

+ Prime focus

Four months on: How North West is recovering from disaster



QRIDA Client Donald Moore at his property near Cloncurry

As quickly as the unprecedented floods swept North West Queensland, killing thousands of livestock, and devastating the livelihoods of rural families and their communities, graziers have just as quickly turned their attention to recovery. As the flood waters receded, graziers got to work straight away, clearing debris and dead livestock, fixing fences, replacing damaged equipment and starting the long road to recovery.

Cloncurry grazier Donald Moore was among them.

Mr Moore estimates as much as 20% of his herd, which was otherwise healthy and strong, died – but like other graziers in the area, his herd didn't drown.

“Our biggest impact wasn't being under water, it was the exposure that killed a lot of our cattle. Through the constant cold and wet, with the lead up of days of 40C temperatures, hypothermia is mainly what killed them, they died from exposure,” he said.

“I thought we would be safe but it wasn't until the last few days of the flooding event where I started to hear neighbours were losing cattle. I got in a chopper as soon as I could and I could see the same story; they were in the North West corners trying to get away from the wind and the rain. That's where they all succumbed to the cold weather.”

Mr Moore was quick to access the \$75,000 Special Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants administered through Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) to help pay some of the costs associated with the clean up and recovery process and later a Disaster Assistance Loan to restock.

More than \$80 million in Special Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants have been paid to primary producers, small business and non-profits across the disaster declared areas as at July 2019. Applications for these grants close on 29 November 2019.

“The grant and the disaster loan really helped us because we were carrying debt, we had to service that debt and had repayments coming up just after the flood event hit,” Mr Moore said.

“It took a lot of pressure off us and it was one less thing to worry about when we had fences to fix and cattle to look after.

“If it wasn't for the grant, instead of being able to go out and buy cattle, we would have had to breed our numbers back up which could have taken five years.”

In addition to Disaster Assistance Loans and Special Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants, QRIDA also administers the \$400,000 co-contribution North Queensland Restocking, Replanting and On-farm Infrastructure Grants for eligible primary production enterprises to restock lost livestock, replant lost or damaged crops or permanent plantings and restore or replace lost or damaged on-farm infrastructure.

Visit our website for full details of the range of disaster assistance measures available and how to apply.

QRIDA administers financial assistance to disaster affected primary producers, businesses and non-profit organisations under the joint Commonwealth/ Queensland Government funded Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018. The North Queensland Restocking, Replanting & On-farm Infrastructure Grants are funded by the Australian Government and administered by QRIDA.

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From the CEO's desk

Another financial year has quickly passed us by and it's been another busy and rewarding one for the QRIDA team.

Despite floodwaters inundating the top half of the state and drought ravishing the southern half we've seen a strong and admirable resilience drive our primary producers onwards.

In 2018-19, QRIDA approved 10,549 applications, totalling over \$238.8 million in financial assistance across all schemes. This compares with 3,189 applications and \$147.8 million in financial assistance in 2017-18.

Of note, we've approved \$89.3 million in First Start and Sustainability Loans to 197 new and existing primary producers to take the next step in achieving their business goals.

We also continue to support those in North and North West Queensland in their recovery from the floods. To date we've approved 2,000 Special Disaster Assistance Recovery Grants for \$83 million for primary producers, small businesses and non profits.

Some of the other key contributions we've made over the past year include:

- providing \$1 million in Farm Management Grants for 578 producers and their families to address farm succession planning
- administering the \$300 million North Queensland Restocking, Replanting and On-Farm Infrastructure co-contribution grants for the Commonwealth. So far more than 30 applications have been approved for \$10 million
- approving \$3.3 million in Rural Economic Development Grants to 15 regional businesses under the first-round of the program
- providing ongoing support to producers facing financial difficulty through our Farm Business Analysis Assistance and Farm Business Debt Mediation.

We also welcomed John Corbett as the new Chairperson to the QRIDA Board of Directors.



QRIDA Chairman John Corbett, CEO Cameron MacMillan and QRIDA Board members visit the Pirrone family on farm at Ayr.

John is a company director and consultant with over 25 years' experience in agriculture and agribusiness.

This year we're expanding our regional presence with a new office to be established in the Townsville region which will compliment our existing network of 10 regional offices.

The QRIDA team continues to strive to do more for rural and regional Queensland and we look forward to helping support and grow your rural business over the next 12 months.

- Cameron MacMillan

New face in the North West

Each issue we will feature comment from one of our ten Regional Area Managers. This edition we hear from North West and Gulf Regional Area Manager, Jessica Christeson.

No stranger to the North West, QRIDA's North West and Gulf Regional Area Manager Jessica Christeson has already started making a difference to primary producers in the region.

Jessica started in the role in the thick of the unprecedented flooding disaster earlier this year and has already been able to meet with impacted producers and help them on the road to recovery.

"It was a crazy, unprecedented event and everyone was in shock, they didn't know what was going on," she said.

"It's a long process, there is a lot of emotion and sadness and some people are still in shock but we do what we can.

"It feels good to promote how we can help, especially when some people don't know what kind of assistance is available. Promoting what we do has been great."

Jessica grew up in Townsville, where she completed a degree in social science with a major in psychology and sociology, but was familiar with the North West and Gulf region. She worked on a cattle property between Cloncurry and Julia Creek from 2016 and later for the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

"I enjoy agriculture and providing for families. I enjoy getting out and meeting people and I get to do that in this role, meet people. I think this job is making a difference to people's lives.

"During the flooding especially it really feels like we are helping people by offering support and making a difference by helping them get back on their feet."

Jessica said it was especially important to have local representation for government services, including disaster recovery.



QRIDA's North West and Gulf Regional Area Manager, Jessica Christeson.

"Clients are talking to someone who knows what the situation is. It's beneficial for them to talk to someone who knows the land and what happened, people can relate to that. Across every region it's handy to have someone who is local and knows the area," she said.

"I'm looking forward to getting out and helping people get into the industry, particularly the younger generations."

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‘Floretting’ new market for oversized broccoli and cauliflower

Oversized broccoli and cauliflower previously destined for livestock feed will be redirected onto Australian families’ dinner plates.

Plans are in place to build a state-of-the-art, Queensland first floretting machine at Qualipac on the Warrego Highway in the Lockyer Valley. The machine will be capable of processing otherwise out of spec food to a saleable product.

Broccoli and cauliflower heads too big for market specifications were previously sold below cost for livestock feed but the latest technology will process them up small enough to meet consumer demand in supermarkets and green grocers.

Company directors Troy and Bradley Qualischefski are among 15 successful agricultural business owners under the latest round of Queensland Government Regional Economic Development Grants administered by QRIDA.

Bradley said existing customers were relying on frozen imported cauliflower and broccoli products, but facilities in Tasmania were already at capacity and seasonal conditions did not allow for expansion.

He said the project would deliver significant benefits for Australian producers and open a market for a product line that did not already exist in Queensland.

“This project is about improving an existing product that already has consumer markets in place. The product would be supplied for four months a year, from July to October, with the potential to be extended.

“It is expected 2,500 tonnes of broccoli floretts and 680 tonnes of cauliflower floretts would be required annually while there is also interest from overseas markets for floretted Australian produce.

“We are comfortable in the knowledge consumers are prepared to pay a higher price for Australian grown produce. We are replacing and improving an existing imported product rather than recreating a new one.”

He said it was expected 20 full time jobs in production, including 18 in the growing, harvesting and production stages of the value chain would need to be filled.



Successful Rural Economic Development Grant recipient, Bradley Qualischefski at his property in the Lockyer Valley.

“Growing, harvesting and processing of broccoli is labour intensive and as a result, the project will result in increased employment on both the growing and processing sides of the project,” Mr Qualischefski said.

Qualipac has 700 hectares of farming property in the Lockyer Valley, Eastern Darling Downs and Inglewood regions and employ more than 120 staff during peak season.

Key product lines include broccoli, onions, pumpkin, sweet corn, beetroot and green beans.

“The project will create a viable market for larger heads of Australian grown broccoli and cauliflower which is often out of spec for current markets. The project will further add value to a growers crop by reducing harvesting costs,” Mr Qualischefski said.

“... the project will result in increased employment on both the growing and processing sides of the project.”

“Up to 75% of the broccoli and cauliflower will be grown on Qualipac farms while the remainder will be sourced from elsewhere.”

The \$10 million Rural Economic Development Grants program provides for three funding rounds over a three-year period ending in 2021.

Expressions of interest for Round 2 of the Grants are now open - for more information visit www.qrida.qld.gov.au/redgrants or Freecall 1800 623 946.

QRIDA administers this scheme on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Cutting energy costs with QRIDA

Aquaculture producers from Childers, Steven and Lisa Volz, used a Sustainability Loan from QRIDA to install a 30kw solar panel system to offset more than \$20,000 from their annual power bill – money better spent on fish food! Learn more about their story by watching our video at www.qrida.qld.gov.au/news-and-events/client-stories



Steven and Lisa Volz with QRIDA's Wide Bay and Fraser Coast Regional Area Manager, Mark Barrett.

+ Regional update



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Sustainability Loans help with BMP

Sustainability Loans are purpose built for assisting cane growers with their Best Management Practice initiatives.

These loans can be used for machinery purchases or enhancements - QRIDA have approved a number of loans assisting with investment in GPS controlled traffic equipment and machinery designed to reduce chemical use when spraying or to optimise fertilizer use.

It has been very satisfying to work with clients who are not only passionate about growing cane but passionate about doing their bit in improving our catchments. If this is something you're interested in contact me to learn more.



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Disaster assistance still available

I've spent considerable time in recent months assisting producers, small business owners and not for profit groups in the Townsville and Burdekin districts understand and apply for the disaster schemes QRIDA administers. It's timely to remind those directly impacted that the Special Disaster Assistance Grant application deadline is 29 November 2019.

Exceptional Disaster Assistance Loans of up to \$1 million are also available for eligible primary producers and businesses in the defined disaster areas that have sustained exceptional damage as a direct result of the Monsoon Trough disaster. Full details re available on QRIDA's website.



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Mixed past six months for Darling Downs

Following good rainfall in my region in March and April, I had many enquires about how First Start Loans can help the next generation take over through property purchase. Most applicants acknowledged it needed to keep raining if they were to have any real opportunity at a reasonable 2019 winter crop. Unfortunately, this did not eventuate and the winter cropping program across the Downs has been poor.

On the back of this continued dry spell, there's been more enquiry for Sustainability Loans to invest in capital expenditure measures to try and drought proof operations - if this is something you'd like to look into, give me a call.



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Put your succession plans in place

Enquiry for First Start and Sustainability Loans has been consistently strong in my region, particularly in relation to partnership rationalisation or succession planning.

Established enterprises that are in the process of staged succession have seen the benefits of QRIDA's concessional loans. Producers throughout my region have welcomed the opportunity to access these loans and with interest rates as low as 2.40% in recent months.

Now is a great time to progress your plans - I can meet you on farm to provide you with more information and talk you through the application process so call me to make an appointment.



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Out and about meeting producers in Burnett

I've attended some very successful industry field days and expos recently. These events have not only informed producers but motivated them to look at their current operations and think about how a range of integrated products and services can improve their bottom line.

Both First Start and Sustainability Loans can assist you with capital projects during this dry weather. Many producers are seeking alternate energy generation or the installation of energy efficient plant and equipment and water infrastructure. Efficiency planning can take some time and requires a lot of communication with suppliers and other producers.



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Low interest loans help with exclusion fencing

Things are looking dry in the Central West and Highlands area. Like a large majority of the state, producers are holding out for rain to boost crops and pastures through the remaining Winter season.

Producers out west continue to face the prevalence of wild dogs and are encouraged to seek a Sustainability Loan to help them fund an exclusion fence which can be used in conjunction with other government funding available.

If this is something you're looking into, contact me to see how QRIDA can help you with your plans.



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Succession, drought preparedness in SW

Many farming families in the region have made great progress in developing their succession plans. Often, a key step in the process is discussing their scenarios with me to identify where QRIDA's First Start Loan may assist to implement the plan. Property sales in the region have been strong, with considerable interest seen for well grassed blocks offering immediate stocking opportunities.

The region has also seen renewed interest in building drought preparedness infrastructure. For some businesses this has been investing in commodity storage (sheds, silos, etc.). For others, it has been redesign and upgrades to stock watering systems.



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Start your property projects with QRIDA

Despite the dry season we are experiencing in the region, the number of enquiries about how QRIDA can help continues.

These opportunities include buying into the family farm or business, developing and growing an existing primary production enterprise, building up livestock numbers and buying a first property. Our First Start and Sustainability Loans are great options for getting these projects started.

If you're thinking about any of the above, please give me a call to arrange a time for us to have a chat and get the ball rolling on your plans.



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Low rates make your plans more affordable

Hello SEQ! I've been getting out and about in my region, which includes the councils of the Scenic Rim, Moreton, Somerset, Moreton Bay, Redlands, Logan, Ipswich, Gold Coast and Brisbane, to discuss how our range of programs can assist with your primary production projects.

A key benefit of our First Start and Sustainability Loans are their low interest rates which are the lowest they've been in a very long time. Our rates are subject to change each month - you can see the current low rates on our website.

With such low rates, why not call me to see if we can assist. Let's make your enterprise and the South East even greater.

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