



SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT FOR CASTLEREAGH COUNTRY RDRP STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT REPORT

6 MARCH 2024



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Document Record

Revision	Date Issued	Prepared by	Approved by	Comments
0	15/02/2024	Alison Crocker	Randall Medd	Draft for Review
1	4/03/2024	Alison Crocker	Randall Medd	Updated Draft for Review
2	6/03/2024	Alison Crocker	Randall Medd	Updated Draft for Review



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Executive Summary

In 2023 Projence was engaged to support a consortia of Gilgandra Shire Council and Warrumbungle Shire Council in the delivery of the Castlereagh Country Regional Drought Resilience Plan (RDRP).

The objective of the RDRP is to develop practical solutions for addressing gaps in the way communities prepare for and respond to drought. The plan will include:

- Historical and projected impacts of drought in each region
- An evidence-based, triple-bottom-line strategy to mitigate or adapt to current and future drought impacts
- A prioritised list of actions and pathways to build drought resilience, specific to the region that addresses the needs of the community.

Projence was engaged to listen to and collect feedback from the community and stakeholders, to ensure the plan was co-designed with the community. Projence and the consortia committed to providing broad, inclusive and transparent consultation, with community at the centre of the design.

Whilst there was less response than anticipated, more than 250 ideas and comments were generated from the engagement.

Face-to-face meetings, virtual drop-in sessions and workshops conducted late November to early December 2023 saw more than 25 community members and stakeholders discuss their experiences with drought and identify opportunities and barriers for resilience.

Projence and the consortia also invited the broader community to share their experience of drought and recommendations via an online survey which had 105 respondents.

Insights gained from assessment of stakeholder responses are as follows:

Challenges faced:

- **Inadequate Coordination** – External drought funding lacked coordination, leading to fragmented efforts among agencies, causing confusion about eligibility and guidelines.
- **Mental Health Support** – The necessity for continued mental health support was emphasised, with concerns about the timing and availability of services.
- **Vulnerability of Specific Groups** – The most vulnerable groups faced housing and subsidy issues, with inadequate support beyond the agriculture sector.
- **Water Scarcity** – Challenges in water availability, cost, carting, and limited bathing facilities were prominent concerns.
- **Community Support** – Volunteer burnout, the impact on local businesses, and limitations in community events management were identified as challenges.

Successful initiatives:

- **Water Management** – Communities utilised bore water effectively, though there were challenges with access and waiting times.
- **Community Cohesion** – Programs and events brought the community together, aiding mental health, and offering subsidies and loans for essential infrastructure.
- **Communication Efforts** – Some community events effectively disseminated information, facilitated connections, and distributed essential resources.
- **Financial Support** – Subsidies, loans, and cash cards for farmers and infrastructure development were well-received.
- **Local Business Engagement** – Efforts to encourage purchasing locally and supporting businesses were acknowledged positively.

Areas requiring improvement:

- **Mental Health** – Addressing increased suicide rates, reducing anxiety, and countering alarmist media language were identified as crucial areas.
- **Resource Management** – Strategies for sustainable agriculture, soil conservation, and water infrastructure development were highlighted.
- **Infrastructure & Services** – Roads, water tanks, and essential amenities like laundromats were identified as lacking and needing investment.
- **Community Education** – Education about passive cooling, wildlife management, and sustainable gardening practices was highlighted.
- **Collaboration and Coordination** – Lack of central information sources, coordination between agencies, and streamlining of assistance processes were highlighted for improvement.

Key Recommendations:

- **Community Engagement** – Promote more community-driven events, encourage local collaboration, and prioritise resilience-building initiatives.
- **Infrastructure Investment** – Focus on water infrastructure upgrades, education programs, and collaborative efforts for better resource management.
- **Coordination & Information Dissemination** – Establish a central hub for information, coordinate mental health services, and streamline assistance processes.
- **Sustainable Practices** – Encourage diverse planting, sustainable farming techniques, and infrastructure investments for long-term resilience.
- **Government Support** – Advocate for government funding, streamlined processes, and support for off-farm income to sustain farms during droughts.

1 Purpose of engagement

The purpose of the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy was to authentically engage with community and stakeholders of the Castlereagh Country region to understand their experience of drought, in the context of building community resilience, to better prepare for, respond to and recover from drought.

The community is key to developing a meaningful and effective drought resilience plan for the region. The engagement and involvement of the community and stakeholders ensures the Castlereagh Country Regional Drought Resilience Plan (RDRP) will be relevant and actionable.

The objectives for the community engagement were:

- Provide mechanisms for industry, community and stakeholders to provide feedback.
- To establish an active and ongoing dialogue with industry, communities, and stakeholders to co-design the plan.
- Cultivate partnerships and collaboration.
- Ensure information is readily available.
- Facilitate an inclusive process for engagement.

The engagement was designed to balance the needs of all key stakeholders including the residents of the Gilgandra Shire Council and Warrumbungle Shire Council Local Government Areas (LGAs), industry specific key stakeholders, councils, state government departments, community groups, Aboriginal Land Councils, and cultural knowledge holders. No single group or person is considered more important than another.



2 Engagement methodology

2.1 Philosophy

The approach to engagement for this strategy is guided by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values.

The Core Values are:

- Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision.
- Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
- Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

2.2 Principles

In engaging with the community and stakeholders, the following principles

- **Purposeful** — our engagement is delivered in a coordinated and consistent manner with clear objectives.
- **Inclusive** — we will seek the views and perspectives of the community. We will provide opportunities for all stakeholders to participate in a fair and balanced way. This includes building meaningful relationships with Aboriginal people and Country.
- **Timely** — there will be enough time for meaningful consultation.
- **Transparent** — the opportunities for engagement are clear and accessible with information on how to participate, as well as how stakeholder input will be used to deliver outcomes.
- **Respectful** — we value the culture, needs, experience, perspective, and expertise of stakeholders and community.

2.3 Co-design process

The co-design process positioned the community at the centre as the subject matter experts. The consortia of the 2 councils worked closely with the community, seeking their thoughts and views to inform the development of the Castlereagh Country RDRP.



Figure 1: Co-design process

3 Stakeholders

Engagement with stakeholders was aligned to their relative impact and influence over the project and this approach was aligned to the IAP2 Spectrum (Figure 2). Engagement activities focused on five broad stakeholder categories, and engagement with each group shifted through each of the five levels of the spectrum during this project.

The five broad categories include:

- Businesses and contractors
- Industry peak bodies and industry groups
- Local councils
- Residents of Gilgandra and Warrumbungle LGAs and community interest groups
- Aboriginal and cultural knowledge holders.

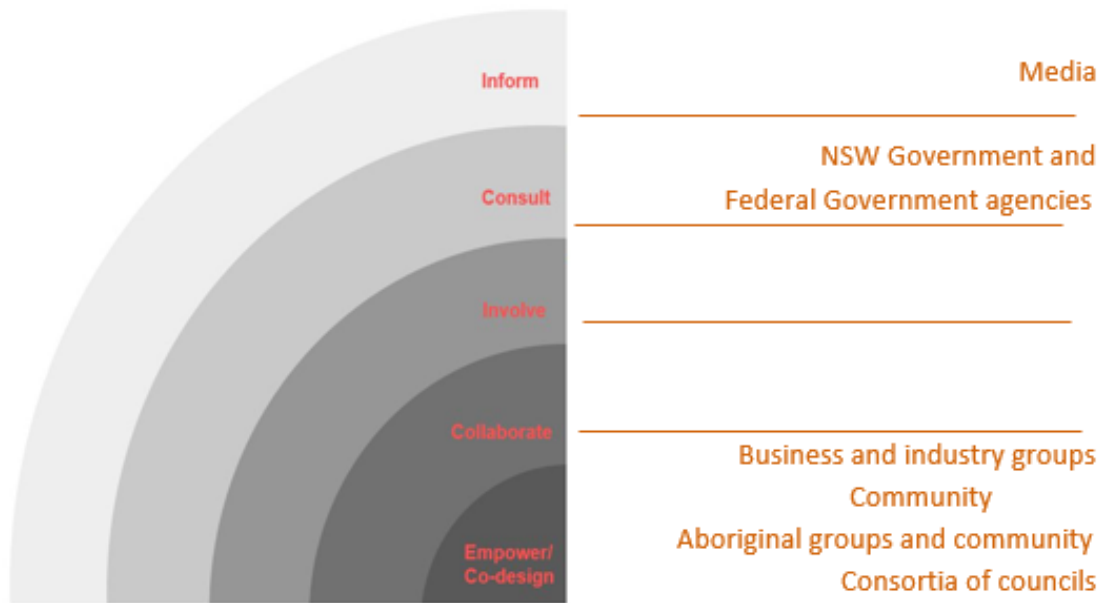


Figure 2: IAP2 Spectrum

4 Engagement activities

The stakeholder engagement plan was approved by the consortia in November 2023 and a 4-step engagement process (Figure 3) was implemented later that same month.



Figure 3: Four Step Engagement Process

The engagement and communication activities associated with the 4-step engagement process are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Engagement activities

Method	Explanation and purpose	Target stakeholders
Media release	Announce upcoming consultation and provide general information about the project.	All
Radio advertisement	To reach the broader community with a call to action on how to participate.	All
Flyer – digital and print	Providing project information and highlighting the opportunity to get involved and contribute to the design of the drought resilience plan.	All
Electronic direct mail (EDM)	Correspondence to identified community and business groups, providing information on the project and opportunity to get involved.	business / industry groups
Workshops – face-to-face	Workshops to explore key themes with targeted stakeholder groups plus interested community.	Key stakeholder groups
Drop-in community sessions	Community face-to-face sessions held in 7 different locations.	All community
Council sessions	Opportunity for council staff to provide feedback and discussion on drought resilience and community needs.	Council staff
Web content	The Council websites contained the information on the project, landing page for the survey and any enquiries	All
Survey	Anonymous opportunity for the community to provide guided feedback.	All
Social media	Promote the consultation and how to get involved.	All

4.1 Timeline of engagement

Monday 13 November

- Online survey went ‘live’ and invitations were published to attend workshops and drop-in sessions
- Media release distributed and information published to social media and websites

Monday 27 November

- Drop-in session at Baradine
- Drop-in Session at Binnaway
- Workshop held for community organisations and social support services in Warrumbungle Shire Council Chambers

Tuesday 28 November

- Drop-In Session Dunedoo
- Drop-in Session at Mendooran
- Gilgandra Shire Council staff workshop
- Combined health/wellbeing and agriculture focused workshop at Gilgandra

Wednesday 29 November

- Drop-in session at Coolah

Thursday 30 November

- Drop-in session at Tooraweenah

Tuesday 5 December

- Drop-in session at Armatree

4.2 Focused community workshops

As part of the co-design process, local needs and preferences were identified by each council and engagement designed to meet the needs of the respective community.

Four focused workshops were planned across both council areas, with the option to attend these workshops online via Microsoft Teams.

Table 2: Community Workshops

Workshop	Date	Time	Location
Community Organisations / Social Support Services	Monday 27 November 2023	5.00pm - 6.30pm	Warrumbungle Shire Council Chambers Coonabarabran (also online, or remote from CHC)
Health and Wellbeing	Tuesday 28 November 2023	5.00pm - 6.30pm	Gilgandra Coo-ee Heritage Centre (also online, or remote from WSC Chambers)
Agriculture	Tuesday 28 November 2023	7.00pm - 8.30pm	Gilgandra Coo-ee Heritage Centre (also online, or remote from WSC Chambers)
Business and Economy	Wednesday 29 November 2023	5.00pm - 6.30pm	Warrumbungle Shire Council Chambers Coonabarabran (also online, or remote from CHC)

Attendees were required to register to attend the sessions. Due to the low registration rates, the two Gilgandra sessions were combined. There were no registrations received for the Coonabarabran session on Wednesday 29 November and it was agreed by both councils and Projence to cancel the workshop.

At each workshop, participants were encouraged to share only what they were comfortable with, and that discussions on drought can affect everyone differently.

Participants were reminded to be respectful of each other and contact details for Lifeline and local support services were available.

Associate Professor Anthony Kiem, Drought Technical Lead, provided a summary presentation on the history of drought and projections around temperature and rainfall patterns for the region as a stimulus for participants.

Whilst discussion at the workshop was community led, the facilitator prompted discussion on the following focus areas:

- Discuss what worked to get your community through the last drought and why?
- What partially worked but would be more effective with additional resources or a different approach?
- What was missing or did not work at all?
- What things did you personally do to get you through the last drought that might be helpful for others to know about?
- How drought resilient do you believe your community is and what are your top 3 recommendations for how this resilience could be strengthened?

De-identified responses were collated for each workshop.

4.3 Drop-in sessions

Seven community drop-in sessions were held across the two LGAs. These sessions focused on the smaller towns and villages across the region. With the workshops in the larger towns of Gilgandra and Coonabarabran, the drop-in sessions ensured face-to-face engagement opportunities were geographically spread across both LGAs.

Table 3: Community Drop-in Sessions

Town	Date	Time	Location Details
Baradine	27 November	12noon -2pm	Baradine Hall
Binnaway	27 November	12noon -2pm	Binnaway Hall
Mendooran	28 November	12noon – 2pm	Mechanics Institute
Dunedoo	28 November	12noon -2pm	Dunedoo Jubilee Hall
Coolah	29 November	12noon -2pm	Coolah Council Chamber
Tooraweenah	30 November	3pm	Mountain View Hotel – Prior to GSC Village Management Plan consultation
Armatree	5 December	3pm	Armatree Hotel – Prior to GSC Village Management Plan consultation

At each drop-in session, stakeholders were provided with project information and were encouraged to speak freely without fear of prejudice or judgment. Representatives from council and Projence (as project consultants) were available at each session.

To reduce consultation fatigue and reduce the travel burden on stakeholders, the Tooraweenah and Armatree drop-in sessions were scheduled to occur immediately prior to community consultation events led by Gilgandra Shire Council.

4.4 Council workshop

As part of the consultation process, council staff were invited to participate in a focused workshop. Warrumbungle Shire Council did not hold a workshop.

Council staff provide a unique viewpoint as both residents of the LGA and frontline staff during drought events. Often in small communities, anecdotal feedback and concerns are shared with trusted community members, and this can often be with a local Council employee who is seen as a potential person to action request or ideas.

Table 4: Council Workshop

Council	Date	Time
Gilgandra Shire Council	Tuesday 28 November	3.30pm – 4.30pm

The Gilgandra Shire Council workshop was facilitated by Tracey Stinson and attended by Projence representatives, Randall Medd, Andrew Krause, and Anthony Kiem.

The format of the workshop was similar to the focused community workshops with guided consideration of the five focus questions:

- Discuss what worked to get your community through the last drought and why?
- What partially worked but would be more effective with additional resources or a different approach?
- What was missing or did not work at all?
- What things did you personally do to get you through the last drought that might be helpful for others to know about?
- How drought resilient do you believe your community is and what are your top 3 recommendations for how this resilience could be strengthened?

4.5 Survey

To support the face-to-face consultation and provide an anonymous platform for feedback, an online survey was deployed on 13 November 2023. The survey link was available from each council website, promoted via both Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Shire Council social media, as a further call to action, printed flyers and posters were distributed to main business outlets.

The survey did not include any compulsory questions and respondents were able to provide free text responses to a number of questions.

The survey questions were:

- What LGA do you live in? (drop down options)
- What town or area do you live in? (free text)
- What is your gender? (drop down options)
- Please indicate your age bracket (drop down options)
- What is your employment status? (drop down options)
- Please select the current industry or sector you work in (drop down options)
- What do you think are the most important issues that should be prioritised during a drought? (ranking of 15 with option for free text 'other')
- From your personal experience of drought in the region, which projects, activities or events do you believe have made a worthwhile contribution to drought resilience? (multiple selections permitted, 10 focus areas plus free text 'other')
- From your personal experience of drought in the region, which projects, activities or events do you believe failed to make a

worthwhile contribution to drought resilience? (multiple selections permitted, 10 focus areas plus free text ‘other’)

- Do you believe your community is as drought resilient as it needs to be, and if not, why not? (free text response)
- What does your community being prepared and equipped to deal with a future drought look like to you? (free text response)
- What are the things relating to drought that you believe do not receive enough attention, or are rarely discussed? (free text response)
- If you could implement one project, activity, or event to help your community during a drought, what would it be? (free text response)
- This is an opportunity to share anything related to drought resilience and future response to drought is there anything else you would like the project team to be aware of? (free text response)

4.6 Communication activities

To support the engagement activities and to facilitate community and stakeholder participation, communication activities were implemented across a variety of channels. A diverse channel strategy ensures greater reach and drives community awareness.

4.6.1 Social media

A social media campaign was implemented by both councils within the consortia.

The call to action was to raise awareness of the drought resilience project and upcoming consultation. The campaigns ran on both Facebook and Instagram channels.



Figure 4: Social Media Tiles

4.6.2 Radio

As consultation was being promoted during the winter crop harvest, radio advertisements/messaging was deployed on local Community Radio stations 2WAR FM in Gilgandra, 2WCR FM Coonabarabran and 3 Rivers Radio in Coolah, Dunedoo and Mendooran.



4.6.3 Website

Digital content was developed for each council webpage.

Digital banners were created to draw attention to the survey and the media release was published in the news section of each site.

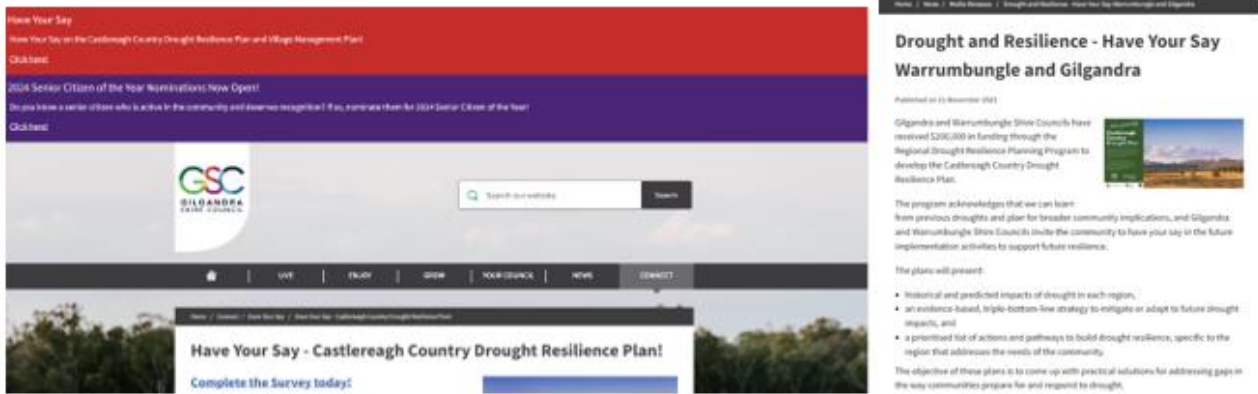
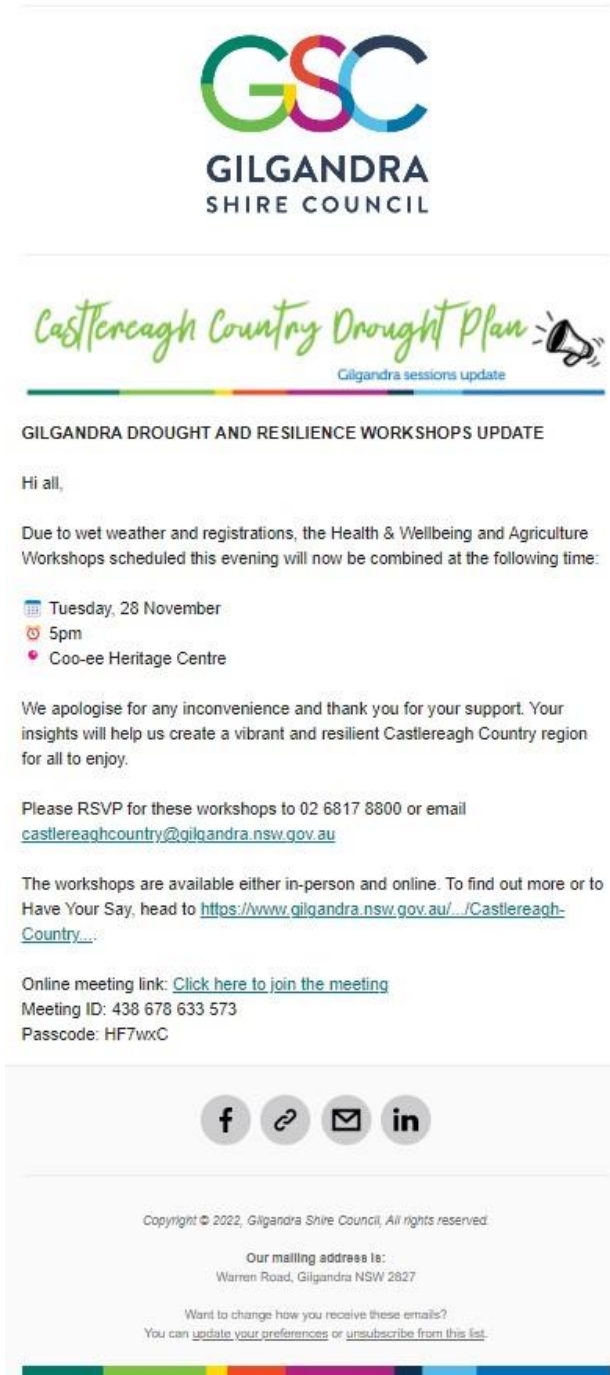


Figure 5: Website Banners

4.6.4 Email

Emails were sent out to all recipients on the respective council distribution lists.



Reminder: Consultation for the Drought Plan commences today!

COONABARABRAN WORKSHOPS

- **Community Organisations:** Today Monday, 27 November, 5pm @ Gallery Meeting Room
- **Business & Economy:** Wednesday, 29 November, 5pm @ Gallery Meeting Room

GILGANDRA WORKSHOPS

- **Health & Wellbeing:** Tuesday, 28 November, 5pm @ Coo-ee Heritage Centre
- **Agriculture:** Tuesday, 28 November, 7pm @ Coo-ee Heritage Centre

Workshops are available both in-person and online, please RSVP to: castlereaghcountry@gilgandra.nsw.gov.au.

DROP-IN SESSIONS

- **Baradine:** Today, Monday, 27 November, 12-2pm @ Baradine Hall
- **Binnaway:** Today, Monday, 27 November, 12-2pm @ Binnaway Hall
- **Mendooran:** Tuesday, 28 November, 12-2pm @ Mechanics Institute Hall
- **Dunedoo:** Tuesday, 28 November, 12-2pm @ Dunedoo Jubilee Hall
- **Coolah:** Wednesday, 29 November, 12-2pm @ Coolah Council Chambers
- **Tooraweenah:** Thursday, 30 November, 3-5pm @ Mountain View Hotel
- **Armatree:** Tuesday, 5 December, 3-5pm @ Armatree Hotel

Have Your Say - Survey

Share your photos! Share the images that demonstrate the resilience, the community, the landscapes and the impact drought has. Images can be uploaded via [Council's website](#). The aim is to feature these images in the final plan to display the real and local stories.



^Photo Credit: Sophie Grimshaw; 'Dust Storm Over Town'

Workshops and drop-in sessions commence today Monday 27 November 2023. [Register today!](#)

Figure 6: Email to Council Distribution List



4.6.5 Collateral

Various assets including community flyers and posters were developed and distributed via council and community group channels across each LGA.

Have your say
Castlereagh Country Drought Plan

Gilgandra and the Warrumbungle Shire Councils are seeking your input on how best to prepare and respond to drought.

Capturing your views, understanding impacts and opportunities in a prepared and resilient way, is vital in making a positive impact during the next drought. Funding from the Commonwealth and NSW Government will enable us to implement your initiatives and prepare our communities.

We invite you to come along to the following workshops or drop-in sessions and help make a change.

<p>COONABARABRAN WORKSHOPS</p> <p>Community Organisations Monday, 27 November, 5pm @ Council Chambers</p> <p>Business & Economy Wednesday, 29 November, 5pm @ Council Chambers</p>	<p>GILGANDRA WORKSHOPS</p> <p>Health & Wellbeing Tuesday, 28 November, 5pm @ Coo-ee Heritage Centre</p> <p>Agriculture Tuesday, 28 November, 7pm @ Coo-ee Heritage Centre</p>
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If you are unable to attend in-person, workshops will be available online.

DROP-IN SESSIONS

<p>Baradine & Binnaway Monday, 27 November, 12-2pm</p> <p>Mendooran & Dunedoo Tuesday, 28 November, 12-2pm</p> <p>Coolah Wednesday, 29 November, 12-2pm</p>	<p>Tooraweenah Thursday, 30 November, 3-5pm @ Mountain View Hotel</p> <p>Armatree Tuesday, 5 December, 3-5pm @ Armatree Hotel</p>
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To register your attendance for a session, visit gilgandra.nsw.gov.au or warrumbungle.nsw.gov.au or email castlereaghcountry@gilgandra.nsw.gov.au

Have your say
Castlereagh Country Drought Plan

The Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Shire Councils have received funding through the Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program to develop the Castlereagh Country Drought Resilience Plan.

The consultation will focus on four key themes - Agriculture, Health & Wellbeing, Business and Economy and Community Organisations.

Capturing your views and understanding local impacts and opportunities is vital in making a positive impact during the next drought.

Have Your Say with our online survey or drop-in to chat between **3 - 5pm Thursday, 30 November 2023**
Mountain View Hotel, Tooraweenah
 To register your interest, email castlereaghcountry@gilgandra.nsw.gov.au

Australia Government | **Future Drought Fund** | **NSW Government**

The Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program is jointly funded by the Australian Government and NSW Government under the Future Drought Fund.

Figure 7: Poster and Mailout Flyers

5 Outcomes of engagement

Communication and engagement activities commenced from 6 November 2023 and ended during the drafting of the RDRP. The online survey results were extracted on 16 January 2024.

During the engagement period:

- Social media campaign reached an estimated 4140
- 105 online survey responses
- 15 attendees at the 2 focused community workshops
- 7 drop-in sessions yielding a total of 19 interviews (13 attendees and 6 nearby interviews)
- 10 attendees at the 1 council workshop
- Media release to local and regional media
- 1167 stakeholders were contacted via email over 5 emails with an average open rate of 42%
- Community radio across both LGAs

Engagement rates were lower than anticipated and three engagement activities were cancelled or adjusted to make best use of the time in each location.

In reflecting on the level of participation and following discussion with local stakeholders, potential reasons for low participation may include:

- Consultation fatigue, particularly in Warrumbungle Shire. There is currently a significant number of proposed renewable energy projects in this LGA, for which proponents have been undertaking community consultation. Council has also undertaken various stakeholder and community consultation activities recently across most of its villages.
- Whilst two weeks advance notice was provided of the consultation, at such a busy time of the year for farmers and families, a longer notice period may have increased attendance.
- The region is not currently in drought and so people are not so concerned about preparation for any future droughts. This was evidenced during the engagement, with stakeholders stating there is a general level of reluctance to discuss drought when conditions are favourable.

5.1 Aboriginal engagement

Engagement with Aboriginal communities, Elders, and cultural knowledge holders and their representative groups and organisations was a priority.

An interview was completed with the CEO of the Baradine Local Aboriginal Lands Council during the street walk that was conducted in Baradine and this provided some insights into the experience of the Aboriginal community during drought.

The survey did not ask respondents to identify their personal heritage, and it is unknown what percentage of respondents were Aboriginal or from culturally diverse backgrounds.

There is a need to continue to seek further engagement with the local aboriginal communities across the region. .

5.2 Focused community workshops

Each of the 2 workshops had a specific focus area which was explored with participants against the matrix of what has worked well and should be maintained, what could be improved or enhanced, and what needs to be introduced or recommendations.

- Warrumbungle LGA
 - Community Organisations / Social Support Services one participant attended in person and two virtually.
 - Business and Economy – Cancelled due to no registrations being received.
- Gilgandra LGA
 - A combined Health/Wellbeing and Agriculture focused workshop was delivered with 10 people in attendance and two virtually.

The top five responses against the matrix Table 5.

Table 5: Outcomes of Workshops

What worked well and should be maintained	What could be improved/didn't work	New initiatives / recommendations
Subsidised water, freight and fodder for rural landholders	Education for farmers to assist with management of pastures and stocking rates, succession planning, innovative learnings from other farmers	Best organisation to manage drought is Local Government – government needs to acknowledge and recognise this, increase in land rates necessary, opportunity for State/Feds to pick up this increase during droughts.
Aligning water restrictions with neighbouring councils – even if Gilgandra didn't need to go onto water restrictions – showing a more united approach if adjoining councils all follow the same water restrictions to support each other.	Allocation of goods received could have been better coordinated.	Improve water storage and infrastructure in the region. Groundwater is seen as a strength, but lack of surface water is seen as a weakness by the community.
Community mental health awareness programs, rural financial counselling services.	Dis-incentives to diversify to establish off farm income as this makes farmers ineligible for government assistance.	Community events – fun with the kids, chance to forget about the drought momentarily.
Community events that bring people together including activities for young people such as sports clinics, BBQ nights.	Rural financial counselling needs to be made available sooner and funded throughout the duration of the drought and beyond to assist people to get back into a sound financial position even after the drought breaks.	Encourage the growing of gardens that use less water, plus more water tanks.
Local cash cards to support buying local.	Community facilities including keeping the pool open, laundry facilities for farmers/out of town families.	Grants to strengthen collaboration between community groups and businesses.

5.3 Drop-in sessions

Both Baradine and Dunedoo drop-in sessions had no attendees and as an alternative, the facilitators walked the Main Street / CBD and conducted spontaneous interviews with community members and sought recommendations for additional people to talk to or contacts to follow up in the future.

- 5 interviews were completed in Baradine.
- 1 interview completed in Dunedoo.
- Drop-in session at Coolah had 3 attendees.
- Drop-in session at Tooraweenah had 5 attendees.
- Drop-in session at Armatree had 2 attendees.
- Mendooran session did not have any attendees.
- Binnaway session had 3 attendees.

Engagement with community at the drop-in sessions and local based interviews identified common themes across the matrix of what has worked well and should be maintained, what could be improved or enhanced, and what needs to be introduced or recommendations.

Consistent themes of feedback on what worked well includes:

- Community cohesion: Programs and events brought the community together, aiding mental health.
- Financial support: Subsidies, loans, and cash cards for farmers and infrastructure development were well-received.
- Local Business Engagement: Efforts to encourage purchasing locally and supporting businesses were acknowledged positively.

Participants provided significant information on what didn't work and what could be improved. Some of the feedback was community specific, however consistent themes of feedback included:

- Participants pointed out issues regarding the coordination of services during droughts, mentioning duplication of mental health services and lack of a united approach among agricultural bodies.
- Volunteer burnout and difficulties in managing donated goods were major concerns. There were challenges in coordinating aid distribution, leading to feelings of guilt or neglect when donations were declined.
- There was a call for better support for small businesses, rates relief, and improved mental health services. Additionally, the impact of drought on youth and the need for off-farm income were highlighted.

A summary of participant recommendations include:

- Water infrastructure and publicly accessible bores: Prioritising the development of water infrastructure, especially publicly accessible bores, emerged as a critical need.
- Coordinated aid distribution: The community emphasised the necessity for a coordinated approach in distributing funds and resources, particularly during recovery phases after a drought.
- The community has a concern about the impact of renewable energy facilities construction and this needs to be addressed.
- Need for a communication and engagement strategy, rather than ad hoc or relying on volunteers. It needs to support cross LGA collaboration and establish single source of information, roles, and responsibilities.

5.4 Council workshop

- One council workshop was held with Gilgandra Shire Council key staff with 10 attendees.
- Warrumbungle Shire Council elected not to have a key staff session.

Attendee discussions indicate a high awareness of the impacts of drought on the broader community and not just council activities and business. The staff in attendance have wider community involvement beyond their professional roles.

Proportionately there were more gaps or things that didn't work well identified by participants than things that did work well during previous droughts.

A consistent theme from participants was the need to be proactive and establish systems and processes before the community is in drought.

Table 6: Outcomes of Gilgandra Shire Staff Workshop

What worked well and should be maintained	What could be improved/didn't work	New initiatives / recommendations
The Local Lands Service Rates subsidies for farmers	Funding flowed in from outside but was not well coordinated	Advocate for increased mental health support and essential services for non-agricultural rural residents.
Councils eligibility for regional investment corporate loans		Proactive Community Engagement Programs
Drought communities fund helped council – couldn't have undertaken a wide variety of projects without the funding. need long term prioritised plans of what to fund and which projects to do		Establish sustained financial and mental health support services that extend beyond the immediate drought period.
Community events – hosted by council		Organize regular social events and discussions focusing on succession planning and proactive community resilience strategies.
Gilgandra Drought Alliance to coordinate and distribute funding and donations.		Advanced Drought Indicators and decision-making tools so Council and the wider community can understand the real time drought stage and how that is determined.

5.5 Survey

The survey was open from 13 November 2023 and remained open during the drafting of the Drought Resilience Plan.

There were 105 respondents to the survey. Not all questions were answered by each respondent.

- The majority (73%) of survey respondents live in the Gilgandra LGA.
- 55% of respondents identified as female, 41% as male, 4% did not specify.
- Half of the respondents indicated they were self-employed with 41% working in agriculture.

- The highest number of respondents were in the 56–70-year age bracket.

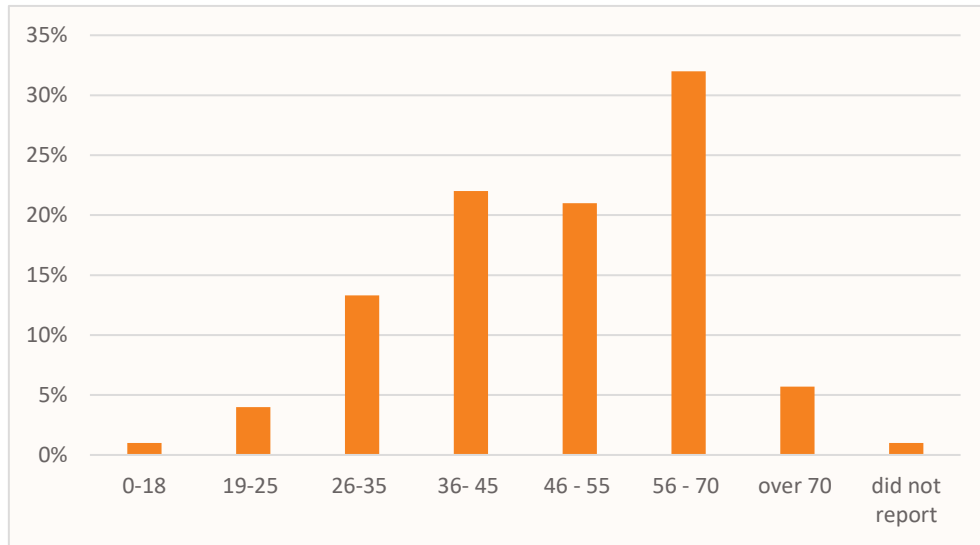


Figure 8: Age of Survey Respondents

When respondents were asked to rank 15 statements in order from most important to least important, the most important issue was water security for both stock and domestic supply and agri-businesses supply (for those not on reticulated town water supply).

Table 7: Ranking of Importance of 15 Statements

Importance	Ranking	Options
	1	Water security – Stock and Domestic supply and Agri businesses (for those not on town water supply)
	2	Water security – Town water supply
	3	Financial sustainability of local agri-businesses
	4	Financial sustainability of businesses which are not agri-businesses
	5	Peoples’ mental and physical health
	6	The effective distribution of aid and financial support
	7	The health and wellbeing of children and young people
	8	Economic Diversification away from activities that are most impacted by drought
	9	Off farm Income and diversification support such as agritourism programs and innovation grants
	10	Coordinated distribution of support (feed, water, and other donations)
	11	Improvements in technology/communications for weather information
	12	Improvements in technology/communications to support agricultural innovation and management practices
	13	Community Events and Social gatherings
	14	Training and Education opportunities
	Least	15

When asked **what projects, activities, or events made a worthwhile contribution to drought resilience**, respondents had a range of views. The question was then repeated, and respondents were provided with the same options and asked to indicate **what failed to contribute to drought resilience**.

As evidenced below, there were almost equally divergent opinions on the value of projects that focus on bringing people together.

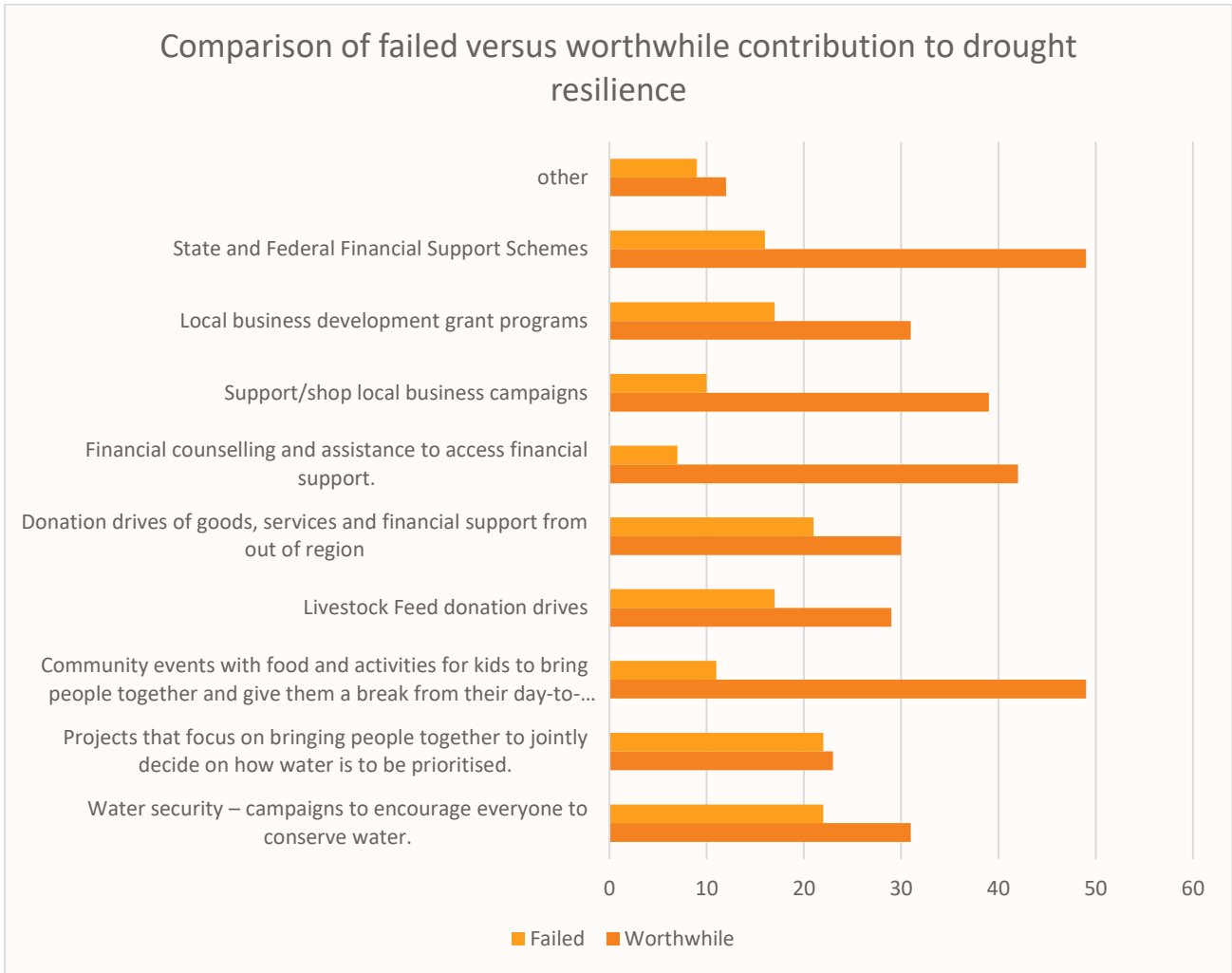


Figure 9: Number of respondents indicating failed and worthwhile drought response to activities

When asked **if the community was as drought resilient as it needs to be** respondents clearly believe that the community needs to be more resilient.

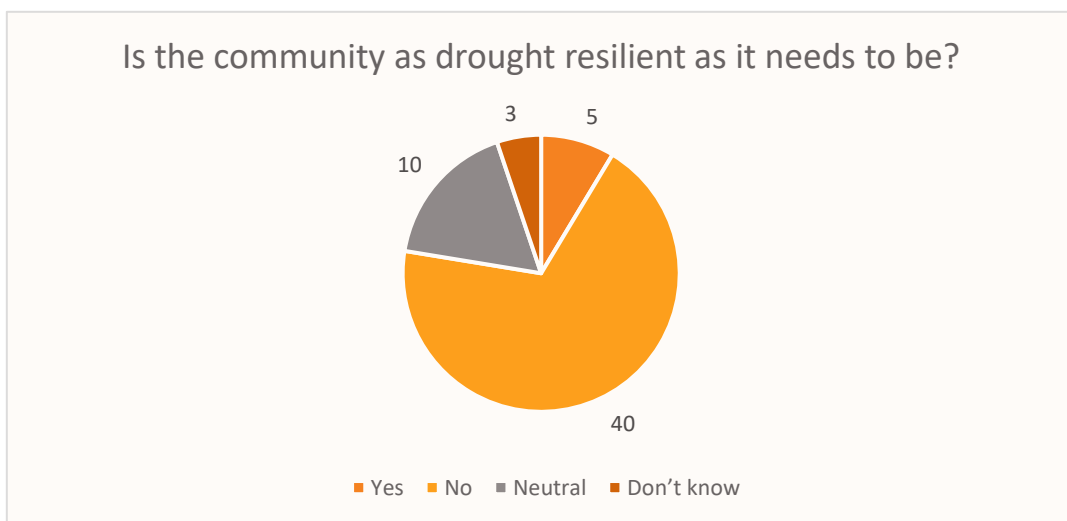


Figure 10: Number of respondents indicating level of drought preparedness of the community

When asked to identify **why the community was not as resilient as it should be** the top consistent responses were:

- Agricultural industry needs to adapt and embrace new technology or practices and look at diversification options.
- Lack of an effective strategy and coordinated leadership or management of drought planning and activities.
- The need to increase water storage and catchment infrastructure.
- Businesses need to take ownership of their own drought preparedness.

When asked **what being prepared and equipped to deal with a future drought looks like**, respondents focused on:

Changes to the physical environment such as increased water storage and catchment, as well as describing a community that was united with a clear plan for drought management that was inclusive and practical.

Respondents were asked to **identify the things relating to drought that do not receive enough attention or are rarely discussed**. The majority of responses focused on health and wellbeing and economic or financial topics:

- The need for more wholistic focus on community members', including children, wellbeing was a resounding theme throughout the responses. This support was not just for farmers, but for local business owners, contractors, and all age groups.
- An emerging theme was also the continued negative focus of the media and how this has a cumulative impact on the community.
- A suggested rarely discussed issue was the pressure on those affected by the drought and the expectation that they will step up in a volunteer role and make decisions about who to allocate donated feed to for example.
- Another theme consistent with previous responses was the impact of repeated droughts on the retention of young people in the community and how this could be addressed.
- The need for financial assistance such as grants etc. and how this is distributed and the eligibility criteria.
- That individuals and businesses have a responsibility to be financially viable, that drought is not new and should be considered when business planning. There was a call for people to stop relying on and expecting a 'bail out' and that businesses in town are often defacto credit facilities, holding debt for agriculture-based businesses.
- Lack of equity. This emerging theme was across many areas including distribution of support for contractors, distribution of fodder, and even the procurement of aid.

As an aspirational question, survey respondents were asked to **identity one project, activity, or event that would help the community during a drought**.

Whilst there was a repetition of key themes there was also some creative suggestions such as 'adopt a farmer'. Responses included more long-term strategies to increase and support the attraction of new businesses and industries into the community that leverage the existing businesses / production, and establishing collaborative partnerships with government agencies, mental health organisations and industry / agricultural companies.

The final survey question provided respondents with the opportunity to **share anything related to drought resilience and future response to drought**.

There were 39 responses received and 9 stated they had nothing further to add. Responses included:

- The need to be proactive and build resilience before drought.
- Better coordination and communication of donations and support.
- Acknowledging that pride can stop people seeking help.
- Farmers have been doing this for some time and hearing they need to be more resilient can be condemning.
- The need to work together to build resilience and find opportunities.



- The need for businesses to be able to stand on their own two feet as a drought, whilst devastating, is not a new phenomenon.
- Remove red tape and regulatory costs.
- Make access to government assistance easier and more equitable.
- Increase employment opportunities by working with small business.
- Need for better coordination of resources.
- The roads need urgent attention.
- The over population of kangaroos and impact on crops.
- The loss of storm water – failing to capture this resource.
- The impact of the Central West Renewable Energy Zone on water access in the Warrumbungle Shire over the next 20 years.

6 Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Shire Council Drought Project Workshops

Prior to finalisation and lodgement of the Draft Castlereagh Country Drought Resilience Plan workshops were held with both Gilgandra and Warrumbungle Shire Councils to review the project action plan and prioritise the implementation projects.

6.1 Gilgandra Shire Council Project Prioritisation

Gilgandra Shire Councillors and Executive Leadership Team were present at the session held on 5 March 2024. The attendees were provided with the following documentation prior to the meeting to enable them to read the material:

- Draft Drought Resilience Assessment
- Draft Stakeholder Engagement Report
- Draft Projects Action Plan
- Draft Castlereagh Region Drought Resilience Plan

The Project representatives presented the key findings from the Drought Resilience Assessment to provide context about drought in the Castlereagh Region. The Project team were available during the process where the Council discussed and prioritised the projects they wish to progress under the implementation phase of this program.

6.1.1

Projects selected to recommend as implementation projects were:

Priority Project Name	Project Objectives Overview	Key Benefits Overview	Indicative Project Costs \$	BCR
Project 1: Groundwater Access and Availability Online Toolkit	Provide a dedicated online interface that combines all available hydrogeological information on local groundwater, existing water bore infrastructure, details of licensed bores and cost estimates for bore drilling and water licensing.	Improved water management, agricultural productivity, community resilience, and economic development.	150,000	3.33
Project 2: Drought Communication Strategy	Improve local and external communication channels to support drought-affected communities in the Castlereagh Country region.	Increased community awareness, engagement, and support during drought periods.	50,000	4.0
Project 3: Drought Innovation and Resilience Showcase Field Day	Field Day Showcase Promote agricultural resilience and knowledge sharing, enhance community cohesion, and support mental wellbeing.	Increased adoption of drought-resistant agricultural practices, strengthened community cohesion, enhanced agricultural productivity.	35,000	4.29

6.2 Warrumbungle Shire Council Project Prioritisation

Gilgandra Shire Councillors and Executive Leadership Team we present at the session held on 6 March 2024. The attendees were provided with the following documentation prior to the meeting to enable them to read the material:

- Draft Drought Resilience Assessment
- Draft Stakeholder Engagement Report
- Draft Projects Action Plan
- Draft Castlereagh Region Drought Resilience Plan

6.2.1 The Projence representatives presented the key findings from the Drought Resilience Assessment to provide context about drought in the Castlereagh Region. The Projence team were available during the process where the Council discussed and prioritise the projects they wish to progress under the implementation phase of this program.

Projects selected to recommend as implementation projects were:

Priority Project Name	Project Objectives Overview	Key Benefits Overview	Indicative Project Costs \$	BCR
Project 1: Groundwater Access and Availability Online Toolkit	Provide a dedicated online interface that combines all available hydrogeological information on local groundwater, existing water bore infrastructure, details of licensed bores and cost estimates for bore drilling and water licensing.	Improved water management, agricultural productivity, community resilience, and economic development.	150,000	3.33
Project 2: Drought Communication Strategy	Improve local and external communication channels to support drought-affected communities in the Castlereagh Country region.	Increased community awareness, engagement, and support during drought periods.	50,000	4.0
Project 3: Drought Innovation and Resilience Showcase Field Day	Field Day Showcase Promote agricultural resilience and knowledge sharing, enhance community cohesion, and support mental wellbeing.	Increased adoption of drought-resistant agricultural practices, strengthened community cohesion, enhanced agricultural productivity.	35,000	4.29

Appendix A List of stakeholders contacted.

Government	Gilgandra Shire Council	Warrumbungle Shire Council
NSW Fisheries	GSC Residents – 7	No Data Provided
National Parks and Wildlife Service	Local Aboriginal Stakeholders - 21	
NSW Local Land Services	Community groups – 31	
NSW Local Land Services	All Local Businesses – 87	
Lifeline	Coo-ee Hertiage Centre Volunteers - 21	
Rural Financial Councillor	Castlereagh Country Stakeholders - 11	
Rural Financial Councillor	Hotels, Pubs, Clubs – 13	
RDA Orana	Local Accommodation – 20	
Department of Primary Industries	Miller St Businesses – 45	
Destination NSW	GIL Collective Suppliers – 45	
Drought Signals	CHC Gallery Artists – 31	

Appendix B Verbatim Response to Open Questions in Survey

Do you believe your community is as drought resilient as it needs to be, and if not, why not?

- *Most farms can handle a drought up to 2 years but town water supplies are not good enough and have to be on restrictions when the water is available but cannot be delivered*
- *No*
- *No. All businesses should be contributing to their own drought preparedness. Why should some look after themselves and not be eligible for government grants etc?*
- *small dam, small catchment. bores with low allocations*
- *lack of conservation of stock feed and hay, and overstocking in good times, leading to inflated prices for hay and low stock prices during extended periods of dry weather*
- *No need more water security*
- *No. It relies on traditional techniques and methods that are at the mercy of weather and climate change. We have an innovative approach and solution to drought proof farms and the local communities.*
- *You are never really prepared for drought but there are lessons learned from each drought*
- *Isolation*
- *No. The local community is still oblivious to the need to have prepared/prepare now for what is to come. They are still planting colonial gardens, still relying on farming, ignoring opportunities for bringing outside dollars in. They still turn their nose up at anything new. They have an insular council that has no imagination when it comes to the benefits of Indigenous tourism, increased arts and culture, the opportunity to encourage tertiary education institutions, aged/disabled care, natural burial etc to come to this area. The majority of the population lives with its eyes closed to what is to come.*
- *Too many ignorant people*
- *Still to many ppl trying to make a living off marginal (at best) land,*
- *No, because our council seem to only focus on one town in the shire*
- *No I don't think you can ever be really prepared*
- *No. The region's economy is built on agriculture. In a drought all local business have reduced incomes, even those not directly supplying agriculture. Diversification of income with small/manufacturing industry that is not Ag dependant is a must. Councils should also remember how important agriculture is in our community. Resilient businesses are those that make enough profit outside of drought years to carry themselves through drought/flood/fire years. Infrastructure that supports our agricultural industries and promotion of our shire as an attractive agricultural region is important.*
- *No probably very hard to overcome because we are agriculture driven, maybe in times of drought and farmers are making no money we stop charging rates, and the high paid pen pushers take a big pay cut in the office*
- *No i don't believe our community is as drought resilient as it needs to be for the following reasons; ageing population, unreliable weather forecasting, media focus on the negatives around drought, lack of services including health and ag related, lack of employment, the need for better education locally, more local government needed in community groups, reluctance to use new technology and the disconnect between local government and community volunteers.*
- *I don't know.*
- *No. We have no fail safe action plan or steps to prevent miscommunication or uneven distribution of funds or donations.*

Drought is regular enough but there are no records of what has and hasn't worked well and much of the disadvantaged community aren't taken into account

- *It could be better - better water security, more effective local government, better support for volunteers*
- *No because there's not enough fat in the system. A lot of enterprises are highly geared and vulnerable*
- *Yes*
- *No, I think this is something we should always be continuing to work on, especially with climate change creating added challenges*
- *probably not. Human nature*
- *No. People were depressed during the last drought. it was hard to access help as farmers. We can always learn and get more resilient.*
- *Strong community, volunteers etc to support each other. Gil as the main centre has some great things happening and range of businesses, cafes etc recently opening but would definitely be impacted if less money being spent.*
- *No because costs have outstripped incomr*
- *No, it's just weather dependant we need more industry diversification*
- *No, need for further on farm water storage*
- *no, improvements can always be made*
- *No as always more can and should be done.*
- *I don't know enough about the issue from a farming perspective to provide an informed opinion*
- *No, a significant percentage of the population is farming based and not diversified, when drought hits again, a lot of the community will do it tough and more needs to be done to prepare for this*
- *NO, the community strongly relies on the farmers to spend money. 80% of the shires GDP comes from Agriculture. Not sure how much more we can do to change this. I like the money spent on social well being programs, Armatree pub gatherings were good, loved that the kids got to do funded programs and fun stuff like the cricket coaching free. Liked the fact that money came in the council for projects and council tried to support local businesses. Didn't like that little road works were done and teh excuse by Council was that there was no water, so providing water to council to fix roads is important, I understand that it costs more but may be a funded program to cover the extra coast to cart extra water longer distances.*
- *No as our shire is connected to two shires that have already been drought declared*
- *No. We need to build on our community water storage*
- *Yes*
- *No, too much reliance on Agriculture. The Castlereagh region needs further industry diversification*
- *no need to have more water storage options*
- *I believe the agriculture agri-business businesses have learnt to be resilient I think non agri business businesses maybe not so, but at the end of the day every business in a rural town, particularly Gilgandra is an "agribusiness"*
- *Yes*
- *No. Rural rate payers are treated like garage by council. They want people to spend money in town, but rural rate payers have to drive down horrible roads each day but are expected to pay rates for no value*
- *No,*
- *No limited access to local mental health personal, doctors, etc no coordination of resources, limited number of rural financial councillors across the shires*
- *No I believe our community has not fully recovered from the last drought to the extent it needs to, to survive another of its kind. Financially people have not recovered from the loss of income, money is still owing and cash reserves have not been*

recovered. Hay and feed supplies are not to the levels required to see through another long period of dry spell.

- No, after going through drought i don't feel the community is well prepared for it to happen again, no one has any plans in place for these events to occur again
- No, being water wise should be second nature but isn't. Council should set example- plant natives/water wise plants.
- No - sustainable and regenerative farming would support this more.
- No. There is no financial support for rural contractors. Towns don't have backup bores...
- It depends on the extent of the drought. With the last 3 year drought, there was no option or way out due to the large area that was in drought. Drought plans and actions need to be identified and actioned well before we are in a fully declared drought as it's usually too late for many and the anxiety that comes up when it starts getting dry is severe by that time. Action these plans earlier and plan ahead instead of acting too late.
- Not with the water needs being imposed by the Central West Orana Renewable Energy Zone. The water that is needed for all the projects will be too much for the southern end of the Warrumbungle Shire. The drawdowns on bores will cause drops in Dunedoo's town bore and cause major problems. The southern area's water will be at risk during drought.
- Yes
- No, we need a way to store water. There was talk of putting a dam across the Castlereagh. The sand wall built years ago was unsuccessful.
- No I think people fall back into old habits and just start over again. Also drought creates a wave of negativity
- No - droughts will be more frequent and severe in the years to come. There is no community leadership in bringing change - it is business as usual for everyone. There are no change makers in this community. No leadership, no one willing to say the uncomfortable truth, that agriculture has to change. Australia is the driest continent on earth, and our weather patterns are changing to be drier (see the BOM website for videos and information). We need more trees, to capture moisture and keep the water cycle recurring.
- Yes
- Not sure
- I would like to see a user pay stand pipe available to residents that don't have access to town water so that they are able to get potable water when their water tanks run low or are empty
- No. Leading up to drought has been high interest rates, low stock prices, hard to make money and make repayments with drought on top of that
- As resilient as can be

What does your community being prepared and equipped to deal with a future drought look like to you?

- Farms store fodder and have a water supply to maintain core stock
- Water and stored feed
- Everyone doing their part to help prepare for possible drought situations.
- second dam, larger dam, higher allocation from bores. more residents with tanks, storm water harvesting
- conservation of water, stock feed and hay sufficient for a 3 year drought, diversification of businesses into technology, manufacturing and tourism that add value to meat, grain and other primary production in general
- Better water storage
- Adopt an innovative, sustainable approach that will benefit the primary producer and local community. To do this

government provides financial assistance for fencing and yard handling infrastructure as well as the infrastructure to vertically integrate the produce through the local communities to the cities and overseas.

- *Early set up of local Drought Alliance, early messaging from all government agencies about the best way to provide assistance (i.e. not sending food/clothing)*
- *Inclusive and supportive of everyone, farming and town people*
- *Removal of front lawns and replaced with low water gardens - Building standards that include reuse of water such as grey water, water collection from house and outbuildings, water restrictions year round, - Education year round about water usage, entrepreneurialism, Council drive to understand new opportunities, - Reward innovators in water use, publicise good water (re)use stories - Educate community about air quality dangers as dust and smoke levels will increase - Normalise mask wearing - Encourage/Educate reducing food waste - Reward and publicise farmers who are best practices in retaining soil moisture.*
- *Focussed and all on the same pages .*
- *Well watered properties, (dams etc) with lower stock numbers*
- *Independents*
- *Strong, diversified and profitable local businesses ready to take on the challenge of a drought because they have the skills needed and the savings behind them to manage through without environmental, animal welfare or economic loss. Community groups that have strong memberships and are not inhibited by red tape and high costs for use of council services/assets.*
- *It looks the same as it dose now but when we are declared drought council forward thinks and supports the people that support it.*
- *A cohesive community that doesn't pit the town (non-ag businesses) vs out of town (farm)*
- *Strong community ties with strong and inclusive leadership, local government realising the value of unpaid volunteers in local communities and helping to make their volunteering easier, clear communication with ag consultants, regular farmer group meetings to share ideas knowledge and improve support, locals supporting local businesses and looking for ways to attract people to the community to increase the revenue base which in turn supports locals, community events and education to improve our communities skills and knowledge, accessible community facilities that are used for events.*
- *A supportive community that knows who is responsible for what actions during a crisis. A clear communication and process to follow depending on what issues may arise*
- *Shared community vision, effective local government, supported volunteers, thriving businesses*
- *Remove regulation and let the market work*
- *Involved community effort for water conservation, assistance to farmers for planning and weather information. Support and donations to those in need. Encouragement to plant more native drought resistant plant species.*
- *Community understanding of conserving water (water wise garden trend etc), water security, robust roll out of community engagement and making sure there is easy access/people to talk to about resources, grants, opportunities available.*
- *I do not know but I feel we can't really on outside help*
- *Support services. Free financial advice. Donations of water ready. A council is prepared that has funds to help wisely.*
- *Programs to use local business to distribute aid, local cash card*
- *Ability for farms to keep breeding stock and seed wheat*
- *Having groups/plans/methods of combacting drought in place before we enter a drought, rather than making reactive plans once we are in active drought*
- *Real outcomes delivered from theses projects not window dressing.*
- *Easy access to support from feed for animals to finances to mental health support*

- *Off farm solutions for people who rely on farming income, support for local businesses who rely on money from locals to be able to stay open when local money is short, water and fodder safety so there is food and water for every person and every animal*
- *Good Social well being programs, Lots of fun stuff for kids so they don't miss out, Extra water for road works, Keep money coming into the community some how.. Fodder and transport subsidies are a must*
- *A working committee to coordinate with donations and ensuring they reach the right people. Those who have had experience and work together*
- *More dams / reservoirs*
- *Being conservative with spending and planning for a drought rather a good year.*
- *Good water security and stores of fodder. Financial support when needed and a strong focus on people well being particularly those with families. Continue to encourage normality particularly for children. Extra financial support towards local community and sports groups to maintain social and sporting activities*
- *more bores to keep up with water supplies*
- *Self support, preparation, not just crying poor every time weather does not go our way, this should include council as well.*
- *Equipped*
- *No idea. Roads are buggered at the moment. How will council be able to keep up with road maintenance with limited water available for grading roads. Hopeless. Pay huge money on rates and going to have horrendous roads during the drought. Just great for rural rate payers mental health*
- *Diversified town economy, tourism, lower rural rates*
- *A large group of people who care for each other and has access to funding and support services and programs*
- *Reserves (cash, stock, feed, water)*
- *Water wise, back up water systems, rain tanks on housing & govt infrastructure where possible. Make access to road reserves priority for locals, weed management when drought breaks along roads, promote rate payment options if people in financial distress*
- *Community Engagement - brainstorm within each community*
- *One where the shire has more water in more dams along the side of roads to catch run off so they can do roadworks and employ farmers/ag contractors/shearers etc who are out of work. It does rain in droughts and the shires could spend a bit on the roads opposed to saying they have no water and differing the road budget for another year...*
- *Having earlier access to funding to increase water supply and security, infrastructure and fodder before drought periods.*
- *1. The Renewable Energy Projects in our area bringing their own water so they do not destroy and drawdown our local bores (towns and properties) as they have needs that far out weigh what is available. 2. Local private businesses (agricultural and town) have drought plans which assist them to get through the drought 3. Local/State/Federal government has workshops, financial counsellors and mental health support to help people get through the drought.*
- *Plenty of water storage.*
- *An action plan that is like a staged plan for dealing with drought. At level 1 drought xyz steps are undertaken and implemented right through to like a level 5 drought.*
- *Its hard, because people have to make a living and they need to plant crops and graze stock. The way farming is structured at the moment is every individual for themselves. But we need to share resources in a fair way to be able to be sustainable. As a start I'd like to see more farmers sharing resources, or having some kind of marketplace where farmers can engage and share resources. eg one farmer has hay on this place and a local farmer can find this out and purchase his hay locally (prioritizing over selling out of the community - cutting down on transport etc). Sharing and trading economies make communities stronger. This can be a simple website or facebook site even?) Also more access to specialist services for farmers such as agronomists, specialists in carbon reduction on farms, rehabilitative farming specialists, organic farming*

practices seminars, rewilding nature - community events and talks to educate and talk about big ideas. A safe place to share new ideas, for people to be comfortable in questioning their own contribution to climate change and the severity of droughts to come.

- Not much
- Not sure
- Not having the combination of recovering from previous drought, high interest rates and low prices for stock. Local council reducing rates would help as they are extremely high and just another cost for people trying the ride this hard time out.
- Water and financial stability

What are the things relating to drought that you believe do not receive enough attention, or are rarely discussed?

- If governments hand out subsidies it must be not means tested
- Mental health
- Those who have prepared themselves adequately!
- storm water harvesting and water tanks
- young people leaving the land and not returning because of the boom and bust cycle of traditional agricultural production
- Government support
- Drought proofing investment. It is all reactionary and band aid stuff time and time again.
- The pressure on those affected by the drought and the expectation that they will step up in a volunteer role and make decisions about who to allocate donated hay, \$ etc to.
- Psychological distress at changing landscape and helplessness
- That it is every person's responsibility to make their surroundings as drought-tolerant as possible. Everyone acts like it's "happening" to them, rather than doing the things that can help in the long run - like removing lawns, planting local/low-water plants, mulching everything.
- More info on personal bores needed
- Overstocking and land that is not arable or has no water
- Live stock markets and commodity markets taking advantage in dire times
- Community groups, businesses and individuals skills and knowledge to prepare for and manage drought. For instance, financial planning/literacy, environmental management (particularly for small landholders), water efficiency (gardens & households), livestock management/feeding and management of mental health.
- That farmers are largely prepared for seasonal changes, and are resilient. They aren't all whinging and expecting hand-outs in tough times, but they do need mental health support, and to know that their community cares.
- Impact media has on farmers mental health and decision making, for example constant barrage of negative stories about drought. Poor weather information impacting decision making for farmers. The impact drought has on Ag contractors. The poor use of resources when fodder drives are organised, these can just inflate the value of feed, and can be making farmers less resilient. Giving them that type of handout can delay them in making crucial decisions in their business, and an expectation that someone will bail them out, which does nothing for their resilience or the communities. Aid being brought in from another region, rather than being purchased locally and distributed which boosts the local economy. The importance of decision making for the farmer. The need to have a positive outlook even in the most difficult times, for individuals, families and communities.
- The impact of children, the disadvantaged the low social economic bracket of unemployed. Drought doesn't go away when it rains it has a long term ongoing impact of the WHOLE community not just the farmers

- *The impact of local government on the community success generally*
- *Whole enterprise profitability and the drain regulation has on that*
- *Water storage during wet seasons. The use of the land during a drought. Not planning ahead.*
- *The fact that it is not an abnormal climatic event, and should be expected.*
- *mental stress*
- *Mental health of local business owners. We discuss farmers mental health but probably not the local businesses effected by drought as much as we should.*
- *Cash injection programs and initiatives to support local business*
- *Stock destruction*
- *govt assistance to droughtproof properties/local businesses prior to entering drought*
- *Widening of social and economic gap between urban and county communities.*
- *I don't know enough from a farming perspective to formulate an informed opinion*
- *Mental health of farmers, the impact on all local economy when there is less money to go around, the internal tensions on every family*
- *The positives stories of drought.. To much doom and gloom and over exaggerated media stories. During drought there are needs for positives because some great things happen during droughts, and friendships deepen.*
- *Finance and Mental Health*
- *Water storage. We need more dams and reservoirs to hold water from times of plenty*
- *Complacency around farms and local businesses not setting enough fodder and money aside to prepare for dry times and hard times.*
- *Industry diversification, family social support , increased water storage capacity and less focus on running water down rivers when not needed. People first - environmental distant second*
- *stock losses*
- *It is part time of the climate/weather cycle, there is no excuse, as we have seen it all in the last 10 years, so everyone should know it rains, it floods, it stops raining and it gets dry. That is what agriculture is, if it was easy everyone would be in it. I think we need to stop expecting handouts.*
- *Rural roads*
- *Rural rate payers and the huge money they pay each year and nothing to show for it*
- *Mental health of kids*
- *Mental health, suicide, there is no ongoing rural support. Governments don't provide help quick enough. Information about where you can access resources eg feedbank, food bank, shops support*
- *Water Security, where donations should go*
- *Ag economy drives region those support businesses in Ag need access to financial & mental health/ physical health support. Events for men who are notorious for socially isolating. Droughts usually break with deluges so preparing for that mess which is to come.*
- *Mental health including loneliness*
- *The loss of the rural workforce... population decline*
- *Peoples physical health, impact a drought has on children and the fact that stock markets crash but retail outlets still charge high prices.*
- *Individual responsibility of businesses in being viable, adapting/changing so they can survive a drought. Businesses need to*

be able to be viable when it is dry and when it rains? Farm Succession when people get older and can't manage farm work during drought (physically, financially and mentally).

- *Donating feed*
- *Storing water. Mental health.*
- *The distribution of financial support and the fact it is not shared equitable between ag businesses and non ag businesses. The fact that the businesses in town become defacto credit facilities holding debt for ag businesses*
- *Agriculture and its contribution to climate change. The supply chain of food world wide is the biggest contributor to the causes of climate change. See regeneration.org Paul Hawkin for more information and solutions - individual, community and government.*
- *Free water*
- *Stress on personal relationships*
- *Land holders that have been forced to seek off farm income to survive are pushed out of grants & fodder drops even though they are still trying to maintain livestock*
- *Roads aren't maintained due to no one wanting to spare the water*
- *People's lack of preparation*

If you could implement one project, activity, or event to help your community during a drought, what would it be?

- *Council need to be active in keeping parks watered and tidy*
- *Donations being made available to every person/business. Not means tested.*
- *water tanks for residents*
- *a project or event that encourages new business to establish in country towns, with the goal of utilizing existing businesses/ production and adding value to agricultural products, for example, agri-tourism or services based on new technologies that conserve water or that make crops more water efficient*
- *Community gathering and mental health support*
- *Government investment into infrastructure. We have an example to showcase and would be delighted to share the technology.*
- *Support via community events with availability of information to access any suitable programs*
- *Coordinate regular community events to bring people together*
- *DURING a drought is too late - promote and normalise water saving and using waste water as an essential part of being a good citizen. Communities thrive when they know what to do - so start putting out posters, and cooling competitions, and sponsoring writing/artwork about saving water. Highlight smart farming. Stop lagging behind and be brave enough to lead.*
- *Town bore . Standpipes with free water to top up from*
- *Don't know*
- *Community support*
- *Workshops focused on PREPARING for drought aimed at local business, community groups, small land holders and primary producers.*
- *Training look in to alternate farming methods stop set stocking stop doing what we have always done change*
- *Regular farmer meetings/workshops/exercise sessions that encourage innovation, use of ag experts, idea sharing, positive*

planning and focus on individuals health. These events can be run at different community businesses and community assets where all supplies for morning tea and lunch are supplied by local businesses or community groups which in turn leads to added value in the local economy.

- *Food bank & washing, showering services for those with limited water supply*
- *Community events with education, entertainment and food*
- *Financial management workshops*
- *Counselling services for farmers and community struggling.*
- *Collaborating with local businesses, government agencies, mental health groups, financial councillors, even larger agricultural companies that want to get involved and help. A lot of people and companies want to help, why not pool these resources to get the most reach and best outcome.*
- *Another MATES day. It was very successful for the local farmers. We also sent messages to local businesses to encourage them.*
- *More support to encourage spending through local business*
- *Off farm training*
- *emphasis on being drought prepared, rather than reacting when in the situation*
- *Sand mine the Castlereagh in Gilgandra to create a social and economic amenity for the town.*
- *Not sure*
- *Temporary employment or opportunities for farmers/agricultural workers. Be this working on an event for the whole community, community projects, roads, or anything else. Employ people to know to help coordinate the efforts, that way the money is going in through the support and the employment*
- *Direct cash incentives into the community by the way of local cash cards. Benefits everyone.*
- *Adopt a farmer*
- *A community get together or concert*
- *Local sport event involving all codes*
- *Community social engagement, bringing people together, allow families to have fun without the worry of financial impacts. Fodder and transport subsidies for farmers*
- *hay drive*
- *I think projects that involve the whole community, or groups across the area. I hate being talked about as a charity case in media, so doing positive activities gives some incentive to keep going.*
- *Food drives*
- *GRADING OF ROADS!!!!!!!!!!*
- *A coordinator who gives out information about where to get help and advertises through the media*
- *A community engagement plan with key stakeholders there to create a plan. Invest in a facilitator to run this. Contact all committees in town such as RFS, Ag Show committees directly to get them to participate. Ity to w*
- *Small dams along dirt roads to catch water to keep locals employed and work on the roads during droughts*
- *Subsidised funding for producers to improve infrastructure on farm*
- *Monthly gathering which had a guest speaker - sometimes about topics helping run their businesses, or mental health speakers or motivational speakers or comedians to help lighten the load. These would be run towards the end of the day with a BBQ sausage at the end.*
- *Feed drops for everyone not just a few hand picked people everyone knows*

- *More water storage.*
- *A community support fund that is built up over time and during times of drought it provides immediate funds to undertake small programs. This means they can be self determined and not reliant on government funding*
- *Something to support mental health.*
- *Free water*
- *Music/concert plus jumping castle etc free BBQ for families*
- *A user pay stand pipe for access to potable water*
- *Can't think of anything off top of head. Free Santa photos. One less expensive and could be part of a community event*
- *None*

This is an opportunity to share anything related to drought resilience and future response to drought is there anything else you would like the project team to be aware of?

- *already said it but so much storm water just washes away.*
- *no*
- *We have a program with 9 farmers ready to go as a pilot program. Please contact me for more information. Mark Osman*
- *Need to coordinate drought relief handouts - i.e. through drought alliance. So many people who accessed funding/handouts/ go fund me etc may have been a bit greedy while many were too proud to accept handouts as drought is expected in agriculture and you need to budget and manage accordingly.*
- *We need a system to keep people engaged and active instead of staying on farm and not seeing anyone*
- *Get more younger people on the council that have the strength and will to make the changes we will need for the future. Conservatism is not the answer when things are changing, and changing fast*
- *Not at this point*
- *No*
- *It is important that council actively helps businesses and community groups to be profitable and resilient outside of drought so that they can manage any times of decreased income (drought/covid/fire/etc). They could do this by reducing red tape, reducing the cost of services to community events and focusing on promotion and business development in Ag industries and small industry. Council should also make it a priority to use local businesses for any projects that they are involved in. I would hope that the consultants running this project are local as I know there are local consultants more than capable of running community engagement and developing drought plans.*
- *It's important for individuals to get together and share knowledge and ideas. We need to encourage young people to stay in rural communities their enthusiasm is crucial to building community resilience. Volunteers and volunteer groups make local rural communities function, assist them, make their life easier they give hours and hours away from their businesses and families to improve their community yet are very poorly assisted by local government on many occasions. Look at ways to improve the effectiveness of farmers that are in the bottom 30% of the industry we need to improve those businesses. Recognise the importance of retaining people in rural communities, think broadly how those skilled people can be retained when employment opportunities decline because of drought. Encourage ideas that strengthen community to handle difficult times.*
- *Remember all of the community are impacted not just farmers and their workers. The flow in effect is something that is felt by everyone*
- *Build resilience prior to drought with an engaged community supported by efficient, helpful local and state government*

people and programs

- *Profitable business is drought resilient. Remove regulatory costs and business will be more resilient*
- *Good to remember farmers are very resilient and to be told they need to be more resilient can be condemning. Drought has been around forever and the farmers are always trying to conserve and make good resourceful decisions.*
- *Better coordinated donations program, greater support for infrastructure projects to keep cash rolling around the community, more social gathering events keeping communities vibrant*
- *Farmers and business owners who's pride stops them apply for assistance*
- *I have been a resident for 3 years and although traveled to the area I was not residing through the previous drought.*
- *Nil*
- *I think I have covered it*
- *Talk to those who worked with groups who were donating goods*
- *Nothing further*
- *No*
- *Water security less of an issue in Gilgandra LGA, cost of living and retaining a standard of living and social interactions important. Support for businesses to remain viable critical.*
- *no*
- *Agricultural businesses need to not be nannied by government. We are responsible for our future, cut the red tape, and offer incentives to be proactive not just hand outs in retrospect.*
- *Other than grading roads. No*
- *Recovery takes time it shouldn't be link to weather events, that is stopping the aide when the rains come people are still suffering for a long time. Access to government aid is extremely limited to some families who have some income off farm*
- *work with local small buisness to help support them and provide jobs where possible*
- *Experience has shown me over several droughts those who winge & carry on, dip into any donation going are usually the least resilient viable farmer who didn't plan or the extreme other end who have financial capacity to cope but if free stuff out there will take it (why they are successful)*
- *If we work with the key stakeholders within each community, we can tailor this to their community which creates ownership.te a*
- *Act sooner when seasons start to turn instead of waiting until we're 6 months into a drought to start taking action*
- *The impact of the Central West Renewable Energy Zone is going to be significant upon water access in the Warrumbungle Shire over the next 20 years. It is being done in Stages, Stage 1 has (over 600 wind towers) and 9 solar projects being built in the southern Warrumbungle Shire. The impact of the water use developing these projects will have a significant impact on the drought resilience of the Warrumbungle Council Area. Stage 2 will move towards Toorawhenah and will in the next 10 years (according the NSW Energy Infrastructure Future planning documentation). The Drought Plan must take into account the impact and look to advocate for the current residents so there is not a lack of water with the lowering of the water table due to excess usage. The EIS of the stage 1 Transmission lines showed significant water usage required for these projects to be built.*
- *The over population of kangaroos, if you lock a paddock up the Roos eat all the grass*
- *Education beforehand on mental health.*
- *Droughts will be more intense and frequent in the future. This is going to effect mental health. This is not just a local problem, it is Australia wide, and world wide. We need to have brave leaders who can think outside the box and implement projects and bring life to ideas which are unconventional. People in power need to use their privilege and power to make good decisions for the benefit of all. Don't be afraid to be a good leader in our community.*



- *Water*
- *Is there a way to ensure all those I need in town or out can access help*
- *A bad combo to be heading into drought with- rates high, stock prices low. Be worse then the last of it continues. Some people won't be able to hold it all together*
- *Nil*