



RFCS future focus

April 2007 no. 12

National workshop for executive officers 21-23 March

A national workshop for executive officers was recently held in Canberra.

The workshop gave executive officers an opportunity to exchange information and methods of managing rural financial counselling services, to discuss policies and priority issues, and to network with their colleagues from around the country.

Sessions included:

- presentations by each executive officer about their organisation
- discussions about rural financial counsellor remuneration packages, and staff development and human resource management
- an explanation and discussion of the ARC database reports available to service providers, state governments and state advisory committees
- reporting templates for budgets, quarterly reports and financial statements
- templates for communications plans
- information about training and outreach activities, and
- information about the statement of compliance.

There was also a session on corporate governance for executive officers, which helped them understand their role in their organisation and how that role relates to the board and to rural financial counsellors.

Executive officers undertook to share policies they have developed and to work with the Office of Rural Financial Counselling to resolve issues with inconsistent data reporting.

Overall, executive officers said they found that the workshop was a good networking opportunity and that they had gained knowledge that would help them manage their organisations better. All attendees are keen to hold another similar event later in the year.

Outreach activities in Queensland and Tasmania

Senior executives of the Rural Policy and Innovation Division in DAFF, together with members of state advisory committees, will undertake outreach activities for the RFCS Program in all states this year.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon Sussan Ley MP, will do her best to attend these events following her commitment in October last year to visit each service provider of the new program, on their invitation.

Outreach activities will be in the form of regional tours and will incorporate meetings with service providers, representatives from rural industry organisations, banking and financial institutions, local landholders and local business people.

On 13-14 March, Ms Ley, all members of the Queensland RFCS Advisory Committee, Glenda Kidman (Manager, Office of Rural Financial Counselling) and Edna Sharpe (Office of Rural Financial Counselling) visited RFCS Queensland - Central Southern Region in Longreach and RFCS Queensland - South Western Region in Charleville.

Ms Ley, all members of the Tasmania RFCS Advisory Committee, Ross Dalton (General Manager, Farm Help and Financial Counselling, DAFF) and Mitchell Grove (Office of Rural Financial Counselling) undertook an outreach tour to Launceston, Tasmania, on 16 April.

These outreach events have been valuable for all involved to hear first-hand about the local issues affecting these services.

Thank you to the executive officers of these service providers for their help and cooperation in arranging these visits.

More outreach activities are planned for the coming months.

Benchmarking training for rural financial counsellors

At the National Workshop for Rural Financial Counsellors in November 2006, several rural financial counsellors asked about training in benchmarking. There are several programs and tools available that may help counsellors and their clients benchmark for productivity.

Producers can benefit by using performance data, such as that provided for the beef cattle industry (through Breedplan: visit breedplan.une.edu.au/bplan.htm) and the lamb industry (through Lambplan: visit www.sheepgenetics.org.au/lambplan/). Many producers have experienced significant financial gains using these databases.

For calculating the cost of production, Meat and Livestock Australia provides two calculators, one for beef and one for lamb. Visit www.mla.com.au/TopicHierarchy/InformationCentre/default.htm and look for the links to the calculators on the right-hand side of the page.

Rural financial counsellors who don't have a background in agriculture may find courses within the NSW Government's PROfarm program helpful to develop skills (www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/profarm).

From the ARC helpdesk

Congratulations to the counsellors who sent their statistics in by the due date - well done! The month of March had the highest rate of compliance since the new program began - please keep up the good work.

Please note: The ARC helpdesk phone number has not changed. To contact the helpdesk, phone 02 6272 3549 or email rfcs@daff.gov.au The main helpdesk contact person is now Michelle Macaulay and you can phone her on this number. Dean Curley will assist whenever Michelle is not available.

We have had a few calls about backing up ARC data. **Remember:** Backing up your data is essential. You should back up to an external source, eg a CD or an external hard drive, which should then be locked away securely. If you don't have a CD burner on your computer or an external hard drive, you can use a USB drive but please note that these drives are delicate and easily lost and should not be used for long-term storage. The ARC back-up files can be copied like any other file in Windows.

We will be releasing a new patch for ARC in the next few weeks. We will email the details to executive officers, who will then send out the information to rural financial counsellors and administrative staff.

NEWS

Mensline Australia—Mensline Australia delivers an Australia-wide 24-hour telephone service offering family relationship counselling, information and referrals for the cost of a local call. Phone 1300 789 978 or visit www.menslineaus.org.au

Feed Grain Availability—The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has launched a [Feed Grain Availability](#) webpage that hosts links to industry, state and federal government web resources dealing with feed grain supply issues during the drought. The webpage also draws together reports on domestic grain stocks from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and ABARE, assessment and regulation information from Biosecurity Australia and AQIS on the importation and processing of feed grain from overseas, and up-to-date grain prices.

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Contact us:

Website: www.rfcs.gov.au

Email: rfcs@daff.gov.au

Address:

Office of Rural Financial Counselling
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601