



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

5 June 2019

### **\$1.2M distributed to 400+ drought affected farming families (so far)**

While recent rain is producing tinges of green in previously barren paddocks across South Australia, Rural Business Support (RBS) and the South Australian Country Women's Association (SACWA) are still receiving applications for urgent financial assistance from up to 30 farming families every week.

Drought relief payments from other charitable organisations have now ended as winter looms and focuses turn to people in need elsewhere – but SACWA is calling for public support to ensure vital assistance to eligible drought impacted families can continue to be provided.

The first-time partnership between RBS and SACWA has seen a staggering \$1.2 million distributed to drought affected farming families in South Australia in just nine months. Since the two not-for-profit organisations teamed up in August 2018, more than 400 farming families in need have successfully applied for grants of up to \$3K through the SACWA with the help of RBS' Rural Financial Counsellors.

RBS CEO Brett Smith said that despite rain falling in many parts of the state, the financial and psychological impact of managing drought would last well beyond the current season.

“Just because we're seeing a bit of green about the place doesn't mean the pressure is off – many are still in financial drought and won't receive a decent income again until harvest come October/November,” Mr Smith said.

“Even then, yields will be dependent on good spring rain and this income will go towards paying down additional debts incurred during the dry times to cover high feed costs and just keep businesses afloat.

“Many farmers have had to sell off stock because they haven't been able to afford to feed them, so the cost of re-stocking when the time is right will be a big challenge for many too. Careful business planning will be essential not only to manage conditions this season, but to come through and out the other side to be profitable in two, five or 10 years from now.”

Rural Business Support is a leading not-for-profit provider of services and independent support for the benefit of rural people and their communities. Delivered in partnership with government and industry, our range of programs and services assist primary producers to be resilient in the face of change, risk and business challenges.

Mr Smith said that while farmers by nature were a proud bunch and loathed to ask for help, the SACWA payments were being gratefully received and providing a vital mental lift.

“We’ve seen cases where families who had been worrying about not being able to pay their children’s local school fees have had this financial weight lifted,” he said. “In other instances, the SACWA payments have spared people from having their power cut off.

“We’re getting so many comments from overwhelmed and sincerely grateful farmers about the immediate financial relief these funds are providing but, more importantly, it’s reassuring our resilient rural families that that they haven’t been forgotten.”

SACWA State Treasurer Sharyn Muller said fundraising for the Emergency Aid Fund would continue for as long as there was a need.

“At the moment we’re consistently processing between 25 and 30 applications a week from RFCS clients, which equates to around \$23,000 in total weekly payments. It’s a significant amount and unfortunately the rate of applications doesn’t look to be slowing down.

“We hope South Australians will continue digging deep to help SACWA ensure that those families who have been so doggedly trying to avoid having to ask for help, can reach out for a helping hand to get them through these tough times.”

Eligible farming families in drought affected areas can apply for up to \$3000 (4 x \$750 payments) for such expenses as utilities, food, medical expenses and clothing.

RBS delivers the Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) in South Australia and the Northern Territory. In January 2018 the service was working with 200 clients – this number has now climbed to more than 520.

SACWA has been giving SA farming families a helping hand in tough times for 90 years. Its Mallee Relief Scheme formed during the dry years of 1929-1931, starting with a 135 pound donation raised at a reception for renowned aviator Amy Johnson after she completed her solo trip from England to Australia.

**People can donate to the SACWA’s Emergency Relief Fund at [www.sacwa.org.au/donate](http://www.sacwa.org.au/donate), or by calling 8332 4166. Donations to this fund are tax deductible. To be connected to a Rural Financial Counsellor call 1800 836 211 or visit [www.ruralbusinesssupport.org.au](http://www.ruralbusinesssupport.org.au)**

### **Visual opportunity**

**When: Wednesday June 5 – 10am**

**Where: SA Country Women’s Association – 30 Dequetteville Terrace, Adelaide**

**Who: RBS CEO Brett Smith, SACWA State Treasurer Sharyn Muller and all of the Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS) team from across SA**

### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

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