



## Media Release

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### **Report reveals the impact of drought on young people in Victoria**

Farmers and rural business are not the only ones suffering due to the drought. Young people in rural Victoria are facing increasing challenges to participate in educational, employment and training opportunities, a new report released today from the Youth Affairs Council and the North Central Local Learning and Employment Network reveals.

'Responses to drought-affected communities need to consider carefully the impacts of drought on young people,' said Georgie Ferrari, CEO of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.

*Talking about the Big Dry: young people and the impact of drought*, reports on the outcomes of a forum and survey with young people in Boort, North Central Victoria. It reveals that young people were also carrying particular stress about the impact of drought on the mental health and wellbeing of their parents.

'Young people are not only experiencing anxiety, but in many cases it impacts on their decisions to access opportunities for higher education or employment. It also makes it difficult for them to maintain their engagement' said Ms Ferrari.

The report has been presented to the Drought Policy review Expert Social Panel, appointed by the Hon. Tony Burke, Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The Panel is currently touring across Australia to hear directly from rural communities about the social impacts of drought on farm families and rural communities.

'There is mounting evidence that the drought is adversely affecting young people's access to, and experience of education at school and tertiary levels and other forms of extended training,' said Georgie Ferrari.

'The already inhibitive costs of supporting a young person to travel to access a higher education place, have become impossible for many rural families to meet and current Centrelink supports are not enough,' said Ms Ferrari.

The report highlights the way the eligibility requirements of the Youth Allowance system actually encourage young people to defer their tertiary places.

'In 2007, more than twice as many rural young people as urban, didn't take up their higher education place once they have deferred as the economic pressures of drought mount. A gap year should be a choice not a necessity in order to receive vital Centrelink support,' Ms Ferrari said.

'The drought is corroding the capacity of young people to aspire to continue their education and training. The anecdotal evidence is mounting that families are having

early conversations with young people to discourage education options that require them to leave rural areas,' said Jerri Nelson, EO of the North Central Local Learning and Employment Network.

Young people also revealed the way in which drought had impacted on their world-view and sense of the future.

'For a teenager, the drought has existed for a substantial part of their life. Not only has drought been a strong influence on young peoples experiences to date, but it can also have a strong impact on their sense of optimism for the future' said Georgie Ferrari.

The report presents young peoples views on how to strengthen their communities at a time of drought, suggesting that actively encouraging young people to participate in community events and drought recovery initiatives would be highly valuable.

'This report reveals that not only is the drought taking a toll on young people in rural Victoria, but that young people themselves have much to contribute to the strengthening and recovery of those communities hurting from drought,' Ms Nelson said.

**To access the full report:** visit [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au) or contact the North Central Local Learning and Employment Network for a hard copy on 5491 1144.

**For media comment: contact Jerri Nelson, EO North Central Local Learning and Employment Network on 0427 952 042 or Georgie Ferrari, CEO YACVic 0411 484 428.**