

Submission from Ms Susan Armstrong Waikerie, SA

Submission Number: 14

Public Submission received by Email to Drought Policy Review 01/08/08:

Have you also attended an Expert Social Panel public consultation forum? NO

Never heard of any in this area but I am a shift worker now and still helping to run the farm so I don't read as much or get the news as often as I once did.

• *What is your experience of drought and its affect on educational and training services in rural Australia?*

Education and training oportunites for mature age students are very limited in the Riverland. How can you justify the cost of traveling to Adelaide when unless you move away? This means selling the family property when there are no buyers at a time when resale values are reduced.

The best future for our children lies in education and training. Rural families do not receive any more help than their city counterparts in this area. Centrelink and other funding agencies fail to realize that for my daughter to attend university she MUST live AWAY from home. This required her to work for a year in order to obtain independent of parents status. (Which she did 3 years ago) Students in this position now may be unable to secure employment and earn the required money to do this a s casual job opportunities are drying up fast.

There must be some kind of assistance in allowing these students to pursue education opportunities which exist only in the city. Scholarships or weekly funding in some form.

My son is currently completing year 12 and completing Certificate 1 in Electrotechnology in Adelaide every Friday, he wants to become an electrician. He will most likely have to move to Adelaide to gain an apprenticeship. I have ABSOLUTELY no idea how to fund this. He hasn't a chance in hell of living on a first year apprentice wage and living in a share house without us contributing approx \$200 per week. Yea sure we can go deeper into debt to facilitate this but when does it stop. We have NO IDEA IF we will be able to get a crop this year as our current irrigation allocation is 2%.

Our children should not have their future damaged as a result of this drought. It is hurting them enough to be sent away!!

• *In what ways could education and training programs and policies be better adjusted to address the specific impact of drought?*

Bring the trainers to the area. TAFE has the resources (ie computers, location etc but is not funded to provide training. There are many farmers who still cannot send emails or access the internet in spite of having the technology for their children. This could be easily addressed by providing night classes.

- *What types of successful initiatives have you or your organisation accessed or developed to overcome the barriers of drought on education and training?*

My daughter worked for a year to declare herself independent of us and gain Centrelink payments to enable her to attend university in Adelaide. This and the receipt of 2 small scholarships have helped a lot.

- *What is your experience of drought and how it affects families in rural Australia?*

Employment opportunities are decreasing rapidly. I am now a prison officer which enables me to work off farm. There are very few employment advertisements in this area and with shops closing all over the area retail is disappearing fast. Citrus packing houses are shrinking and in real danger of disappearing, they have been a big employer in the past.

- *In what ways could programs and policies be better adjusted to address the specific impact of drought on families?*

- *What types of successful initiatives have you or your organisation accessed or developed to overcome the barriers of drought on families?*

Off farm employment. Interest rate rebate grant.

- *What is your experience of drought and its effects on employment and professional development in rural Australia?*

As previously discussed.

- *In what ways could employment and skilling programs and policies be better adjusted to address the specific impact of drought?*

Someone needs to put some energy into what industries could be brought to the Riverland that will create employment without using water! I have no idea what to suggest here.

- *What types of successful initiatives have you or your organisation accessed or developed to overcome the barriers of drought on employment and professional development?*

Off farm employment. Our property previously employed both of us and some casual labour.

- *What is your experience of drought and its affects on mental and physical health in individuals or services in rural Australia?*

People are disillusioned and in some cases depressed. How can anyone plan a business year when the variables such as water is unknown. We are not dryland farmers we are not used to lack of water. We MUST know what the annual entitlement is at the start of the irrigation year as it used to be (until 2 years ago). Rumours of suicides the day 2 % was announced are around. There must be a better way, word behind the scenes is we will get 30% these guys were right last year so why can't we be told upfront.

- *In what ways could mental or physical health programs and policies be better adjusted to address the specific impact of drought?*

Bulk bill if possible. When money is tight a visit to your GP to discuss mental health issues which most people are uneasy with anyway is compounded by the costs involved.

- *What types of successful initiatives have you or your organisation accessed or developed to overcome the barriers of drought on mental and physical health?*

Off farm employment. Talking, reassuring each other.

SUMMARY

In addition to the damage done to mature age residents such as myself we will lose a generation here. Two of my sons are genetically predisposed to be great farmers but both will be denied that opportunity. Given the financial rewards offered in this industry they will probably be better off as wage earners anyway but they will still have to move just to gain employment.

The magnitude of this impending disaster is little understood. Another year of low water allocation will see the bankruptcies begin. Do we really want ghost towns in the Riverland ?