

Primary Interest

The Newsletter of the
ADVISORY BOARD OF AGRICULTURE
Governing Body of the Agricultural Bureau



Issue 1, December 2007

Water-wise veggie grower wins Peter Olsen Fellowship

A Gumeracha-based horticulturist, who is building an environmentally sustainable fresh vegetable enterprise through improved soil moisture monitoring techniques, has been awarded the 2007 Agricultural Bureau of South Australia Peter Olsen Fellowship for Young Farmers.

Steven Newman, 34, has been involved in his family's business, Hills Fresh, since 1995. As production manager, he is responsible for planning, growing and harvesting the company's three main crops – cauliflower, leeks and lettuces.

The award was announced at the State dinner of the Agricultural Bureau of SA held in Adelaide on October 23.

Mr Newman said his aim was to grow vegetables at an environmentally sustainable and consistently high-quality level, while staying profitable.

Moisture monitoring

"With the help of the fellowship, I will investigate the most suitable soil moisture monitoring equipment for the vegetables we are growing to get the best growth rate from the water we use," he said.

"I also plan to use cover crops such as sorghum or oats to improve soil condition and the soil's water holding capacity."

Mr Newman said he hoped to share the knowledge gained from his trial work with other growers to assist them



GROWING CONFIDENCE: Agricultural Bureau of SA State President Mark Dennis (left) with vegetable grower Steven Newman, Gumeracha, the recipient of this year's Peter Olsen Fellowship.

to maximise benefits while minimising water usage.

Agricultural Bureau of South Australia President Mark Dennis said Mr Newman epitomised the type of forward-thinking young farmer the industry needs to encourage to ensure the State has a viable primary production sector.

"Steven clearly demonstrated that he has a plan for his farming enterprise that is mindful of the need to maximise water use efficiency, which is the overriding issue for all primary producers at the moment, whether dryland farmers or irrigators," Mr Dennis said.

Grower groups

"His involvement in various grower improvement groups within industry also showed that he is very willing to share the knowledge he will gain from adopting new farming techniques."

The fellowship, which is jointly sponsored by the Agricultural Bureau of SA and Primary Industries & Resources South Australia (PIRSA), is named in memory of Eyre Peninsula farming identity and Agricultural Bureau member Peter Olsen, who, with wife Wendy were among the eight people killed in the Whyalla Airlines plane crash in 2000.

Mr Olsen had served on the Advisory Board of Agriculture, the Bureau's governing body, for three years before his death.

Open to people aged between 18 and 35 who have been farming for at least the past 12 months, the annual fellowship provides \$7000 to pay for courses, study tours or special projects that will enhance the skills of young South Australian farmers.

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Supported by

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Primary Industries and Resources SA

Sowing the seeds with Mark Dennis



Chairman, Advisory Board of Agriculture
President, Agricultural Bureau of South Australia

Welcome to the first edition of the ABA's new e-newsletter *Primary Interest*.

Through our new publication, we want to raise the profile of the Board and the Ag Bureau movement across the State.

Our aim is two-fold – to position ABA/Ag Bureau as a primary source of information and advice for primary producers in the State and continue to be an important and influential voice for rural South Australia in our dealings with the Government.

Those of us who have been involved in the Bureau movement for some years know the inherent value we receive from that involvement. And we need to spread the word. The ABA is in a privileged position as a body representing primary producers in SA. We meet regularly with the Agriculture Minister and provide informed advice about what is happening in rural communities and agricultural industries.

The Government respects the Ag Bureau's standing in the community as a representative body.

Local links

During the Premier's recent tour of drought-affected regions of the Eyre Peninsula, it was the Ag Bureau network his advisers called on to get a comprehensive picture of the current situation and what type of drought relief assistance was required. Without the branch system that is at the heart of the Ag Bureau, many of the links across the regions would be lost and our value as a first port of call to decision-makers such as the Premier and his Ministers would be lost.

It's important that we capitalise on our unique position to influence policy. There is certainly much greater potential for grassroots knowledge and ideas to filter up to the highest levels in government.

It's absolutely essential that the Ag Bureau movement be thriving and sustainable as we move into the 120th year of what is a very proud history.

Membership matters

First of all we need to encourage people to show their support for their local branch by joining. Most Ag Bureau annual membership fees are very low with \$27.50 of those fees going to the ABA to help with the cost of administration. But no matter how small the fees are, the services Ag Bureaux provide must be relevant if people are to be persuaded to join. Each of us, as committed members of an Ag Bureau, needs to look at what our branches do and how that might evolve to meet the changing times and the changing needs of the agriculture sector. While farmers these days can get business and agronomic information from an enormous range

of sources, including government and private consultants and the Internet, the localised knowledge of your neighbours really has no peer, and that is what the Ag Bureau can provide.

Today, the Bureau is one of the largest rural networks in the State whose role has expanded far beyond the notion of improving farming practices. At the ABA's last Board meeting, much of our time was spent discussing drought and the most appropriate response in terms of financial support and other areas such as mental health. Our discussions were about determining the issues that affect the viability of rural communities and advising the government on solutions.

The Bureau movement is about communication within regions, across regions, to government and the metropolitan community. It's about celebrating rural life, showcasing the achievements in agriculture and canvassing the challenges. I encourage you strongly to think about ways to enhance the value and relevance of your local Ag Bureau to encourage younger members to join. Think about what they may want rather than how they can fit into your 'tradition'. The right mix of the old and new will be the recipe for survival of this wonderful movement. Finally, it's important to publicise branch activities and achievements and *Primary Interest* will be an excellent forum for you to let others know what is happening.

Board Bis

October meeting

The Advisory Board of Agriculture met on 23 and 24 October. In addition, Chairman Mark Dennis and several Board members met with Agriculture Food and Fisheries Minister Rory McEwen on 22 October. Board members heard a presentation on the roles and responsibilities of financial institutions from a representative of the Banking and Financial Services

Ombudsman Office and received an update on Centrelink programs and packages for drought-affected primary producers. Lib Hylton Keele, Manager of Rural Affairs, PIRSA spoke on the SA Rural Leadership Program. Working groups met on 24 October.

ABA nominations

Nominations for ABA membership 2007/2008 are now with the Minister for Agriculture Food and Fisheries for final approval and appointment.

Communications

In late September, Tim Boord joined PIRSA's Communications and Marketing unit and will be assisting the ABA/Ag Bureau with communications and media support. Tim is keen to hear from Board and Bureau members so he can publicise stories from around the regions. Tim can be contacted on (08) 8226 0596, 0434 660 987 (mobile) or via email at boord.tim@saugov.sa.gov.au

Seeds pioneer honoured for service to industry

Well-known grain and legume seed producer David Verner of Korunye, near Mallala, has been awarded the Agricultural Bureau of SA's 2007 Services to Primary Production Award.

Mr Verner, 80, founded the crop seed processing plant DR & JM Verner in 1974, the first in SA to be accredited by the former SA Department of Agriculture for receiving and processing bulk seed.

Known as someone who has worked tirelessly behind the scenes on behalf of the farming community over the past 60 years, Mr Verner has played a major role in helping to develop and commercialise new seed varieties, including niche crops such as lentils and coriander.

Mallala Ag Bureau committee member Jim Franks, who nominated Mr Verner for the honour, said the seeds industry pioneer was a worthy recipient of the award.

Problem solver

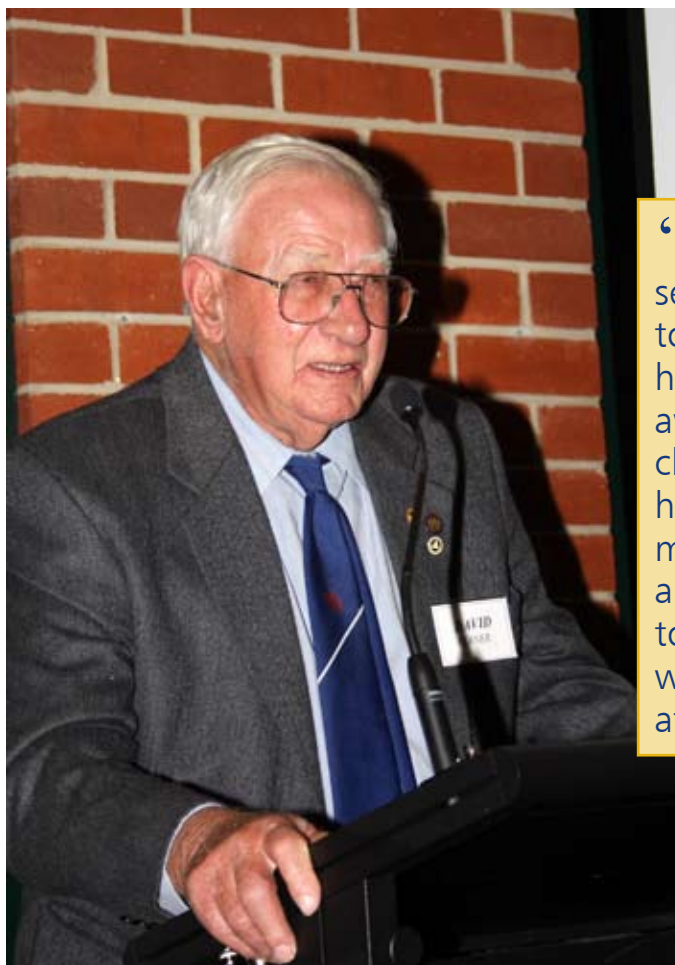
"Hard work is second nature to David and he never shies away from a challenge. He has a keen mind and is always seeking to improve whatever task is at hand, whether it involves livestock, machinery or people," Mr Franks said.

"He is a person who follows up ideas and tries to nut out answers to problems in the industry."

Mr Verner, a life member of the Ag Bureau of SA and a former Mallala branch president, has had a long association with farming improvement groups, industry organisations and lobbying bodies, including Australian Seed Federation, South Australian Farmers' Federation, Crop Science Society and Australian Field Crop Association.

Pea and grain exporters

In 1983 he helped form and chaired the Two Wells-based Pea & Grain Exporters Australia, which became the largest consigner of grain containers from South Australia. The business was sold to the former AusBulk company (now merged with ABB Grain) in 1998 and still provides a valuable outlet for exporting legumes.



'Hard work is second nature to David and he never shies away from a challenge. He has a keen mind and is always seeking to improve whatever task is at hand.'

LONG SERVICE: Seed producer David Verner, Korunye, spoke about the many changes he had experienced over more than 60 years in farming when he gave his acceptance speech as the 2007 Agricultural Bureau of SA Services to Primary Production Award winner.

The Verner family business now produces or processes varieties for companies and organisations such as ABB Grain, AWB Seeds, Nuseed, Australian Field Crop Association, South Australian Research and Development Corporation, University of Adelaide, Australian Grain Technologies and Seedmark. In 1992, it became the first seed business in Australia to qualify for Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) certification.

Seed quality standards

"Our aim has always been to introduce new varieties that would bring benefits to farmers. This has meant adopting strict quality standards and rejecting seed if it is not up to scratch," Mr Verner said.

"I've also tried to be up front with customers so they don't have any unrealistic expectations about the seed

they are getting. The fact that our repeat customers over the decades amount to thousands suggests we must have been providing products and a service that farmers have been happy with."

Agricultural Bureau of SA President Mark Dennis said Mr Verner's name was synonymous with seed variety development and processing in South Australia and nationally.

"David has been a very successful farmer and businessman over the years but he has always sought to put back just as much as he has got out of the industry. His pioneering efforts in promoting niche crops and new seed varieties have opened up cropping opportunities for many farmers across Australia," Mr Dennis said.

2007 Ag Bureau Dinner and Presentation Night

About 60 people attended the Ag Bureau's annual state dinner and awards presentation night on 23 October, which was again held at Lirra Lirra Bar and Café (Waite campus). In addition to announcing the major



Brian and Mary Vickers, Rosslyn Park. Brian is a former member of the ABA and the Lenswood/Forest Range Ag Bureau.



Michael Noble, Cleve, was awarded the 2007 Lois Harris Scholarship as the student with the highest 2006 TER score who entered the Bachelor of Agriculture at University of Adelaide.



Ag Bureau of SA President Mark Dennis (right) with Services to Primary Production Award nominee Jim Martin of the Parawa Ag Bureau.

award winners Steven Newman (Gumeracha) and David Verner (Korunye), the other nominees for the Services to Primary Production Award, Lindsay Dowley (Loxton) and Jim Martin (Parawa), were recognised on the night with framed certificates, and Lois Harris Scholarship winner Michael Noble (Cleve), was presented with the second instalment of his scholarship funds as the student with the highest 2006



South Australian Farmers' Federation (SAFF) Policy Manager Deane Crabb, ABA Fleurieu/Murray Plains representative Vic Walter, Victor Harbor and Richard Verner, Korunye.



ABA member Dr Tony Rathjen (University of Adelaide School of Agriculture & Wine) with 2006 Peter Olsen Fellowship winner Brendon Johns and wife Denise Johns, Port Pirie.



Member for Schubert Ivan Venning with former ABA member Mark Greenfield and wife Sharon.



ABA Barossa Valley representative Trevor Wilksch, Cockatoo Valley with Rob and Jan Smyth, Cooke Plains.

Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) score to undertake studies for the Bachelor of Agriculture degree at the University of Adelaide.

During the dinner, 2006 Peter Olsen fellow Brendon Johns presented research findings from satellite yield mapping work on his Port Pirie grain growing property.



Mark Dennis with Services to Primary Production Award nominee Lindsay Dowley of the Loxton Irrigation Ag Bureau.



ABA Murraylands representative Peter Rose, Karoonda, former ABA member Andrew Hansen and ABA Upper South East representative Janette Ridgway, Wolseley.

Minister hears ABA's drought response priorities

Before the last ABA meeting in October, Chair Mark Dennis, Board members Philip Wheaton, Heather Baldock and Neville Ferme and strategic adviser Helen Lamont met with Agriculture Food and Fisheries Minister Rory McEwen to discuss a range of issues, the most pressing of which was the current drought and the areas for priority response.

The meeting followed a detailed submission that the ABA prepared for the Minister in September, which was developed after receiving feedback from Ag Bureau members across the State.

Support to youth, industry and community leaders is seen as critical as these individuals carry many of the pressures and stresses for themselves and others.

During the 2006/07 year farms across the dryland regions generally reduced all forms of spending and have been using reserves such as farm management deposits. They have been making early decisions to de-stock or confine feed livestock and have sought information provided through workshops and information sessions.

With the continuation of drought conditions during 2007/08, farm businesses have indicated that they will continue to reduce spending further where possible; including staying at home more; seeking off-farm income for members of the family; or seriously considering ceasing farming and selling their properties.

In the short-term, farm businesses are actively seeking more information at these critical times to assist in decision making for medium-term recovery.

In the longer-term, farm businesses are encouraging the continuation of research into viable alternatives; more support for education and uptake of risk management strategies; consideration of greater support to farm businesses not accessing Exceptional Circumstances support; and having services available to all businesses, not just those in difficulty. Download full report at www.agbureau.com.au

Ministerial Recommendations

The ABA has recommended that the following support measures be considered for funding across regional South Australia, in response to at least two years of extreme dry conditions.

- **Livestock audit across SA** to help with decision-making on feed, particularly hay supplies and management to protect soils.
- **Regionally specific technical extension services** to provide an independent sounding board for discussion of options, assisting in decision making and increasing the rate of return to productivity.
- **Regionally specific drought information sessions** to discuss options, share and build relationships, to assist in increasing the rate of return to productivity in the longer term.
- **Increased commitment to Mental Health** by supporting programs to increase community capacity to access support and reduce the longer-term impacts on the community and health sector.
- **Series of financial Institutions 'Watch' Forums** to consider the current situation and options.
- **Reduce costs to attend accredited training** for farm businesses within EC regions, to encourage continuation of formal learning.

Premier gets drought update from ABA Board member

In late September, Premier Mike Rann visited ABA Board member Philip Wheaton and his wife Jan during a fact-finding tour of the Eyre Peninsula's drought-affected regions. Mr Rann was accompanied by then acting Agriculture Minister Patrick Conlon, PIRSA Chief Executive Geoff Knight and SA Drought Response Team Chairman Ben Bruce. The delegation visited Cleve, Darke Peak, Wudinna, Kyancutta, Minnipa, Wirrulla and Streaky Bay.



Photo courtesy of *West Coast Sentinel*

Branch Briefs

Charra (Eyre Peninsula): Branch president Milton Chandler was interviewed by ABC West Coast regarding concerns about the SAFF Grains Council's position on grain marketing, particularly its stance on the wheat single desk.

Milang (Fleurieu Peninsula): The branch held a crop walk for its October meeting with many crops showing good potential.

Millicent (Lower South East): ABC's *The Country Hour* was broadcast from the South East on 25 October. Millicent Branch President Robert Wallis was featured in the program with a shearing school set up on his property to provide an introduction for people considering entering the wool industry. Mike Grant from South Pacific Seeds spoke on fodder crops at the branch's September meeting.

Monarto (Murray Plains): The branch is in recess until February for harvest and Christmas break. The AGM saw a change in office bearers with a new President Mark Jaensch and Secretary David Mills being elected.

Parawa (Fleurieu): The branch held its last meeting on 12 November with a speaker on the topic "*Worms and Drenches for Livestock*". This was a change from the branch's usual first Monday of the month meeting.

Riverland Field Days: Neville Ferme and Richard Konzag attended the Riverland Field Days and made a presentation on behalf of the ABA to the Field Days organising committee recognising 50 years of service to the local agricultural area.

Upper North: Most branches have had crop inspections and have now gone into recess for harvest.

Yorke Peninsula Field Days: Neville Ferme attended the official luncheon, which included an address by a beyondblue representative.

Weather Watch

Lower Eyre Peninsula: Recent rain has been of little benefit, holding up harvest in parts of Lower EP and increasing the chance of grain damage – *Mark Dennis*.

Upper North: 2007 will go down in history as one of the years for "the haves and the have nots". Those who sowed exceptionally early, controlled summer weeds and did not forward contract their grain (*before September field days*) were the winners. In late October some farmers were close to finishing harvest around Port Pirie (Nelshaby, Port Germain, Wandearah) area. Weather has been dry for the end of the growing season, with some severe thunderstorms delaying harvest and reducing crop potential in northern agricultural areas. – *Neville Ferme*.

Barossa Valley: In October, the Barossa had a couple of rain events with gaugings up to 10mm on several occasions. While of limited benefit to grape growers, there will be some benefit to later cereal crops. Many crops are being cut for hay so the rain has been unwelcome for those farmers. There are rumours of another 1000 acres of farmland being sold for vineyard in the Gomersol area. The question of continued supply should be looked at for these new plantings. Most grape growers had good growth of vines despite low rainfall during winter. They were helped by five inches (27 mm) or more during May. So far reports are for an average to good crop showing (some Shiraz very large). Many growers have purchased extra water from River Murray, but most secured only small amounts because of the cost. There is some optimism for the coming season and many hope for a cool summer so as not to put too

much stress on the vines. – *Trevor Wilksch*

Mid South East: The Mid South East received late October rains of 40mm, bringing a late spring flush of pasture and, while frustrating hay baling, the resulting extra pasture seed will be of great benefit. Good supplies of silage have been cut. Due to early finishing, large numbers of lambs and cattle at market have created depressed prices. Good breeding stock is in demand and selling well. Wood prices are enjoying an upward trend. – *Yvonne Correll*.

Lower South East: Grasses continue to grow after the "big rain": somewhere around 4" at end of October / early November on the heavier ground in the Penola area. Phalaris is as high as the fences in many places, but it is mostly stalk. The lighter soils aren't as productive because the clover had just about finished before the rain. Much pasture hay is now being made. – *Lyn Teakle*

Parawa: Silage production is mostly finished and hay cutting has started but some cuts will be rain damaged. There is good feed regrowth on early cut silage paddocks. Lambs are in good condition but there is concern over the lower value of lamb and the higher wool prices not flowing through to the higher microns (28+). Water is not a problem on the southern Fleurieu. – *Vic Walter*.

Milang: Hay is being made with harvest started and some good crops expected to yield well. – *Vic Walter*.

Monarto: Hay production is mostly finished and harvest has started. There is a wide range of land ranging from failed crops to very good crops. The October rains did not help crops in some areas but will bring on some useful stock feed. – *Vic Walter*

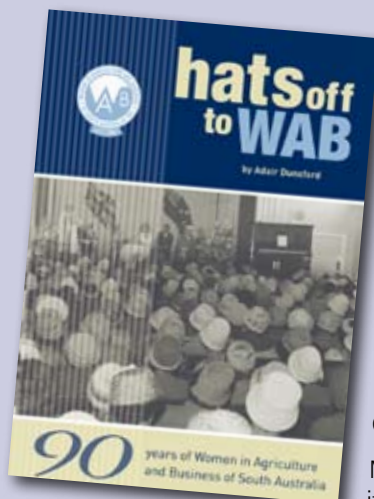


WAB News



Keith author and Women in Agriculture and Business SA State Council member Adair Dunsford has compiled a history of WAB to mark the organisation's 90th birthday.

Hats off to WAB contains a background history of WAB and features contributions from more than 120 WAB members, with many reflecting on the benefits they have gained from membership.



WAB is the oldest rural women's organisation in Australia and began as Women's Branches of the Agricultural Bureau. The first branch was formed at Riverton in October 1917.

Mrs Dunsford said it was apparent from the

contributions that many SA rural women had acquired knowledge and skills through WAB.

"For many women, WAB has given their lives another dimension, they have gained confidence and some have applied their skills and abilities

in other community groups and contributed knowledge to farm businesses," she said.

WAB branches had remained relevant throughout the 90 years by including current issues on their programs.

"When WAB started in 1917, farm women wanted to know how to milk a house cow or how to make butter," Mrs Dunsford said.

"In 2007, programs reflect the changed and changing role for rural women, with groups learning about the stock market, taxation and superannuation and digital photography," she said.

Details: The book is available for \$25 including postage from Glenice Bourne, PO Box 865, Naracoorte, SA 5271 or phone 8765 2202.

Updates

Banking and Financial Services Ombudsman

A representative from the **BFSO** addressed the ABA on 24 October regarding the roles and responsibilities of financial institutions.

Board members were encouraged to look at two key bulletins available from the BFSO website www.bfso.org.au:

Bulletin 46: dealing with customers in financial difficulty / guide to searching for unclaimed monies.

Bulletin 53: customers in financial difficulty – Code of Banking Practice and Uniform Consumer Credit Code (UCCC) obligations.

Details: www.bfso.org.au or **1300 78 08 08 during normal office hours.**

New water saving incentives

The State Government will spend \$24 million on water saving rebates, which is estimated to save more than five billion litres of water by 2010. It commenced on 1 November with rebates available to all residential properties.

Details: www.sawater.com.au or **1800 130 952.**

Support for Unemployed Rural Workers

A Drought Force Program has been introduced to help drought-affected farms with their workforce needs. The program provides unemployed rural workers with income support while they work on drought-affected farms.

Details: www.workplace.gov.au/droughtforce or **1800 004 226.**

Grants for Irrigators

Grants of up to \$20 000 are available to assist irrigators in the Murray Darling Basin to respond to significantly reduced water allocations. Eligible irrigators must meet the EC Interest Rate Subsidy off-farm assets test (\$750, 000).

Details: 1800 050 015 (Referral Line) or the Rural Counsellor on 8595 9100.

FarmBis

The **FarmBis** State Planning Group met on 30 October. Jeff Hillan from the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) made a presentation on the national FarmBis program about which there was much discussion. Also on the agenda was a presentation of the Virtual Classroom project, as well as a discussion on the smooth transition to the national FarmBis program and the coordinator / networker activities since the last meeting. The next meeting is set for 14 December.

Remote access no longer a training barrier

Farmers who think living out in the sticks means not being able to do training should think again.

FarmBis State Planning Chair Laura Fell says the idea of up-skilling for farmers no longer means spending a lot of money travelling great distances with very little rewards.

“There are so many flexible options now available, such as on-line learning, open access learning and small local courses that offer a good mix of new knowledge and expertise,” Ms Fell said.



FarmBis State Planning Chair Laura Fell

“And given demand, many training providers are prepared to come to you.”

FarmBis offers training in all areas of business management and all courses are subsidised up to 65%. FarmBis caters for all types of people in all areas and provides childcare support.

Details: www.farmbis.sa.gov.au or freecall 1800 182 235.



Drought Information

Drought Assistance eligibility guidelines are available from: PIRSA Prudential and Rural Financial Management, on 1800 182 235 (freecall)

Further information is available from:

- PIRSA website drought page www.pir.sa.gov.au/drought or the Drought Hotline: 180 2020 (freecall)
- SA Government Drought Response <http://www.service.sa.gov.au/ContentPages/sagovt/Drought.aspx>
- Rural Financial Counselling Service SA <http://www.rfcssa.org.au/>
- Centrelink Drought Assistance http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/drought_assist.htm
- Australian Government Drought Assistance <http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/drought>
- beyondblue <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

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