



# 2025 National Drought Forum

8-9 September 2025 | Gawler, South Australia



## Speaker biographies

Monday 8 September

### Day 1: Drought in context

#### Open and housekeeping

#### **Adam Fennessy, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (MC)**

Adam Fennessy PSM has over 25 years of public sector experience at state and federal levels. His former roles have included Secretary of the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Secretary of the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning, the Victorian Public Sector Commissioner and Dean & CEO of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). Adam has worked in the private sector as a partner with global advisory firm Ernst & Young.

Adam is an IPAA National Fellow and previously served on the board of IPAA Victoria. In 2018, he received a Public Service Medal (PSM) for leadership in the Victorian public sector.

#### **National Farmers' Federation welcome**

#### **David Jochinke, President, National Farmers' Federation**

David Jochinke, commonly referred to as 'DJ', is a third-generation dryland mixed farmer. DJ operates his family's property in the Wimmera, Victoria, producing various broadacre crops and finishing prime lambs.

He has been heavily involved at all levels of farmer advocacy since finishing his Diploma of Applied Science (Ag Services) at Longerenong College. DJ was elected as President of the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) in October 2023 after serving as vice president and director for numerous years.

DJ is the immediate past president of the Victorian Farmers Federation, a board member of Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water and current chair of Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism.

He is a past recipient of a Nuffield Australia Scholarship and Australian Rural Leadership Program and is an active contributor to his local community. DJ holds membership of numerous committees, including Wimmera Machinery Field Days, the Wallup Ag Group, the Northern Wimmera CFA Brigade, Longerenong College, Telstra Victoria Rural Advisory Committee and Birchip Cropping Group.

## **Bureau of Meteorology update**

### **Andrew Jones, General Manager of Agriculture and Water, Bureau of Meteorology**

Andrew stewards the agriculture and water teams in creating impact and value for sectoral customers and stakeholders, drawing on relationships that foster a broader and deeper capacity to understand and meet customer needs.

Andrew also serves Australia and the Indo-Pacific region in his capacity as the General Manager of International Development at the Bureau. As part of achieving Australia's foreign policy objectives, Andrew works with partner Met Services in strengthening capability and capacity in everything from observational infrastructure to evidence-based decision-making and action.

These roles build on 20 years of experience leading diverse, multidisciplinary teams in the provision of strategic information, project implementation and policy development across a wide range of sectors, including climate change, oceans science, maritime governance, natural disasters, water and sanitation and energy systems.

## **Our current drought context**

### **Mel Brown, First Assistant Secretary, Farm Resilience Division, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

Mel works alongside government, non-government and industry stakeholders to provide strategic policy advice and support that helps build resilience in Australian agricultural communities – including drought resilience.

This role includes overseeing the development of drought policy and the administration of the \$400 m Future Drought Fund, through innovation and adoption. Mel was born and bred on a cattle and sheep farm in the Snowy Mountains. She left school and went straight into working on the family farm, before joining the Australian Public Service (APS). Her career has spanned across many portfolios, including environment, biosecurity, emergency response, international relations, agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Mel has over 31 years' experience in the APS and is passionate about true stakeholder engagement and building strong and trusted relationships.

## **Reflecting on our drought framework (Day 1) and Strengthening mental wellbeing and preventing suicides through drought (Day 2)**

### **Tanya Lehmann, Facilitator, Leadership, Change and Resilience Consultant**

Born and raised on a sheep farm in Wagin WA, and living in the Riverland SA since 1998, Tanya Lehmann is deeply rooted in the rhythms, challenges and spirit of rural Australia. She's spent her life walking alongside people and communities navigating big questions – of health, of change, of identity and of what matters most.

Now a sought-after facilitator and leadership coach, Tanya brings humour, a deep sense of purpose, and enough energy to power a small town to every room she enters. Whether developing regional leaders, health executives or national policy reformers, her magic lies in helping people pause, connect and find clarity amidst complexity.

From running hospitals to shaping national rural health policy and building community capacity, Tanya has spent 3 decades in the business of adaptive change. Through her consultancy, Aurora Meliora, she designs and leads bespoke processes that elevate the human spirit and support real-world progress.

A proud associate of the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, Tanya also happens to be a sucker for river swims, homemade pottery, good books and messy art projects.

At heart, Tanya believes that leadership starts with listening, and that the most powerful transformations begin with authentic human connection.

## Tuesday 9 September

### Day 2: Drought engagement

#### Panel: Farming futures and the challenge of transition

##### **Chris Young, General Manager, Trade and Economics, National Farmers' Federation**

Christopher Young (Chris) joined the NFF in February 2022 and is the General Manager, Trade and Economics. In this role he leads the organisation in policy areas including trade, taxation, investment and supply chain competition.

He is a member of numerous national and international bodies, including the ACCC Agricultural Consultative Committee, Anti-Dumping Commission International Trade Remedies Forum (Industry) and the World Farmers' Organisation Trade Policy Committee.

Prior to joining the NFF, Chris worked for Rural Funds Management, a leading Australian agricultural investment firm. Before this he spent time working for MLA.

He holds qualifications in commerce and international relations from the Australian National University. Chris is also a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (GAICD).

##### **Isobel Knight, Proagitive Founder, Owner and Succession Planner**

Isobel is a succession planning specialist who co-founded Proagitive in 2004; a business which combines the analysis of family psychology and relationship dynamics with business analysis and viability and has assisted over 400 Australian families in their quest to find tailored, bespoke outcomes to suit their people and business. Isobel is a mother of 3 and grandmother of 5, has degrees in business law and psychology, is a trained counsellor and mediator. This remarkable level of training and experience sets Isobel apart from anyone else in the field of succession planning.

Isobel was awarded the 2013 NSW–ACT Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation (RIRDC) Rural Women's Award and national runner-up. Isobel's association with family farm businesses stems back to her family's farm near Junee and now Loomberah NSW where she runs a cattle-trading enterprise. Being part of 2 family farms and experiencing firsthand the challenges of planning for the future has been the catalyst for Isobel's interest in farm succession planning.

Isobel's passion is to ensure that the next generation has an opportunity to participate in agriculture and believes a lack of succession planning is costing farming families, rural communities and

agriculture dearly. Isobel has worked closely with hundreds of individual farming families and has provided mentorship to the entire Proagitive team.

Isobel has completed the Introduction to Collaborative Practice Courses for wills and estates, which has always been a keen interest of Isobel's. She has presented to many industry and government bodies and stakeholders, including Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF), NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (NSW DPI), Department of Primary Industries, Queensland (DAF QLD), Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS), NSW Law Society, Agri-banking institutions and many more.

### **Chris Warrick, Board Chair, Rural Financial Counselling Service Victoria West**

Chris is the Chair of Finwell Support, which delivers the RFCS program for the western half of Victoria.

In his day job as Director of Primary Business, Chris coordinates the GRDC's National Grain Storage Extension Team.

He is passionate about helping people make informed decisions. Chris doesn't claim to be right; his aim is to offer options to help progress.

With a Bachelor of Business in Farm Management, Chris started his career as a research officer with the Kondinin Group before moving into management consulting.

Operating under his primary business, Chris now focuses on facilitated learning and specialises in grain storage management.

### **Peta Ward, National General Manager, Westpac Regional & Agribusiness**

Peta is passionate and energetic and holds the core values of our customers and regional, rural, and remote Australia at the heart of everything she does.

Peta is a highly respected leader in agribusiness banking, with nearly 20 years of industry experience and a strong commitment to supporting the success of individuals, businesses, and communities—particularly in regional and rural Australia.

For more than 17 years, Peta has been an integral part of Westpac Agribusiness, bringing deep industry knowledge, strategic insight, and a passion for customer-focused solutions. She holds a Bachelor of Agricultural Science and is known for her strong leadership and collaborative approach.

Outside of work, Peta has a genuine interest in running her family farms, with strong internal and external networks, built through extensive stakeholder engagement, volunteer activities and community and professional representation at local and government levels. Peta was the treasurer of the Rural Press Club in QLD for a 3-year term and served 2 years on the Australia China Business Council QLD Food and Agribusiness Working Group.

Peta has been at the forefront of Westpac's response to natural disasters, including drought and flood events, where she has provided steady leadership and guidance to customers and the Westpac staff, navigating complex and uncertain circumstances. She is deeply motivated by the impact she can make through her role—advocating for rural clients, championing sustainable growth, and helping regional businesses thrive.

### **John Howard, Chief Executive Officer, Regional Investment Corporation**

The Regional Investment Corporation (RIC) is the Australian Government's provider of low-interest loans for farm businesses and farm-related small businesses. RIC's investment in agriculture improves farm business cash flow and operating position and has flow-on benefits to the rural and regional communities, economies and agricultural supply chains that depend on agriculture.

Prior to the RIC, John worked in financial investment markets and financial restructuring as a senior leader for a fund manager and an alternate capital provider both investing in the agriculture sector, responsible for strategy and portfolio development, integrating new assets into operations, and driving capital development deployment. He has worked across the agricultural supply chain, from primary production (family and corporate farming) to commodity marketing, trading, manufacturing and food marketing.

### **Panel: Drought as a catalyst for change**

#### **Ashley Herbert, Member, Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee**

Ashley is from southwest Western Australia. Ashley is a successful self-employed farm management consultant. He has over 30 years' experience providing whole farm advice on agricultural sustainability. He is the director and board member of the Rural Business Development Corporation, an independent statutory authority of the WA Government to administer schemes for the rural sector.

#### **Dr Jared Greenville, Executive Director, ABARES**

Jared Greenville was appointed Executive Director of ABARES in 2020.

In this role he leads a comprehensive program of economic analysis and scientific research across Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry. ABARES work underpins the development of Australian Government policy as well as decision-making from the farm gate to national industries and international markets.

Jared currently represents Australia at OECD forums on sustainable agricultural production, global food security and climate policy.

Prior to joining ABARES, Jared held a senior role at the OECD focusing on agri-food trade policy, global value chains in agriculture, and food security and risk (Southeast Asia) along with monitoring and evaluating.

He has worked for the Productivity Commission, providing high level advice to the Australian Government on bilateral and regional trade agreements, domestic drought support policy, infrastructure policy and the challenges posed by an ageing population.

More recently, Jared led the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Policy Group as acting deputy secretary, overseeing research and the development of policies and programs to support agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries toward their goal of being a \$100 billion sector by 2030.

Jared holds a PhD in agricultural and natural resource economics from the University of Sydney.

### **Tas (Ian) Loane, Drought Resilience Coordinator, TasFarmers**

Tas is an agricultural professional committed to supporting Tasmania's farming communities. His background is in farm and business management, primarily within the livestock sector, where he specialises in large-scale, high-input operations focused on aligning stocking rates with land carrying capacity. Before working with TasFarmers, Tas contributed to the soil carbon sector in project management, working with producers on the principles of the Emissions Reduction Fund Soil Carbon Projects at a national level.

Tas currently serves as the Drought Resilience Coordinator for King Island with TasFarmers. He works closely with producers to navigate seasonal challenges and build long-term resilience to ongoing climate variation. He collaborates with stakeholders, including the Tas Farm Innovation Hub, Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE) and related agencies, connecting farmers with essential resources and support services. His practical, community-focused approach is grounded in years of experience working directly with producers and managers during difficult seasons.

### **Dr Stephen Lee, Director, SA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub**

The South Australian Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub co-designs and delivers collaborative programs focused on building resilience to and preparedness for drought and climate change across South Australia's primary industries.

Stephen has extensive experience in leading agricultural research, adoption, and commercialisation programs with primary expertise in optimising livestock enterprise productivity and profitability in variable climates. Prior to joining the Hub, he was manager of the South Australian Sheep and Beef Industry Blueprint where he led the development and implementation of a value chain wide growth strategy. Stephen is a non-executive director of MLA.

### **Carissa Buckland, Director, Corporate Affairs and Marketing, Nutrien Ag Solutions**

Nutrien Ag Solutions, is a global agribusiness working with farmers across the supply chain in more than 14 countries. She has built her career at the crossroads of government, industry, and community, with experience as a ministerial adviser in state and federal governments and in corporate affairs roles across global mining and agricultural companies, including Rio Tinto, South 32, Bayer and Monsanto.

Carissa is motivated by the power of storytelling to bring industries and communities closer together. With a passion for agriculture and its cornerstone role in strong and prosperous economies, Carissa brings deep experience in stakeholder engagement and strategic communications to her role at Nutrien, where she works to help connect farmers, industry leaders and government in shaping the future of the sector.

### **Workshop: The pathway out of drought**

#### **Lucinda Corrigan, Member, Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee**

Lucinda is from south-east New South Wales. Lucinda is Director of Rennylea Pastoral Company, which develops Angus genetics. She is the former chair and co-founder of Farmers for Climate Action, established to influence Australia to adopt strong economy-wide climate policies and realise a

prosperous and sustainable future. Additionally, Lucinda has a strong background as a former director and member of many agricultural boards, including MLA and the NSW Primary Industries Minister's Advisory Council.

## **Panel: Foundations of community resilience**

### **Professor Jacki Schirmer, Director of the Centre for Environmental Governance, University of Canberra**

Jacki leads the WellRes Unit, a team of researchers examining wellbeing and resilience in regional Australia. Since 2013, her team have conducted the Regional Wellbeing Survey, an annual survey examining the views of 15,000 rural, regional and urban Australians about the liveability and resilience of their community, and their own wellbeing and resilience. It covers topics ranging from understanding how to support carers living in the bush, to identifying the impacts of poor internet connectivity, and understanding how events such as droughts, floods and environmental policy change affect rural communities – and how communities can build and maintain resilience. Jacki's personal research in recent years has focused on understanding wellbeing, resilience and recovery amongst communities experiencing cumulative extreme weather events and disasters, including drought, examining how to support climate change adaptation and resilience, and understanding the social acceptability and impacts for rural communities of environmental policy and practice.

### **Ian Hamm, Chair, Future Drought Fund First Nations Advisory Group**

A Yorta Yorta man, Ian has extensive government and community sector experience, particularly at executive and governance levels. Ian has overseen major policy and strategic reforms for government and community organisations. He works with people from a vast array of backgrounds, managing complex and sensitive relationships to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Ian was Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a major Aboriginal community organisation from January to August 2018.

Ian chairs, and is a member of, a number of boards, including the Indigenous Land & Sea Corporation, the Community Broadcast Foundation, the First Nations Foundation, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, the Healing Foundation, Community First Development and Holmesglen TAFE. He is also devoting himself to improving the representation of Aboriginal people on boards and other high-level governance, through strategic action, advocacy and mentoring.

### **Jennifer Lynch, Chief Executive Officer/Director of Regional Development, Regional Development Australia**

Jennifer Lynch is an accomplished executive with more than 20 years' experience leading strategic planning and sustainable economic growth across regional communities. She has worked extensively with public and private organisations, both in Australia and internationally, to build capacity, strengthen ecosystems, and prepare industries for future change.

Before joining RDABGLAP, Jennifer was an Associate Director at Deloitte Australia, delivering projects in AgTech, sustainability, climate adaptation, and supply chain transformation across the AgriFood, Defence, and Utilities sectors. She has also served as CEO of the McLaren Grape Wine & Tourism Association, where she reshaped regional strategy and drove significant growth in international brand awareness and regional value.

Jennifer co-led the creation of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia, the nation's first sustainability program for grape growers and producers. Recognised among South Australia's 40 Under 40 and as a Deloitte Inspiring Women leader, she is dedicated to strengthening South Australia's regions for long-term success.

## **Panel: Drought in a changing climate**

### **Brent Finlay, Chair, Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee**

Brent is from eastern Queensland. He has more than 40 years' experience in agriculture, and 13 years in agricultural representation, including as President of AgForce and President of the NFF. He is also current Chair of the FDF Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs Advisory Committee. Brent runs a sheep and cattle property 'Cooinda' in the Traprock region of Southeast Queensland. Brent is also the Managing Director of Finlay Agricultural Industries, which provides specialist strategic advice to both existing and emerging enterprises across the agricultural sector. His business interests include developing the next generation of agricultural products and travelling to developing countries.

Brent was elected to the board of the World Farmers' Organisation based in Rome, where he represented the Oceania region. Key issues negotiated while Brent was in these roles include trade agreements with China, Japan and Korea; and the Transpacific Partnership; drought packages; backpacker tax and responses to natural disasters. Recently Brent has been the independent chair of the Emu Swamp Dam Detailed Business Case, now known as Granite Belt Water, which proposes the development of an irrigation project for the Granite Belt's high-value horticulture.

### **Brett Hosking, President, Victorian Farmers Federation**

Brett farms at Quambatook in Victoria's Mallee region alongside his wife, Jane, and their 4 daughters where they produce grains, oilseeds and pulses as well as running merino ewes and a small herd of beef cattle. Brett is an experienced and respected agricultural leader and advocate having represented farmers at local, state and national level for many years. He is a strategic thinker and has been at the forefront of leading industry. Brett has participated in overseas trade missions alongside federal ministers to work with new and existing markets and has led growers through geopolitical trade disruptions and climate related impacts to farming business including the development of new markets for grain and stronger resilience among growers.

With more than 13 years' experience as a company director and chair, Brett is widely respected for his integrity, emotional intelligence, and professional leadership. Brett currently serves as President of the Victorian Farmers Federation, as well as being Deputy Chair of the Birchip Cropping Group.

### **Andrea Tschirner, South Australia Sustainable Ag Facilitator, SA Arid Lands Landscape Board**

With 20 years of experience in working and living across Australia's Rangelands, Andrea has extensive ecological knowledge of semi-arid systems. Andrea is passionate about connecting land management practitioners with science – which has led her to be an advocate and facilitator in the delivery of land management resources and extension to remote and regional areas.

Her background in native pasture science and keen interest in soil health in low rainfall regions, supports her role in working with grazing land management. Andrea currently works as a Sustainable

Agriculture Facilitator with the SA Arid Lands Landscape Board, supporting the pastoral community across the north of South Australia – a region covering more than 500,000 square kilometres.

### **Josh Gilbert, Member of the Future Drought Fund Consultative Committee, Indigenous Consultant, Agriculturist and Innovator**

Joshua is a Worimi man with extensive experience in Indigenous affairs, environmental sectors, and sustainable agriculture, advocating for Indigenous identity and truth-telling. Pursuing a PhD on Indigenous modernity through agriculture at Charles Sturt University with support from the Food Agility CRC, he has just launched a book entitled *Australia's Agricultural Identity: An Aboriginal Yarn*.

Josh is recognised internationally for his work, announced in the inaugural '50 Next: People Shaping the Future of Gastronomy' cohort. He is the Assistant Director for the UTS Centre for Indigenous People and Work. He serves on the Future Drought Fund's Consultative Committee, the board for Indigenous Business Australia, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, and the Australian Conservation Foundation, and is the Aboriginal Co-Chair of Reconciliation NSW. Josh is also an advisor for the CSIRO's Agriculture and Food Advisory Group and the First Nations Trade and Investment Advisory Group.

### **Peter Donaghy, General Manager, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries**

Peter's professional journey spans almost 30 years, integrating skills in economic analysis, bioeconomic modelling, policy development and administrative law with a specific focus on the resource and agricultural sectors. Peter is an experienced leader of technical, legal, administrative, and academic teams fostering a culture of innovation, impactful delivery, and continuous improvement.

An Australia Day Medal highlighted Peter's substantial contributions to Queensland agriculture, reflecting his proficiency in applied economics. As a qualified economist, scientist, and board director (GAICD), Peter has successfully applied his expertise to roles with the Queensland Government, Australian Universities, not for profit sectors and as a private consultant.

An excellent communicator, Peter has written and co-authored numerous publications, presented at national and international conferences and acted as government spokesperson for various committees, external engagement activities and in negotiating large scale mining and energy projects.

#### **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the National Farmers' Federation would like to acknowledge that the 2025 National Drought Forum is being held on Kurna Country. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of this land, their culture, their language and Elders both past and present. We recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries, and forestry industries.

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## 2025 National Drought Forum

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