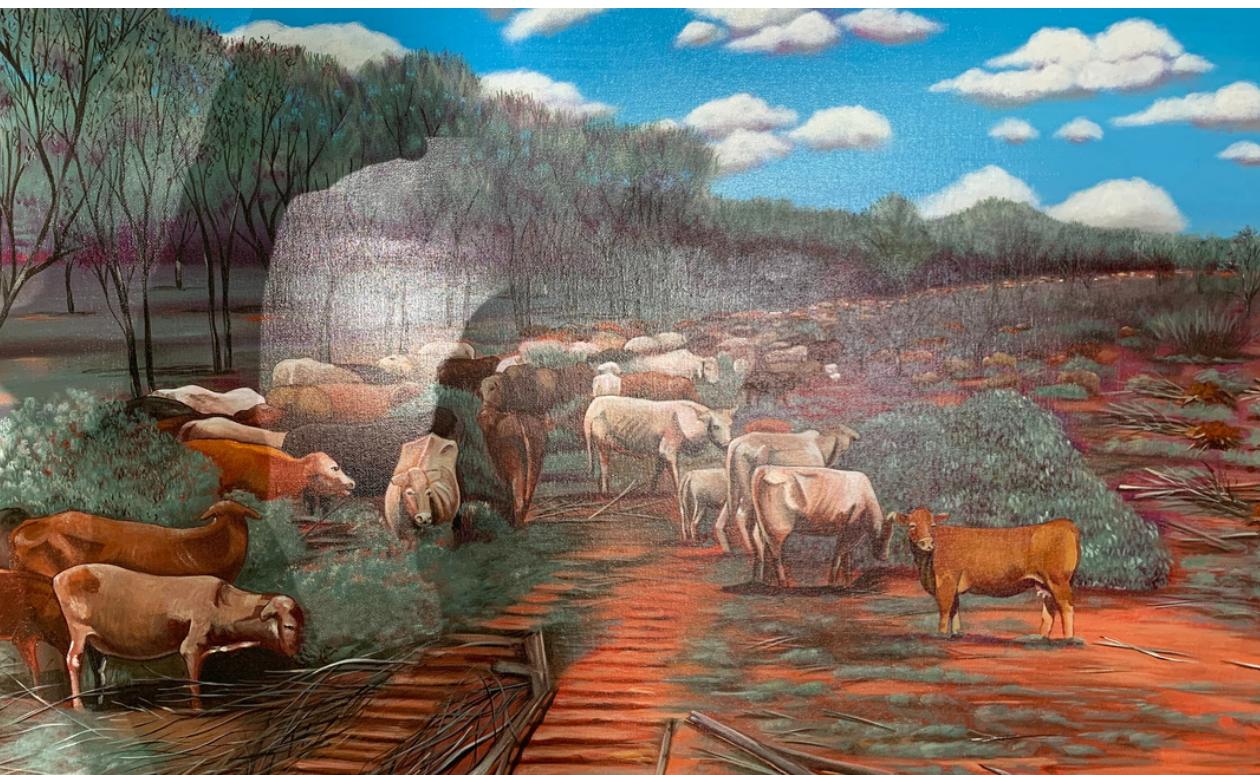
community events such as the ‘Local Show’ or ‘Race Day’. These programs may have received state or Commonwealth government funding from program sources such as: the Queensland Community Drought Support Program, and/or the Commonwealth Drought Extension Program, but the organisation impetus and initiative came from within the community themselves.

We also were privileged to be invited to a number of ‘interagency’ and ‘networking’ events. Two were hosted by local councils that had taken the initiative to facilitate regular ‘interagency’ meetings. Interestingly, while both groups were ‘informal’ they had been utilised for some time for input into their Local Disaster Management Committees. Another, larger and more formal gathering was a ‘Mental Health Roundtable’ organised by the Western Queensland Public Health Network. On all occasions we witnessed very effective information-sharing and viewed presentations on new program initiatives.

Importantly, (but not surprisingly) time and time again we came across examples of highly effective ‘informal’ networking – within communities and between communities... and wider. News travelled fast through all sorts of networks about successful drought programs and projects.

Two Important Issues

In the midst of all this good news, people also drew our attention towards two major issues of particular concern for our investigations: (1) Despite the recent rhetoric, the majority of drought support programs were still felt to be ‘reactive’ rather than ‘proactive’ and did not do enough to build capacities for ‘preparedness’ and ‘resilience’. (2) The majority of drought support programs were still targeted at individual ‘farmers’ and agricultural producers and there were very limited resources available to support community drought planning.



More Emphasis Needed on Planning and Preparedness

It was interesting that it was a wide variety of people – and including many ‘farmers’ and primary producers that were eligible for many of the drought response programs – that commented that so much of the existing drought programs available were still ‘reactive’ and mostly targeted at agricultural properties that were already badly drought-affected.

Even some of those who were quick to admit that they “...applied for everything on offer” were concerned that a number of the current programs were “...simply propping up bad farmers”. One farmer’s advocate described a number of the drought relief programs as “...a sugar hit... a quick fix for now” that doesn’t really tackle the long-term and systemic problems. In some places people noted that droughts were a ‘traditional’ feature of the local landscape and “...if you are going to make your living from dryland farming, you should plan how to make it through regular droughts”. Some even went so far as to say that in some cases, government support was “...rewarding poor business skills”.

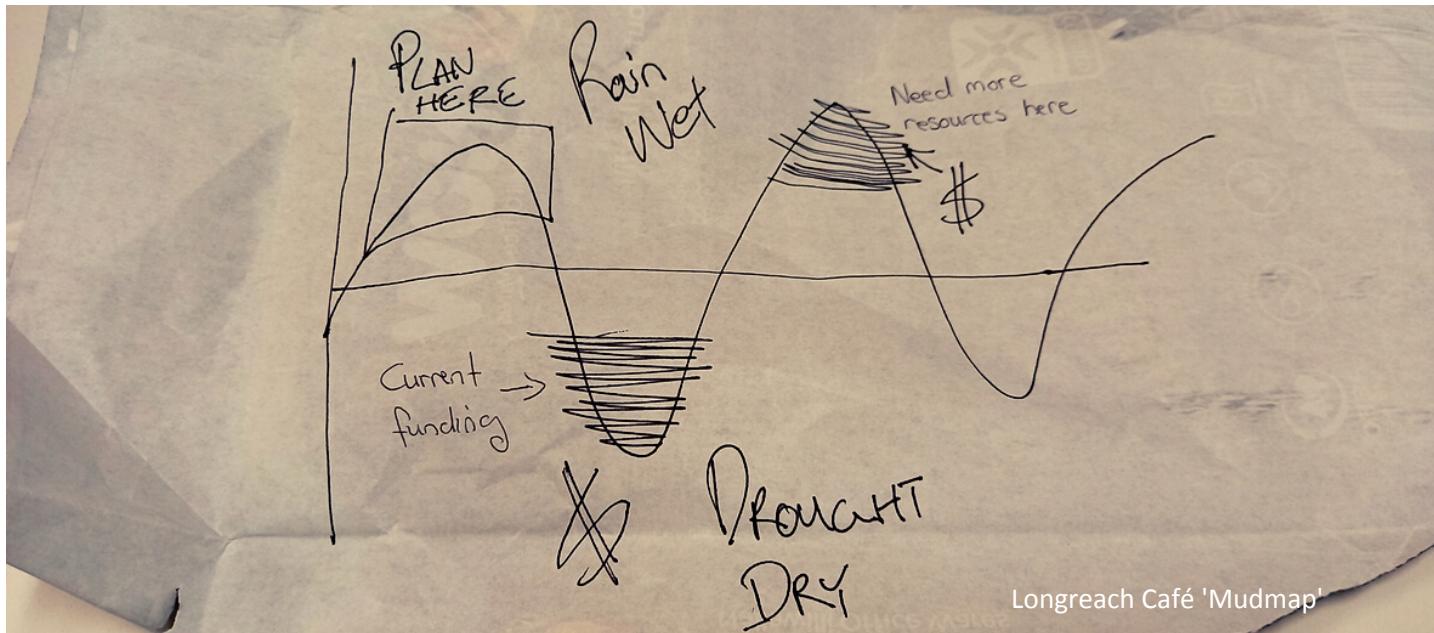
The most recent (2020) Review of Australian Government Drought Response by the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Recovery and Response Agency also noted clearly that those current programs of fully-funded in-drought support (without any requirement for co-contribution by the recipient) had a negative effect and reinforced a mendicant attitude.

Recovery and Response Agency also noted clearly that those current programs of fully-funded in-drought support (without any requirement for co-contribution by the recipient) had a negative effect and reinforced a mendicant attitude.

“A lack of mutual obligations across several drought response (in-drought support) programs does not encourage ongoing resilience and preparedness”.

National Drought & North Queensland Flood Recovery & Response Agency

Almost everyone we spoke to, at some point in the conversation, suggested that there was still a strong and continued need to move the emphasis on funding away from drought ‘response’ and ‘recovery’ and towards ‘planning’, ‘preparedness’ and ‘resilience’. Our noisy discussions



with a well-known local pastoralist in a Longreach café, had local onlookers intrigued as together we all excitedly sketched out a ‘mudmap’ of our ideas on a shared piece of scrap paper.

It is important to note that this issue has been noted in the majority of government (both state and Commonwealth) reports[21] for the last few decades. There is no doubt that governments are clearly aware of the urging for more ‘pro-active’ planning and ‘preparedness’, but we were genuinely surprised at how strongly the idea was supported by the very people who are the primary recipients for the current programs. Overwhelmingly, nearly everyone we met suggested that ‘good’ farmers should be planning and preparing for the next drought now – not even waiting until this one broke and the rains came. Rainfall in this kind of country, they said, had always been cyclic, and even though the cycles were becoming more erratic, you could be sure that the rains would come again...and then so would the next drought. But they said many people don’t prepare effectively, and every drought even more people would have “dug themselves into such deep debt” or “ruined their country so badly” that even with a number of good seasons the property may not ever fully recover.

A lot of people reminded us that ‘drought preparedness’ was easy to say but not so easy to describe... let alone achieve. There were

many conversations that focussed on the same question: “How exactly, do you prepare for a drought when you don’t know if it will last for 8-10 years?” It was clear that for many agricultural businesses and ‘farmers’ and their families ‘drought preparedness’ was primarily still about: (1) water security (e.g. ensuring water supply, irrigation and storage infrastructure were upgraded and/or maintained); (2) crop or stock management (e.g. adapting planting/harvesting practices, preparing feed or moving stock to maintain their health, agistment or de-stocking); (3) physical farm management (e.g. upgrading or maintaining machinery, fences, infrastructure) and (4) varying degrees of financial management (e.g. business planning to manage debts and operate on limited income, being financially prepared for when the drought ends).

But even these steps, if well done (and we were told many tales of them all being done badly) still didn’t always prepare people on farms for the rigours of “the long haul”... and that was also assuming they were in good health and not “too elderly”. Also, as people pointed out, “...what about everyone else... people in town, kids and young people, other kinds of businesses?”

Naturally, we were particularly interested in the kind of ‘psychosocial’, ‘mental’ or ‘social’ preparations that people in households, families or communities might make to better endure the rigours of drought. This was an

area it seemed where our questions elicited very mixed opinions but a common and strong suggestion not to “impose a one-size-fits-all” approach.

People have all kinds of different beliefs, “inner strengths” and “core values” they can draw on to keep them going through tough times they said. These were personal matters, we were reminded... even private sometimes. It was important to respect people’s beliefs but it was not a good idea to try and force people to talk about them out in public. Also, they noted that often people just don’t want to talk about the drought any more once the rains come.

“You watch...as soon as they get decent rain they’ll be all happy again and jumpin’ up and own... they’ll forget all about this drought until the next one comes. But some of them will just be too broken to fix”.

Ex-cattle farmer, near Emerald

However, many agreed it was very important to talk about, and plan for, these kinds of issues at a community level. These were the kinds of interrelationships between ‘external’ factors and ‘internal’ capacities, community support and ‘resilience’ that all contributed to ‘wellbeing’. What did we learn from the last drought? What kinds of things can we do together to better prepare this community for the next drought? What can we plan together? What can we work on together? How can we plan better together to support each other through the next drought?

Rural Diversity and Drought-Affected Communities

In Australia both the current government management and response to drought as well as the dominant coverage by the media,

seems to be dominated by a number of underlying paradigms:

1. Drought is still treated as a predominantly ‘rural’ issue as the majority of lands that are drought-declared are rural.
2. Drought is regarded as predominantly an ‘agricultural’ issue and both Commonwealth and state governments most often manage their drought response programs from within Ministries or Departments of Agriculture.
3. It is traditionally accepted that drought mostly effects ‘farmers’ – and in particular, graziers and broadacre croppers.

Hence, most of the response and recovery programs are directed towards ‘farmers’. Also, ‘farmers’ are usually spoken of (and sometimes treated as) a homogenous group, and drought-affected communities are often still referred to as ‘farming communities’... but our recent journeys showed up considerable variety and even divisions.

Our observations and findings from the field trips challenged a number of aspects within these paradigms.

At times, our conversations revealed how, even amongst ‘farmers’, the drought and sometimes the support programs themselves could accentuate divisions, due to different practices and beliefs and also various eligibility criteria making some farms eligible for certain support programs and others not. It seems divisions (and not always just ‘friendly differences’) occurred within communities, and sometimes even between neighbours. Some of the stories we were told were peppered with derogatory references that highlighted differences between “real farmers”, “the Squatocracy”, “hobby farmers”, “townies”, “big corporates”, “blow-ins”, “prickle farmers”, “greenies” and “hillbillies”. There were even stories of outright community conflict and violence caused by differing views around the acceptable uses of ‘emergency’ water supplies.

Drought-affected communities are typically far broader and more varied than simply groups of ‘farmers’ and the drought impacted everybody, but sometimes in different ways. This was recognised in most communities and community leaders frequently spoke of balancing support for diverse opinions whilst also

taking steps to build and maintain social cohesion. In areas we visited where there was a wider mix of agricultural and natural resource (mining or gas) employment, everyone agreed that the diversity of employment was really good for the local economy and also improved the ‘resilience’ of the community during the drought – but also one young woman pointed out how “...round here, in high school you’re either mining, farming or a townie... and sometimes they don’t really mix”.

Drought and the Social Ecology

These examples of differences and divisions within the communities prompted us to question people further about social impacts of the drought and opportunities for building ‘social capital’, or as one mental health worker called it “social glue... the things that help communities stick together and deal with stuff”. People in those communities that had also endured other rapid-onset disasters such as floods, cyclones or severe storms often talked about “mateship” and “...the way everyone came together and just helped out”. One community leader in Julia Creek – when reflecting on their community experience in the devastating 2019 floods and then the ensuing drought said: “during the floods we quickly came together and we learned a lot of positive things about ourselves as a community... but the drought has been different”.

Perhaps it is the long, slow, enduring ‘endlessness’ of drought that doesn’t have the ‘drama’ or urgency of rapid-onset disasters and hence doesn’t bring on the same kind of ‘community spirit’. Perhaps it is the continual burden of trying to “be positive and support each other in little ways every day” over a lengthy drought which may last ten years, that just becomes too much. Or maybe people just become so consumed with the hard work and daily grind of trying to “...keep life kind a’ normal” that they find, gradually, they just don’t have the time or emotional energy to maintain community relationships.

A number of reports,[22] such as those from the ongoing Australian Rural Mental Health Study have confirmed these issues as causes of both Personal Drought-Related Stress (PDS) and Community Drought-Related Stress (CDS). The reports showed up “Loss of contact with friends” and “Not going out as much” as two of the top six factors that caused PDS... no

doubt exacerbated by more than half of the study participants saying they simply had “More work to do”. For communities: “People leaving the area”, “Losing businesses and services in town” and “Not getting together as much” were all cited as primary causes of CDS.

More Emphasis on ‘Practical’ Community-based Planning and Responses

From all of the drought-affected communities we visited – and from local people, service providers, business people, community leaders and often government representatives – we began to sense a common desire.

On our journeys, we found that many drought-affected communities desired more emphasis and more resources directed towards what they called ‘practical’ community-based planning and responses to drought.





Whilst there are a relatively small number of programs such as the Commonwealth Drought Extension Program and the Queensland Government's Community Drought Support Program (CDSP) which offer targeted support for 'community infrastructure projects' and/or 'community events and activities', the bulk of government drought response programs still focus on individual farming businesses and households. There are an increasing number of programs that now also include 'small rural businesses', including the Rural Financial Counselling Service. However, presently, there is less emphasis on supporting drought-affected communities as a whole, to come together and work on their own planning and preparedness.

To be fair, various sources mentioned that there had been a considerable increase in the number of (and amount of resources allocated to) community 'health', 'mental health' and 'wellbeing' programs, provided by both government and non-government agencies. Also there are community grants available through initiatives such as the 'Tackling Tough Times Together' program (managed by the Foundation for Rural and Regional Recovery) that fund a wide variety of community-based projects and events. However, there was still a noticeable degree of cynicism, amongst some of the folks we talked to, about funding for what they referred to as "happy bandaid events" with "face painting" or a "sausage sizzle". They were regarded somewhat as "distractions". Despite the welcomed increase in 'mental health' services, and a decrease in general community stigma about discussing 'mental health' or 'wellbeing' issues, there was still evidence of a degree of negativity about events that advertised themselves as being primarily focussed around these topics. Nevertheless, local people and community leaders we spoke to offered us all sorts of suggestions for 'practical' processes to support community drought planning and preparedness – expanding on the experience

that many communities already had from preparing Local Disaster Management Plans and other 'formal' community planning exercises.

"We should be able to come together as a whole community and look at what skills, knowledge and resources we already have to deal with this on our own... before we go asking for outside help. We are practical people and this kind of process is real community-building".

Local Mayor

Just as they believed that communities should be able to select a range of local drought indicators most relevant to their context and situation, they thought it would be a "...useful community conversation... to frankly and honestly appraise" their local risks and vulnerabilities, as well as their genuine ability to respond effectively based on their local capacity. And when they said 'community', they meant everybody: farmers, townies, local businesses, First Nations leaders, big companies (including multinationals), tourist operators, young people, old people, men and women.

They supported their ideas by saying that not only would such a kind of community planning, problem-solving and 'place management'

process be a ‘practical’, ‘positive’ and ‘productive’ task to promote ‘community strength and awareness’, but also it would enhance community resilience and “...make for a more targeted use of outside support and resources”.

The Commonwealth Future Drought Fund, (FDF) describes itself this way on its webpage: “The \$5 billion Future Drought Fund provides secure, continuous funding for drought resilience initiatives. It will help Australian farms and communities prepare for the impacts of drought”.

As we write this paper, the program details for many of the FDF’s new programs are unfolding and more details are emerging about programs such as: ‘Drought Resilience Self-Assessment Tool’, ‘Drought Resilience Leaders’, ‘Networks to Build Drought Resilience’ and ‘Regional Drought Resilience Planning’. These initiatives would appear, at first glance, to support what we heard about community aspirations for locally-led planning and a degree of self-reliance.



KEY POINTS



- The majority of current state and Commonwealth ‘drought response’ programs are “working okay”.
- Recent information campaigns seem to be working: most people seem to know what they are eligible for... or where to go for more information.
- Many examples of effective communication and dissemination about programs – particularly through local government ‘interagency’ and/or ‘community events’.
- Despite the recent rhetoric, the majority of drought support programs were still felt to be ‘reactive’ rather than ‘proactive’ and did not do enough to build capacities for ‘preparedness’ and ‘resilience’.
- The majority of drought support programs were still targeted at individual ‘farmers’ and agricultural producers and there was more limited resources available to support community drought planning and response.
- More emphasis needed on community planning and preparedness.
- Need to recognise a variety of community-wide ‘preparedness’ activities – not just farm activities.
- Need to mentally/socially prepare for the “long haul” as a community.
- Rural communities are diverse – hence drought impacts are diverse.
- ‘Wellbeing’ events were a welcome distraction but ‘practical community planning’ and ‘realistic problem-solving’ processes were also needed.
- There is a need, enthusiasm and also support for developing a model of community-led drought planning and capacity-building.

Drought is not Considered a 'Disaster' in Government Systems and Programs

4

but community planning for drought and disasters should be done together

Since 1989, drought has been excluded from being defined as a 'disaster' and hence is not considered an event that triggers funding from the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA). In particular, at a state level in Queensland, drought is not covered under the Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003 nor the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (the QDMA).

In early meetings, the Reference Group raised the question of whether the discussion paper project should investigate whether drought should be integrated into Queensland's existing disaster management arrangements. The supporters of this proposal argued that integrating drought into the QDMA would enable a more systematic approach. We agreed that we would raise this option as a question during our field trips. After all, our key question was still to investigate "what kind of management framework would support the key stakeholders in the 'drought space' (in Queensland) work better together?"

Firstly, during our field trips, it became apparent that only representatives of government (especially local government) and 'representative' bodies (e.g. industry groups, advocacy groups etc) were even aware of this policy 'distinction', and for many, unless they were closely involved with either 'disaster' or 'drought' management... they were not overly concerned by this fact alone. Many stakeholders working in the 'drought space' in local communities (especially local government) were already quite used to working under a variety of legislative arrangements and policy frameworks, and also adept at securing funding from a wide array of program sources.

We found two instances where local government Mayors and/or CEOs strongly advocated for drought to be included in the QDMA and the DRFA. From what they said, it was clear that their main reasoning was centred around the fact that their Councils valued the Queensland disaster recovery and reconstruction arrangements and the 'safety net' of funding for repairs due to damage from an eligible event.



"Drought should be a disaster like other disasters. When we have a flood we get the money... last time we got 30 million. When we have a drought we should also get the money... guaranteed".

Senior Council Manager

For some smaller rural Councils, in areas of Queensland frequently struck by regular (and increasingly frequent) 'disasters', the confidence that they can rely on support and funding for repairs to disaster-damaged 'essential public assets' is critical to them and their communities.

However, we did not meet anyone who articulated how integration in QDMA disaster management arrangements would improve the effectiveness of drought response and management. In particular, those (from local or state government) whose daily work was personally involved with the Local Disaster Management Committees (LDMCs) and the QDMA management and planning processes, strongly rejected the idea.

Nevertheless, many people from a variety of Councils and state government agencies spoke highly of the 'logical' and 'systematic' approaches in the current QDMA processes and the fact that it had "clear roles" and "legislative teeth". They also suggested that their experience with the QDMA, allowed them to suggest a number of valued key elements that they believed should be incorporated into any improved management framework for drought planning, preparedness, response and recovery – although they suggested that current trends might suggest that communities may not ever fully 'recover' from drought so building 'resilience' be more appropriate.

"The QDMA is a purpose-built tool... It works for rapid-onset disasters... it is just not built for drought... it's like using a spanner when you need a hammer".

Local Council Disaster Coordinator

"Oh...please don't add drought to QDMA... many of my councils round here are barely coping as it is".

Regional Emergency Services Coordinator

"Drought needs a much more holistic approach. QDMA is more about emergency management".

Local Council Disaster Coordinator

They usefully suggested that a more effective drought management framework should:

- Be a community-centred approach, with local government (albeit with 'Backbone' support) in a primary and central role.
- Be open, transparent and participatory.
- Prescribe clear roles, responsibilities and the expectations for various stakeholders – especially (but not limited to) government.



KEY POINTS



- Most local people (not working for government or representative groups) don't understand the definitional distinctions between drought and disasters.
- Local people and local government can negotiate a wide range of funding programs and agencies and do not need a 'one-stop-shop'. However, the current 'arguments' and 'distinctions' between different kinds of adverse events is not conducive to integrated planning.
- We found only a few people who advocated for drought to be included in Queensland's QDMA.
- The people we met who were directly involved with 'disaster' planning and management, did not want drought included with the current QDMA process.
- People identified many key elements of the QDMA that they valued, and said they should be built into any new system of drought planning and management.
- There was strong support for concurrent planning for drought and all other natural 'adverse events' at the local and regional level in Queensland – even if resources, response and recovery programs came from a variety of agencies.

- Prescribe coordination between a set of critical key agencies... but still allow for far wider involvement.
- Be a logical, 'step-by-step' approach that guides communities through an informed (by external and local sources) assessment of the situation, risks and vulnerabilities and "...an honest appraisal of our capabilities to respond".
- Produce a clear set of, practical, effective and related Drought Management Plans (they suggested local, regional and state);
- Have the legislative 'teeth' to be considered a 'formal agreement' between the parties.
- Be the logical 'discussion point' for negotiating drought support from the Commonwealth and state programs.

There was a strong consensus that, whilst there may be a variety of (separate) agencies and funding programs for 'drought' and 'disasters' at both state and Commonwealth levels, 'drought' and other 'disaster' planning would benefit from being undertaken through the same process at a local and regional level. As many people pointed out the local (and often regional) impacts and risks of drought cannot be easily disentangled from impacts of other disasters and 'natural hazards', and therefore it would be logical that they be considered concurrently through a holistic process.

Interestingly our further reading revealed that a similar suggestion had been recommended by the (former) Coordinator-General for Drought, Major-General Stephen Day, when he recommended: "A pilot program to build community leadership capability, involving the development of a local 'adverse event' plan, should be undertaken to build communities' capacity to adapt and cope with chronic stresses and acute shocks".[23] He then explains in further detail that "Shocks are typically considered single event disasters, such as fires, earthquakes, and floods. Stresses are factors that pressure a community on a daily or reoccurring basis, such as drought, chronic food and water shortages, an overtaxed transportation system, or high unemployment". So in this context, the term 'adverse event' is used to refer to a wide range of 'stresses', 'shocks', 'natural hazards' and 'disasters'... even social and economic issues... as well as drought.

More could be done to Improve the Local Coordination amongst the 'Charity' and 'Not-for-Profit', and 'Wellbeing' Sector

and between this sector and communities

5

Whilst there were some stories and perceptions around a lack of cooperation and coordination between government organisations and agencies, we found more examples of poor coordination between 'charity' and 'not-for-profit', and 'wellbeing' organisations – and also between this sector and local communities. For Red Cross, these issues manifested in both our own 'auxiliary' role within the government 'sector', but also along with our colleagues and partners in the 'non-government' sector.

This issue was highlighted in a number of reports and statements and had been mentioned a number of times by the previous Coordinator-General for Drought, Major-General Stephen Day. Also, the charities regulator, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) has held a number of well-publicised reviews into various 'drought-related' charities and subsequently published guidance for donors, fund-raisers and charity managers to try and assist more clarity and "prevent overlaps".

This is a sensitive topic, not the least for Red Cross – itself a 'charitable organisation'. It is very important to note that in no way are we suggesting that any charity or 'not-for-profit' organisation has acted illegally, unethically or

inappropriately. Nevertheless, our field trips threw up clear examples of lack of coordination and we still found few examples of formal collaboration.

We heard about, and sometimes saw the evidence of, well-meaning 'charity' campaigns that "missed the mark". We visited the town where "...some lovely schoolkids on the coast" had started a campaign that eventually donated so many small, plastic bottles of drinking water that it required the community to rent an expensive warehouse and the management by a group of busy, local volunteers. There were stories of heated arguments between neighbouring farmers about whether or not donated hay was "contaminated" with pests or weeds. In one town, the council staff pointed to the nearby field where they had ended up burying most of the truck-load of donated 'fresh' fruit and vegetables that had simply arrived one day – "this semi turned up but we don't have enough cold storage in this town to deal with that much volume". On our field trips, some farm households even offered us canned fruit and pumpkin soup because "...we've got boxes of the stuff and we didn't want to say no to these people".



We did hear some great stories where generous organisations had contacted agencies in town and asked "How could we best help?" Councils spoke highly of charities and 'well-being' programs that consulted with them and/or attended their interagency or planning meetings. Early consultation and coordination with local networks was certainly highly valued. Also, programs which supported local businesses by supplying prepaid shopping vouchers or debit cards were consistently spoken of as being the most 'useful', 'valued' and 'effective'.

However, the impression we got was that there was still room for much better coordination: between charities (particularly at the local level); between charities and government agencies (especially local government); and with the existing community groups and networks such as: Queensland Country Women's Association (QCWA) church groups, schools and sporting clubs... even local Red Cross branches (where they exist). Even where we found great examples of interaction, integration and coordination, the relationships that led to this success were typically more personal, rather than strategic organisational relationships.

KEY POINTS



- There are an increasing number of 'charities', 'not-for profits' and 'wellbeing programs' in the 'drought space'.
- There is evidence of lack of coordination at local level – most stories of successful 'inter-charity' or 'inter-program' relationships were personal, not organisational.
- Charity programs can be seen by local communities as 'provider/donor-driven'.
- Some stories of inappropriate donations and sometimes of actual community costs and imposts.
- Many more positive stories of sending money to fund local programs and/or local business vouchers.
- Charities should be participants in, and guided by community-led planning.

To be frank, we even listened to a few people make scathing comments that were certainly 'uncharitable' about other organisations and the effectiveness of their work. Similarly, we noted some relationships between various government-funded 'mental health' and 'well-being' NGOs appeared to be somewhat competitive and 'territorial'. In some cases this 'hostility' was exacerbated when government funding schemes required competitive bidding for a limited pool of funds. But often 'competing' programs were operating across the same regions (if not communities).

By their very nature, all charities are motivated by 'good intentions' and aim to meet 'critical needs'. But, at times, some local people sighed, it "...all seems a bit provider-driven".

"Sometimes, these people just turn up... Look they are really good people... but they just want to give us what they've got... it's not always what we need".

Rural Community Leader

It is clear that there is an opportunity for better 'alignment' and integration amongst all providers (both government and non-government) of support and assistance programs to drought-affected communities. The logical starting point is for all such providers to be part of, and informed by, a process of local, community-based drought planning.

Conclusions and The Idea



Conclusions

the journey continues towards a community-led model of resilience, relief & recovery planning

By the end of 2020, we completed our field trips. We conducted a few, final meetings and interviews – mostly ‘clarification’ meetings with government agencies, key bodies and members of the Reference Group to get their feedback on some of the critical points we had heard on our trips.

In some places we had visited, some rains have come, but others are still waiting. For shires and local government areas in Queensland, the drought will end officially, or be ‘revoked’ only when the Local Drought Committee "...is confident that livestock have enough pasture and water to last until the next expected rainfall... this is usually the next wet season".[24] The return of the rains brings many things but mostly they bring hope. For primary producers, they hope that this year 2021 will be a ‘good year’ and they will end this year with more money in the bank... or at least a bit less debt. For all sorts of businesses in the drought-affected communities, the rains might bring hope of more customers. For the people of rural towns and communities, they hope that the rains will lift people’s spirits, make them feel more confident and positive, and make it possible to do things that "...make them feel more like a community again". Most importantly, we heard that "...right now is always the best time to be planning and preparing for drought".

Since this project started in early 2020, we have observed a number of significant government developments that will change and

shape the way we will treat drought in Australia... and in Queensland. We will wait to see the developments unfold.

The Australian Government has listened to the recommendations and reviews in the last years and it would appear that Future Drought Fund is underpinning a range of new programs that will support a more ‘proactive’, ‘integrated’ and ‘holistic’ approach to drought ‘preparedness’ and ‘response’. We wait with interest to see how the newly-announced National Resilience, Relief and Recovery agency (NRRR), will develop, what exactly its role will be, and how ‘Drought’ will be integrated into its operations along with other ‘disasters’. We are keen to see the outputs from the projects to develop the two new sets of National Drought ‘Indicators’ (one for the Australian Government to use and the other to better inform "...decisions by farmers and communities to manage and prepare for drought") – but we are intrigued on how the second ‘community set’ will be able to "[draw] on the indicators for government" when it is stated that these "...drought indicators and complementary framework should not be made public".

In Queensland, we await the outcomes of the Queensland Drought Program Reforms, including: the review of the current drought declaration and Local Drought Committee (LDC) system and development and implementation of a new system – including the reported development of a ‘drought severity index’. We are pleased to note the continued support for a range of Queensland Government drought support programs.

It is in this exciting context that we draw our conclusions and propose some points for future discussion and development. In particular we offer the first draft of a model of community-led Model of Resilience, Relief and Recovery Planning.



key points for further discussion and development



1 It would seem from what we learned, that the governmental definitional distinctions between, 'adverse events' 'shocks', 'natural hazards' and 'disasters' and 'drought' are not useful nor helpful to people in the local context trying to develop practical plans and responses.

Many local individuals and organisations in drought-affected areas (especially, we found, farmers and local government) are experienced in negotiating between different funding programs and agencies, but the differences in government classifications are not helpful.

We found that whilst this irregular 'labelling' was not a 'critical' issue at the local level, it is still an impediment for having clearer and more effective community conversations about 'adverse event' planning in the future. At a local community level we found, the distinctions in labelling seem artificial and (in Queensland at least) it is sometimes not even possible to disentangle the long-term impacts of a drought from the effects of, say, a subsequent flood – even if one is classified as a 'disaster' and one is not. Recent experiences with COVID-19 have taught us that no community is immune from a wide range of challenges brought on by the vagaries of nature and our human interactions with the natural world. Queensland communities that are likely to be affected by drought (and that list is growing) are also likely to need to plan and prepare for a wide range of natural 'shocks' and 'stresses'. Hence, the practical language of planning and response needs to be ratified and agreed upon by all providers of support (government and non-government) and the community.



2 Current drought 'response' and recovery programs need a significant shift of emphasis from drought 'relief' to individual agricultural businesses, and more resources need to be allocated towards 'planning', 'preparedness' and building capacity for 'resilience'.

Whilst this topic has been stressed in many government reports, and for some time, there needs to be more than just rhetoric. Indeed, the launching of the NRRR would seem a good point to support more active discussions, developments and trials of more holistic and integrated models of 'adverse events' planning for regions and local communities. Such new planning models need to utilise reliable 'outside' (science-based) knowledge and expertise, but require the balance of subjective local knowledge (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' traditional and cultural knowledge). This planning needs to be undertaken through a 'community' and 'place management' process because that it is in these 'places' that people live and/or work. Such planning needs to be highly participatory and 'multi-sector' – it cannot simply be tackled sectorally between government agencies and specific 'industry' groups.



3 There is evidence of a growing support for a model of community-led planning for drought 'Resilience, Relief and Recovery' – and the logic of also considering other 'adverse events' in the same process.

We were surprised to find that many of the property and 'agricultural business' owners (and representative groups) that received individual support and funding from governments, also spoke of the need for more resources to go towards community-wide processes.



It was recognised that drought (just as other natural ‘adverse events’) did not just affect the agricultural sector and not just ‘farmers’. Whilst (naturally) property owners wished protect their levels of government support, they also noted that the planning for the ‘survival’ of the community around them was a critical and collective task.

Current community events seem to be mostly ‘informational’ or smaller-scale infrastructure projects that generate some employment. However, a number of stakeholders advocated for a funded and supported ‘framework’, where communities were guided through a process that was resourced with ‘outside’ expertise and ‘scientific’ knowledge, but balanced with ‘local’ capacity and knowledge based on lived experience through “understanding the local context”.

We found a strong view that it would be “more logical” to plan for drought along with other ‘adverse events’. In Queensland, this would mean a local/regional planning model that encompasses the ‘disasters’ covered by the QDMA, as well as the ‘natural hazards’ identified by the QFES... and drought. Roles, responsibilities and responses may differ due to the guidelines for various programs and agencies, but the planning process for this variety of natural ‘adverse events’ could be concurrent even if not consistent.

4 Local and regional planning processes should be facilitated by local government (with support) and the resulting plans seem the ‘logical primary interface’ for allocating further government (and charity) support.

As we discussed ideas for how a local ‘Drought RRR’ process might work, people often got quite enthusiastic. It was suggested by many, that this kind of process would best be facilitated by local government: local councils at the community level and at the regional level by the Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs such as RAPAD).

However, this prompted relatively frank discussions, especially with Council staff, that highlighted views regarding the varied capacity of individual Councils to facilitate such a process. It was clear that many would benefit from the support of a ‘Backbone’[25] organisation – perhaps such as the Red Cross – as well as ensuring that there were adequate government resources (funding, support and expertise) for councils to implement the process effectively.

Most importantly, the view was expressed on a number of occasions that the output of these local planning sessions – the Local and Regional ‘Resilience, Relief and Recovery Plans’ could become a useful ‘starting point’ for more effective and targeted community drought support. Like the current QDMA ‘Disaster Management Planning’ process, this model would involve analysis of the impacts, risks and vulnerabilities from drought (with consideration of the effects of other ‘adverse events’) and then an ‘honest’ appraisal of the community resources and capacities to deal with drought. It was after this, they said, that would seem the logical point to identify just what kind of additional support would help achieve the drought management objectives in the plan.

As people further explored and developed the basic ideas, it was also suggested that the planning process could also be an opportunity to involve other local stakeholders such as the private sector, ‘not-for-profits’ and also charities. Once fully developed, it was suggested that such a plan could be a useful guide for charities that showed clearly the local priorities and helped charitable organisations better align with local needs.

We make no apologies that the ‘sketch’ of the proposed model that follows is rudimentary and lacks detail. It is “work in progress” and is, at present, just a collection of ‘ideas’. However, we believe that it captures the ideas of the people we spoke to and deserves to be further discussed – after all, this is a discussion paper. Red Cross Queensland will continue to promote these ideas and seek resources to conduct a possible trial in the future.

The Idea

a community-led model of Resilience, Relief and Recovery (RRR) Planning

The model sketched out graphically on the following pages is rudimentary and a "very early" draft. It emanates from the ideas and comments of many people we met on our field trips, as well as ideas and concepts already discussed in a variety of reports and documents. The model recognises that the current context for Drought 'Resilience, Relief and Recovery' planning is very dynamic at present and there are a number of important developments underway at both Queensland and Commonwealth government levels. However, we have attempted to allow for a number of alternative scenarios without trying to "double-guess" possible government decisions.

The model is based on a number of key underlying principles and learns from the experience of working with the QDMA. It contains a number of key elements:

- This model is designed for the current context in Queensland.
- Community-level, collective planning for drought 'preparedness, response and recovery' does not replace the efforts required by individual agricultural businesses (and other businesses) to plan for their own activities. This community planning process seeks to deliver shared community outcomes.
- The process is to be facilitated by local government. However, local government should be assured adequate support from other spheres of government (funding, resources and expert advice) to be able to carry out the model effectively.
- Local government at the 'local' and 'regional' level will be supported by a non-government 'Backbone'[26] organisation (perhaps such as Red Cross). This is a trusted organisation whose role is particularly to "support the facilitators" and help "keep the process together and on track".

- The details of the planning process are yet to be finalised and would be developed during a trial and pilot. However, in broad terms, the process would be to:

- (1) Develop a snapshot of current 'drought situation' (and the effect of other adverse events).
- (2) Analyse the impacts using 'external' (scientific) indicators and also 'local' (subjective) indicators.
- (3) Analyse the impacts and risks from drought and the current capacity (including resilience) to deal with these 'shocks'.
- (4) Identify capacity gaps and vulnerabilities.
- (5) Prioritise community objectives in relation to drought (and adverse events) and set goals.
- (6) Identify where additional support is required from state and Commonwealth government, as well as charities and others.
- (7) Produce a Regional 'RRR' Plan and a subset of Local Community Plans for presentation.



Local and Regional Drought (and adverse event) Resilience, Relief and Recovery (RRR) Planning



Led By...

Regional Organisation of Councils and Local Councils

At Regional & Community Level



Supported By...

'Backbone' Organisation*
(e.g. Red Cross Queensland)

*This organisation supports the facilitation and assists to organise, implement and coordinate the collective work. It does not seek to influence the outcomes



Input From...

Various People and Organisations, to be Selected by the Facilitators and Backbone Organisation

Local Citizens

Including town and rural property residents, young and old

For Support, (Traditional) Knowledge, Experience, Resources

Local Businesses

Large and small, agricultural and other businesses

For Support, (Traditional) Knowledge, Experience, Resources

Key Community Groups

Religious, sporting, social, QCWA, local Red Cross etc.

For Support, Knowledge, Experience, Resources

Charities, 'Wellbeing' and Not-for-Profit Organisations

For Support, Knowledge, Experience, Resources

Local Government

For Support, Knowledge & Expertise, Venues

Australian Government

NRRR, Future Drought Fund, BOM, Public Health Network, Other Government Departments & Agencies – various.

(Advice, Expertise, Support & Resources)

Queensland Government

DAF, QFES, QRA, DCDSS, Department of Health, Other Government Departments and Agencies – various.

(Advice, Expertise, Support & Resources)

Key Representative Bodies

For Advice, Expertise, Support & Resources:
AgForce, QFF, RFDS, LGAQ

Universities

For Advice & Support: USQ, JCU

stage 1

"Getting Started"

REGIONAL PLANNING FORUM | 2-3 days

Hosted by: Regional Organisation of Councils - Facilitated by: ROC and Backbone Organisation

TASKS

- Explain process: timelines roles and responsibilities.
- Snapshot of current and projected situation – presentations and discussion.
- Mapping of key impacts across all indicators.
- Identify regional priorities – most significant impacts.
- SWOT analysis – identify regional resources to respond and gaps in resources/knowledge.
- Prepare Draft Action Plan.
- Identify key communities for inclusion in Stage 2.
- ToT for local Stage 2 Facilitators and organise logistics, resources and invitations for Stage 2.

stage 2

"Listening to Community"

LOCAL PLANNING FORUMS | over 6 months (including 1 or more community meetings)

Facilitated by: Local Councils, Local Facilitators and Backbone Organisation

TASKS

- Snapshot of current and projected Regional and Local situations – presentations and discussion.
- Presentation of key impacts across all indicators (test/trial practical sets of indicators).
- Feedback and validation of local impacts, and gaps/vulnerabilities.
- SWOT analysis – identify local resources to respond and gaps in resources/knowledge/capacity.
- Identify external assistance required.
- Review Draft Regional RRR Action Plan – for guidance Prepare Draft Local RRR Action Plan – with priorities, goals, objectives and resources required.

stage 3

"Putting it all Together"

CONSOLIDATION FORUM | 2 days

Hosted by: Regional Organisation of Councils – Facilitated by: ROC and Backbone Organisation

TASKS

- Presentation of an overview of local plans – discussion.
- Review concurrence and/or difference between Regional draft and Local plans... discussion, comments and proposed amendments.
- Consolidation of Local plans into Draft Regional Plan.
- Decide about changes to Draft Regional Plan and how to accommodate local circumstances.
- Develop Regional RRR Plan – including actions and responsibilities.
- Develop any necessary amendments to Local RRR Plans.
- Identify Critical Regional resource/support needs.
- Present Draft Regional RRR Plan and Local RRR Plans to relevant government agencies, NGOs/Charities, and Private sector (sources of advice and resources).
- Gather and collate feedback from Resource/Program Providers.

stage 4

"Joint Planning and Resource Allocation"

RESOURCE ALLOCATION MEETING | with resource/program providers (govt. and non-govt.)

TASKS

- Presentation of Draft Regional and Local RRR Plans (Overview) and summary of collated feedback/response.
- Discussion of feedback/response issues... Suggestions to modify Regional and/or Local plans.
- Presentation of Final (draft) Regional RRR Plan – response within agreed period by Government, NGO, Business sector, and key stakeholders.
- Finalisation of Local RRR Plans.
- Public release of Final Regional and Local RRR Plans – public response and commitments by Government, NGOs, Business sector, Charities and key stakeholders.
- Need for ongoing M&E and Review process.

Appendices



stage 1

"Getting Started"

REGIONAL PLANNING FORUM (2-3 days)

HOSTED BY:

Regional Organisation of Councils – e.g. RAPAD

INCLUDING:

- Member Council Mayors
- Local Disaster Coordinators
- District Disaster Coordinators
- QRA
- DAF
- Relevant National Drought agency (e.g. NRRR)
- Key stakeholders (see input list)
- First Nations Elders and knowledge holders
- Key private sector
- Invitees, including technical and university experts (e.g. USQ/JCU)

FACILITATED BY:

ROC and Backbone Organisation (e.g. Red Cross)

TASKS

- Explain process: timelines roles and responsibilities.
- Snapshot of current and projected situation – presentations and discussion.
- Mapping of key impacts across all indicators (test/trial practical sets of indicators: external and 'local') – current and projected.
- Identify regional priorities – most significant impacts.
- SWOT analysis – identify regional resources to respond and gaps in resources/knowledge.
- Prepare Draft Action Plan.
- Identify key communities for inclusion in Stage 2.
- ToT for local Stage 2 facilitators.
- Organise logistics, resources and invitations for Stage 2.



stage 2

"Listening to Community"

REGIONAL PLANNING FORUM (over 6 months)

ONE OR MORE COMMUNITY MEETINGS

INCLUDING:

- Council Mayor and Staff
- Local Disaster Coordinators
- Key Local Stakeholders (see input list)
- First Nations Elders and Knowledge Holders
- Relevant Invitees

FACILITATED BY:

Local Councils and Backbone Organisation

SUPPORTED BY:

Backbone Organisation (e.g. Red Cross)

TASKS

- Snapshot of current and projected regional and local situations – presentations and discussion.
- Presentation of key impacts across all indicators (test/trial practical sets of indicators) – current and projected.
- Feedback and validation of local impacts, and gaps/vulnerabilities.
- SWOT analysis – identify local resources to respond and gaps in resources/knowledge/capacity.
- Identify external assistance required
- Review Draft Regional RRR Action Plan – for guidance.
- Prepare Draft Local RRR Action Plan – with priorities, goals, objectives and resources required.



stage 3

"Putting it all Together"

CONSOLIDATION FORUM (2 days)

HOSTED BY:

Regional Organisation of Councils – e.g. RAPAD

INCLUDING:

- Member Council Mayors
- Local Disaster Coordinators
- District Disaster Coordinators
- QRA
- DAF
- Relevant National Drought agency (e.g. NRRR)
- Key stakeholders (see input list)
- First Nations Elders and knowledge holders;
- Key private sector
- Invitees, including technical and university experts (e.g. USQ/JCU)

...BUT SMALLER THAN STAGE 1

FACILITATED BY:

ROC and Backbone Organisation (e.g. Red Cross)

TASKS

- Presentation of an overview of local plans – discussion.
- Review concurrence and/or difference between regional draft and local plans... discussion, comments and proposed amendments.
- Consolidation of local plans into draft regional plan.
- Decision about changes to draft regional plan and how to accommodate local circumstances.
- Develop Regional RRR Plan – including actions and responsibilities.
- Develop any necessary amendments to Local RRR Plans.
- Identify critical regional resource/support needs.
- Present Draft Regional RRR Plan and Local RRR Plans to relevant government agencies, NGOs/charities, and private sector (sources of advice and resources).
- Gather and collate feedback.



stage 4

"Joint Planning & Resource Allocation"

PLANNING FORUM (2 days)

HOSTED BY:

Regional Organisation of Councils – e.g. RAPAD

INCLUDING:

- Member Council Mayors
- Local Disaster Coordinators
- District Disaster Coordinators
- QRA
- DAF
- Relevant National Drought agency (e.g. NRRR)
- Key stakeholders (see input list)
- First Nations Elders and knowledge holders
- Key private sector
- Invitees, including technical and university experts (e.g. USQ/JCU)

FACILITATED BY:

ROC and Backbone Organisation (e.g. Red Cross)

TASKS

- Presentation of Draft Regional and Local RRR Plans (overview) and summary of collated feedback/response.
- Discussion of feedback/response issues... Suggestions to modify Regional and/or Local Plans.
- Presentation of Final (draft) Regional RRR Plan – response within agreed period by government, NGO, business sector, and key stakeholders.
- Finalisation of Local RRR Plans
- Public release of Final Regional and Local RRR Plans – public response and commitments by government, NGOs, business sector, charities and key stakeholders.
- Need for ongoing M&E and review process.



List of Informants and Interviewees

Kirsten Pietzner*	Lead-Regional Development; LGAQ
Carl Peterson	Coordinator Disaster Management Engineering Construction and Maintenance; Moreton Bay Regional Council
Ben McMullen	Coordinator Environmental Planning and Policy; Moreton Bay Regional Council
Chris Barnes	Disaster Preparedness Coordinator Engineering Construction and Maintenance; Moreton Bay Regional Council
Darryl Bates	Principal Community Development; Toowoomba Regional Council
Sarah Rossiter	Community Development Officer; Toowoomba Regional Council
Matt Brown	Disaster Management Officer; Toowoomba Regional Council
Jenna Buckley	Principal Disaster Management; Toowoomba Regional Council
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Paul McDonald	CEO; Southern Queensland Landscapes
Andrew Sinnamon	AgForce South; East Regional Manager
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Dr. Geoff Woolcock	Senior Research Fellow Institute for Resilient Regions; University of Southern Queensland
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Glenda Riley	Granite Belt Drought Assist; Stanthorpe
Jacki Harvey	Queensland Country Women's Association; Stanthorpe
Helen O'Brian	Mental health Service Navigator; Rhealth Warwick
Jane McCollum	Counsellor; Rural Aid; Warwick
Vic Pennisi	Mayor; Southern Downs Regional Council
David Burges	CEO; Southern Downs Regional Council
Michael Bell	Manager Community Services and Major Projects; Southern Downs Regional Council
Pia Fletcher	Disaster Manager; Southern Downs Regional Council
Belinda Armstrong	Community Service Coordinator; Southern Downs Regional Council
Craig Magnussen	Manager Environmental & Regulatory Services; Southern Downs Regional Council
Michael Jensen	Owner; Granite Belt Motel; Santhorpe
Brian Dodson	Rural Financial Counsellor; Charleville
Angela Bowden	Rural Financial Counsellor; Charleville

Lisa Hamlyn	Manager of Corporate and Community services; Quilpie Shire Council
Tim Rose	Acting CEO; Quilpie Shire Council
'Bluey'	'Local Fixture'; Quilpie Imperial Hotel
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Jeff Russell	Rural Support Worker; Neighbourhood Centre; Charleville
Tegan Russell	Service Integration Coordinator; Queensland Health; Charleville
John Nicholson	Economic Development Officer; Murweh Shire Council; Charleville
Shaun (Zorro) Radnedge	Mayor; Murweh Shire Council; Charleville
Trish Mckenzie	South West Regional Manager; AgForce, Charleville
Debbie Alick	Red Cross Branch Secretary; Charleville
Bruce Scott OAM	Advisor, National Drought and North Queensland Flood Recovery and Response Agency; Charleville
Maureen Scott	Primary producer; (ex) 'Moothandella'; Murweh Shire
Craig Alison	Executive Officer; South West Regional Economic Development (SWRED); Charleville
Danielle Steele	Mayor; Mt Isa City Council
David Keegan	Interim CEO; Mt Isa City Council
Denise Price	Flood Disaster Recovery; North West Hospital and Health Service, Queensland Heath; Mt Isa
Julie Anderson	TRAIC Program, Queensland Health; Mt Isa
Donna Drysdale	Flood Disaster Recovery; North West Hospital and Health Service, Queensland Heath; Mt Isa
Marianna Masiorski	Manager – Integrated Mental health; North West Remote Health
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Matt Chesnais	Executive Manager – Hazard and Risk Unit; Community Resilience and Risk Mitigation; Queensland Fire and Emergency Services; QFES
Dr Lochlan Morrissey	Senior program officer, Hazard and Risk Emergency Management and Community Capability; Queensland Fire and Emergency Services; QFES
Dr. Georgina Davis*	CEO; Queensland Farmers Federation
Kerry Battersby*	Project Officer; Queensland Farmers Federation
Kerry Hayes	Mayor; Central Highlands Regional Council Emerald
Andrew Farquhar	Farmer/Mining Trainer; Emerald
Glenn Bell	Coordinator Disaster Management and Community Resilience; Central Highlands Regional Council

Tim Shaw	Manager, Mental Health Services; Royal Flying Doctor Service RFDS
The Hon Shane L Stone AC QC	National Coordinator-General; Drought & North Queensland Floods Agency
Steve Kemp	Aboriginal Elder (ex-Mayor); Woorabinda Aboriginal Council
Alistair MacDonald	Coordinator, Service Providers; Commissioning; Western Queensland Public Health Network
Stuart Gordon	CEO; Western Queensland Public Health Network
David Arnold	Executive Officer, Rural Financial Counselling Service North Queensland; CEO, Remote Area Planning and Development Board Longreach
Vol Norris	Regional Manager (West); AgForce, Longreach
James and Manny Walker	Agripreneurs; Camden Park Station – Longreach
Lisa and Peter Clark	Graziers; Longreach
Tony Martin	CEO; QANTAS Founders Museum, Longreach
Peter Whip	Chair; Outback Futures
Bradley Whittington	Regional Area Manager: Central Highlands & West; Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority - QRIDA; Emerald
Anthony (Tony) Raynor	Mayor; Longreach Regional Council
Mitchell Murphy	CEO; Longreach Regional Council
Craig Neurndorf	Disaster Coordinator; Longreach Regional Council
Lisa Young	Director, Community and Cultural Services; Longreach Regional Council
Paul and Paula Mispeka	Small Business Financial Counsellors; Longreach -Central West Queensland
Rachel Bock	Rural Financial Counsellor; Rural Financial Counselling Service, Longreach
Vaughan Johnson	Queensland Drought Commissioner; National Drought and North Queensland Flood Recovery and Response Agency
John Nicholson	Business Development Officer; Murweh Shire Council; Charleville
Angie Bowden	Rural Financial Counsellor; Rural Financial Counselling Service Southern Queensland; Charleville
Brian Dodson	Rural Financial Counsellor; Rural Financial Counselling Service Southern Queensland; Charleville
Suzanne Poulter	Manager; Connected Communities; Emerald
Trudy Gorringe	Mithaka Aboriginal Cooperation; Windorah
Natalie Gorringe	Mithaka Aboriginal Cooperation; Windorah

Jo Killick*	General Manager; Liaison and Recovery; Queensland Reconstruction Authority
Ben Norris	Manager; Drought, Disaster and Emergency Incidents; Team Mental Health Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch (Queensland Health)
Denis Ware	Red Cross Officer; Rockhampton
Ron Weazel	Mayor; Woorabinda Aboriginal Council
Steve Kemp	Elder (ex-Mayor); Woorabinda Aboriginal Council
Wayne Fossey	Elder-in-Residence; University of Southern Queensland
Garry Page	State Director; Red Cross Queensland
Various Members	Social and Human Recovery Group; Central Highlands Regional Council; Emerald
Michael Carl	Depot Manager; Aussie Helpers; Charleville
Helen Cook	Parent Liaison Officer; Charleville School of Distance Education
Belinda Murphy	Rural Business Owner (ex-Mayor); McKinlay Shire Council; Julia Creek
John Kelly	CEO: McKinlay Shire Council; Julia Creek
Jane Williams	Chair: Central-Western Rural Wellness Network; Central-West Board Chair; Queensland Health; Longreach
Various Members	The 'Central West Mental Health Roundtable' (December 3, 2020); Organised by the Public Health Network; Western Queensland; Longreach
Vern Rudwick	Director; Drought Programs and Response; Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Natasha Johnson	Co-Founding Director; Drought Angels
Collin Sivalingum*	State Emergency Services Manager; Red Cross Queensland
Professor Roger Stone*	Director Centre for Applied Climate Sciences (Queensland Drought Mitigation Centre); University of Southern Queensland; Toowoomba
Cam Parker*	Grains Policy Director; AgForce Queensland
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*Members of the Red Cross Queensland Drought Management Reference Group

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