



# KEEPING THE VILLAGE GREEN

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## Liverpool Plains Shire Council and Gunnedah Shire Council Regional Drought Resilience Plan





## **Acknowledgement of Country**

*We acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the people of the Kamilaroi Nation. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah regions.*



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## **Foreword – A Word from our Mayors**

Communities in the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah regions are all too familiar with the hardships of drought. Droughts have hit hard here on seven occasions over the past 130 years. Despite the many challenges they have thrown at us in the past, we have always managed to work together to overcome them. But the growing and unpredictable threat of drought courtesy of climate change, has changed the drought landscape forever. We acknowledge we have no choice but to be more resilient to droughts moving forward. There is simply too much at stake.

Our part of the world punches above its weight in terms of its contribution to the national and NSW economies. Both regions sit on one of the richest pockets of agricultural land in Australia. As well as agriculture, both regions are home to a diverse range of industry sectors such as resources, manufacturing, retail, and hospitality. The Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah local government areas also boast an enviable lifestyle, sweeping landscapes, a vibrant Aboriginal and cultural heritage, dynamic townships, and even better people.

We are proud of our communities and our way of life. This has fueled efforts by Liverpool Plains Shire Council and Gunnedah Shire Council to collaborate and develop this Regional Drought Resilience Plan.

This document outlines what we need to do to better prepare, respond and recover from droughts. It offers effective, community-led recommendations on how to build drought resilience, which have been shaped by the insights and ideas of members of our community.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the Regional Drought Resilience Plan process. Together we have created a plan for a more drought resilient future for generations to come.

Cr Kenneth Cudmore  
Mayor, Liverpool Plains Shire Council

Cr Colleen Fuller  
Mayor, Gunnedah Shire Council



## Glossary of Key Terms

Absorptive capacity	The ability of individuals and groups to continue without adapting or changing their behaviour in response to environmental and socioeconomic changes (Béné et al., 2012).
Adaptation	Adjustment or modification in natural and/or human systems in response to actual or expected shocks and stresses to moderate harm, reduce vulnerability and/or exploit beneficial opportunities (CSIRO, 2022).
Adaptive capacity	The ability of individuals and groups to adjust and respond to environmental and socio-economic changes (CSIRO, 2022).
Adaptive governance	Coordinating iterative, flexible and responsive interactions between systems when designing interventions and for their implementation and evaluation.
Co-design	The process of partnership to develop and formulate project delivery and agreed objectives and needs, using participatory methods. A process of working together utilising generative and explorative processes.
Drought	Drought in general means acute water shortage. Drought is a prolonged, abnormally dry period when the amount of available water is insufficient to meet our normal use (BoM, 2022).
Economic resilience	The ability of the economy to absorb the economic impact of shocks and stressors without changing the economic status or outcomes (CSIRO, 2022).
Environmental resilience	The ability of the natural environment to cope with a diverse range of shocks and stressors while maintaining natural processes and ecosystem services (CSIRO, 2022).
Governance	Governance is the structures and processes by which individuals, groups and agencies in a society share power and make decisions. It can be formally institutionalised, or informal (CSIRO, 2022).
Intervention options	Alternative or complementary actions, projects, programs, policies, initiatives and investments that are planned to bring about change in the system (Maru et al., 2017).
Local knowledge	Local knowledge and First Nations knowledge incorporates elements of lived experience within a landscape, bearing witness to the operation of systems. It includes aspects of people, landscape, culture – how people interact with surroundings and as part of communities and processes.
Resilience	The ability of a system to absorb a disturbance and reorganise so as to maintain the existing functions, structure and feedbacks (Walker et al., 2004). Also see general resilience, specified resilience, economic resilience, environmental resilience and social resilience.
Risk	The potential for adverse consequences for human or ecological systems, recognising the diversity of values and objectives associated with such systems (IPCC, 2020).
Shock	Sudden, short-term events that threaten a city (or region). Examples include major storms, floods, bush fires, heatwaves, disease outbreaks, terrorism and cyber-attacks (Resilient Sydney, 2018).



Social resilience	The ability of the human society to cope with a diverse range of shocks and stressors while maintaining existing social and community functions (CSIRO, 2022).
Stressor	An event that occurs gradually over a timeframe that causes an adverse effect, e.g., drought (CSIRO, 2022).
Systems	The interaction of processes, networks and inter-dependencies across a complex 'whole'.
Theory of change	Refers to theories, causal mechanisms and assumptions that explain how and why outcomes and impacts will be achieved through use, implementation and production of proposed inputs, activities and outputs (Maru et al., 2018).
Trends	Major global or regional influences that have driven change in the past and are expected to shape change into the future (Taylor et al., 2017).
Threshold	The point at which a change in a level or amount a controlling variable causes a system to shift to a qualitatively different regime. Also referred to as a tipping point (Folke et al., 2010).
Transform	The process of radically changing or building a new system with different structure, functions, feedbacks and identity (Folke et al., 2010).
Trigger point	A pre-agreed situation or event, that when met, activates a management intervention. Trigger points are usually defined in the planning phase (Wise et al., 2014).



## Introduction

This Regional Drought Resilience Plan has been developed in accordance with guidelines distributed by the Australian Government and the NSW Government under the Future Drought Fund (FDF). It is essentially a blueprint for communities across the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shires on *'Keeping the Village Green'* – identifying ways to enhance economic, environmental and social outcomes in the face of drought.

The climate is changing, the science tells us there is a growing risk of climate-related impacts on natural, social, and economic systems across NSW. Now, more than ever, regional communities need to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and plan for a resilient future. While droughts are a natural part of Australian life, they are expected to be exacerbated by climate change, with increased impact from prolonged dry spells caused by decreased rainfall and high temperatures.<sup>1</sup> The increased danger of drought is increasingly being felt by local economies, natural ecosystems and the people who live in NSW, including those in the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah regions.

Memories of the worst drought in 100 years (2017-2020) are still fresh for residents of the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah local government areas – the entire community was impacted in one way or another. The Liverpool Plains Shire Council and Gunnedah Shire Council Regional Drought Resilience Plan (the Plan) heralds a new chapter on how community members living in these important regions of NSW can band together and become even more resilient living with drought. At its heart are the insights, ideas and perspectives of those with a lived experience of drought. Coupled with the latest research, this has supported comprehensive, and informed planning and decision making. This Plan provides a new, innovative and collaborative approach for community-led action to better overcome the impacts of drought now and into the future. The centerpiece of this document are four themes for opportunity, each with their own effective, practical and realistically achievable actions designed to strengthen resilience.

The Regional Drought Resilience Planning (RDRP) program is one of the five focus areas of the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund (FDF). The NSW RDRP program is jointly funded by the Australian Government and the NSW Government under the FDF, supporting local governments to work together regionally to plan for drought resilience proactively and pragmatically. The resulting plans focus on innovative ways to build regional drought resilience, taking steps today to stem future impacts of droughts.

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<sup>1</sup> CSIRO – Building a Disaster Resilient Australia





## THE PLAN



**Empower** local communities to implement transformative activities that improve drought resilience



**Strengthen connectedness** and boost social capital across Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah LGAs



**Support** more land managers to adopt new approaches for long-term productivity and landscape health

## PLAN AIMS



Understand current and future drought resilience



Form strong connections and relationships



Identify actions, pathways and opportunities to improve drought resilience



Support innovation and transformation of communities



Position communities to take advantage of opportunities



Increase community knowledge and understanding



Support future investment



Improve natural resource management capability



Leverage existing strategic planning



Combine First Nations' and local knowledge with resilience and risk data and information to make informed decisions



## Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Regions



### GUNNEDAH SHIRE COUNCIL

**Area (sq km):**  
4,992

**Population:**  
13,280

Inclusive of:

- Breeza: 146
- Carroll: 337
- Curlewis: 771
- Mallaley: 174
- Tambar Springs: 273

**Median Age:**  
37

**Primary industries of employment:**  
Agriculture, mining, construction, retail trade, education & training and health care & social assistance (Economic ID).

**Median weekly household income:**  
\$1,557

**Traditional Owners:**  
Kamilaroi

**Key regional landmarks:**  
Lake Keepit State Park,  
Porcupine Lookout.

Source: ABS 2021

### LIVERPOOL PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL

**Area (sq km):**  
5082.2

**LGA Total Population:**  
7,551

Inclusive of:

- Quirindi: 3,355
- Werris Creek: 1,572
- Blackville: 113
- Caroona: 196
- Currabubula: 339
- Pine Ridge: 116
- Premer: 126
- Spring Ridge: 240
- Wallabadah: 382
- Willow Tree: 308

**Median Age:**  
47

**Primary industries of employment:**  
Beef cattle farming, grain-sheep or grain-beef cattle farming, hospitals, other grain growing and education

**Median weekly household income:**  
\$1,165

**Traditional Owners:**  
Kamilaroi

**Key regional landmarks:**  
Quipolly Dam,  
Who'd A Thought It Lookout.

Source: ABS 2016 and 2021



# 1. Our Resilience Vision



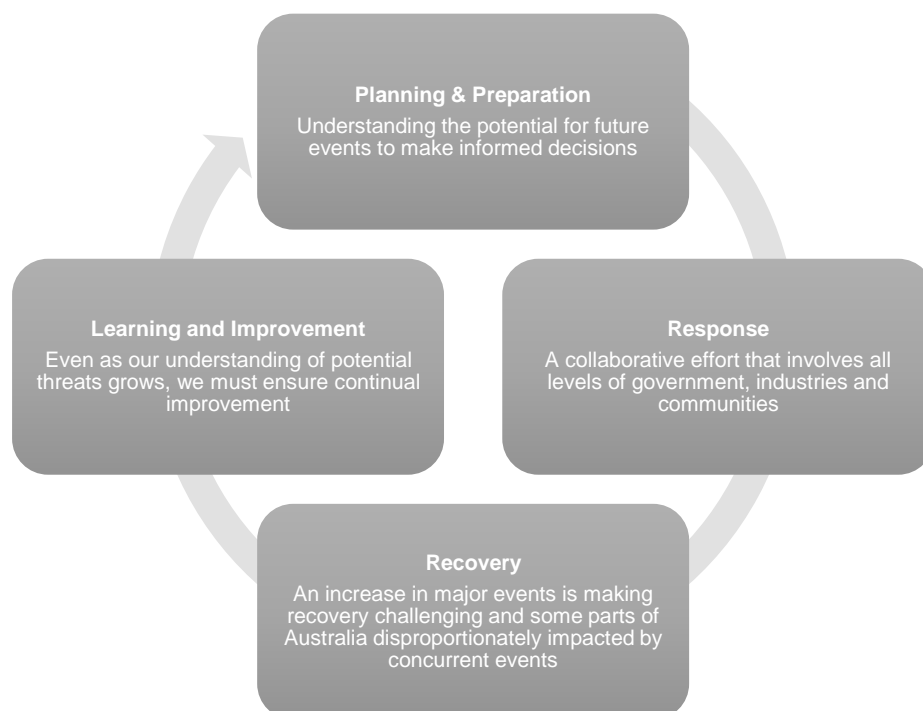
***Resilience is the ability of a system to absorb a disturbance and reorganise so as to maintain the existing functions, structure and feedbacks (Walker et al., 2004).***

The need for resilience and the implementation of drought-coping measures has long been recognised by our traditional owners, and in more recent times by farmers, the agriculture sector, rural and regional communities, governments at all levels and environmental authorities.

Drought resilience relies on more than just farm outcomes in times of drought. It is heavily invested in a community's ability to absorb, respond to and recover from the many impacts of drought, often over lengthy periods of time.<sup>2</sup> It is critical to securing the future of country townships and surrounding areas – influencing the status of local business and industry, the prospects of those on the land, and the mental health and wellbeing of the local population. The power of drought resilience is that even in the depths of drought, it has the capacity to mobilise communities and help create opportunities for rural and regional Australia to secure long-term growth and even successes.

Now is the time to invest in response capacity, recovery and building back better, to reduce the drought burden to economic, environmental and social factors. To adequately respond to increasing vulnerabilities of the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires presented by drought, it is critical that a collaborative, integrated approach is applied in developed strategies and models to enhance drought resilience.<sup>3</sup>

## **The four steps to building climate and disaster resilience**



<sup>2</sup> ABARES - Measuring Drought Risk: The Exposure and Sensitivity of Australian Farms to Drought

<sup>3</sup> CSIRO – Building a Disaster Resilient Australia



## Types of Resilience

**Economic Resilience:** The ability of the economy to absorb the economic impact of shocks and stressors without changing the economic status or outcomes (CSIRO, 2022).

**Environmental Resilience:** The ability of the natural environment to cope with a diverse range of shocks and stressors while maintaining natural processes and ecosystem services (CSIRO, 2022).

**Social Resilience:** The ability of the human society to cope with a diverse range of shocks and stressors while maintaining existing social and community functions (CSIRO, 2022).

## A Plan for Drought Resilience

The overarching objectives of the Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program are at the heart of this Plan. Each stage of this Plan's development was critical – listening to the needs and wants of the community based on their local experiences and expertise, identifying gaps in economic, environmental and social resilience, calculating future stresses and shocks, and providing locals with the tools and know-how they need to build resilience. Ultimately, the outcomes of this Plan include recommendations of opportunities to strengthen the region's drought resilience across both the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires.

This Plan assumes the reader well understands the interconnections between economic, social, and environmental factors, and how these connections mitigate cascading impacts of drought. Living through previous droughts, we are well aware of the financial, natural, social, human and infrastructure impacts. The purpose of this Plan is identifying opportunities for the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils and their communities to work together to reduce the overall impact.

Incorporating feedback from the CSIRO Review (September 2024) we note future plan updates could engage more with concepts of transition and transformation, and how to put these into practice in resilience planning. This would help when planning for future scenarios. These concepts are important when planning for scenarios in which it may not be viable to maintain economic, social, and environmental systems in their current state.

Future plan updates could also conduct a baseline resilience assessment that covers economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It could also extend the current impact assessment by explicitly considering the capacities (anticipatory, absorptive, adaptive and transformative) of the region's different sectors and community segments to drought and related stresses and shocks. Additionally, future plan updates could be improved by including a resilience assessment that provides quantitative and empirical evidence in key economic and social variables over time. This assessment could show demographic changes in the diversity of businesses, livelihoods and employment opportunities for different community segments; emergent versus declining types of industries; and labour mobility among different industry and sectors. Together, this evidence would better inform the analysis of socio-economic resilience of the region to drought. This work, along with development of other drought specific measurements and reporting, would require separate and significant funding but would be extremely valuable.



### **PROJECT INCEPTION**

A Project Control Group (PCG) made up of representatives from Liverpool Plains Shire Council and Gunnedah Shire Council, and the Department of Regional NSW (DRNSW) was established to manage and support the design and development of the Plan.



### **DESKTOP RESEARCH**

Extensive analysis of government strategies, plans, statistics and data, the economic, environmental and social impacts of past droughts, and climate forecasting and future droughts predictions for both Shires. Existing local government, and State and Federal Government resilience strategies for both the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah regions, were also closely examined.



### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND DROUGHT RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT**

Community members representing farming and non-farm sectors, youth, migrants and First Nations people provided important insights, knowledge and ideas through face-to-face meetings, pop-up sessions, and an online drought resilience survey. Throughout consultation, various models were applied to the process including the Triple Diamond Approach (a people centred and co-designed approach) and the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation model (informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering). The desktop research and stakeholder consultation process informed the development of a comprehensive drought resilience assessment of the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah regions.



### **PLANS THEMES AND ACTIONS**

The drought resilience assessment (stakeholder engagement feedback), along with feedback from the PCG, and the CSIRO's Resilience, Adaption Pathways, and Transformation Assessment (RAPTA) framework, helped shape the development of the Plan's themes and four achievable and impactful, community-led actions, to enhance drought resilience. Identified actions are 'road tested' with selected stakeholders and prioritised.



### **MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING**

A monitoring plan, based on the KPIs of each action, is used as a baseline for evaluating outcomes. Short term actions are then reviewed at end of 6-month implementation period while longer-term actions reviewed annually. Continuous learning of Plan activities will be captured through quarterly meetings of Regional Resilience Taskforce and series of workshops with key stakeholders.



## Community Shaping a Resilient Future

To understand gaps in drought resilience and identify opportunities to address them, it was essential to understand the insights and ideas of those living in the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires. As part of a wide-reaching stakeholder consultation process, a large cross-section of both communities provided detailed feedback on their lived experiences of drought and the lessons learnt – what worked, what did not, and what would they do differently next time and why. The sharing of grass roots knowledge is critical to shaping a more resilient future for both regions.



### ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SHIRES



**9,500 Australia Post mailbox drops** throughout both LGAs.



**2,693 emails sent** and received encouraging community input.



**4 workshops** in Quirindi & Gunnedah with over 40 participants representing a wide range of community groups & businesses.



**11 pop-ups** held in regional locations to engage with local residents in neighbouring towns and villages.



**72 online surveys** completed, following the distribution of an online survey link to all households across the LPSC and GSC LGAs.



**4 written submissions** received.

### SOME KEY ORGANISATIONS ENGAGED

#### Liverpool Plains Shire

<a href="#">CWA Werris Creek Branch</a>	<a href="#">Quirindi Lions Rugby Union</a>
<a href="#">HealthWISE Mental Health Services</a>	<a href="#">Quirindi Red Cross</a>
<a href="#">Liverpool Plains Shire State Emergency Service Unit</a>	<a href="#">Rural Aid</a>
<a href="#">Lions Club of Werris Creek Inc</a>	<a href="#">Lions Club of Willow Tree</a>
<a href="#">Rotary Club of Quirindi</a>	<a href="#">Walhollow Heath</a>
<a href="#">Namoi Valley Environmental Protection Association</a>	<a href="#">Wallabadah Community Association</a>
<a href="#">Quirindi Bowling Club</a>	<a href="#">Farming for Kids</a>
<a href="#">Liverpool Plains Business Chamber</a>	<a href="#">Challenge Community Care</a>
	<a href="#">Currabubula Pony Club</a>
	<a href="#">Friends of Quirindi Library</a>
	<a href="#">Nungaroo LALC</a>

#### Gunnedah Shire

<a href="#">Gunnedah &amp; District Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc</a>	<a href="#">Manildra Grain Business in Alignment</a>
<a href="#">Gunnedah Community Round Table</a>	<a href="#">Hutcheon and Pearce</a>
<a href="#">Min Min Corporation</a>	<a href="#">Gunnedah Golf Club</a>
<a href="#">Stewart Surveys</a>	<a href="#">Gunida Gonyah</a>
<a href="#">Daisy's Water Cartage</a>	<a href="#">G B P Cranes and Heavy Haulage</a>
<a href="#">Nutrien Water</a>	<a href="#">Winanga-Li</a>
<a href="#">The Plains Psychology</a>	<a href="#">Louis Tennis Academy</a>
<a href="#">Carroll Cotton</a>	<a href="#">The Courthouse Hotel</a>
<a href="#">Gunnedah RSL</a>	<a href="#">Curlewis Progress Association</a>
<a href="#">Red Chief Land Council</a>	<a href="#">Forsyths Accountants</a>

*The full list of verbatim comments from participants at the workshops and pop-ups and in the online survey, are included in Appendix 1.*



## **2. Regional Profile: Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires**





## **New England North West Region**

The Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Local Government Areas (LGAs) are located in the New England, North West region of NSW which also comprises the Armidale, Glen Innes Severn, Gwydir, Inverell, Moree, Narrabri, Tamworth, Tenterfield, Uralla and Walcha LGAs. The region is home to a strong and growing economy –\$13.7 billion Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021 up from \$10.8 billion GDP in 2016, with more than 95,000 people employed. The region produces around a fifth of the state’s agricultural output. It is home to 16 per cent of the state’s farm businesses. Beef, sheep and wool, poultry, broadacre crops, vegetables and fruits and nuts are also produced throughout the region. While agriculture is the main economic driver of the New England, North West, it has a growing health care and social assistance sector, along with education and training, all of which are expected to generate increasing employment opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

The region’s location lends itself to expand supply chains across national and global markets, with key freight networks and connections to the Port of Newcastle, Sydney and airports in Queensland.<sup>5</sup>

Spanning from the tablelands of the Great Dividing Range in the east, to the rich black soil plains in the west, the New England, North West boasts highly diverse landscapes including rainforest-covered volcanic plateaus and escarpments, wetlands, alpine communities, remnant inland forests, grasslands and many forest ecosystems. The region also boasts several World Heritage-listed areas such as the Washpool, Gibraltar Range, Oxley Wild Rivers and Werrikimbe national parks and the Pilliga Community Conservation Areas.<sup>6</sup>

## **Liverpool Plains Shire**

### ***Geography and Population***

The Liverpool Plains Shire is positioned at the junction of the New England and Kamilaroi Highways and is approximately 350 kilometres north of Sydney. Covering an area of 5,082 square kilometres, the region is home to 7,608 people.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the population, services and administration are based in the main centres of Quirindi (3,355) and Werris Creek (1,572) but are also spread across the smaller villages of Willow Tree, Wallabadah, Caroon, Walhallow, Currabubula, Premer and Spring Ridge.<sup>8</sup> The Kamilaroi people are recognised as the traditional custodians of the land within the Liverpool Plains. In 2021, nearly 15 per cent of local residents – or 1,121 people – were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders. The median age of residents across the Liverpool Plains is 47 years old.<sup>9</sup>

In 2021, the unemployment rate for the Liverpool Plains was 5.5 per cent compared to the Australian average of 6 per cent, while in 2020 13.1 per cent of young people aged 16 – 21 were receiving an unemployment benefit compared to the NSW average of 9.1 per cent. In 2016, the SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage score for the region was 914 - Liverpool Plains LGA was more disadvantaged than the Australian score of 1000.<sup>10</sup> A lower

<sup>4</sup> New England North West Regional Plan 2041

<sup>5</sup> New England North West Regional Plan 2036

<sup>6</sup> Adapt NSW - Western Enabling Regional Adaption New England North West region report

<sup>7</sup> Department of Regional NSW Lower North West Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 Update

<sup>8</sup> ABS Liverpool Plains 2016 Census All person Quickstats

<sup>9</sup> ABS Liverpool Plains 2021 Census All person Quickstats

<sup>10</sup> Primary Health Network Hunter New England and Central Coast Liverpool Plains LGA Population Health Snapshot 2021



index score indicates that an area has more disadvantage relative to other areas with a higher score.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Weather and Climate***

The Liverpool Plains region is typical of temperate woodland regions in south-east Australia, with an elevation of about 270 metres above sea level.<sup>12</sup> Most of the 620mm of rainfall the area experiences each year – in a typical non-drought year - is high intensity and occurs in the warmer months, from October through March.<sup>13</sup> During the warmer months, temperatures average about 25 degrees, while in the cooler months, temperatures drop to an average of 10 degrees.<sup>14</sup>

Rivers run from the Liverpool Ranges in the south-east to the Namoi River valley in the north-east, where elevation falls to 264 metres above sea level. Soils in the area are distinctly black, have a high fertility rating and store a lot of water. They are well suited to growing winter crops such as wheat, but at risk of erosion when cultivated.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Economy***

Agriculture is the major driver of the Liverpool Plains economy and regarded as the cornerstone of the local community's future prosperity. The region has a reputation as an agricultural powerhouse thanks to its fertile soils and extensive groundwater resources and is a key 'food bowl' for Australia and contributor to export markets. The Liverpool Plains region is home to more than 1,000 businesses of which 53 per cent are directly involved in agriculture.<sup>16</sup> As well as agriculture, local businesses align with automotive and machinery services, business and finance services, personal and social services, construction, trades and maintenance, gardening and excavation, hospitality, creative arts and transport services. In 2016, the total gross revenue generated by Liverpool Plains businesses and organisations was more than \$860 million.<sup>17</sup>

## **Gunnedah Shire**

### ***Geography and Population***

The Gunnedah Shire is located on the north-west slopes of NSW, adjacent to the Liverpool Plains and framed by the Nandewar Ranges, 425 kilometres north-west of Sydney. Covering nearly 5,000 square kilometres, the region sits on the intersection of the Kamilaroi Highway Touring Route and Oxley Highway. The town of Gunnedah is the population and business hub of the Shire, which also includes the villages of Breeza, Carroll, Curlewis, Emerald Hill, Kelvin, Mullaley and Tambar Springs.<sup>18</sup> In 2023, the Gunnedah Shire had an estimated population of 13,280 and a median age of 37 years.<sup>19</sup> The Kamilaroi people are recognised as the traditional

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<sup>11</sup> Gunnedah Shires Council Community Profile

<sup>12</sup> Cameron, John I.; Green, Margaret (1991). "Cropping on the Northern Slopes of New South Wales". In Cameron, John I.; Elix, Jane A. (eds.). *Recovering Ground: A Case Study Approach to Ecologically Sustainable Rural Land Management*.

<sup>13</sup> Cameron, John I.; Green, Margaret (1991). "Cropping on the Northern Slopes of New South Wales". In Cameron, John I.; Elix, Jane A. (eds.). *Recovering Ground: A Case Study Approach to Ecologically Sustainable Rural Land Management*.

<sup>14</sup> Time and Date – Climate and weather averages for the Liverpool Plains

<sup>15</sup> Cameron, John I.; Green, Margaret (1991). "Chapter 2: Case Study 1: Cropping on the Northern Slopes of New South Wales

<sup>16</sup> Liverpool Plains Shire Council Economic Development Strategy 2022-2025

<sup>17</sup> Liverpool Plains Shire Local Government Area Module

<sup>18</sup> Visit Gunnedah

<sup>19</sup> Gunnedah Shire Council Community Profile



custodians of the land within the Gunnedah Shire, with 15.6 per cent of the region's population – or 2,021 people - identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>20</sup>

In 2021, the unemployment rate in the Gunnedah Local Government Area was 5.2 per cent, compared to the Australian average of 6.0 per cent. While in 2020, nearly 22 per cent of young people aged between 16 and 21 were receiving an unemployment benefit compared to the NSW average of 8.1 per cent.<sup>21</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Socio-economic Indexes for Areas, or SEIFA, summarises the socio-economic characteristics of regions. In 2021, the SEIFA Index score for the Gunnedah Shire was 967 compared to the Australian score of 1,001 and the NSW score of 1,000. A lower index score indicates that an area has more disadvantage relative to other areas with a higher score.

### ***Weather and Climate***

The Gunnedah region is typical of temperate woodland regions in south-east Australia, with an elevation of about 270 metres above sea level.<sup>22</sup> In a typical non-drought year, most of the 620mm of rainfall the area experiences each year is high intensity and occurs in the warmer months, from October through March.<sup>23</sup> During the warmer months, temperatures average about 25 degrees, while in the cooler months, temperatures drop to an average of 10 degrees.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Economy***

Located within the rich fertile plains of the Namoi region, the Gunnedah Shire Council Community Profile states the Gunnedah Shire's Gross Regional Product (GRP) is worth \$1.07 billion. Agriculture and resources underpin a strong and growing economy. In fact, in 2023 the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry had the largest number of total registered businesses in LGA of 707 - nearly 43 per cent of all total registered businesses. The region contains the high yield metallurgical and thermal coal deposits of the Gunnedah Coal Basin - the state's third largest coal reserves and 12 per cent of NSW's resources. The area also has significant coal seam gas, with deposits covering more than 3.4 million hectares. Importantly, the Gunnedah Shire benefits from connections to local, national and international markets via the Oxley and Kamilaroi highways and the North-West (Mungindi) rail line. Gunnedah's economy is supported by a thriving commercial, arts, cultural and retail service sector as well as value-adding industries in manufacturing and processing.

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<sup>20</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Gunnedah

<sup>21</sup> Gunnedah LGA Population Health Snapshot 2021

<sup>22</sup> Cameron, John I.; Green, Margaret (1991). Cropping on the Northern Slopes of New South Wales". In Cameron, John I.; Elix, Jane A. (eds.). *Recovering Ground: A Case Study Approach to Ecologically Sustainable Rural Land Management*.

<sup>23</sup> Cameron, John I.; Green, Margaret (1991). "Chapter 2: Case Study 1: Cropping on the Northern Slopes of New South Wales". In Cameron, John I.; Elix, Jane A. (eds.). *Recovering Ground: A Case Study Approach to Ecologically Sustainable Rural Land Management*.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.timeanddate.com/weather/@7839748/climate>



# **3. Australia's History of Drought and Impacts**



## Australia’s History of Drought

As the world’s driest permanently inhabited continent, water security is of paramount importance to Australia. It is the lifeblood of many industries, cities and ecosystems that all rely on water. Extraordinarily, 90 per cent of the rain that falls on Australia evaporates back into the atmosphere. Only around two per cent of that rain makes its way into the ground and is stored in groundwater reserves. The remaining 10 per cent of rainfall is considered runoff, which makes its way into streams, rivers and lakes. That runoff is vital - sustaining the country’s agriculture, urban water and ecosystems.<sup>25</sup> So, when the rain stops, the impacts can be serious and widely felt by all Australians.

### What is drought?

Drought is a period of abnormally dry weather sufficiently prolonged because of a lack of rainfall that causes a serious hydrological imbalance and has connotations of a moisture deficiency with respect to water use requirements.

There are at least four types of drought:

- *Meteorological*: a period of low rainfall, which often is exacerbated by high temperature and/or high evaporation;
- *Agricultural*: short-term dryness of soil layers at a critical time in the growing season;
- *Hydrological*: prolonged moisture deficits that affect surface or subsurface water supply, thereby reducing stream flow, groundwater, and dam and lake levels; and
- *Socio-economic*: when human activities are affected by meteorological, agricultural or hydrological drought

*Source: National Centers for Environmental Information – National Oceanic and Atmospheric administration*

## Historical droughts in Australia

<b>The Federation drought 1895 to 1902</b>	One of Australia’s worst droughts started in the mid-1890s and peaked in late 1901 and 1902. Nationwide there were heavy sheep and cattle losses, and the national wheat crop was all but lost.
<b>The 1914 to 1915 drought</b>	Although short, the drought was extremely damaging - responsible for the failure of the national wheat crop when severe drought ravaged both south-eastern and south-western Australia simultaneously.
<b>The World War II drought 1937 to 1945</b>	Compared to the previous two droughts, this had more breaks but more periods of intense dryness. Despite 1938 being a La Niña year, conditions worsened substantially in the lead up to the Black Friday bushfires in Victoria in January 1939.
<b>1965 to 1968 drought</b>	Towards the end of 1964, drought had developed over north-western NSW and then extended to most of the country in 1965.
<b>The 1982 to 1983 drought</b>	Regarded as one of Australia’s most severe droughts of the 20th century, it was associated with a very strong El Niño event.
<b>The Millennium drought 1997 to 2009</b>	Much of southern Australia experienced a prolonged period of dryness, but conditions were particularly severe in the densely populated south-east and south-west.
<b>2017 to 2020 drought</b>	The worst drought over the historical record from the 1890s until now for most river valleys across NSW, with some more impacted than others. Not all valleys experienced the same severity of drought because inflows to major storages, a measure of water security, varied across the state.

*Source: BOM Drought Knowledge Centre – Previous droughts and NSW Department of Water – The 2017-2020 Drought*

<sup>25</sup> Adapt NSW Climate change impacts on drought



## National and Regional Economic Impacts of Drought

Drought can significantly impact economies and the agricultural sector through various ways. It can damage farmable land by inflicting erosion and the loss of topsoil, reduce food and fibre production leading to shortages in supply, and trigger widespread job losses across the industry. For those on the land, droughts impact on crop selection and success as well as heads of livestock.

The direct correlation between drought and the loss of agricultural production can result in increased uncertainty for farming family incomes and the wider regional, rural and remote communities. This can trigger many flow-on impacts to the wider economy – particularly agricultural related industries such as manufacturing, transport and retail.<sup>26</sup> It also impacts on a community's mental health and wellbeing.

During the 2017-2020 drought, while all inland east coast regions of NSW were severely affected by the big dry, the region most impacted was the New England North West.<sup>27</sup> Farmers in the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires were hit hard. It was an unprecedented dry - worse than the 1940s drought and the Millennium drought. Many were forced to de-stock or pay for water and feed for their animals. Irrigators were struggling with no access to water for long stretches of time.

During this time, the importance of the agricultural sector to NSW was evident. Like the drought itself, the impacts on business and industry were far-reaching and severe. A report in the Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics showed that real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the region in both 2018-19 and 2019-20 dropped almost 15 per cent below forecast, with an accompanying drop in employment of more than 5.0 per cent.

Comparatively, the data for NSW was far better with real GDP dropping by 0.7 per cent or \$2.6 billion in 2017-18, and more than 1.3 per cent or \$5.5 billion in 2018-19 and 2019-20. These impacts reflected the dramatic reduction in farming activities during drought years, with agriculture accounting for about 1.6 per cent and downstream processing for about 3.5 per cent of the state's income. NSW job losses due to the drought were about 0.55 per cent or 17,500 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs in 2017-18 and more than 1.0 per cent or 34,000 jobs in 2018-19.<sup>28</sup>

The NSW Business Chamber's *Drought Survey August 2018* provides a snapshot of how damaging the 2017-2020 was for the state's businesses. It found 84 per cent of regional businesses in NSW had been impacted by the drought, 43 per cent of which said the current drought was far more severe than previous droughts. According to the survey, approximately one in three businesses indicated the viability of their business was at risk due to the current drought conditions and on average, affected businesses indicated they may have to reduce staffing levels by 1.5 employees.

In the New England North West region, the survey found 93.5 per cent of local businesses said they has been either directly or indirectly impacted, by drought conditions. When asked whether they had experienced a decrease in sales or revenue due to the drought, 94 per cent of

<sup>26</sup> Adapt NSW Climate change impacts on drought

<sup>27</sup> Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics 65(4), June 2021, *Estimating the economic impacts of the 2017–2019 drought and 2019–2020 bushfires on regional NSW and the rest of Australia*

<sup>28</sup> Australian Journal of Agriculture and Resource Economics 2021



businesses in the region answered yes. More than 90 per cent of local businesses said their cashflow had been affected due to the drought.<sup>29</sup>

## **National and Regional Environmental impacts**

Water is life for unique ecosystems across NSW - from rivers and wetlands, rainforests, and woodlands. A lack of water during periods of drought can profoundly impact these environments and the many species which depend on them. Early observers in Australia reported the collapse of bird communities ('the bush fell silent') and other wildlife during the Federation Drought (1895 – 1902). Days of extremely hot temperatures also exceed the thermoregulatory tolerance of some species – meaning mass mortality for some animals and large numbers of even hardy native trees.<sup>30</sup> According to the Climate Council, during the Millennium Drought (1997 – 2009), there was a marked decline in water bird, fish and aquatic plant populations in the Murray–Darling Basin. Many terrestrial ecosystems were also impacted, with iconic species such as the river red gum dying over extensive areas in the Basin at the time. Drought is also regarded a threat to planted forests.<sup>31</sup>

Drought conditions between 2017 and 2020 resulted in widespread ecological impacts across the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires. Local rivers and water courses either dried up or reached dangerously low levels and groundwater reserves were found wanting.<sup>32</sup> Deteriorating water quality in dwindling waterways led to algal blooms and increased salinity levels. Strict water restrictions were imposed and water allocations for agricultural activities were drastically cut, governments were forced to step in with the likes of household assistance schemes, funding for council projects aimed at economic stimulus, small business grants, subsidies for farmers for buying and carting water and the waiving of water charges.

The impact of droughts can be felt in urban environments too. As larger cities in NSW continue to grow, the demand for urban water supplies increases. During drought, households and businesses are required to limit their water use according to their council's water restrictions. Furthermore, the drier conditions during drought events increases the risk of hazards such as bushfire and dust storms which can directly affect homes, properties and businesses.<sup>33</sup>

## **Social impacts**

Everyone living in rural and regional communities can be touched by drought. The Regional Australia Institute identifies the significant social aspects of drought as: erosion of income resulting in rural poverty; increased workloads; physical and mental health and welfare issues; problematic access to services and overload on service providers; declining access to education; and isolation.<sup>34</sup>

Across NSW, rural communities suffered during the 2017-20 drought. Farmers were heavily affected. The National Farmer Wellbeing Report 2023 released by the National Farmers' Federation found that that more than a quarter – or 27 per cent – of Australian farmers surveyed said they had feelings of loneliness or isolation, combined with limited access to mental health services, over the past five years.<sup>35</sup> Drought events are linked to increased suicide rates across

<sup>29</sup> NSW Business Chamber Drought Survey August 2018

<sup>30</sup> University of NSW – We must strengthen environmental protection during drought – or face irreversible loss

<sup>31</sup> Climate Council Factsheet: Climate Change and Drought

<sup>32</sup> <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/allocations-availability/drought-and-floods/drought-recovery/2017-20-drought>

<sup>33</sup> Adapt NSW – Climate change impacts on drought

<sup>34</sup> Regional Australia Institute – Social Impacts of Drought: A Report to NSW Agriculture

<sup>35</sup> NNF National Farmers Wellbeing Report 2023



rural Australia. In fact, as drought becomes more severe, the statistics show that the risk of suicide can jump by up to 15 per cent for men between 30 and 49 years of age.<sup>36</sup>

As well as increases in the incidence of mental health issues and suicide, the drought was linked with the increases in domestic violence and alcohol consumption; downturns in community activity; reduced sporting and educational opportunities for children; reduced social engagement and reduced community resilience. Indigenous populations were also hard hit by the drought; available bush tucker and medicine dwindled, access to traditional meeting places was restricted and sacred sites were exposed and damaged. The drought made it hard for Indigenous people to take part in cultural practices, triggered strong feelings of empathy with the land and caused anxiety and distress at drought impacts on landscapes and biodiversity.<sup>37</sup>

Droughts can have wide ranging effects on health, including impacts on nutrition, infectious diseases, on forest fires causing air pollution, and on mental health, such as post-traumatic stress and suicidal behaviour (Haines et al 2006; Climate Commission 2011). Droughts can also contribute to increases in mortality rates. Declines in physical health are also particularly prevalent amongst the elderly in drought-affected rural communities in Australia.<sup>38</sup>

Through the worsening drought, charities and NGOs also felt enormous pressure from individuals and families in desperate need of assistance. In July 2018, the Country Women's Association (CWA) of NSW's launched its Drought Aid Scheme. Before long, it was in high demand. Between 2018 and 2020, the fund distributed almost \$19 million in grants across the state. Under the scheme, grant payments to a maximum of \$3,000 per individual applicant and/or household were made available to farming businesses that were drought-affected and reliant on farming as their primary source of income. The money was able to be used for the likes of groceries, vehicle maintenance, school expenses, household bills and medical costs.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Adapt NSW Climate change impacts on drought

<sup>37</sup> Southern NSW Innovation Hub – Baseline Drought Developing a baseline understanding of farmer & community perceptions of drought

<sup>38</sup> Climate Council – Factsheet: Climate Change and Drought

<sup>39</sup> Country Women's Association of NSW Drought Aid Scheme





# **4. Future National and Regional Drought Predictions and Impacts**



According to the CSIRO, climate predictions state that over the coming decades Australia will experience further increases in temperature, with more extremely hot days and fewer extremely cool days. There will be ongoing sea level rise and further warming and acidification of oceans around Australia. There will be a decrease in cool-season rainfall across many regions of southern Australia, and more drought events. There will also be an increase in the number of high fire weather danger days and a longer fire season for southern and eastern Australia.<sup>40</sup>

In the New England, North West region, a hotter climate with increased drought events presents significant risks to important agricultural productivity and related economies, natural ecosystems and biodiversity, and the wellbeing of those who work and live in the region.

The long-term temperature trend for both the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires indicates temperatures have been increasing since approximately 1960, with the largest increase in temperature in the most recent decades. The upward trend of more hot days is forecast to continue for both Shires, particularly in the near future (2020-2029) and far future (2060-2079). In the near future, the majority of the Liverpool Plains region is set to experience an additional five to 10 days each year with a temperature of more than 35 degrees. The bulk of the Gunnedah region is set for the same five to 10 degree temperature increase, however the northern part of the LGA is set to experience an additional 10 to 20 days above 35 degrees in that period. In the far future, the majority of the Liverpool Plains is expected to record an additional 20 to 30 days of temperatures above 35 degrees. Likewise, most of the Gunnedah region is tipped to experience 10 to 20 days above 35 degrees, however, like in the near future, that same northern section of the LGA is expected to be hotter for longer. In the far future, it is set to receive 30 to 40 days above 35 degrees.<sup>41</sup>

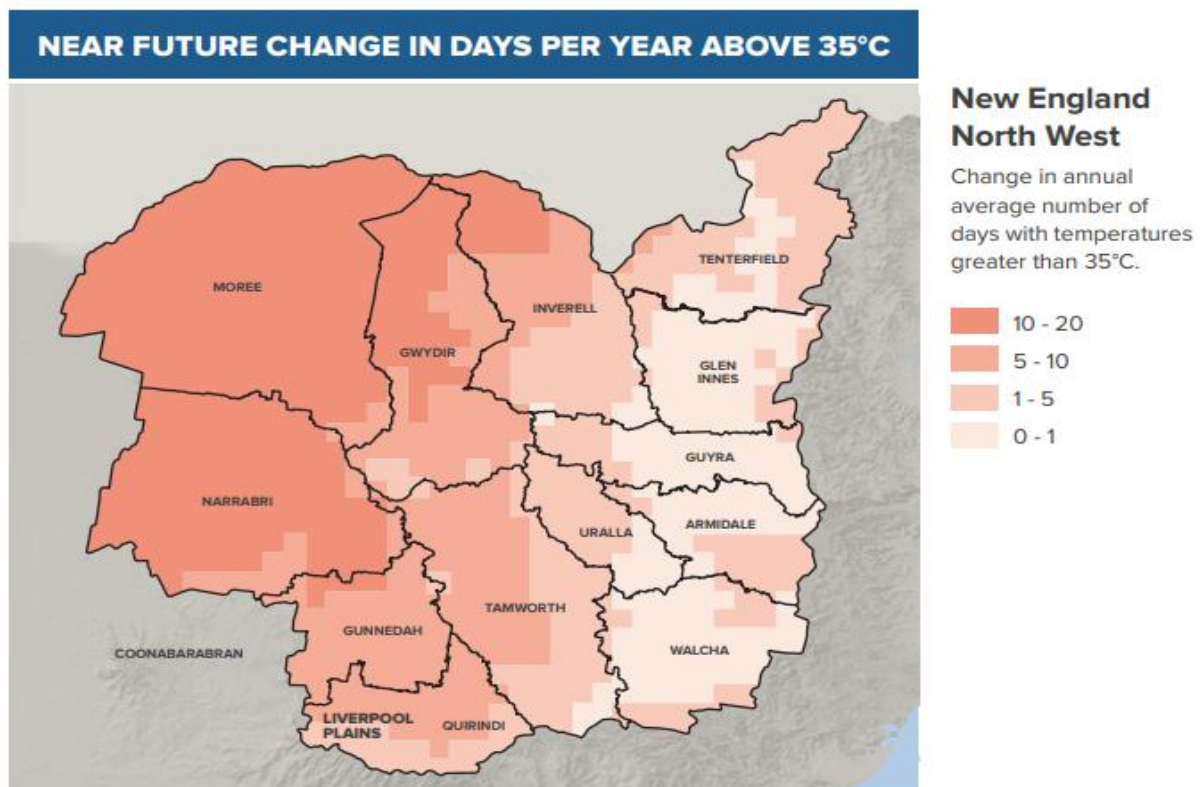


Figure 8: Near future (2020-2039) projected changes in the number of days per year with maximum temperatures above 35°C.

Source: 2014 Adapt NSW – New England North West Climate Change Snapshot

<sup>40</sup> CSIRO State of the Climate - Future Climate

<sup>41</sup> Adapt NSW – New England North West Climate Change Snapshot





# **5.A Resilient Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Region**



## What's already being done to build drought resilience in the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah regions?

Well informed and strategic planning has already started to address drought impacts and boost economic, environmental and social drought resilience, but more is needed to help equip these regions to better prepare and respond to droughts of the future.

Key existing drought strategies and resources for the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires include:

**NSW Government's Western Enabling Regional Adaptation – New England North West region report**

Provides a resource for state and local government and regional communities to understand how climate change will continue to impact the region and our values.<sup>42</sup>

**NSW Department of Planning and Environment's State-wide Natural Hazards Package**

Provides a guide on how natural hazard risk is considered in local land use planning. The package directly informs the preparation of regional plans and local strategic planning statements.

**NSW Department for Regional NSW Lower North West Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 Update**

Provides an updated evidence base to guide governments in making policy and investment decisions to enhance resilience and drive sustainable, long-term economic growth across the region. The REDS Update included these priority areas:

- Leverage existing infrastructure and unique offerings for growth in key sectors, including agriculture and tourism
- Build the agriculture sector
- Secure future growth in Tamworth by resolving water security issues
- Reduce unemployment by improving connections between industry, local education and employment initiatives.

**The NSW Department of Planning and Environment's 2023 Namoi Regional Water Strategy**

Sets out the long-term plan for water management in the region, with a key focus on long-term water security across the Namoi Valley, supporting growth in the regional economy and removing barriers to Indigenous water rights.

<sup>42</sup> Western Enabling Regional Adaptation – New England North West region report



## Liverpool Plains Shire Council resilience building

Significant investment in enhancing water security has taken place in the Liverpool Plains shire in recent years. The Quipolly Water Project was completed in 2024, improving water security for Werris Creek, Quirindi, Willow Tree and the surrounding areas. Its objective was to diversify water sources and build a drought-resilient water supply with increased capacity to meet existing and growing water demand from the townships, improving water quality consistency and compliance, improving reliability and resilience, and replacing existing aged and inadequate infrastructure.<sup>43</sup>

The project involved construction of a new state-of-the-art water treatment plant capable of treating up to 6ML/day, employing at least seven different treatment processes, about 750m of raw water pipeline, 20kms of treated water pipelines, a new 0.4ML concrete reservoir in Werris Creek, and underwater construction work in the dam to install a new intake manifold and destratification system. It was achieved with funding commitments of \$25 million from the state and federal Governments and a further \$11.9 million from the council.

The council is also in the process of developing the new Quirindi Aquatic Centre after securing \$6.6 million from the state government. Construction is currently underway following widespread community consultation, with the pool facility considered a valuable community recreation asset and social outlet.

In the wake of the last drought the council received funding for several projects to aid with community recovery and support. The Drought Stimulus Support for the shire included:

- \$125,000 for accessibility improvements to the Royal Theatre;
- \$550,000 for the Quirindi Sporting Fields Redevelopment; and
- \$225,000 for the reinvigoration of local community infrastructure.

Currently the council is working towards its new community strategic plan for the next four years, *Our Plains, Our Future*. The highest-level long-term plan for the community, it reflects the vision, aspirations and priorities for the future and outlines how the council and community will work together to achieve these goals and will obviously be complemented by the RDRP and its priorities and actions. *Our Plains, Our Future* maps the journey of:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be in 10 years' time?
- How will we get there?
- How will we know we've arrived?

Like neighbouring Gunnedah Shire and other council areas across the region, Liverpool Plains Shire Council is focused on building its tourism appeal for both domestic and international visitors, launching its *Destination Management Plan 2022-2026*. In its draft Growth Management and Housing Strategy, council has targeted a moderate growth scenario of 6.4%, which will bring an additional 500 residents to the Liverpool Plains over the next ten years. The strategy is designed to support 218 new dwellings.

## Gunnedah Shire Council resilience building

In 2020, the council's *Community Resilience Program* won the local government award in the NSW 2020 Resilient Australia Awards, outstanding recognition of the combined efforts of the

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.liverpoolplains.nsw.gov.au/Council/Projects-and-works/Quipolly-Water-Project>



council and community to strengthen the shire through an incredibly challenging period, and to ensure its resilience into the future. <sup>44</sup>

The program sought proposals for community projects to stimulate local spending, provide employment and use local businesses and suppliers while delivering a long-lasting public benefit. There were a number of specific program objectives, which included:

- Delivering economic stimulus to the local economy;
- Providing local employment and supporting local purchasing;
- Addressing water and other utility conservation;
- Sustaining the community social fabric, health and wellbeing;
- Strengthening long-term community resilience; and

Projects were funded via a contribution from \$1.2 million Council allocated funding, \$1 million from the Commonwealth Drought Communities Extension program and \$1 million from the NSW Government Drought Stimulus program.

Projects eventually completed under the federal funding requirements included:

- Upgrades to the Gunnedah Rural Museum, Carroll Sports Ground and Gunnedah Rural Fire Service Headquarters;
- Drought resilience projects at Porcupine Reserve and Pensioners Hill, and water supply upgrades at Yallabee Gunnedah Homes for the Aged and Kelvin Hall;
- Tourism-focused activities like a Dorothea Mackellar inspired Silo Art painting, and protection of the Gunnedah Water Tower Museum;
- Support for sporting associations, with the upgrading of lighting at local tennis courts and upgrading the canteen for Gunnedah senior and junior rugby; and
- Culturally-targeted projects with an Arts Gunnedah mural in the CBD and new musical and theatrical events developed by the Gunnedah Conservatorium of Music.

Projects completed with state funding were:

- Upgrading of amenities and equipment at the Gunnedah Shire Band Hall;
- Approvals, bores and standpipe installations in Carroll, Emerald Hill and Kelvin;
- Solar panel installations at two key sites - the sewerage treatment plant and the sewer pump station - better utilising council land and contributing to reduced energy costs; and
- Installation of automatic watering and monitoring systems at Pensioners Hill and the Showground precinct, supporting drought resilience and volunteer efforts.

Of the council's \$1.2 million contribution, \$200,000 engaged the resources to design, support and administer the Community Resilience Program, and about \$300,000 was directed towards the Farmer Army, paying locals whose income had been impacted by the drought for such projects as the Stock Road beautification.

According to Regional Development Australia (RDA) modelling, the council estimated the *Community Resilience Program* supported a total of 40 jobs in the Gunnedah Shire Council area in 2020/21 and created 10 new jobs, with direct expenditure of more than \$2 million into the then drought-impacted economy having significant economic and social benefits, revitalising local assets and improving community resilience into the future.

The shire also has in place the *Gunnedah Shire Economic Development Strategy 2022-2026* which aligns directly with council's Community and Strategic Plan and *Future 2040 – Local Strategic Planning Statement*. It provides a framework and directions for economic development

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<sup>44</sup> Community Resilience Program Final Report, *Drought Communities Program and Drought Stimulus Program Funded Projects - March 2022*



with actions focused on economic diversification of key industries, population retention and growth, support for small-medium sized businesses and investment in projects to stimulate growth.

The strategic plan, *2017 to 2027 – Together We Achieve Great Things*, will complement current drought resilience efforts through its themes of community engagement and support, economic growth, quality of life and environmental protection, while the *Gunnedah Destination Management Plan* (DMP) identifies opportunities to build visitation and assess the product and infrastructure development required to realise these opportunities.

In addition, since 2018, the shire has also seen significant government investment in the area with the \$53 million for the Gunnedah Hospital Redevelopment, \$4 million to deliver the Gunnedah Airport upgrade and \$20 million committed to the Gunnedah Koala Sanctuary.

Finally, a new group called the Gunnedah Community Resilience Network (CRN), is currently being established and will facilitate dialogue between the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC), the community and local organisations and groups. The CRN will enable these groups to participate in disaster management recovery planning, which does not include drought.





# 6. Regional Resilience Stories



## Farmer Army creating Gunnedah jobs in the face of drought

As the impacts of the 2017-2019 drought hit hard across the Gunnedah Shire region, the Council announced an initiative around the formation of a temporary workforce of people whose primary income had been impacted by the drought, offering flexible work arrangements to help keep money coming in when they needed it most.

The Farmer Army was born, and across a six-month period injected valuable spending into local businesses, kept food on the table of participants and assisted with projects that helped boost community morale in an incredibly challenging time.

The \$300,000 in funding came from a \$3.2 million community program, funded by Gunnedah Shire Council and the federal and state governments.

The Farmer Army, formally known as the Drought Employment Program, was opened to farmers, farm workers, contractors, business owners, suppliers and employees in related industries, with 15 people working under the program over a six-month period in 2019 and early 2020.

Gunnedah Shire Council mayor Jamie Chaffey described the program at the time as a “wonderful initiative”.

“There are many people with valuable skills who are willing and able to work, but need a flexible option that will allow them to fulfil their on-farm obligations. We are keen to keep our hard-working residents and families here, and this provides an option to help the shire and as well as supplementing their incomes,” he said of the program.

“It’s also a great resource for Council to have temporary workers who can assist with some of the many important community projects that are under way. And while the shire is benefitting from the Farmer Army members’ experience, we are also offering the chance to learn new skills and build on existing skills so that people are even more employable.”

The group assisted with a number of projects with an environmental focus, including native tree plantings across the shire, the native species seen as a more drought-resilient alternative to many overseas species. They helped the local Landcare group with their activities and planted eucalyptus trees at the soon-to-be-opened koala park just outside Gunnedah.

Farmer Army participants also looked after existing trees in local parks and carried out fencing activities.

Susan Frater, of Gunnedah Shire Council, who helped coordinate the program funding, said the initiative not only put money in the pockets of people who had found themselves without an income during the drought, that money was then spent with local businesses, providing an economic boost.

She said it also helped the Farmer Army participants’ mental health by giving them a new purpose and helped relieve some of their financial anxiety at the time. They were also able to stay in town rather than look for work elsewhere.

“If we had lost those people from the district, they would have been hard to replace down the track,” Susan said. “We knew it would rain, it was just a matter of when, so we needed something to help tide them over until it did.”





## Off season rugby event boosting drought resilience

The Gunnedah Rugby Club is the home of the Red Devils - an important hub in the community for both sporting and social connections.

In February of 2018 and 2019, in the middle of the most recent drought to hit the region, it was the social aspect of the club, rather than its prowess on the rugby fields of North-West NSW, that became the real focus.

The club decided to organise A Day with the Devils, the first of which was held in February 2018. With the aid of some government drought funding, organisers planned a day of music, but most importantly a day where people could forget about the ravages of drought for a few hours.

“I’m a firm believer that you have to put back into the community and our club assists in a lot of different ways where we can,” said club president Bruce Hockings.

“We didn’t organise these days to get credit points, we just saw it as a way to boost people’s spirits, because a lot of people were down at the time. We could see it would be good for people to get off the farm, and that can be really hard during a drought. We needed them to have an excuse to get off their farm and talk to their mates. Even if only one person goes home with a better mindset, then it was worth doing and we’ve done our job,” he said.

The day featured a couple of bands, market stalls and food outlets, and people who came off the land were given some complimentary drink and meal tickets as part of their entry. The first one was such a success, another was organised at the same the following year, with more than 1000 people attending each event. In 2019, the music line-up even included popular Aussie rockers, The Choir Boys.

At each event, the club also organised for some organisations to be present with advice and materials around drought relief opportunities and mental health assistance.

“The feedback we got was tremendous. People were saying ‘that was unreal’, and wives were saying ‘that was unreal because I’ve been struggling to get him off the place, and once he was there he spoke to a bunch of blokes in the same position’.

“It just boosted people, showed them they weren’t alone.

“Something like a sporting club is so important, especially during a challenging time like a drought, and you can see it. Some guys aren’t good at expressing their feelings, but if you get them in a group, and maybe share a couple of drinks, it only takes one of them to say something that others might also be struggling with, and that can help because they see they’re not the only ones.”



## Christmas spirit of Liverpool Plains on show through dry

Christmas came early to the community of the Liverpool Plains Shire in 2019, with an event aimed at lifting community spirits after several years of drought.

The Liverpool Plains Business Chamber organised a subcommittee of volunteers called Christmas on the Plains-Quirindi to organise a fun family night to celebrate the SPIRIT of Christmas in Quirindi and the Liverpool Plains region. Christmas on the Plains-Quirindi Street Party for the December of 2019, transforming the CBD of Quirindi into a festive wonderland for kids and adults alike.

Christmas on the Plains-Quirindi Street Party was a celebration featuring two bands, 40 stalls and late-night shopping down the CBD, amusement park rides, two jumping castles, mini golf, rock climbing wall, petting zoo, kids' corner, free photos and lollies with Santa, Lions BBQ, food vendors, raffles, Rotary Chocolate Wheel, Motorbike and Car Show 'n' Shine, Interactive Model Railway Display, GREAT George Street Line Dance, and competitions for kids and teens of all ages.

Tammie Clark, Secretary of the Business Chamber, said one of the highlights of the celebration was the distribution of hundreds of new toys and books to local children, donated by the Greater Blacktown Business Chamber, Kids West, Lions Club and Blacktown City Council community in Sydney, the 'sister city' of Liverpool Plains Shire.

"They were so generous to us during the drought, and prior to Christmas 2019, they brought up hundreds of toys, hampers and books. I couldn't tell you how many there were, it took a group of us so long to wrap them all. It was amazing," Tammie said.

"But we all wanted the district's children to have a Christmas because it might have been difficult for some of their families to have the celebration they normally did. The Chamber also decided to decorate the main CBD streets (three blocks) with lights that year because we felt some families wouldn't have been able to afford Christmas lights."

A local business and Chamber member sponsored one free ticket per local primary-aged school children for their choice of one amusement ride or fun activity at the Christmas on the Plains-Quirindi event, making it more accessible for the whole community. Tickets were distributed to all primary schools in the Liverpool Plains region.

Tammie said up to 10,000 people attended – "an extraordinary number" – and emphasised the importance of organising the event. It brought other families from surrounding shires to enjoy the evening's festivities.

"To see all those people, it was unbelievable. We wanted to boost community spirit, and this was such a morale-building activity for people. It was really magical seeing so many people enjoying it and all the activity in the main street," she said.

As part of their regular activities, the Liverpool Plains Business Chamber also renewed the membership of existing members free of charge during the drought and charged a heavily reduced rate for new member businesses.

Tammie said while drought took an enormous toll on agriculture, it also had a significant impact on small town businesses in rural and regional communities.

"They say, 'If the farmer makes money, everyone makes money, but if they don't, then no one does'. And that's certainly true for our district. The Liverpool Plains depends on agriculture, and when we farmers don't have the money, we're not going into town to spend it."





## **Drought resilience sky high at the Quirindi Aero Club**

Quirindi Aero Club (QAC) was formed in 2012, following a prolonged drought period, and was a welcome distraction for a group of local people severely impacted by the economic downturn. Just a few short years later the club again became somewhere for some welcome relief from several years of relentless blue skies.

QAC member Lyle Passfield said the current membership was 'mostly middle-aged' males, but women are now joining the ranks, the common thread between them all a shared passion for aviation.

"Some own their own plane, these ranging from inexpensive single-seat home-builds to high-tech gyros. The club meets each month for a barbecue breakfast where we open our hangar doors, drag out the gas barbecue and set up tables and chairs. Several members usually fly in from distant farms and other towns, such as Gunnedah, Scone, or Manilla," Lyle said.

He said the get-togethers provided a non-threatening reprieve from the severe isolation often inherent in rural life, where members were able to chat, initially perhaps about aeroplanes and flying, but then potentially moving on to include the more challenging issue of their daily lives, which just a few years ago was drought.

"The stresses of life are eased; community networks are reinforced. All of us have traumas thrown at us by life - the loss of a career or a loved one, a break-up, financial distress. Dealing with these is hard enough, but often made far worse by isolation. All too often, the normal reaction is to shut ourselves away from the very human contact we are in most need of," Lyle said.

"Such isolation can be a health hazard in itself. Mental health can take a beating; some isolated individuals lose perspective. We all know of such cases, some of which have led to tragedy."

Today's QAC is not the first Quirindi Aero Club. Its predecessor was formed in the post WWII era, when becoming a pilot had a higher profile. Lyle said the wider Quirindi community enthusiastically supported building the new Quirindi Airport, which opened in 1955, with local earthmoving contractors and farmers helping in construction.

In that era, Quirindi Airport was the base for a small commuter airline with several planes. The airport attracted regular passenger services via DC-3 and Fockler F-27 airliners, hosted air shows and there was even a Royal visitor who touched down.

Today the QAC may no longer operate against the backdrop of a bustling regional airport, but its role in the community, and that of other groups like it, is just as vital, perhaps even more important than it ever was.

Lyle said the mental health benefits of groups like QAC couldn't be measured, "but would be considerable" and during such stressful events like drought, the opportunity for face-to-face connections with others going through the same anxiety was invaluable.

Rural communities like Quirindi once boasted dozens of sporting, hobby and service organisations, local events used to draw big crowds, as everyone showed up to the Show, church, or the like," Lyle said.

"Today, even mainstream churches and sports clubs struggle to remain viable. Where our grandparents learned to practise patience and tolerance in challenging social settings, new communication technologies now allow us to escape, to seek out and connect with like-minded people far away. We can now use social media to congregate with ever more narrowly-focussed interest groups, distracting us from the local links we need," he said.

"The Quirindi Aero Club has a role in keeping us connected, in maintaining resilience in our community."





# 7. Drought Resilience Themes, Outcomes and Actions



## Resilience Objectives

Based on the Resilience Assessment (see supporting document *Keeping the Village Green: Liverpool Plains Shire Council and Gunnedah Shire Council Regional Drought Resilience Plan – Resilience Assessment*) as well as stakeholder feedback, 10 key objectives have been developed to align with the drought resilience actions of the Plan.

	<b>OBJECTIVE 1</b> Ensuring future drought support by community groups		<b>OBJECTIVE 6</b> Securing a local workforce for the future agricultural sector
	<b>OBJECTIVE 2</b> Empowering local residents to contribute to their community		<b>OBJECTIVE 7</b> Strengthening social connections within community
	<b>OBJECTIVE 3</b> Intergenerational knowledge sharing to increase drought resilience		<b>OBJECTIVE 8</b> Providing people with confidence to stay in region and boost local skills and experience
	<b>OBJECTIVE 4</b> Greater collaboration between community, local businesses and governments to boost economic resilience		<b>OBJECTIVE 9</b> Supporting improved mental health
	<b>OBJECTIVE 5</b> Boosting community morale in times of drought		<b>OBJECTIVE 10</b> Diversification - encouraging farmers to consider agritourism and other opportunities to supplement income during drought

## Themes

The extensive engagement and consultation with industry, community, and local residents on how the region can be more drought resilient resulted in a number of observations and recommendations. This process revealed the shocks and stressors of drought events, barriers to enhancing resilience, and even 'glimmers of hope' through lived experiences of drought. The survey – which was distributed to every resident in the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires - found nearly 60 per cent of participants have at some time been severely impacted by drought. From our detailed engagement, there are four key themes that emerged as standout priority areas for community members, that they believe hold the key to improving drought resilience across economic, environmental and social factors.



## Theme 1: People, Community and Wellbeing



## Theme 2: Environment



## Theme 3: Agriculture and Farming



## Theme 4: Economy: Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) and Industry

## Actions

Five recommended priority actions have been developed with the aim to enhance community resilience. All are realistic, effective and designed to be community-led. Four of the actions are underpinned by the Plan's four key themes. The fifth action, considered an overarching action, has been developed to support the success and progress of the other four actions.

All actions outlined in this Regional Drought Resilience Plan will be 'road tested' by key stakeholders in the next stage of its implementation, and prioritised.

## Timeframes and Funding

Each action aligns with an implementation timeframe and funding allocation of either:

- **Short Term - Within 6 months using secured funding over that period as part of the current project funding allocation; or a**
- **Longer term - Ongoing timeframe which is reliant on additional or alternative future funding allocations.**





**Overarching Priority Action:**  
Establishment of a Regional Resilience Taskforce



**Priority Action 1:**  
Community Engagement: Volunteering for a Resilient Future



**Priority Action 2:**  
The Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shires - Evergreen Program



**Priority Action 3:**  
Classroom to Paddock Program – local students preparing to join Agricultural workforce



**Priority Action 4:**  
Resilient Businesses – the key to a resilient economy



## **Overarching Priority Action: Establishment of a Regional Resilience Taskforce**

It was evident from the consultation process that the community has several firm ideas on how to improve drought resilience across the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires. What was also clear, was that a more effective and coordinated process is needed to make that a reality.

*“Get stakeholders together in a sub-committee so drought is coordinated across the board - councils, community groups, state government, NGOs. We need to get an understanding early on (pre-drought) about who they are and their capacity to assist or support when drought hits so we're all working together and using resources well, not overlapping each other.” – Local resident at stakeholder meeting.*

*“Last drought there was no plan and lack of coordination between stakeholders. Everyone wanted to do something but were doing it over the top of everyone else. A coordinated approach would have worked well.” - Local resident at stakeholder meeting.*

The establishment of an overarching resilience taskforce is critical to oversee the coordination and management of the four remaining actions outlined in this Plan. It would ensure a collaborative approach to delivering measures to enhance resilience in the lead up to drought as well as managing measures to address drought once it hits. The Taskforce, 'active' in non-drought and drought periods, would be equipped to respond to droughts more efficiently and effectively through the coordinated sharing of local resources, knowledge, and skills. Furthermore, it would be able to quickly oversee the management of other disaster situations such as floods and bushfires, if the need arose. One key responsibility of the Taskforce would be to determine a set of indicators used to determine the impact of weather and climate conditions upon agriculture, small business, population health and community infrastructure. Applying these indicators would assist both councils in identifying when the

regions are regarded as 'in drought' and help determine when the necessary actions should be activated to mitigate its impacts.

The taskforce structure would comprise one representative from local volunteer groups, businesses, agricultural industry, local government, NSW Government department/agency, sports groups, arts organisations and the education sector. Each representative would relay relevant information and updates from the Taskforce's quarterly meetings, back to local groups in their specialist area in either written form or face-to-face. However, to ensure the Taskforce is 'active' when drought is not front of mind and as a long-term investment, it is suggested that it is the responsibility of an existing role at both Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shire Councils.

Representation from groups with different vulnerabilities to drought will be sought, incorporating NSW and Federal Government departments, farming and non-farming, manufacturing, mining and transport industries. Both Councils are committed to principles of diversity and equity and will ensure accessibility of the Taskforce meetings, minutes and outcomes. Capacity building across represented organisations will be a focus, with the Taskforce demonstrating effective responsibilities and accountabilities.

The Regional Resilience Taskforce will be formed to include the establishment of adaptive governance arrangements and consideration of resilience principles.

The new Taskforce would be promoted to the community through an awareness campaign to increase its profile and function in assisting with drought resilience measures across the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires. Importantly, the insights and intelligence gained by the Taskforce will be shared and referred up from local government to both state and federal government departments/agencies.



As it turns out, the Gunnedah Community Resilience Network (CRN) has been recently established. The CRN is a smaller group with a focus on resilience around disasters. It is this Plan's recommendation that the Taskforce could leverage the CRN, harnessing this existing resource to serve the wider two regions.

**Facilitator:** Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils will be the Taskforce administrators.

**Stakeholders:** Cross section of volunteer groups, sporting organisations, state and local government, local businesses and industry representatives.

**Timeframe and Funding: Short Term** - Within 6 months under current project funding allocation. Some funding would be allocated to setting up data collection for baseline reporting and ongoing monitoring.

**Indicators:** The following KPI's have been developed to measure success:

- Taskforce created and recruited.
- Terms of Reference for the group created with specific timelines and KPIs for delivery of actions included.
- Implementation plan developed by the group, outlining goals and delivery of actions.



## Theme 1: People, Community and Wellbeing

Actions under the theme 'People, Community and Wellbeing', are designed to enhance drought resilience across the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires by increased knowledge-sharing, collaboration, connectivity, and civic participation in local volunteering services that play a critical role in assisting many in need, particularly in drought. They are the invisible workforce that supports communities across the country. According to Volunteering Australia, more than five million people volunteer through an organisation annually, while an additional 6.5 million provide informal volunteering support within their community. Volunteering builds strong, connected, and resilient communities.

But concern about an ageing volunteering population is widely felt, which is compounded by the fact that there was some belief there was reduced interest from the wider community, particularly young people, to take over volunteer roles – potentially due to limited time, other competing pressures or priorities. There were calls for a re-set and new approach to ensure the continuity of volunteer support for the community, which is critical to drought resilience.

*“That the older generation 50+ are the ones who are involved or running not for profit and other organisations. How do you suggest we encourage the under 40s to join?” – Local resident at community pop-up session*

The online survey - 'Have your say – Regional Drought Resilience' - asked participants which local groups, activities or businesses are critical in supporting the community during future droughts?

*“CWA, Rotary, Lions, Sister-cities, churches and religious organisations, sporting clubs, schools, councils” – Liverpool Plains resident and full-time worker in arts and recreation services*

What/who do you feel helped you or your community through previous drought periods?

*“Local, repeat Local, volunteer and support networks, not the big government promoted ones” - Gunnedah Business Owner in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector*

### **Priority Action 1: Community Engagement: Volunteering for a Resilient Future**

#### **Theme 1: People, Community and Wellbeing Resilience Objective**

**OBJ1: Ensuring future drought support by community groups**

**OBJ2: Empowering young people to contribute to their community**

**OBJ3: Intergenerational knowledge sharing to increase drought resilience**

**OBJ7: Strengthening social connections within community**

In agriculture dependent communities, particularly in times of drought, volunteer groups are a crucial part of the social fabric. Volunteers build hope and community resilience. Local volunteering enables communities to take ownership of local challenges, set their own priorities and provide services and support which make a real difference to people's lives in the lead up to and during drought.

But the bulk of volunteering work in rural and regional areas is carried out by older Australians. In fact, the latest data from the National Strategy for Volunteering found that people aged 65-74 years were the most likely to volunteer (39.1 per cent), with those aged 25-34 years the least likely (26.3 per cent). With an ageing population there is an urgent need to reassess the function and operation of volunteer groups to ensure they have the capacity and personnel to provide services to the community now and into the future. A decline in the level of community volunteering would result in a decline in community resilience during drought periods.



Priority Action 1: Community Engagement: Volunteering for a Resilient Future includes the following actions:

**Short Term Actions – 6 months:**

- 4.1 Mental Health First Aid Training:** Organised sessions to broaden the knowledge of community members working in volunteer groups, with mental health training. Partnering with a training provider such as St John Ambulance, Australian Red Cross or Mental Health First Aid Australia, volunteers would learn the skills needed to recognise and respond to someone experiencing a mental health problem or mental health crisis. This training opportunity has the potential to encourage people to join community groups as a volunteer.
- 4.2 Volunteer Group Audit:** An analysis of key volunteering groups in the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires and their current volunteer engagement. The audit could provide an accurate baseline on local volunteering, so assessments could be made to ensure there was enough capacity to meet demand during drought events to boost community resilience and/or unveil what could be done to improve that support. As part of the audit, volunteers could provide insights on additional volunteer training that they believe would be beneficial to servicing and supporting community members.
- 4.3 Modern Volunteering Campaign:** Definitions of volunteering are changing. This campaign would promote what it means to be a volunteer today, and how changes in technology and new ideas such as corporate volunteering has changed what the volunteer today, looks like. The campaign aims to change the perception of volunteering to a younger, local audience by pitching greater flexibility, more family friendly and work friendly hours and the use of new technology in volunteer work. The campaign would include a guide for what modern volunteering looks like with insights from authorities such as Volunteers Australia. The concept of ‘active citizenship’ - attending and supporting volunteer-run events but not necessarily organising them – would also be incorporated into this action. It is important to convey that support for volunteering can translate in many forms such as

attending a community BBQ or even buying tickets to a volunteer-run event.

**Longer term actions (if additional funding allows)**

- 4.4 Volunteer-a-Thon:** Designed to encourage and increase local interest in joining a local volunteer group. The objective of the event could include securing five new members for each volunteering group, boosting community participation and capacity building.
- 4.5 Volunteer Training:** Organised sessions for groups/individuals on skills that support volunteer engagement, such as virtual meeting training. These workshops would be aligned with local training organisations or experts and linked into other organisations, for example, the business chamber. This could also include older volunteers sharing their knowledge and experiences with younger people starting out with volunteering groups.

**Facilitator:** Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils

**Stakeholders:** Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils, local volunteer groups such as the CWA, Rotary, Lions Club and Red Cross.

**Timeframe and Funding:** *Short Term* - Within 6 months with funding secured as part of the project funding allocation. *Longer Term* – beyond 6 months if additional funding allows.

**Indicators:** The following KPI's have been developed to measure success:

- *Number of mental health first aid sessions hosted*
- *Number of volunteers in attendance at mental health first aid sessions*
- *Volunteer audit completed*
- *Baseline survey conducted as part of the audit*
- *Modern volunteering guide developed and distributed to volunteer groups*
- *Number of presentations given to volunteer groups on modern volunteering*



## Theme 2: Environment

Actions under the theme 'Environment' aim to boost drought resilience through positive mental health outcomes, boosted morale, increased connectedness amongst the population and pride in the community, through enhancing public open space and retail precincts during times of drought and non-drought periods. Vibrant, engaging and revitalised public spaces may not have a direct economic impact, but they are an essential ingredient in boosting community resilience. In fact, across Australia, common green space is considered essential infrastructure for all members of the community, particularly when times are tough. Main streets and local precincts are the beating heart of regional or rural towns. Often it is small, practical ideas related to these common areas which can unite a community, lift morale, and confidence when faced with adverse circumstances, such as drought.

The online survey - 'Have your say – Regional Drought Resilience' - found 63% of participants said that to enhance drought resilience there should be a greater focus on health and wellbeing, including mental health, support and services.

*“Lack of green spaces, dust storms etc impact mental & physical health. The death of animals (whether wild or domestic) due to drought can be traumatising” - Gunnedah resident.*

*“My neighbours asked me to keep watering my very small front lawn they could see from the road, as it cheered them up” – Local resident at community pop-up session.*

### **Priority Action 2: The Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shires - Evergreen Program**

#### **Theme 2: Environment Resilience Objective**

**OBJ7: Strengthening social connections within community.**

**OBJ9: Supporting improved mental health.**

**OBJ5: Boosting community morale in times of drought.**

The NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure refers to public open space as the foundation of liveable communities. This action recognises the clear correlation between community resilience and the maintaining of vibrant, green spaces during drought events. Residents were clear in articulating that a key pain point of previous droughts was seeing local trees die, realising that and sometimes seeing wildlife and animals were suffering in the conditions, and watching gardens slowly die. These circumstances impacted morale and heightened a sense of hopelessness within the community. But what community members also expressed in the stakeholder engagement process was that keeping even the smallest of gardens alive during a drought was a symbol of hope, it lifted spirits and enhanced resilience.

This action would be guided by councils' tree strategies which would include advice on what species of tree should be planted and where in the local area – local schools, public spaces or around community buildings. This action could also connect with existing council schemes such as Gunnedah Shire Council's 'Farmer Army' initiative, which was established in 2019, creating a temporary workforce of people whose primary income had been impacted by the drought.



Priority Action 2: The Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shires - Evergreen Program would include the following components:

**Short Term Actions – 6 months:**

**2.1 Tree Planting Initiative:** Partnering with the local Landcare Australia group (Quirindi and Gunnedah) or NSW Local Land Services to establish a committee which is responsible for year-round tree planting and maintenance. The committee could include representatives from both councils and local groups such as Namoi Water In the Landscape Initiative (WILI). Local kids could be involved in the initiative, planting their own tree and looking after it through dry times, instilling a sense of pride, ownership and resilience building when times are tough. As part of this initiative, council parks and gardens teams could identify 'shovel ready' projects that would assist in the next drought. Water conservation education, which aims to reduce water use locally, could be incorporated into this action.

**2.2 Ground Cover Initiative:** Working with Landcare on improving soil health in and around local townships. The goal is to increase the moisture in soils, so when drought hits, it can hopefully outlast the dry period. Some members of the community told us that the key to achieving this is ground cover, which can be achieved with the planting of deep-rooted perennial grasses. This initiative would include further education on ecosystems for the local grazing community, drawing on the latest advice and methods. It is worth considering a rebate system of some sort to encourage community participation in this initiative. This action could also include appointing local group the WILI to facilitate a number of workshops with community members on water management challenges in the region across urban, agricultural, recreational, or industrial settings.

**2.3 Brighten the Town:** Discussion in stakeholder meetings suggested pot plants with bright flowers such as sunflowers (an icon of the area)

could be used during drought to brighten the area. Community members could be involved in growing and caring for these instantly recognisable flowers – with pots placed in the main streets, in high pedestrian traffic areas, near the local hospital, schools, along footpaths and even in people's front yards. A plan for this action would be developed by the Taskforce so it is ready to be activated during a drought declaration.

**Facilitator:** Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shire Councils

**Stakeholders:** An example of the types of suitable organisations that might be well placed to lead this initiative include, Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shire Councils, Landcare Australia, WILI, NSW Local Land Services, businesses and farmers

**Funding:** Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils

**Timeframe and Funding: *Short Term*** - Within 6 months with funding secured as part of the project funding allocation.

**Indicators:** The following KPI's have been developed to measure success:

- *Tree planting committee established*
- *Approval of the tree planting committee implementation plan*
- *Number of trees planted*
- *Number of education sessions held on ground cover improvement and the latest information on water management*
- *Delivery of the 'brighten the town' implementation plan*



### **Theme 3: Agriculture and Farming**

Actions under the theme 'Agriculture and Farming' are designed to enhance resilience in the agricultural and agribusiness sector by encouraging growth in the local workforce and opportunities for industry and business that would buoy the regional economy. The New England North West region produces one-fifth of the state's agricultural output and is home to 16% of farm businesses in NSW. These statistics weren't lost on stakeholders who contributed to the consultation process.

Nearly half (49%) of participants in the online survey - 'Have your say – Regional Drought Resilience' - said they worked in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector. And 71% of them said agriculture (agribusiness, primary production) was the most impacted by drought.

*“Community involvement where the older experienced are teaching the younger fresh minds moving forward” - Local resident at community workshop session*

#### **Priority Action 3: Classroom to Paddock Program – local students preparing to join Agricultural workforce**

##### **Theme 3: Agriculture and Farming**

**OBJ8: People staying in region, boosting local skills and experience.**

**OBJ2: Empowering young people to contribute to their community.**

**OBJ4: Greater collaboration between community, local businesses and governments to boost economic resilience.**

**OBJ6: Securing a local workforce for the future agricultural sector.**

The Priority Action 3: Classroom to Paddock Program – local students preparing to join Agricultural workforce – would include the following components:

**3.1 On- farm Work Experience:** Throughout the consultation, there was strong feedback from the community about the concerning trend of

young people leaving the region and its subsequent impacts. The local agricultural industry - which is the cornerstone of the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah economies - needs the next generation to be on hand to continue the work of the future. There is significant concern that without depth in the local agricultural workforce, in times of drought this will only be exacerbated as young people leave the area. A key part of this action is strengthening the local agricultural industry in non-drought periods, so that when drought does hit, the region and its agricultural sector is more resilient to its impacts.

This action supports the development of a pilot school program which is designed to get students onto local farms to learn about life on the land, agriculture, and agribusiness opportunities and career prospects. The stakeholder engagement process highlighted that a push for more agritourism opportunities was important to locals, so this could be incorporated into the program. Likewise, alternative farming was singled out as a priority in drought resilience, so the latest farming techniques and methods could be part of the learnings of the initiative; however, it will be important to ensure the school curriculum is aligned with this content. Finally, there is also scope for the pilot to include related workforce opportunities for students in agribusiness, such as farm machinery, logistics and farm supply businesses.

**3.2 Ag Careers Expo:** Both Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shire Councils co-host a careers expo focussing on agriculture. Gunnedah already hosts a careers expo in Youth Week every year, which could be used for this opportunity. The expo would not be exclusively for young people but would be open to anyone interested in learning more about and working in the agriculture industry.

**Facilitator:** The on-farm pilot program would be implemented and managed in collaboration with one local school from each of the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education,





NSW Local Land Services, Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA) and local farmers, tradespeople, and businesses.

The careers expo would be jointly facilitated by both Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils.

**Stakeholders:** Farmers, local high school and students and NSW Department of Education

**Timeframe and Funding: *Short Term*** - Within 6 months with funding secured as part of the project funding allocation. With a view to secure longer-term investment.

**Indicators:** The following KPI's have been developed to measure success:

- Development of pilot program plan with school and agribusiness
- Engagement of school and agribusiness to be involved in pilot program
- Delivery of Ag Careers Expo
- Number of people in attendance at Ag Careers Expo
- Level of event engagement through social media (likes, comments on posts)



## Theme 4: Economy: Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) and Industry

Actions under the theme 'Economy: Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) and Industry', aim to build resilience in local businesses and industry to help them better prepare, respond to and recover from the many significant impacts of drought. Whether agricultural businesses, retailers or those in hospitality, these actions lay the foundation for a prosperous future in the face of drought.

The online survey - 'Have your say – Regional Drought Resilience' - found 57% of participants identified economic downturn/increased cost as the most concerning impact of drought.

*"In a drought (I mean a real drought over a number of years) the fish and chip shop, and the tyre shop, and the local owner operator of machinery shops do it just as hard as do corporate farmers" – Gunnedah business owner in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector*

### Priority Action 4: Resilient Businesses - the key to a resilient economy

**Theme 4: Economy: Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) and Industry**

**OBJ8: People staying in region, boosting local skills and experience.**

**OBJ2: Empowering young people to contribute to their community.**

**OBJ3: Intergenerational knowledge sharing to increase drought resilience.**

**OBJ4: Greater collaboration between community, local businesses and governments to boost economic resilience.**

Small businesses are the backbone of rural and regional communities. Not only do they support local economies and are relied upon heavily as the source of food and beverages, supplies and services, they also play a significant role in social and community cohesion – promoting the unique

identity of a town or village, its people and local activities. Often a small business may be the one place where community members can chat to one another, to talk about their work, families, and experiences. Maintaining these vital services, and societal contributions, are essential. Strengthening resilience in small businesses in the good times will pay dividends when times are tough. We know in times of drought; small businesses are often quick to feel the impacts. As such, a key action to emerge from the consultation was to encourage and support local residents to start new businesses and maintain existing ones. The feedback revealed that without support, many people with the potential and enthusiasm to develop the skills and the finances they need to start a business, could leave town for work and opportunities elsewhere. With succession planning and business continuity, comes business resilience over the long-term which is particularly important in times of drought.

Priority Action 4: Resilient Businesses - the key to a resilient economy would include the following components:

#### 4.1 Supporting succession planning in business – keep the doors

**open:** In addition to targeting young people to participate in this initiative and become the next generation of local business owners, we propose there is significant benefit to extending it to include minority groups such as migrants, First Nations peoples and women. To understand the level of interest from the demographics targeted in this program, we propose a comprehensive survey of the targeted groups. With the help of local businesses, accountancy firms and banks, an audit of skills in the community could be carried out.

The results would form the basis of a business succession planning program which would match potential business owner candidates with local business owners who may be considering retirement and may be interested in that candidate taking over their established business.



Initially, this initiative will be rolled out as a pilot program over a six-month period focussing on one local business sector and involving one mentor business owner and one mentee/prospective business owner. The success of the pilot program will inform potential longer-term investment and expansion in the scheme across both regions.

In the long term, this action enhances the probability of retaining people in these communities with encouraging, long-term career prospects. There is also the possibility of a mentoring and work experience element to the program, whereby an interested young person works one day a week in their prospective business and learns from the owner of the business in the workplace.

This initiative has the potential to revitalise local businesses, strengthen the local economy, and improve morale for both local residents looking for a career change or opportunity, and those who have spent a lifetime establishing a business they are proud of. There is also scope as part of this action for the establishment of an employment drive to keep people in the community through new training workshops for locals looking for work or who are keen to upskill.

This action could run like a 'share farming' scheme and be managed and driven by the local chambers of commerce. The chambers will have up-to-date intelligence on potential business opportunities, for example, oversight over who in the local business community is considering retirement in the future and when. The chambers could also issue an Expression of Interest to the wider community to see who might be interested in potentially taking over an existing, local business.

There is the scope for the chambers to partner with a financial institution with specialist skills in regional small business, a financial advisor/accountant and a real estate agent, to undertake a pilot project in supporting a business to transition to new owners/manager and share the learnings.

Acknowledging local business chambers' role in advocacy, there would be a need to upwardly refer the activities and priorities of this program to the state government's Business NSW. This could be done through coordination with Service NSW's Business Connect initiative which has advisors who assist business owners and start-ups achieve their goals.

**4.2 Regional Currency Initiative (Gunny Money and Quirindi Shop Local Dollars):** Acknowledging the success of Gunnedah's Gunny Money initiative, which was launched during COVID-19, a similar currency initiative would provide much needed support to those in need, particularly in times of drought, while stimulating local small business activity. Councils would work with chambers of commerce to provide the funding to cover gift cards to be distributed to members of the community, which can only be spent at participating local businesses. This concept keeps locals spending locally when times are tough and further to this, it could also include an audit of what customers are spending on, and where. These insights could help councils identify long term trends and patterns, and pinpoint where and when their support is most needed by local small businesses, and whether there are obvious opportunities for them to diversify. The funds for the initiative would be held until required and the initiative would be effectively 'activated' based on the Regional Drought Resilience Taskforce's established drought indicators.

**4.3 Small Business Activation and Technology Assistance:** The impact of drought can significantly change customer behaviour. When people's disposable income takes a hit, so does spending at the local hairdresser, clothing store and newsagent. This change in customer behaviour can be devastating for rural and regional small businesses, particularly when coupled with a rise in online shopping. Many small businesses are simply not able to compete with rivals who have an established and reputable online presence.



This initiative would include training for small business owners across the Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shires to help them diversify their income streams by expanding online. They would be upskilled through the benefits of a newly-formed Regional Technology Hub which is run by local IT experts. The hub would guide them on how to become more tech-savvy and competitive – which could include learning all there is to know about the designing of a website, Shopify and ecommerce platform options, and social media promotion. The cost of the training for small business owners would be subsidised through the RDRP via chambers of commerce.

In addition to supporting businesses reach their digital potential, there are also measures councils can adopt to enhance the vibrancy and attractiveness of main streets and public places, which have tangible benefits for local businesses by attracting more customers. As stated by the NSW Small Business Commissioner, councils can leverage their ability to approve businesses, run events, manage land use permissions, and provide services to help reinvigorate areas and generate commercial and investment opportunities. This could include pop-up shops, arts and culture to better utilise vacant shops or the footpath, co-working spaces in the main street, or dual businesses/multi-occupancy opportunities such as shared retail space or dual tenancy arrangements and shop façade upgrades to attract business.

**Facilitator:** Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils and local business chambers

**Stakeholders:** Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils, local business chambers, Business NSW, Aboriginal Land Councils, Service NSW.

**Timeframe and Funding: *Short Term*** - Within 6 months with funding secured as part of the project funding allocation. With a view to secure longer-term investment to continue.

**Indicators:** The following KPI's have been developed to measure success:

- Keep the Doors open pilot program established, including selection of business and mentor
- Local currency initiative implementation plan developed and ready for activation when required
- Number of small business tech training events held
- Number of attendees at small business tech training events
- Baseline survey of businesses conducted



# 8. Monitoring, evaluation and learning



## Monitoring



A monitoring plan has been developed based on the KPI's for each action in the Plan. This monitoring plan sets the baseline for the evaluation process, enabling a consistent approach to assessing the impact the various actions are having on preparing for drought events. The aim of the monitoring plan is to identify whether each action is having the intended result and impact, and if not, what interventions may be required to adjust or adapt the action.

The Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils are responsible for overseeing the IMP, working closely with the resilience taskforce.



## Monitoring & Evaluation Plan – Short Term Actions

Theme	Priority Action	Sub Actions	KPI related to action	Goal	Responsibility for delivery	Measurement Tool	Estimated Timing
 <b>OVERARCHING</b>	<b>Establishment of a Regional Resilience Taskforce</b>		Taskforce created and recruited – EOI and direct invitation to appropriate groups/people	Within 2 months	Councils		2 months post plan approval
			Terms of Reference for the group created with specific timelines and KPIs for delivery of actions included	Within 2 months	Councils		2 months post plan approval
			Implementation plan developed by the group, outlining goals and delivery of actions	Within 4 months	Regional Resilience Taskforce with support from Councils	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with plan included	4 months post plan approval



Theme	Priority Action	Sub Actions	KPI related to action	Goal	Responsibility for delivery	Measurement Tool	Estimated Timing
 <p><b>THEME 1</b> People, Community and Wellbeing</p>	<p><b>1: Community Engagement: Volunteering for a Resilient Future</b></p>	Mental Health First Aid Training	Number of mental health first aid sessions hosted	10 sessions (5 sessions per LGA including surrounding villages)	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Engagement of Mental Health First Aid Australia instructor (local if possible)	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with confirmed events	Within 6 months of plan approval
			Number of volunteers in attendance at mental health first aid sessions	15 people at each session	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with registration records	Within 6 months of plan approval
		Volunteer Group Audit	Volunteer audit completed	Completed within 6 months	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Possible engagement of consultant to complete	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with registration records	Within 6 months of plan approval
			Baseline survey conducted as part of the audit	20 responses from a range of volunteer groups	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Possible engagement of consultant to complete	Volunteer Online survey	Within 3 months of plan approval
		Modern Volunteering Campaign	Modern volunteering guide developed and distributed to volunteer groups	Consultant engaged to conduct research and deliver guide within 6 months	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Possible engagement of consultant to complete	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with copy of guide for approval	Within 6 months of plan approval
			Number of presentations given to volunteer groups on modern volunteering	10 presentations given across both LGAs	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Possible engagement of consultant to complete	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with list of confirmed presentations	Within 6 months of plan approval
 <p><b>THEME 2</b> Environment</p>	<p><b>2: The Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah Shires - Evergreen Program</b></p>	Tree Planting Initiative	Tree planting committee established via EOI process	10 members from range of backgrounds. Established within 3 months	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Councils	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with EOI responses	Within 3 months of plan approval
			Approval of the tree planting committee implementation plan	Implementation plan developed and approved by Councils within 8 months	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Councils	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with copy of implementation plan for approval	Within 8 months of plan approval
			Number of trees planted	200 trees planted in each LGA	Lead: Tree Planting Committee	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with registration records	Within 6 months of plan approval
		Ground Cover Initiative	Number of education sessions held on ground cover improvement	4 sessions	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Others: LLS, Council, Landcare	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with list of confirmed sessions	Within 6 months of plan approval
		Brighten the Town	Delivery of the 'brighten the town' implementation plan	Plan developed and approved within 6 months. Funds allocated held with process confirmed ready for activation when required	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Other: Councils	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with plan included	Within 6 months of plan approval



Theme	Priority Action	Sub Actions	KPI related to action	Goal	Responsibility for delivery	Measurement Tool	Estimated Timing
 <p><b>THEME 3</b> <b>Agriculture and Farming</b></p>	<p><b>3: Classroom to Paddock Program – local students preparing to join Agricultural workforce – would include the following components:</b></p>	On Farm Work Experience	Development of pilot program plan with school and agribusiness	Plan developed and approved within 3 months	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Other: Department of Education, Local Schools, Councils	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with plan included	Within 3 months of plan approval
			Engagement of school and agribusiness to be involved in pilot program	1 school in each LGA 1 business in each LGA	Lead: Regional Resilience Taskforce Other: Council	Quarterly Report from Regional Resilience Taskforce with confirmed school and business agreement included	Within 6 months of plan approval
		Ag Careers Expo	Delivery of regional Ag Careers Expo	1 regional Ag Careers expo implemented within 6 months (2025)	Lead: Councils Other: Regional Resilience Taskforce	Confirmation of event	Within 6 months of plan approval
			Number of people in attendance at Ag Careers Expo	500 visitors registered, 20 exhibitors	Lead: Councils Other: Regional Resilience Taskforce	Online registration form	Within 6 months of plan approval
			Level of event engagement through social media (likes, comments on posts)	200 across promotion timeframe	Lead: Councils Other: Regional Resilience Taskforce	Meta reports for Facebook	Within 6 months of plan approval
 <p><b>THEME 4</b> <b>Economy: Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) and Industry</b></p>	<p><b>4: Resilient Businesses – the key to a resilient economy</b></p>	Supporting succession planning in business – keep the doors open	Keep the Doors open pilot program established including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation plan developed and approved</li> <li>• EOI for selection of business and mentee</li> <li>• Matching of business and mentee</li> </ul>	Within 6 months	Lead: Local Chambers of Commerce Other: Council, Business NSW	Report from Business Chambers with confirmed plan and participants	Within 6 months of plan approval
		Regional Currency Initiative (Gunny Money and Quirindi Shop Local Dollars):	Local currency initiative implementation plan developed and ready for activation when required	Within 6 months	Lead: Local Chambers of Commerce Other: Council, Business NSW	Report from Business Chambers with confirmed plan and indicators for activation	Within 6 months of plan approval
		Small Business Activation and Technology Assistance	Number of small business tech training events held	4 per LGA	Lead: Local Chambers of Commerce Other: TAFE, Community College, Council, Business NSW	Report from Business Chambers with confirmed events	Within 6 months of plan approval
			Number of attendees at small business tech training events	20 people	Lead: Local Chambers of Commerce	Online registrations	Within 6 months of plan approval
			Baseline survey of businesses conducted	20 responses	Lead: Local Chambers of Commerce	Online survey	Within 3 months of plan approval





## Evaluation

The Regional Drought Resilience Plan short term actions will be evaluated in line with the monitoring plan at the end of the initial 6-month period of implementation. Afterwards, longer-term actions will be reviewed annually.

### *Key Evaluation Questions*

A series of key evaluation questions (KEQs) will be developed to monitor and evaluate the Regional Drought Resilience Plan in achieving intended outcomes, as well as to facilitate learnings. The KEQs will be accompanied by sub-questions to guide the collection of evidence to answer the KEQs.

## Learning

Continuous learning will form an important part of the RDRP's success. The following activities will be implemented throughout the process, ensuring learnings are captured regularly and actions adapted throughout the roll-out of the plan.

**Learning Reflection:** Each quarterly Regional Resilience Taskforce meeting should include a group reflection section on their agenda. This will be a similar process with a consistent set of questions to ensure successes, issues, ideas, and questions are captured and the RDRP can be continuously improved.

**Learning Workshop:** An initial learning workshop will be conducted following the implementation of the short-term actions (after 6 months). Following the first 6 months, an annual workshop will be held for longer term actions and to assess the ongoing effectiveness of the RDRP. The workshop will be facilitated by Liverpool Plains and Gunnedah shire councils in line with the Regional Resilience Taskforce and key stakeholders including Chambers of Commerce.

**Ongoing Structured Learning:** The Regional Resilience Taskforce will agree upon a process for ongoing structured learning once engaged. This will include setting learning objectives, content, agreement on delivery methods and assessment (internal and external). The structured learning process developed and agreed by the Taskforce would include how lessons learned from the initial community consultations will inform greater inclusion of disengaged segments of the community in future resilience-building activities and planning.



# 9. Appendices



## Appendix 1 – Verbatim comments: Online survey

The below responses have been received as part of the stakeholder consultation and have been included verbatim in order to fully capture and represent the sentiment and intent of the participants.

**Q17. What/who do you feel helped you or your community through previous drought periods?  
Please specify:**

RESPONSES
The community
Community events bringing people together
Community Forums. Fodder transport subsidy.
Lions club
People generally adhered to strict daily water usage
The heavens opening their doors to the weather so rain fell. Yes it created destruction through floods but most people in the community weren't too worried. But now it's about being conscious of the fact that drought could happen at anytime anywhere.
Knowing that at the stage of absolute failure, a process would eventually step in and try and mitigate a minimum service.
Interest rate subsidies, transport subsidies, critical weather grants
Community
Broad community support acceptance
Being able to talk through options. Community events
Locally organised community events to keep people together. People keeping an eye on people doing it tough.
Communication
Forward planning
Service organisations.
Friends. Community gathering at Local Pialloway Hall. Knowledge that it would rain again.
Talking with neighbours and other people going through it
Neighbours looking out for each other. Community support
Landcare.
Other genuine people
Rain
Community
Funding, funding for small businesses in the tiny township to help reduce the impact on the community by reducing pressure on the drought period. Mental health issues are also have concerns and importance through out the times
Previous investments in water infrastructure, pasture/soil health. Being part of a beef discussion group previously, bouncing ideas off likeminded peers.
Family support and talking about the issues.
Community help
Local, repeat Local, volunteer and support networks, not the big government promoted ones.
<b>WORKING TOGETHER</b>
Not much
Social connections
Connection to each other. Financial assistance (for family - not myself)
CWA and local groups
Community sticking together
CWA & other charity groups
Community groups. Buy a bale, buy from the bush, Vinnies etc
Path dependence. People went into survival mode.
Quirindi community pantry helped with food hampers and low cost groceries.
Rural Financial Councillor
family



Regular Get togethers with neighbours
Faith and friends
Sometimes groups like rural aid assist but some people use them that shouldn't. Usual parasites of the society.
Planning, you know there is always a drought coming
Cattle prices remained high, Gunnedah has a mixed economy with mining. Cotton was still irrigated which brought money into town.
Friends, neighbours, government
Hayrunners, volunteer groups
Sister City Relationship, Rotary, Lions and CWA networks
Local businesses
Neighbours, community

**Q18. In your opinion, what are the areas/aspects within our community that worked well during drought – where were the glimmers of hope?**

<b>RESPONSES</b>
Cohesiveness of community
As above
Targeted training programs. Community gatherings.
There weren't too many , as farmers we were told how resilient they were and we felt very isolated
Recycling grey water and any water hack to keep going
Still the ability to create additional income
All actions have been too late in the past.
Rural Financial Advisors
Social positive activities
Drought support should be tailored to people who really need it
People seemed to be able to get assistance from agencies when required. But in the end everyone makes their own decisions and cannot always expect to receive assistance
Cohesive community - developed over many good years. Regular community events which bring people together - sport, biggest morning teas, Christmas parties, fire brigade and so on.
Community events
Communication
Service organisations, sports associations, religious groups
Community get togethers. City supporting small off farm business (Buy Aussie), city travelling to stay in country areas (domestic water was an issue)
Nothing. It was an awful awful time
Organising community get togethers and celebrations.
Community coming together. Landcare projects to create mitigation strategies.
People who stuck together to help a mate/friend
People
Having regular contact with social events. Being the hub of tambar found families and friends gathering and discussing their experiences with each other was a massive success and also having an event that helped their mind set and put a smile on their faces
Emphasis on production and/ or strategic de-stocking.
Understanding people were not alone and it was ok to ask for help.
Supporting each other
Local groups such as the CWA, the churches, and progress associations who tried to help out locally and organically.
Access point for potable water . Community Pantry for food in most desperate, donated fodder was moral boost
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>
CWA
Sporting events
Services such as RAMHP providing farm gate counselling.
Community worked on the basis "that we have been here before" and need to ride it out together
Knowing it will rain one day



Ordinary people close to the ground who came up with practical help packages. No admin top heavy govt schemes work well
Dogged resilience.
Community events
Having access to clean ,clear uncontaminated groundwater remained & gave my family our biggest glimmer of hope . It has to be protected at all cost for the future viability of our community.All future planning & development by local council has to protect this precious resource from contamination or loss
outside help
Social cricket for the men,
Those who helped with encouragement and offers.
The knowledge it will come to an end
Yes reduction of IIs fees
Resilience, generosity
Willingness to help out a mate
Networks; tourism! City people supported rural towns by visiting Nd spending money - Agritourism - spreading awareness and bridging isolation for farmers
Local businesses, even though they were also struggling they were still there
People sharing their troubles and assistance for those most in need in the form of care packages etc

- *All responses have been included exactly as they were presented by participants, without corrections or editing, to ensure they are an accurate representation of participants' thoughts on the day.*

**Q20. In your opinion, which local groups, activities or businesses are critical in supporting our community during future droughts? Please list.**

<b>RESPONSES</b>
Land Services
Mental health organisations, Landcare, local community groups (progress associations) that are not necessarily in the towns
Local Land Services NSW DPI. Farm Gate Support. TAFE NSW
Government drought councillors
Local council
Salvation Army, st Vincent DePaul, and other community sector services like Gunnedah's family support
Businesses that are diverse from supporting the agriculture industry. Once agriculture close up spending during drought, all flow on downward economic effects occurs in agricultural support industries/towns. Employment in industries/commercial activities that do not rely on large volumes of water give an economic continuity (resilience) during drought.
Governments at all levels
Not sure
Psychologists are actually very important
All the service organisations, community groups, churches, can organise supportive activities to bring people together. Large enterprises can develop a list of projects that can be carried out during droughts to employ local people and keep them in the district. Many large enterprises have diversified financial portfolios and aren't wholly relying on local production. Ditto for local government. Federal, state land management agencies and related community groups such as LandCare. Mental health support. Welfare organisations.
Local councils Sporting clubs Community groups
All levels of government, groups such as CWA, Salvation army
All personal controlling water harvesting.
Service organisations include Salvation Army, Saint Vincent De Paul, Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, etc. Religious groups and sports associations.
Drought planning services, financial planning, volunteer groups
NSW RAA Community organisations that bring people together in adversity.
Landcare WILLI (Water In the Landscape Initiative Regenerative Farming Groups
Farming groups
Fire and Rescue
None



The local hub which is tambar Springs General Store/post office which has become a popular gathering place for people to enjoy the time talking to one another
Service clubs (particularly) Rotary, LLS
Locally based, preexisting organisations. Not ones who fly in and out to assist.
Volunteer groups Support groups
RFS CWA Local Churches Local Progress Associations Local Hospital retention of services Local Doctors and surgeries with plenty of staff Attraction of Big City Medical infrastructure and services that stay permanently and are not reliant on the whims of NSW health. Strong Agricultural services Communicative and innovative Shire Council Shire Councils not held captive to green wash but consider all their constituents. Financially strong, stable, and to a degree independent, Shire councils
Charity , rural financial counsellors ( Rural Assistance Authority, suppliers of potable water, trucking businesses - movement of livestock & fodder In dire drought , fodder & hay is unprocurable ,so such local businesses are of no benefit.
CWA
Sporting groups Local government services
Physical health and well-being, local leaders maintaining connection and cohesion of the community in these times of huge stress.
Farmers and disadvantaged families and elderly that may not have regular access to basic services.
Tourism
CWA, charity groups, service clubs & churches. All businesses are critical in small communities
Local, practical people from the land who can provide actual help on farm eg fencing. Water infrastructure help feeding stock etc
Autonomous Communities. Planning ahead and working on achieving self-reliance and resilience. Consider/assemble/build the opportunities droughts create and be prepared to action oportunities.
Quirindi community pantry, cwa, lions
All local businesses, both rural & town
established local volunteer groups, mental health supports
Rural financial Councillors
St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army
Councils. By creating more economic diversity we can keep population up. People moving from the area needs to prevented a it impact service available in the local area
CWA, show society, nsw farmers
Local Government, department of agriculture
CWA, Rotary, Lions, Sister-cities, churches and religious organisations, sporting clubs, schools, councils
Ag supply businesses, local independent retailers
state and federal government, community fundraising groups, mental health groups

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## Appendix 2 - Verbatim comments: Village pop-up sessions

	<p>Proposed Actions - need to educate the grazing community on ecosystems and how to manage the country. Understand what ecosystems are. Get people prepared that what the generations before have done might not be the right way to do it. They came from a very different background coming. Educating the community into the landscape and the water. If we can continue to build landscape health this will be the key.</p> <p>Challenge - getting people on board is the challenge. Council could do it via grant funding for people to be involved - cash incentives are critical. Or part of the ratepayers money is going back to the farming community and they get paid according to the ground cover and soil.</p> <p>Priorities – we need to slow the water down - there are many ways to do this. To address here in the upper end of the catchments we need to address the infiltration rate of water - how quickly it soaks into the ground. Using livestock, perennial grass - that grass is the reason we have grass in the droughts.</p> <p>One of the things we need to have in the drought planning, is some guidance on when do we start to destock. We need to manage number of mouths to carrying capacity. If it stops raining, carrying capacity reduces so need to manage this. If you're prepared, the danger of the drought becomes less and less.</p> <p>Rural Adjustment Authority - they funded people to do courses and used to give money out for drought loans. The same people will want handouts from Government again and again so we need to make changes and educate people before the next drought.</p>
	<p>Lives in the village but family has been in the area since 1860. Seen both bad droughts and good seasons. In town, when it rains the water plateau is underneath their block and soaks straight in. Maintaining vegetation makes sense – means water is not digging deep channels when we get good rains and rivers running.</p>
	<p>Keeping water in the landscape is vital rather than it heading out onto the Plains where it causes enormous damage ie. erosion. There's actually an initiative called "Water in the Landscape" or WILI which was launched last year and is supported by many local councils.</p> <p>Fencing off creeks is critical to help restore and secure banks and keep stock away from these waterways - reduce erosion during floods/droughts. Grow plants right up to the edges of the waterways. Put structures into creeks to slow down the water flow and reduce damage.</p> <p>Use underground water systems and not dams.</p> <p>Revegetation is vital.</p> <p>There needs to be more community awareness around Landcare groups and what they do, and encourage more people to join their local Landcare groups.</p> <p>More consideration of mixed species cropping - use of 'cover' crops sown at the same time as the main crop so that there left to protect the integrity of the soil when the main crop is harvested.</p> <p>These are all strategies that need to be employed to minimise drought and flood impacts.</p>
	<p>More public seating (tables and chairs) at the Mullaley Roundhouse for people to gather during challenging times and have a coffee, talk, catch up</p> <p>Keep our smaller towns and villages neat and tidy at all times - beautification of these communities - particularly during times of stress for the community ie. drought to boost community morale.</p> <p>Kerbside pick-ups should also be carried a couple of times a year as part of the beautification process and to assist the community.</p>
	<p>Need more investigation of alternate nutrition sources eg. carobs for livestock - to assist farmers in keeping breeding herds</p> <p>Consider more measures around flood harvesting along our major river systems</p> <p>Need more crops that use less water</p> <p>Sporting clubs are great community hubs, particularly during times of community stress. Gunnedah sporting clubs particularly strong. "The spirit of the town would be dead without them".</p>



	<p>Waiving of certain levies/permit fees worked well in the last drought and should be enacted as soon as drought is declared in a particular district ie. water licence fees, LLS annual levy, biosecurity levies, council rates etc.</p> <p>Allow farmers to graze stock outside properties with no charges to be levied - currently farmers have to pay per head of stock and per week to LLS. "There's always so many hoops you have to jump through to make this happen and it's really stressful when you're already dealing with a lot".</p> <p>Travelling Stock Routes (TSRs) - should be better maintained at all times so they're ready for drought times when farmers really need them. Currently, so many are very run down - holding yards are in poor condition so many can't even contain stock, and the infrastructure at watering sites is so run down there's often not any water for stock. Leasing of TSR's by the government also needs to stop.</p> <p>We got waste food from Sydney Markets delivered to the farm during the last drought and that was really useful to supplement stock feed. That came through Aussie Helpers and we should look at expanding schemes like that.</p> <p>Need to get really serious about climate change and "stop fluffing around the edges".</p>
	<p>The cost of permits and levies is ridiculous and there should be some relief on these for farmers during drought.</p> <p>"The red tape around things like permits and assistance schemes is ridiculous".</p> <p>Rotary vouchers were really welcome during the drought.</p>
	<p>Keeping grass green in local parks so kids can play without getting prickles. Also to cover the hot ground.</p> <p>Drinking water in the village - we're paying for water and we can't even drink it</p>
	<p>More holding tanks in the community for fires during the drought - currently only 1 tank</p> <p>No drinking water in the village when it's dry. Can't drink the tap water because too much calcium so have to buy in water. Could be some assistance for cleaning tanks when they are dry, ready for the next lot of rain so it can be drinkable.</p> <p>Cultural burning should take place in the lead up to a drought then there wouldn't be so many fires in the drought</p> <p>Idea - prepare info packs or a checklist for the community people so they know what do to during a drought. Similar to what the energy commission have done. Turn off dripping taps, don't drink dirty water etc.</p> <p>Water usage rebate so can keep cool and use some water when really hot during a drought - no pool here so kids get under the sprinkler to keep cool.</p> <p>Planting trees along the river</p> <p>Rebates for aircons for hot and dry times</p> <p>Water for pets during droughts - local water undrinkable</p> <p>Land management - when roadworks on the local bridge was completed, the crossing that was created as a detour wasn't removed. All the water is pooling up on one side and not flowing past unless there is a decent amount of rain. This can be removed to how it was.</p>





## Appendix 3 - Verbatim comments submitted by attendees via the interactive survey tool Slido and written notes in the session: Stakeholder sessions

All responses have been included exactly as they were presented by participants, without corrections or editing, to ensure they are an accurate representation of participants' thoughts on the day.

### Discussion Question - What matters to you?

The happiness of the community remaining positive.
active community and members with strong sense of service, a sense of self determination, (not being over governed from afar)
Sporting clubs
Colour
Social networks
Being able to see water
We need a strong local community with strong secondary industry
Economic performance/alternatives
Sometimes community groups will wain during a drought, let's be ok with that as well!!!
Being asked for in put before decision made
That the older generation 50+ are the ones who are envolved or running non for profit and other organisation How do you suggest we encourage the under 40s to join
Engaging positively with cities/urban areas it's not all just dust and flies
The community I live work and play in matters to me
Respect for community group knowledge
Providing realistic tools and supports a community no matter what the environment is throwing the communities way...
With regards to drought water usage and control with regards to environmental and sharing of resource.
A recognition by all spheres of govt that cookie cutter solutions don't work
A vibrant community - people to see places to go ..
Equitable access to services and information by the community
Information relevant to the community
Keeping money circulating in the local community
Community involment where the older experienced are teaching the younger fresh minds moving forward.
Staying optimistic
A person centred approach to strengthen our capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from drought
Remembering all sectors of the community are affected
That all community understands what equity and equality really means to ALL
Can community take only what is needed not what can be offered? Is what matters to me.
Also that Drought is EVERYONE'S business. Water is life!!!
Viable business community
Maintaining people, businesses and services during hard times.
Knowing people down the street
Access to quality underground water
Water supply
Investment in education at all levels
Genuine meaningful engagement
A cohesive caring community
Community connectedness
Investment in community members
Town, country and industry working together
People, the close connections and relationships built in this community there is alot of large interconnected networks in this town, between sporting groups bussiness groups community and special interest groups, there is alot of varied businesses we have alot of nateral resources and also different types of skilled bussiness able to train the and give opportunities, being able to maintain retail in a downturn
Attraction to the area for skilled workers
Access to services to keep people living and thriving in town and surrounds
Health of the environment.
Viability of towns and farms.
Economic future for young people to live in regional townw.
Vibrant community & businesses
Safe community



Health and wellbeing
Social connections
Financially profitable businesses
Water security, especially maintaining clean, clear, uncontaminated ground & surface water.
Landscape health
Supply chain working and costs under control
Connection to people. The sustainability of primary production. Strong town businesses. Employment for youth. Security for our older folk. Drinkable water
The river, the people, the land and the community
Families and local opportunities
Community resilience.
Jobs/ employment
Keeping people and attracting people to our rural communities
Social networks, strong and passionate leaders, thriving businesses, connection to country
Keeping our skill base
Sense of belonging. Security and community spirit. Opportunities - social, sporting, economic.
People
Community growth and development
Community groups/clubs
Keeping our people well and connected
Family
People wellbeing
Employment
Outdoor space. Swings for 60 plus year olds. Creating/producing our own culture.
Community

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**Discussion question - What do people care about in the community?**

Being able to get together, share ideas, experiences and work together for a safe, healthy, working community
protecting the options and opportunities from the current quite stable and productive suite of climate, soils, water
A vibrant main street
Lifestyle
Belonging
Age in place
Bring up a family
Good schools
Health care
Retaining young people
A strong service industry employing more particularly the youth
Places to meet and build community (that's not always the pub)
Only worrying about AgQuip traffic
Good public spaces
A positive future
Ease of getting around
Value the diversity of our population. Our farmers are the cornerstone of our Shire.
Yes to morning coffees
Morning coffees
That our leaders care and represent all in the community
Access to services, quality public infrastructure, things to do and see.
We love our district and want people to stay here
To live in a vibrant and resilient community
Safety, access to services, that the quality of their family time spent together is worthwhile and job security
Management of our local councils, quality of roads, health and community services, schools, people and the prosperity of our local people and area
Places to connect.
Way of life that is intrinsic to our Shire and what makes us unique
Opportunities, access to education, jobs, training, services, all that makes a place united and strengthens communities.
That Gunnedah is a great place to live and work
That people are welcomed and want to live here
Safety, freedom, housing, job security
To feel welcome and included. We want you here!
Friends and family first, but also jobs and access to services such as health.



That we have access to government services in an equitable way (we pay taxes too)
They care about each other, checking on each other when times get tough
Safe communities
To be safe, include, welcomed and part of!
Transport & links to & from other regions
Sense of belonging and pride
That our children can receive a quality education
Being able to get together, share ideas, experiences and work together for a safe, healthy, working community
protecting the options and opportunities from the current quite stable and productive suite of climate, soils, water
Retaining young people
Retaining young people; A vibrant main street

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**Discussion question - Thinking back to previous droughts, how were you as a community most impacted?**

Beauracrats
Many people had troubles filling out paperwork and were very de-motivated
Starved of cashflow
Not economically as a retiree, but socially. Difficulty of maintaing gardens. Extra pressures on Landcare and Rotary - more projects and tasks in hot weather. Physical activities less enjoyable and reduced scenic amenity. Higher power costs due to constant air conditioning.
Fighting a proposed coal mine at the same time was exhausting
Banks selling up people and businesses even when pretending to support
Low mood, running out of options to keep going.
Less people in area creates loss of groups including sporting and social opportunities
Small businesses that support the whole communities broke financially and personally. Carrying long term clients
Fighting against Coal Seam Gas , impacts of climate change
It takes along time for Primary Producers to recover from droughts . One good year does not make up dd or lost income . It can take 5 years to recover! And that is only there isn't another problem... mouse plague, flood, fire
Depressed community members Isolated Could spend money on treats Everyone suffering at the same time
Get out of here as often as possible because it was so dry and depressing here
Feeling helpless
Lack of finances in the community to spend in the hospitality and retail sectors leading to less hours and jobs available
Financial eg cost of living. Families financial pressure
Social impact
Mental health - heavy cloud over our community
Lack of income coming in to the town due to farmers etc not having money to spend.
Put feeling isolated
Social impact, financially mentally
People leaving town

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**Discussion question - Thinking back to previous droughts, where were the pain points as a community?**

Drought loans offer very good return on investment, however they need to be geared lower than commercial loan rates .
Droughts push family farms out of farming which becomes an opportunity for corporate farming. This changes the dynamics of our rural communities
Sad to see primary production parents needing to take their children out of school to assist with feeding animals.
Towns like Gunnedah with a strong mining and primary production industry there was a HUGE variance of experience of the residence of surviving the drought. Those with steady mining incomes and those that didn't.
Some people taking advantage of assistance being provided by city folk
Beauracrats not understanding rural life
Difficulties in distributing donated aid
Already stretched community members having to navigate logistics and expectations of donors and recipients



Financial hardships
Relentless
Lack of feed availability if could afford
Some access to funding was restricted due to off- farm income including that of associates
Some would not ask for help - pride
Couldn't afford to clean out dams while they were dry
People were mentally, emotionally stressed
Physical stressors, more physical labour required to feed cattle
The heat was relentless , seemed never ending
Seeing trees die.
Knowing wildlife was suffering badly.
Watching gardens dying.
Seeing farm landscapes totally bare and how long before income could be generated.
Water bores continually being used after a long period of drought lower stock water bores
High debts
Loss of contractors/families eg harvesters, spray rigs who had no work at all
So frustrating to see hobby farmers getting SO much support from Drought Angles Etc. Farmers competing AGAINST Drought Angles etc for the cost of fodder which had the impact of increasing costs
No end in site creating ongoing angst
Not knowing how to reach people who needed help
Slow response and excessive red tape from government
Foreign owned water rights preventing primary producers from accessing water and no government mechanisms to take control over that water in a national emergency
Divide between city country reinforced
Continually fighting against Coal Seam Gas coming onto the pristine Liverpool Plains, fighting to save our precious ground water
Mental health
Not seeing people, our smaller communities disconnected a little
Access to government funding and support mental health
City/coastal people not appreciating rain they were getting
Not sure where to go to for help
Not sure what help was available
No one to talk to face to face
Financial
Mental health
Repetitive
Negativity
The farmers, how did they cope. Mental health problems
The pessimism
Freight costs were excessive
No escaping the barren landscape
DUST

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**Discussion Question - Thinking back to previous droughts, what are the aspects within our community that worked well – where were the glimmers of hope?**

Having access to clean bore water offered a glimmer of Hope every day
City people being made aware of the importance of primary production.
I ran the City to Surf - so many people wanting to assist rural people and understand the plight of drought
Online selling/ websites allowing purchasing from outside the Shire
Gunnedah council employing some farmers
Mining offering jobs to suit farmers
Alternative income sources - part time work, agritourism, farm gate, farm stay
Off farm income unrelated to agriculture
A lot of philanthropic funding was distributed, especially to farmers.
A lot of small scale gatherings in small local communities.
Focus on water supplies by Councils.
Gunnedah and it's agricultural area has possibly the best water supply to know life will return for farming and businesses.
Lots of city visitors came to rural towns to spend money to support drought-affected areas
Off farm income opportunities kept families fed
Our rural communities rallying together as one voice in saving the Liverpool Plains from the treats of coal seam gas and fighting to protect our precious ground water our town & rural land
Charity organisations and not for profits always there to help, not financially but visiting, offering counselling etc
Going out to social gatherings
Going to the pub , dinner and music
Taking kids to the local pool
Church groups



My neighbours asked me to keep watering my very small front lawn they could see from the road as it cheered them up
Funding through a rural resilience program provided villages an much needed opportunity to get together
Local community groups, volunteers, local council, mining company donations and financial stimulation program for small businesses
Community ran and funded events. Music, sport, food,
Departments helping find your entitlements and holding your hand through applications
Diversification outside traditional primary production such as Agri-tourism and value adding. Consideration of alternative farming - eg regenerative agriculture which encourages investment in soil and landscape literacy. Consider alternative cattle - eg Low Lines (Angus) mean higher stocking rates with feed requirements one third that of larger cross breeds.
RAA = great support.
Agritourism not only offered an extra income but also bridged the isolation for farmers and educated about the drought
Hospitality providers running events and providing a hub for community
Sporting clubs putting on special days to get together
Community banding together in tough times
Gunny money

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**Discussion Question - What do we already have in the community we can tap into?**

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Cohesiveness of community
As above
Targeted training programs. Community gatherings.
There weren't too many , as farmers we were told how resilient they were and we felt very isolated
Recycling grey water and any water hack to keep going
Still the ability to create additional income
All actions have been too late in the past.
Rural Financial Advisors
Social positive activities
Drought support should be tailored to people who really need it
People seemed to be able to get assistance from agencies when required. But in the end everyone makes their own decisions and cannot always expect to receive assistance
Cohesive community - developed over many good years. Regular community events which bring people together - sport, biggest morning teas, Christmas parties, fire brigade and so on.
Community events
Communication
Service organisations, sports associations, religious groups
Community get togethers. City supporting small off farm business (Buy Aussie), city travelling to stay in country areas (domestic water was an issue)
Nothing. It was an awful awful time
Organising community get togethers and celebrations.
Community coming together. Landcare projects to create mitigation strategies.
People who stuck together to help a mate/friend
People
Having regular contact with social events. Being the hub of tambar found families and friends gathering and discussing their experiences with each other was a massive success and also having an event that helped their mind set and put a smile on their faces
Emphasis on production and/ or strategic de-stocking.
Understanding people were not alone and it was ok to ask for help.
Supporting each other
Local groups such as the CWA, the churches, and progress associations who tried to help out locally and organically.



Access point for potable water .
Community Pantry for food in most desperate, donated fodder was moral boost
COMMUNICATION
CWA
Sporting events
Services such as RAMHP providing farm gate counselling.
Community worked on the basis "that we have been here before" and need to ride it out together
Knowing it will rain one day
Ordinary people close to the ground who came up with practical help packages. No admin top heavy govt schemes work well
Dogged resilience.
Community events
Having access to clean ,clear uncontaminated groundwater remained & gave my family our biggest glimmer of hope . It has to be protected at all cost for the future viability of our community.All future planning & development by local council has to protect this precious resource from contamination or loss
outside help
Social cricket for the men,
Those who helped with encouragement and offers.
The knowledge it will come to an end
Yes reduction of IIs fees
Resilience, generosity
Willingness to help out a mate
Networks; tourism! City people supported rural towns by visiting Nd spending money - Agritourism - spreading awareness and bridging isolation for farmers
Local businesses, even though they were also struggling they were still there
People sharing their troubles and assistance for those most in need in the form of care packages etc

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**Discussion Question - My BIG IDEA for our community is...and who could facilitate these actions if needed?**

Last drought there was no plan and lack of coordination between stakeholders. Everyone wanted to do something but were doing it over the top of everyone else. A coordinated approach would have worked well. Charities came to town – some were dishonest, some were great.
Gunny money cards worked really well to spend in the local community. These were easy to gift to people in mailboxes (when compared to baskets of donations, or food hampers etc.) and they chose where to spend locally. Hampers didn't work - too hard to distribute and people don't necessarily need the things in them, so they are wasted. Gunny Money also supports the local businesses.
Promote volunteers in the community - community working group set up to connect volunteers with groups.
Volunteer-a-thon
Hay bale charities don't work - we have to do better than that as a community.
More support for people who prepare for droughts - not just for people who haven't - support needs to go to business that can provide proof of resilience. There needs to be some compliance throughout good times so we are keeping the good farmers farming and not propping up those who don't prepare.
Conversations need to be ongoing and not just in a crisis - we can be so much more resilient.
Get stakeholders together in a sub-committee so drought is coordinated across the board - councils, community groups, state government, NGOs. We need to get an understanding early on (pre-drought) about who they are and their capacity to assist or support when drought hits so we're all working together and using resources well, not overlapping each other.
The same people are still making the same mistakes in every drought – information is out there, but need to get it out so people know about it – tap into services like LLS. Water infrastructure info, financial etc. - people don't have the info so doing things the same way and making the same mistakes. How do we get farmers to attend and know about it?
Could we do more hardship packages for businesses - when we have wages, super etc. but no money coming in, it's very hard to keep going.
How can we engaged TAFE in new occupations and training - linking TAFE, high school and other groups.
Mental health is an issue but what happens when someone is right down the rabbit hole – who helps them then? We don't have any psychologists or mental health people available. Mental health first aid is first step – people can use this to pick up if something may not be quite right and know what to do to get help but what if we don't have the help here? If you're teaching someone to look for signs it's a good first step – people may not even pick up.
Young people are keen. We are trying to get young people involved. They want to be involved but hard for them to get a break and own their own business. It is becoming financially impossible because of the cost with interest rates. There are lots of people in the community who are retirement age but young people can't afford to buy – they want to but can't because they can't get bank support.
Training is important. Trade community and farm employees who want to develop skills – can we do this locally.
We need blocks of land to open up for people to purchase land to buy and live close to work (eg: spring ridge) need land to open up by Council.
Better management of the road infrastructure – if roads are closed can't get to work, kids can't get to school.
A strong service industry employing more particularly the youth.
A plan to retain young people.
In the last 50 years terms of trade have deteriorated. Have a great small school but these kids have to leave this town. In Ag, the next generation is going to be huge – we need those kids here in town so they work their way up and keep their



skills here. Employment rules are making this hard – can't put kids on to work for a few hours after school to learn these skills, too much red tape. Link between Department of Education, farmers/trades/businesses and local school principals.
Mentoring and work experience program - one day a week for kids to do work and learn new skills with the aim that they stay in town after school and their skills remain in the community. Simple as a list of kids, list of businesses and they can be matched up to learn new skills. Need to look at regulations and insurances around this.
Under resourced in Quirindi and other close areas. Attracting skilled people is key. Skills transfer so older people can share their knowledge and skills - matching them to kids coming out of highschool who want this knowledge. This could be a mentoring program so they can learn/be enthusiastic in whatever they are doing. If we don't do something about the real problem here, we will need more mental health support. This needs to be community led.
Stronger Land care. Could we look at partnerships with schools and younger people coming out to farms and assisting in town to plant trees or other land care support.
How do we get people who want to volunteer their time. Volunteers are hard to get. Modern volunteering plan needs to be introduced.
Try and bring back some of the tick the boxes to allow for approvals for advancements, buildings to be decided locally rather than someone in the city. Regulations are too tight, takes too long for approvals – one example has taken 12 years for approvals for some water work – during this time it's taken away from employing locals or getting back to business. Want these decisions to be made locally.
If big corporates come in and buy our family farms where do we get that sense of community and look after the land. We needed to start the conversation.
The symbol Lismore had as a community was a heart - 'the heart of the northern rivers' – people had heart badges. When the floods happened, people started putting up hearts in their shop windows to show they were open and the heart became a symbol of hope. Demonstrates the unity and the togetherness. We could take this on board with sunflowers.
The business chamber have the sunflower trail. This is a chamber sub-committee. We could put some type of sunflower on Chamber promotions. Have flags in the street and change the flags regularly depending on what is on.
Regionality has helped promote the sunflower promotion. Agritourism has been very positive.
From our experience, we know we are good at dealing with crisis, but we need to have built resources to get through crisis. Need to expand our offering in the area so we can get through – can only do this with resilience. Trying to build the reserves should always be the aim. Kids are the reserves. Young farmers are the reserves – we need to build their capacity and support them so they can take over. Farmers on the range were months away from selling because their groundwater dried up. How do we build reserves for these people?
Need other options of employment - diversification is needed so it's not all just on the farm and this is where all our money comes from. When Werries Creek mine shut down, the school lost 40 kids (some directly related to the shut down, some not). Lots of businesses are shutting down. We have timber forestry not far away and a timber mill close by that's not being used - we are not tapping into this. How can we get our timber mill going again. Use the local mill and have jobs that are not farming. Fix the roads so this can happen. Talk to State Forest, they do the contracts on where the pine is going – we can start the mill up ourselves if we know we have the contracts locked in.
We have water – how can we use this – this is important.
Coming together during hard times to meet and relax – could even bring something to the local pub.
Back to Warra weekend – get people back to the communities - something similar to this for the town and other villages
Community Connections toolkit – what do you need to do
Community database so they can have their name and number to their neighbours
Community group (Facebook or similar) for people to share ideas and general lost dogs, snake catches, grocery deliveries, lost mail etc.
Community Kit – clubs – support people to do 3-4 come and try days – skills that people have to package up
Local rainwater tanks and planning – make sure people have expertise in design and planning so they can be thinking ahead – resource for the community
Community Directory – to connect people to groups and consultants to help – design, knowledge skills craftsmanship – connecting people with experts and experienced for support in the community so people can tap into knowledge.
Knowledge Hub - Tap into local knowledge and experts for planning and other areas. Capture these and share with the community.
Tap into the Library digitization project – tap into his and get this knowledge into a knowledge hub.
Rural Heritage Village can be involved in the Library history digitization project.
Skills Audit of local people and their skills – arts and culture, sporting groups, historical knowledge, equine industry – use this for the weekend activities and skills bring to town
What do we love about the area? Spring Ridge etc. Own it, visualize it, communicate it. Come for this, but also see this...
Can we look at the school buses – what is the role of this during a drought. Can people from properties come in on these. Can we add aspirational things to the buses to uplift the community.
There is a difference between graziers and croppers. When Govt started to roll out access to financial loans or feed etc. you needed your PIC number. On your LLS rates notice PIC number – graziers have a pic number and cropper doesn't. So croppers were down and out. All needs to be under one umbrella. Whoever designed the software their understanding was the everyone has a pic number when they don't. It was major in this area. At Baradine you needed a pic number to get the food pantry so even people with only 1 or 2 animals could access but others who were large croppers couldn't access.
If we didn't have mining, we wouldn't have had the businesses in town during drought. But it did put a further wedge between the community. Drawn people from ag to mining so they could keep income. Gunnedah sees that without mining we wouldn't be here but also see it more clearly when farming is doing it much tougher – friction in a town that doesn't need the friction. Diversity of town income is important. So we can continue on when one industry is impacted.
A job keeper for farmers is great idea. But drought isn't classified as a disaster. It is an emergency, so we need to have the funding available – needs to be reassessed so it is considered an emergency disaster. Once families are put off and the minute we start losing people during a drought, hard to get them back – takes up to 10 years to rebuild the community of the people who have left. We need to keep them in the town.





Prior to a drought look at an audit about what skills we need for young people, then how can we use TAFE to do this based on feedback from another meeting that TAFE will open (see TAFE report)
Sponsorships – sporting clubs etc are impacted when small businesses don't have \$\$\$ to spend.
Grants to set up online with shopify for businesses and learn how to sell online outside of the community.
If you have farmers with the skillset of driving tractors or other things. Can we give them a 'civilian' license or insurance so they can do this in our community – not outsourcing to large companies from away.
A great community, great skill levels, a new industry is needed with value adding required.
Find an icon or symbol like a sunflower that can be used as a symbol of hope
Support people who prepare for droughts
Promotion of support for people who prepare for drought.
Gunny Resilience Initiative PRE - DURING - POST
Sub Groups include: Young people Late youth - Early 20s Adults Mature Age.
This would include - families, disability, cultural etc.
A combined response to droughts, floods & any other dilemma. Everyone pulls together & we'll get through
A shared and optimistic but achievable vision for the future - the long term picture - not just electoral cycles - Council led but community driven??
Have a 'volunteer-a-thon' where there is a community drive to encourage more volunteers eg each community aim for 5 new members
Promote volunteering in the community - set up a community working group to connect volunteers with groups.
Bring back local people that have been successful to offer ideas and training Eg Thirdi - building
Tafe training but also include every day skills that could develop into a home business
A great hospital with rehabilitation services would attract people as part of operation recovery and their supporting family
My course in Mindful Movement to be available to everyone online and in person. I teach people (business owners and leaders) mindfulness and movement so they can feel calm in their mind and body. Practicing mindfulness is proven to build resilience to stress and improve wellbeing.
Business & Life in Alignment can facilitate this.
To make sure drought funding is spent as much as possible with local businesses and services
With the permission of the Kamilaroi we have very unique cultural opportunities here
A village green - a place for gatherings, markets etc
Liverpool Plains -Sunflowers to the city !! Every Sunflower sold goes to rural resilience
Promotion of regenerative agriculture
A coordinated street shade tree program to improve walking track and footpath comcort in summer. Keep the town livable. Currently too many being removed. Needs follow up watering.
A Tech and Skills Recognition Hub to aid people with existing skills to get them recognised through RPL to aid in having access to the necessary legally required skills to provide services in a emergency and Tech hub services to help businesses get online to diversify local businesses income streams and income sources by opening up our businesses income pool to an online audience
Makers Shed - with tools and equipment
100km businesses and or food
Park run at Tambar Springs
Additional water supplies/capture to help supplement the community needs during drought
We need our own festival! Dolly and Elvis are taken - it needs to be something fun
Surfer training and community fun - wave pools
Agritourism organization and promotion - Plains Inc and Rose Wright
Getting TAFE back up and running

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