

Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW - Central West Inc



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Continued State funding for the Rural Financial Counselling Program

Following the recent State Government budget announcement, it is welcome news that the new State Government is prepared to provide the same level of funding, as the previous government has in the past, to the Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW Central West Inc (RFCS-CW), and even more welcomed news resulting from the Bi-Lateral Agreement with the Commonwealth, the State Government will now support all NSW based RFC Services over the next four years.

Over the past three financial years, the State Government has contributed core funding to RFCS-CW, which has allowed us to provide free, impartial and confidential financial counselling to help farmers, fishers and agriculture-dependent small businesses in their decision making. RFCS-CW covers approximately 60% of NSW, spanning the area from Forbes to the Blue Mountains, north to Lightning Ridge, west to Cameron's Corner and in the south west, to Wentworth/Balranald (excluding Bourke and Brewarrina Shires).

We have been busy and over the past 12 months, the number of active clients in the area serviced by RFCS-CW increased by 34% (figures as of 31 March 11), to 1,190 active clients. RFCS-CW has been servicing approximately 17% of the active clients nationally (for the past year to 30 June) and more than one third of the active client load in NSW for the same period.

RFCS-CW chief executive officer, Jeff Caldbeck said the State Government's commitment to the service in what was a tight budget, was strong recognition of the importance of the work done by Rural Financial Counsellors (RFC's) in supporting and working closely with rural and regional communities, attempting at all times to produce positive outcomes for their clients.

NSW Government Trade & Investment

The State Government has announced the name of the current Department of Industry & Investment changed effective 1 July 2011 to Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services.

RFCS-CW Annual General Meeting

The RFCS-CW Annual General Meeting is schedule to take place in Dubbo on the **16th November 2011**. For more details contact RFCS-CW Regional Office on **02 6884 7841**.

RFCS-CW CONTACT DETAILS

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|--|--------------|--|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| Regional Office | 02 6884 7841 | Dubbo Office | 02 6884 2275 | Buronga Office | 03 5021 1558 |
| Coonamble Office | 02 6822 3220 | Forbes Office | 02 6852 3837 | Gilgandra Office | 02 6847 1084 |
| Mudgee Office | 02 6372 6660 | Nyngan Office | 02 6832 2169 | Orange Office | 02 6361 1117 |
| Parkes Office | 02 6862 1646 | Tottenham Office | 02 6893 3843 | Walgett Office | 03 6882 2049 |
| Broken Hill (contact via Buronga office) | | BALRANALD OUTSOURCE OFFICE (contact via Buronga office) | | | |

Rural Financial Counselling services within the Gilgandra Community

As identified previously in this bulletin, the State Government's commitment to financially support all NSW RFC services was great news, however it has to be noted that our service's operational income for 2011-2012 remains at 18.97% less than for the 2010-11 year. This decrease in funding income has meant that operationally the service has had to undertake a major re-structure.

Following the release by RFCS-CW management of the re-structure strategy, the local Gilgandra community have over the past few months expressed concern at the possible loss of their local Rural Financial Counselling office. The RFCS-CW management and Board do acknowledge that traditionally the Gilgandra community has had a dedicated full time counsellor and a fully serviced office site.

The good news is that the Gilgandra office will remain open with a Dubbo-based counsellor providing outreach services at the existing Gilgandra office site, as required. To book and appointment with the Counsellor servicing Gilgandra please call the Gilgandra office on 02 6847 1084 or our Regional Office on 02 6884 7841.

Staffing Update

At a time when rural NSW is still recovering from years of drought, devastating summer floods and 2011 winter cropping activities were under threat, the Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW Central West Inc. (RFCS-CW) announced cost-cutting measures in response to a significant funding shortfall for the financial year 2011-12.

RFCS-CW CEO Jeff Caldbeck identified that "Despite a commitment from the Federal Government to the tune of \$1.7 million (GST exclusive) a year, our 2011-12 budget shortfall severely impacted on our ability to service the existing client case load and additionally the service has had to reduce staffing levels, in line with this funding shortfall," he said.

On the 1 July 2011, RFCS-CW reduced administration support within its Regional Office, and did not renew 11 part-time Administrative Service Officer positions (the equivalent of more than five full-time jobs). It also announced the closure of the Gilgandra office, and reduced Rural Financial Counsellor hours within Walgett, Parkes, Dubbo and Buronga.

"As a result of community concerns and areas of protest over the identified RFCS-CW re-structure program, some community-supported initiatives were initiated and then forthcoming, allowing the Service to maintain the Gilgandra office as well as allowing for extensions to existing Administration Support staff contracts at Gilgandra, Forbes and Tottenham. These initiatives are welcomed but are only stop-gap measures and do not address the longer terms funding needs of running the service or providing any certainty to our staff or clients," Jeff stated.

On behalf of RFCS-CW Board and Management, Jeff felt it important to take this opportunity to thank the Gilgandra Shire Council, Forbes Rural Financial Counselling Inc and an anonymous donor from the Tottenham area who have undertaken to financial support the Service over the past 3 months.

But more importantly Jeff would like to acknowledge and express sincere gratitude to the members of the RFCS-CW team past and present. He stated that "the lose of our administration support staff in July has not only been disappointing for the Service but it has been sad for the communities to lose such dedicated and passionate members of the RFCS team, in their communities". He went on further to state that "many of our administration support team members have worked with their local RFC's for years. These employees have served the organisation with enthusiasm and devotion and their commitment to their respective community is unquestionable".

Jeff went on further to state that on behalf of himself, the management team and the board he wishes departing staff all the best and thanked them for their dedication and support to the service.

Succession Planning Brochure available to clients

RFCS-CW CEO Jeff Caldbeck notes it is widely accepted that succession planning is a critical factor in effective business planning and that by developing a succession plan, a business definitely lowers its financial risk. However, he acknowledges that succession planning involves (amongst other things) determining what the existing generation wants to do; the identification of the needs and expectations of each family member for the future of the farm enterprise; and building, maintaining and possibly even repairing relationships between family members. It also identifies and allows for the orderly transfer of management, responsibility, ownership, assets and control of a farm enterprise over a planned timeframe.

RFCS-CW has undertaken to develop a comprehensive brochure which outlines; what a succession plan is, why farm businesses need a succession plan, some common business transition options, how rural financial counsellors can help with succession planning, the six steps in the succession planning process, and the client and rural financial counsellors responsibilities in the succession planning process.

Jeff actively promotes the need to succession plan, start today by getting and reading our brochure, it will help. If you would like a copy of this "Succession Planning" brochure or assistance with your succession plan please contact RFCS NSW – Central West on 02 6884 7841 or your local Rural Financial Counsellor.