



RFCS future focus

October 2006 no. 9

NSW service providers confirmed

The new providers of rural financial counselling services in NSW are:

- RFCS NSW – Northern Region (an amalgamation of Richmond Valley Business and Rural Financial Counselling Services, the New England, Southern New England, North West, Gunnedah and Lower Hunter-Manning Rural Counselling Services and the Warrumbungle Rural Community Program)
- RFCS NSW – Southern Region (an amalgamation of the Monaro, Cowra, North East Riverina, Southern Riverina, Southern Tablelands and Lower Lachlan Rural Financial Counselling Services)
- RFCS NSW – Central West (an amalgamation of the Central West, Macquarie, Forbes, Bogan, Upper Hunter, Castlereagh, Walgett and Lachlan Rural Financial Counselling Services)
- RFCS NSW – Wentworth Balranald, and
- RFCS NSW – Bourke (now incorporating the Brewarrina area).

These organisations are working towards setting up their services and all services are expected to be operating under the new arrangements from 1 November.

New drought package: extra funds for rural financial counselling

Additional funding will be provided to rural financial counselling services to assist with the increased workload due to drought. There may be a need for more counsellors, or for help with extra costs, depending on the severity of the drought-affected area.

All service providers received a letter last week from the Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, spelling out the details of the new funding.

Rural financial counsellors should contact Centrelink on the National Drought Helpline 13 23 16 to check EC assistance eligibility. For EC interest rate subsidy information, producers should contact their State Rural Adjustment Authority.

For more information about the new drought assistance package, visit www.daff.gov.au/droughtassist

RFCS National Conference 2006: outcomes

The inaugural RFCS National Conference (for service providers) was held on 4-5 October in Melbourne. The conference was held at the Brighton Savoy Motel, near Brighton Beach, and many attendees enjoyed an early morning walk along the beach before the days' sessions!

Many state advisory committee members, including state government representatives, also attended, ensuring a good coverage of perspectives and issues.

The conference was formally opened by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, who announced that Minister McGauran has asked her to take on responsibility for the program. Ms Ley also launched the RFCS Program Charter, which sets out the responsibilities of service providers and ministerial expectations for the program's outcomes. The conference included sessions on the changes to the RFCS Program, human resources issues, corporate governance and communications.

The majority of attendees stated that most aspects of the conference were very good:

- 67% rated the corporate governance session as the most relevant
- 77% thought the conference would help them make changes in their organisations, and
- 97% stated they would attend another similar event.

However, many attendees felt the role of the state advisory committees needs to be clarified.

Many people commented that the conference was a great networking opportunity and enabled service providers and executive officers to mingle with delegates from other states as well as with state advisory committee members and Office of Rural Financial Counselling staff.

New look for RFCS website

When you next visit www.rfcs.gov.au, you'll notice some changes.

First of all, there are two new pages. One new page, 'History of the RFCS Program', provides a brief overview of how the program got to where it is today.

Most importantly, there is a new page designed just for service providers and rural financial counsellors. You can reach this page via the link 'RFCS administration: For service providers and counsellors' on the home page or go directly to www.rfcs.gov.au/admin (remember to bookmark the page or add it to your Favourites on your web browser). Here you'll find information, publications and documents to help you run your service or work as a counsellor.

Remember to check www.rfcs.gov.au/admin regularly for updates.

We have also updated the rural financial counsellor contact pages for each state based on the contact details we had to hand. **Please check your contact details** and let us know of any changes (email rfcs@daff.gov.au). Please also check that the town or area you are located in is correct.

National Workshop for Rural Financial Counsellors 2006

The inaugural national workshop for rural financial counsellors will be held in Canberra on Wednesday 22 November.

The workshop will have sessions on:

- training and skills issues
- roles and responsibilities
- client eligibility and client declaration forms
- human resources
- other government programs, including drought assistance, and
- rural financial counselling's place in the provision of community counselling services.

There will also be training in the new ARC database on Tuesday 21 November and Thursday 23 November, which will include migrating current client data to the new database. Counsellors only need to attend one session.

The workshop will be held at Rydges Eagle Hawk Resort, Federal Highway, North Canberra.

A formal letter of invitation, including all travel and accommodation details, was sent to chairs and executive officers last week. For general information about the workshop, phone Tamsin Sowden on 02 6272 5449 or Michelle Macaulay on 02 6272 4617 (email rfcs@daff.gov.au). For enquiries about travel arrangements, phone Hilary Connors on 02 6272 5571 (email rfcs@daff.gov.au).

From the ARC helpdesk

Rural financial counsellors are to attend ARC training as part of the National Workshop for Rural Financial Counsellors 2006 in November.

At these training sessions, counsellors will be trained in the new ARC database and will also receive a copy of the new program. Their current data will be migrated to the new database.

For your training session, you should either:

- bring the laptop that has the current ARC database on it to the training session, or
- if ARC is used on a desktop computer, bring the file `atdedata.mdb` on a CD or USB drive – this file is usually in the ARC folder on your C drive (C:\ARC). If you can't find the file, phone Dean Curley on 02 6272 3549 or email dean.curley@daff.gov.au. If you are on a network, the file may be located elsewhere – either contact your network administrator or phone Dean.

If you have a new laptop which does not yet have ARC installed, you should bring this laptop with you as well. The new version of ARC requires Windows 2000 or Windows XP as the operating system and a facility for connecting to the internet. If you are unsure what is required, please call Dean Curley for assistance before leaving for Canberra as it is essential that all counsellors' ARC databases be upgraded and that the data be migrated to the new version of ARC during the workshop.

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If you bring a laptop to the workshop, the new version of ARC will be installed on that laptop and your ARC data will be migrated to the new version. If you use a desktop computer and bring the atdedata.mdb file on a CD, you will get a new CD containing your ARC data migrated to the new program, as well as a copy of the new version of ARC with instructions for installation.

On 12 October, we held a pilot session in South Australia where we updated the SA counsellors' ARC database and migrated their data over to the new version. Overall it went very well and gave us valuable information for the main training and rollout of ARC in Canberra during the national workshop. Thank you to those in SA who participated.

NEWS

What is Landcare Farming?—Landcare Farming is about taking a holistic approach to land management. It involves adoption of sustainable farming practices for the good of the land and land managers. Visit the [Landcare Online](#) website for information and inspiring success stories.

FarmBis—a highly successful program which subsidises training and education for farmers. Visit www.farmbis.gov.au for details of courses available, training locations in your state and how to apply for funding.

For comments about *RFCS future focus*, email rfcs@daff.gov.au

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