



**Factsheet: preparing rural business for natural disaster**

# IRO program helps farmers one on one

RECOVERY from Cyclone Yasi in Far North Queensland has been made easier by a team of Industry Recovery Officers (IROs) who have been assisting primary producers and small businesses with the various forms of assistance needed to help recover from the devastation of a Category 5 cyclone.

The IRO program has been a partnership between the Queensland Farmers' Federation, industry groups, and the State and Federal Governments. Post-cyclone it has seen 17 IROs working across the industries of the region, including tourism, horticulture, bananas, grazing, sugarcane, dairy, nursery, aquaculture and fishing. The program followed a simple template first used after Cyclone Larry in 2006. It has used established industry people to work with farmers and help them negotiate the various forms of assistance – including QRAA grants and loans.

Innisfail sugarcane producer Charlie Zappala welcomed the IRO program and said it was appreciated by many growers. "A lot of the growers in the Innisfail/Babinda region are getting older and have a background of from overseas, so their English isn't perfect," Mr Zappala said. "The IROs have been there to help them."

Wil Conn has been an IRO

servicing the aquaculture and seafood industries. He agreed that the program built on existing networks. "The greatest benefit we've been able to bring to a small number of people is the ability to engage face to face, gain their trust and then hopefully align their needs to the assistance packages that are out there," Mr Conn said.

QDO President Brian Tessmann said the IROs were industry people and were known on the ground. "They relate

to farmers on their own terms, and are trusted. In the dairy industry the QDO IRO, Lyn O'Connor, is a farmer herself – so she certainly knows what the farmers have been dealing with."

While the program has now concluded, QFF CEO Dan Galligan said it had helped get primary producers and business back on track, and in turn regional economies and communities, and therefore, it was a proven template that could successfully be used in future disaster situations.

"The Federal and State



governments offered various forms of assistance to farmers during this summer of natural disaster – and it is understandable that sorting through the paperwork and complexity of these is a tough job for farmers when their first priority is dealing with the damage to their farms, families and communities," he said.

"The IROs have helped farmers decide what assistances are most needed for them, and to get the right applications into the right places."

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