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Drought Submission

Thankyou for the opportunity for this submission. I am a generational beef cattle grazier.
Apologies for the brief nature of this submission.
Current drought programs & industry approach need a bottom-up complete overhaul.

Our Livestock industry MUST make changes to our current approach & adapt to the natural conditions of this continent. It must start with the acceptance & NORMALISING of the fact of periodic drought. We must learn to be flexible & manage through our naturally highly variable climate. Some level of cooperation & nation-wide industry coordination is required to facilitate the necessary flexibility.

In seasonally arid continents like our own, animals migrate to follow the rains. We must learn to mimic this natural pattern as much as possible. Programs & strategies are required that focus on moving the animals – developing & facilitating livestock markets & marketing strategies, transportation, agistment, buying & selling.

We must move right away from any strategies based on keeping the animals stationary and carting in feed, as this does tremendous damage to our pastures & soils & exacerbates current & future droughts.

Ground cover is king – a culture of keeping the soil covered at all times needs to be promoted, to both increase water infiltration & reduce loss through evaporation. Bare soil promotes droughts & floods.

Water retention & infiltration programs need to be adopted, such as those taught by:

<https://themullooninstitute.org/>

We need a discussion & strategy around national herd management & programs to promote retention of quality young females for future breeding, to increase livestock industry flexibility & ability to bounce back when the droughts break.

Carting hay is utterly unacceptable: livestock should NOT be fed on paddocks of bare soil. This is environmentally, financially, and ethically (animal welfare) unacceptable & creates many problems including soil destruction, spread of weeds, financial ruin, & promotes poor practices & erodes social licence. We must move the animals ... NOT the forage!!
Supplementing to assist animals to digest poor quality roughage feed is OK, but once a minimum threshold of ground cover is reached the animals MUST be moved off of the property or confined in a lot-feeding style.

Facilitate/encourage agistment: a discussion & programs about how to encourage the agistment market (particularly for young female stock) needs to take place, to facilitate the mimicking of natural animal migration & recovery of national herd after the drought breaks.

Markets are required for 'unfinished' (not fat) cattle in order to facilitate good animal welfare and environmental outcomes when gripped by dry times – the live export provides an important function to remove unfinished livestock.

Grazing pressure from kangaroos: kangaroos would naturally die off in times of drought as the natural water evaporates. Artificial water leads to artificially high kangaroo numbers & uncontrollable overgrazing & loss of ground cover. Kangaroos need to be managed, particularly in times of drought.

Education & extension: there is much the average farmer/grazier can learn that will greatly help to mitigate droughts. I highly recommend these following courses, which we have found immensely helpful in managing through the dry:

<https://themullooninstitute.org/>

<https://www.klrmarketing.com.au/>

<https://www.insideoutsidemgt.com.au/>

<https://www.rcsaustralia.com.au/>

I understand that public money is to be spent on the "Public Good" and not go to private businesses, HOWEVER it is a grave mistake to ignore the good that is being done by these private educational institutions. I suggest that government research funds would be well spent investigating the theories & methods espoused by the above institutions to validate them scientifically & then the results of this research can be disseminated to landholders through governmental extension & education services. This knowledge is KEY to learning to successfully live with cycles of drought.

Tax: the taxation rules around livestock need to be reviewed. EARLY selling of stock needs to be encouraged to the greatest degree. 5 year offset on sale of livestock may not be long enough when droughts have been ongoing for 7+ years. Graziers needs to be able to liquidate stock & KEEP the funds aside for re-purchasing stock when favourable seasons return.

Predatory banking: the effects of predatory banking & high debit:equity ratios must be looked at in relation to drought flexibility.

No livestock equity: allowing livestock to be used as equity discourages the owner to sell them. Fluctuation of livestock numbers needs to be encouraged & facilitated.

Foreign purchases inflating land prices & driving up debt & equity risk: agricultural properties should not be worth more than they can produce & pay off. High debt & equity risk promotes poor management practices.

Grazing pressure is relative to individual animal size & class (eg dry vs lactating).

Animal Unit (AU) or Dry Sheep Equivalent (DSE) is a measure of the intake requirements of individual animals. This is often MORE IMPORTANT than simply total animal numbers.

Current drought declaration rules state that if *any* individual animals are brought onto a property, as detected by NLIS tags, then drought declaration may be lost. This is very impractical & severely limits management options. For example, a full grown cow losing weight rapidly from the pressures of feeding her calf is around 1.5 AU of grazing pressure & at very high risk of suffering poor welfare outcomes. It makes sense to sell or agist her onto greener pastures & replace her with a smaller dry

heifer of say 0.6 AU grazing pressure who is also much more capable of handling the dry conditions & will be ready to re-build the herd when rains come.
Current rules discourage such pro-active management decisions.

The drought charity industry needs to be regulated. It is often doing more harm than good through promoting poor practice, facilitating animals being kept on bare ground, & undermining local businesses. Food hampers and hay are NOT appropriate charity items. Assistance with transportation of stock & practical financial assistance – eg a cash card to be spent in local stores on essential items is far more appropriate.

Assistance with livestock Euthanasia: if things become really bad & farmers are forced to euthanize their own animals, this is very traumatic & commonly accompanied by a spike in suicides. If this terrible point is reached, programs are required to assist farmers with this grizzly task. The police, army, & local hunting organisations may be able to offer assistance. A trigger point to be watched for is when the price received for an animal dips below the cost of transporting the animal to market.

Dam desilting: server dry times is the only practical time to do maintenance work on existing dams that is important for future drought mitigation, yet this is also the time of highest demand both on the farmer's time & finances. Dam maintenance programs should be a part of drought policy & funding for dam maintenance should be a part of drought relief financial packages.

Thank you for your time,

Regards,

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