



Drought Policy

QFF believes that communities, industries and governments need to be better prepared to deal with extreme weather events. Where there are identifiable risks associated with weather and climate variability, these need to be planned for rather than reacted to. While self interest may guide the responses of individuals to these climate risks, there is also a need to promote similar group responses.

1. DROUGHT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) calls for a co-ordinated, national approach to drought preparedness and drought management in preference to the reactive and uneven application of the current Exceptional Circumstance (EC) and state Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS) programs. Policy must be sufficiently robust to deal with the challenges Australia faces from weather and climate variability and change in the future.

There is an urgent need to implement a complete whole-of-government approach to public initiatives and investments to deal with drought and climate variability and change.

Measures to deliver better climate management tools are needed, including risk management strategies to cover preparation, management and recovery activities for extreme weather events, and programs to deliver appropriate skills to plan and cope with longer term climate change scenarios. The best solution to drought and climate change is preparation. Such policies and programs should:

- Be based on the principle of continuous learning and improvement and the application of timely, science-based information;
- Identify with effective supply chains that are market responsive and adaptable;
- Deliver research, education and training skills and tools relevant to an ever changing world;
- Show how they assist in developing a sustainable, low-cost, globally competitive agriculture and food sector;
- Include appropriate transition arrangements;
- Provide underlying welfare support in a timely and equitable fashion;
- Aim to retain a skilled workforce in rural areas along the supply chain during extreme events;
- Encourage the use of farm management tools which promote self reliance and risk management and provide the leverage to proactively deal with future droughts and climate change/variability;
- Be universal in application. Drought impacts will vary and they are dealt with accordingly, but as their effects accumulate and reach "exceptional" there should be no discrimination as to which sectors may need assistance when clearly the whole community is impacted.

QFF acknowledges that state and national drought assistance arrangements need to remain in place until the current drought ends. However, both Queensland and Australian Governments need to commit to a more proactive program than is currently underway through the Primary Industries Ministerial Council process. QFF calls for:

- More consultation with intensive agriculture in the development of the National Agricultural Monitoring Scheme (NAMS) to assist in drought declarations, along with a work program so that NAMS can achieve its goals of delivering timely and accurate information to all stakeholders;
- State assessments of "seasonal conditions" to more comprehensively incorporate all principal agriculture activities in a region;
- Finalise the implementation of "standardised and harmonised" processes for drought declarations and recoveries;
- Set benchmarks and timelines to integrate weather, climate and water monitoring into the measurement of production, landscape and social impacts at appropriate local and regional levels (shire and statistical divisions).

2. DROUGHT PREPAREDNESS AND CLIMATE RISKS

QFF believes that Governments need to promote and support programs to improve industry drought preparedness and management of climate risk, including:

- Farm Management Systems (FMS) - Specific drought, climate and water management modules should be developed as appropriate to the needs of each industry for inclusion in industry-led FMS programs designed to make farming more profitable and sustainable;
- FarmBis and TASK-type Rural Training Programs - Encourage and expand programs that educate and promote a whole-of-farm approach to managing rain and water variability and consequent income fluctuations to individuals and communities;
- Long-Range Seasonal Forecasts Linked into Production Systems, including Water Management Systems - Increased public research on climate risk management and climate change and variability to better predict and manage weather and climate variability, with results presented in a format that can be applied by agricultural enterprises;
- Risk Management - To ensure environmental and animal welfare are at the forefront of sustainable land use, primary producers, regions and industries must be educated in and encouraged to use risk management strategies that can cope with any form of climate extremity. Producers should be encouraged to take a co-operative approach to land management, recognising that climate extremities and impacts are generally wider than the farm boundary.

3. CLIMATE APPLICATIONS AND PUBLIC RESEARCH

Climate variability needs to be considered as a normal part of risk management and decision-making. To ensure such decisions are better informed, a comprehensive research and communications strategy is needed, providing:

- Information in a form that land, water and business managers can utilise and incorporate into their decision making processes, developed in consultation between scientists and users;
- Climatic indicators and projections which are more specific measures of on-ground manifestations of weather events;
- Redirection of public research work programs to specifically incorporate climate adaptation issues;
- Better education of the community about possible future climate scenarios and the development and promotion of strategies to either mitigate or adapt to these scenario.

4. WATER POLICY ISSUES

To cope better with climate variability, more efficient storage, management and use of water resources is essential. While QFF is supportive of the National Water Initiative (NWI), it requires further research and policy development to:

- Better specify the scope of responsibilities to deal with drought and climate change, with adjustments to reflect the underlying science and economics of water use;
- Raise public awareness of drought impacts and adjustment options including better decision-making tools;
- Provide more relevant and timely data and assessment of the impact on water availability from weather and climate variability and change, particularly on a regional and catchment basis;
- Improve the catchment-based water resource planning and monitoring to better assist rural water users in effectively managing for the risks of climate and natural events such as drought;
- Provide for greater security of entitlement to water for primary production;
- Prioritise planning for the reuse of water from the treatment of municipal sewage effluent, industrial and agricultural effluent and urban storm water, and exploration of potential development of agricultural uses for such water;
- Expand the Rural Water Use Efficiency and like programs designed to encourage and assist water users to be more efficient. Public assistance is required to create the constant learning environment that will extend the value of similar research and development programs with broader education and extension effort, along with appropriately targeted incentives to promote better practices;
- Reduce or waive fixed water charges where exceptional drought impacts have reduced water deliveries to less than half of water allocations as part of a wider array of appropriate drought assistance measures.