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Submission

To

Regional Australia Standing  
Committee Inquiry

By

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**A very general summary of my data and statistics and observations from 3.5 years farm and small business visits in the Campaspe and Gannawarra Shires.**

- 500 + visits to Farms and Small Business visits (Echuca, Gunbower, Mathoura, Cohuna, Lockington)
- Face to face conversations more productive than leaving information. Often value of just listening very therapeutic
- Majority of concerns around money, water supply and availability and feeding
- Levels of stress, anxiety, depression high
- Interest rate subsidy, Form filling, EC – ending and being on it, off it, reapplying very stressful
- Pressure on relationships, and separations
- All visits given referral pathways and information about services – impossible to document the takeup. However, refer to increased stats of numbers accessing Mental Health clinicians at GP practices.
- Majority of referrals to Rural Financial Counsellors and Centrelink Rural Service Officers
- Over 70 referrals to RFC and / or RSOs
- Over 50 contacts exhibiting Mental Health concerns at a level requiring followup
- Half of these were referred or guided to more professional services (Eg. ATAPS clinicians in GP practices / Social Workers at Centrelink or Primary Care)

**Ruth Turpin, Rural Support coordinator Mental health support for Drought Affected Communities program, Murray Plains Division of General Practice**

## Two different but similar stories from different days visiting in this area – both dairy farmers

### Case 1

Conversation opens around farm, feed supply, concerns about lack of water ... etc...

- Questions asked by us around how is the family? Wife's health not good.
- Teenage children... I empathized around the extra stress and anxiety they place on you
- Farmer acknowledges he is just the same as everyone ... I softly challenge that and point out he has a lot on his plate to worry about ...
- Trigger point time, farmer begins to weep openly and conversation suggests he may be needing some help to cope.
- He suggests he may be depressed while accepting that we farm visit workers must be seeing a lot of this sort of thing.
- More work by us to get permission (after a lot of procrastination) and recognition that he needs help and we are able to set that in motion.
- We use knowledge of local support services to decide on the most appropriate referral and then follow up to ensure that contact has been made and support is in place.
- I visit again 6 months – farmer mentions he was in a bad way and got help....

### Case 2

Call in at dairy farm ... youngish farmer, young son in pusher in dairy .. wife off farm on part time work. Little guy has to be with dad

All over the farm.

Initial inquiry about how are things on the farm?

One work reply: Shit

And how are you doing?

Again: Shit.

Again we asked about the farm, home, supports, connections with others ... and got his story... again he was visibly upset.

This time though he didn't want any referrals or followup support but just welcomed the opportunity to let off steam and have someone listen to how it was for him.

I continued to make contact with him via phone and feel assured he was OK.

Both interventions and visits were appropriate and timely – both requiring monitoring but different follow ups.

What I often wonder though is what would have happened to both those men if we hadn't called. Maybe nothing major, but

The visits were both timely and a pressure valve release at that time in their lives when they both were in trouble.

... and they ( and if they share) know that there are workers and supports in their communities.