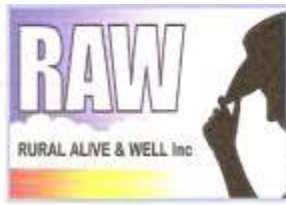


Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper Submission - IP646
Rural Alive & Well Inc
Submitted 22 April 2014



Rural Alive and Well Inc. (RAW) is concerned that the lack of consideration for the Human Factor in the Issues Paper would mean that one of the more important and limiting factors is being ignored.

This short submission we hope will go some way to outlining how the RAW Model can help with the Human Factor that will limit the success of some of the initiatives proposed.

The RAW model can be part of the solution jigsaw. Which when put together with the other pieces can provide the solution for agricultural competitiveness and profitability.

RAW is a not for profit organisation delivering suicide prevention and community wellbeing services in Tasmania and was established in 2009 to address the high suicide rate of men, in rural and remote Tasmania. The suicide rate in Tasmania was the second highest in the nation after the Northern Territory and greater than the number of road deaths recorded in Tasmania. The State was also experiencing one of the worst/longest droughts.

RAW is rural based and funded through a mix of Federal and State government grants to provide support in the areas of Central Highlands, Southern Midlands, East Coast, and to work with forest workers, their families and associated businesses who have been impacted by changes within the forest industry. This support service to those impacted by forestry changes is delivered state-wide.

The vision of RAW is to focus on facilitating service delivery to ensure early intervention policies and programs that are effective and timely in reducing the incidence of suicide and promoting help seeking avenues for individuals, families and communities experiencing stress, mental health and community welfare issues. These interventions and supports will lead to strong robust and resilient communities, families and individuals. RAW gives one on one support and follow up to help clients “tough it out” via outreach workers who cold call on isolated men and their families during times of trauma and stress. RAW does not provide clinical services but connects clients with existing appropriate service providers. The client is supported by the outreach worker until they have support networks in place to ensure the clients safety.

The White Paper Overview identifies the critical issues are for Agricultural competitiveness however it ignores the serious issues of the “Human Factor”. People have to do all these things and need to be functioning at optimum levels to achieve the intended outcomes. Often these responses are needed on the back of trauma to individuals, families, their business, and communities’ resultant from natural disaster including fire flood or drought as well as business difficulties due to fluctuations in commodity prices and other external events. All of which are beyond individuals control. This trauma has ongoing effects which take years to recover from on personal and business levels only to find they are repeating and individuals and communities reel from event one to the next.

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The Government initiatives in place will certainly go towards strengthening the rural economy and the “overarching objective of assisting the farm sector to become more competitive, profitable and sustainable.” is commendable. However people have to do these things and they do need support structures to achieve the desired outcomes.

It should be noted that research shows that \$1.00 spent on proactive programs returns \$9.00 in year one and up to \$48.00 in years 3 to 5 of the program.

The achievements of individuals, their businesses, and the rural community are the scope of the implementation of the RAW model when things are difficult. RAW has noticed that in difficult times it becomes obvious that rural and isolated business communities and individuals have little knowledge of government programs or assistance that may be relevant to them. RAW provides a conduit to facilitate the connection between the client and the service. In fact RAW is instrumental in identifying opportunities to develop partnerships with other agencies and service providers to facilitate multi-level services to communities and identifying service gaps.

RAW also aims to promote its Model to other rural communities across the country where high levels of suicide and mental health issues are identified, as well as working with all tiers of government.

This submission focuses on points 2 and 5 of the scope of the White Paper.

In doing this RAW poses 3 questions

1. *Why are our rural men killing themselves*
2. *Why does caring for the land and environment give them no future*
3. *Why when they generate up to 16% of GDP and one in five jobs are we not supporting them (Tasmanian figures)*

The Human face of competition and profitability

Agriculture is expanding in more regional and isolated areas as population grows and cities and communities expand and the global need for food and fibre production increases.

The contribution of Agriculture to the community identity and wealth of Australia is well documented. Combined with land management of 53% of the land mass of Australia indicates how important it is to have people “out there” reflecting the strategic importance of land management in remote areas.

The biggest regional employer is small business apart from mining. Boosting productivity and generating jobs is the province of regional communities and the business there. This is

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governed by the individuals who generate this (the Human factor). This naturally leads to Issue 2.

Issue 2: Farmer decisions for improving farm gate returns

Farmers and farm business and their communities need to be functioning at high capacity to achieve the outcomes necessary for competitiveness profitability and resilience in agriculture.

This can only occur when people are connected, relaxed and positive and given the circumstances they face in the regular extreme conditions this is difficult. (The causative factors can be environmental, commodity based; trade based and out of their control). Harnessing the cooperation and good will of key leaders in the community, local community services, and support groups to respond to adversity and relevant issues and outlines the human factor.

Suicide rate and business failure is a huge cost to the community and the social fabric of rural and isolated regions. Poor decision making as a result of stress challenges makes survival difficult for small business in times of drought, financial stress and commodity downturn. This results in contracting regional communities and numbers of small business, isolating those who are left.

The Tasmanian experience suggests that the RAW outreach model in difficult times can help individuals, families, business and communities to be more resilient and adjust to issues by supporting them to overcome adversity and be ready for the next challenge.

The RAW model strengthens individuals, families and social networks to adjust to adversity and change.

The RAW model connects them with existing services, both government and private, which are appropriate and mentors them through the process so they can remain resilient functioning contributing community members.

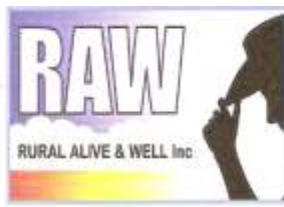
Risk management is OK when the individual is OK as is the community OK

Responses to the Questions for consideration for issue 2

The big issue for Farmers is they want to be able to look after themselves and their families as well as their business which includes their employees. Profit is a big driver here and the report has already outlined government initiatives for this for which we commend you.

The Human factor is also critical when times are tough. This has not been commented on in the White Paper.

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The RAW outreach model provides support to individuals businesses and communities in difficult, stressful circumstances. In fact during drought the implementation of the RAW model could be one of the measures that are effective in ensuring individual and community resilience.

The suicide rate rises during these times and places extreme stress on families and business in isolated, rural and regional jurisdictions. The RAW Model approach can be used to ameliorate this.

Response to questions for consideration for Issue 5

Population decline in Rural and remote areas mean it is more difficult to find good employees or even any employee at all. The lack of basic services like doctor, school, police and even the local shop /newsagency that are numbers driven makes employees move away to more suitable family friendly towns.

This puts businesses under productivity pressure as well as the business owner. Long working hours do little for good decision making over time. As well as stress and pressure to get the job done the impact of the Human factor becomes obvious.

Jobs growth is critical and better linkages with Government service providers and a better understanding of what's out there to help us can be facilitated by the RAW Model.

Adaption to change is always a challenge for individuals and small business whatever that change may be. A high functioning resilient business in a similar community is more likely to succeed. The Human factor here can be focused on by using the RAW model to decrease the fear of change, fear of the new; and connecting communities with the relevant government services to help.

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