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# **FIGHTING FOR OUR FARMERS - THE EPILOGUE**

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The biggest Australian Rotary project has now been completed, with the distribution of \$10.1 million of appeal funds to farming families impacted by the severe drought.

In July 2018, a partnership was formed between Channel 9, the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) and

Rotary Australia World Community Service Ltd (RAWCS) to raise money under the banner of "Fighting for our Farmers". Each partner brought specific skills and experience to the appeal, which together created a powerful organisation that could make a significant difference.

Channel 9 would use its morning *Today Show* to promote donations; RAWCS would be responsible for processing online donations and the distribution of the appeal funds; and the NFF would use its knowledge of the Australian farming community to ensure funds reached those households with the greatest need.

The appeal commenced in late July 2018 and would culminate in an all-day telethon on August 20, 2018. It was

clear from the outset that the Australian public embraced the demonstrated need of farmers, some of who had experienced prolonged drought for over five years. Their inability to feed both their animals and their families resonated. The deterioration of mental health throughout the drought areas and the high incidence of suicide was very evident.

The day of the telethon showed Australians supporting their fellow Australians doing it tough, with unsurpassed generosity; donations that day amounted to \$3.4 million. The telethon activity peaked at 8.45am,

**The Board of RAWCS would like to sincerely thank all Rotarians who have assisted in the magnificent effort to support the drought relief and in particular to acknowledge the huge amount of work put in by our treasurer Mike Whitehouse.**



with emails with tax deductible receipts attached being issued five every second. Donors' first names and suburbs streamed across the bottom of TV screens, with updated appeal totals being announced every 10 minutes. It was exciting television.

The appeal closed on September 30, 2018, with in excess of 65,000 tax deductible receipts issued for the \$10.1 million raised.

The partners agreed that any organisation involved in the distribution of appeal funds would not receive any administration fees, with those involved signing legal agreements to this effect. From day one of the appeal, it was continually stated that every dollar given would be received by the farmers, and this eventuated.

Following this, the NFF invited detailed applications from charities to participate in the distribution, which commenced with the three tranches of payments totalling \$4.5 million being distributed prior to the appeal closure on September 30. A further tranche of \$3.75 million was distributed on October 5. The final distribution of \$1.87 million occurred on January 15, 2019.

**The distributing charities were:**

- RAWCS Drought Relief Projects X 8 - \$2,350,000
- Salvation Army - \$1,750,000
- St Vincent's de Paul - \$1,500,000
- Country Women's Association - \$1,454,900
- Lions Club of Pakenham - 1,000,000
- Drought Angels - \$500,000
- Blaze Aid - \$500,000



- Western Queensland Drought Committee - \$412,500
- WA Freight - \$250,000
- Givit - \$250,000
- Eyre Peninsula Charity Initiative - \$100,000
- Uni Canberra Mental Health Mobile Unit - \$32,600
- **Total - \$10,100,000**

RAWCS had two district drought projects, districts 9570 and 9630 in Queensland, which had been operational for some five years. A University of Queensland report on the District 9630 drought relief project, managed by PDG Phillip Charles, became the model for establishing a chain of RAWCS drought relief projects west of the Great Dividing Range, from Far North Queensland (D9550), Central Queensland (D9570) and Southern Queensland (D9630), through NSW (D9670, D9650, D9700/9710) and District 9800 in Victoria.

In addition, the Rotary Club of Narrabri, NSW, established the "Neighbours in Need" drought project. It was about local Rotarians throughout these drought-impacted areas identifying farming families doing it tough, getting along side, offering them help and involving these families in community activities. The mantra was "Wellbeing not Welfare".

The personal involvement of Rotarians and their local clubs throughout the Rotary drought network has made an extraordinary impact on the lives of countless farming families. Not only have these Rotary district drought relief projects distributed the \$2,350,000 of appeal funds, they have also distributed more than \$1.4 million of donations made directly to their individual projects.

This effort has been recognised by the Commonwealth Government, which has since asked Rotary to join in distributing \$6.5 million of the \$30 million announced by the Prime Minister for drought assistance in October 2018. Starting in January 2019, these Rotary district drought relief projects have already identified and paid grants to 3247 farming households (eligible recipients) totalling \$4.83 million, with the balance of \$1.67 million to be distributed to 555 eligible recipients in early May 2019 when this funding is received. More than 3800 farming households will have been touched by Rotary service.

In summary, these eight Rotary drought relief projects, supported by local Rotary clubs and their members, will have distributed in excess of \$10.25 million in less than five months.

Clearly, Rotarians are *People of Action*.