

## **No more hot air needed on drought – Outback Queensland calls for workable drought solutions.**

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Almost a quarter of Queensland is challenging the Prime Minister to do something meaningful to better equip communities, farmers and businesses in inland Australia to not just survive, but thrive through drought.

All seven councils of the RAPAD region (21% of QLD) have been fully drought declared since 2014; the communities within the region are currently experiencing the worst drought and economic decline, in its history.

“In my town, shire, and the greater Central Western Qld region, this forum needs to provide support for:

- Increased agricultural productivity and returns,
- Increased community and business economic diversification
- Increased individual and community mental and physical well being
- A reversal of population decline.”

Anything less is a failure”, RAPAD Chairman and Barcaldine Regional Council Mayor Rob Chandler said.

“Just through this dry spell, we have welcomed and talked with three separate Prime Ministers, Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison. And while I’ll happily attend and constructively contribute to the Prime Minister’s Drought Forum today we are quickly growing tired of repeating the same needs over and over. I acknowledge the support to date, but we are in crisis, we need support that will make a real meaningful difference to people in rural communities,” said Cr Chandler.

“For more than a decade many workable solutions have been offered, we don’t need another talk fest. We need a government that will be bold enough to drive transformational change and finally erect the scaffolding around communities to enable them to develop their economies to be diversified away from weather dependence,” Councillor Chandler said.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2003 Senator Ursula Stephens in her Rural and Regional Australia speech spoke of changes needed to the zonal tax rebate scheme, water reform and how to protect the rural economy among other critical changes needed to support communities during and recovering from drought.

Fast forward a more than a decade and RAPAD’s submission to the Queensland Drought Program review called for 10 key actions including; responding to the economic and

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personal costs of drought, protecting the rural economy, focussing on a renewable energy future, restoration of zone tax rebate scheme and water reform.

Back in 2008 The Local Government and Shires Association of NSW provided a submission to the Drought Policy Review which highlighted many issues also covered in this year's the Beyond the Dust report released by the Western Queensland Drought Appeal.

Both had many recommendations to help build resilience in communities going through drought. Beyond the Dust report concluded with a set of four principles, to underpin strong governance arrangements and to support resilience building in the Central West region.

The report also set out 17 major recommendations which included transforming governance to foster local decision making.

"The research is in; the solutions are on the record and have been for many years. Drought stricken communities are starting to believe all the submissions and reporting would be better utilized as fodder for hungry sheep and cattle unless real tangible, short, medium and long term actions are taken by government," Councillor Chandler said.

"I look forward to being part of the Prime Ministers Drought Forum today and I am hopeful it will be the last one...not because droughts are rare, quite the opposite.... but because this government takes on the big job of improving the future of regional, rural and remote Australia," he said.

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