

# Drought Taskforce Briefing: Key Priorities from Rural Councils Victoria

## Summary

Rural Victoria is facing an escalating drought crisis that is impacting not only farmers but entire communities. Immediate support is needed alongside longer-term investments in rural resilience. Rural Councils Victoria (RCV) is calling for urgent and practical interventions that go beyond agriculture, acknowledging drought as a community-wide disaster event.

## Positioning

- While not seeking formal emergency declarations, RCV aims to position drought alongside fire and flood in terms of urgency and scale.
- Emphasise impact beyond the farm gate on towns, businesses, families, and mental health.

## Top 5 Immediate Priorities

### 1. Rates Relief for Farmers: State-Funded, Council-Delivered

- Councils are calling for the State Government to provide a primary producer rate subsidy, reimbursing drought-declared councils for waived or discounted farm rates.
- Example: In Corangamite Shire, farm rates total \$13.2 million, a significant burden on struggling producers.

### 2. Zero Interest Loans: Federal Government Support

- Current matched funding models are ineffective and inaccessible for many farmers.
- We need for the Commonwealth to provide zero-interest loans for drought-affected primary producers.

### 3. Freight Access and Hay Supply

The high cost of fodder and transport requires substantial subsidies and coordination to help farmers afford feed for their animals.

Biosecurity restrictions are limiting the flow of Western Australian hay into Victoria.

Action is needed to secure reliable freight corridors and clarify or amend biosecurity restrictions to ensure access to fodder.

#### 4. Immediate Community Response Funding: \$250K per Council

- The impact extends to small businesses, families and whole communities.
- Each drought-declared council should receive \$250,000 in immediate funding to deploy flexible, community-led initiatives e.g.
  - Temporary officers for community coordination
  - Events (e.g. volunteer dinners, youth band nights)
  - Volunteer support and coordination
- Similar Funding should also be allocated to RCV to help coordinate efforts, disseminate information, and provide leadership support.
  - Webinars and community resources
  - CEO mentoring and leadership support
  - Coordination of regional messaging and advocacy

#### 5. Support for Pest Control and Roadside Grazing

- Increase capacity to manage kangaroo and wild dog populations, a key concern raised by the VFF and rural landholders.
- Streamline permits and access for roadside grazing (as flagged by Moyne Shire).

### Medium to Long-Term Investment Proposals

#### Rural Community Infrastructure and Facilities Fund

- Propose a \$500M fund in roads, bridges, halls, and recreation assets across rural Victoria.
- Build greater resilience in all rural communities and help them grow and rebuild after disasters. Leverage the legacy of past drought investments to enhance community resilience.

#### Funding for RCV to Scale Support

- \$250,000 to RCV to provide ongoing support to the sector
- Information gathering and sharing, coordination
- Council capacity building