



MEDIA RELEASE

DRY SEASON DISCUSSIONS

The Mayor of Buloke Shire Council, Cr Reid Mather, and CEO, John Hicks, had a highly productive meeting with Jaala Pulford, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Agriculture, to discuss the recent dry seasons. The Minister was very receptive to Buloke Shire's concerns and the plight of the region. As part of the dialogue, Cr Mather suggested that Buloke Shire could be used as a pilot for initiatives in the short, medium and longer term to address the unseasonal weather conditions experienced over the past two years.

Dry weather from 2014 in the Southern Mallee and Northern Wimmera has persisted into 2015 with rainfall at approximately half the long term average. The crops in this area failed in 2014 and have been subjected to dire conditions over the past weekend; with temperatures in the high 30's C and strong dry northerly winds. The impact has been to stop growth and kill many existing crops. The extent of the drought effects on cropping this year is expected to far exceed last year.

Key to discussions with Ms Pulford were ideas on how best to mitigate the impact of the drought. Ideas raised included a rebate on rates to assist farmers with a significant debt liability while at the same time enabling local government to continue to provide the services needed by a community under stress. Consideration of small businesses in local towns as another group under major stress was also discussed. The burden of water rates was another issue raised for attention.

A dearth of Mental Health Support Services in the region was noted as a matter in need of serious attention. An increase in access and resources for personal counselling and financial support could also be provided.

"I felt the Minister was genuinely concerned and looking for real solutions by listening to understand the impacts the dry has on communities. We have offered her Buloke as a sounding board to get the best fit for any proposed initiative. The opportunity to have a one-on-one discussion for an hour with a busy and an influential Minister was excellent and we look forward to outcomes for the Buloke community," said Mayor, Cr Reid Mather.

End release

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