



BRIEFING PAPER #2: How important is RFCS-CW to its region?

- According to recent ABARE research, of the 69% of farmers & rural businesses considered at risk in Australia only 10% have sought assistance from rural financial counselling services across Australia
- Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW Central West Inc. (RFCS-CW) has the highest case load of any RFCS in Australia, managing approximately 44% of the cases in NSW alone (April 2011).
- In the past 12 months, RFCS-CW increased the number of active clients by 34%; in March 2011 alone, 690 clients were assisted by RFCS-CW
- As of 31 March 2011, the average number of cases managed by Rural Financial Counsellors (RFCs) is about 51 (10 more than other NSW services & 18 more than other services across Australia)
- Issues being dealt with across the region include natural disaster assistance, succession planning, drought recovery (post Exceptional Circumstances) and climate change adjustment

ABARE figures estimate that 69% of farmers and rural businesses in Australia are facing financial difficulties. Only 10% of those farmers have sought assistance from the RFCS nationally on an annual basis.

Nationally, RFCs have serviced 15,000 clients (07/08) and in the year to date about 9,500 clients are considered active. Of those 9,500 clients, Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW Central West Inc. (RFCS-CW) is servicing 17% – that is 44% of the cases in NSW. RFCS-CW has the highest case load of any rural financial counselling service in Australia. In March alone, 690 clients were assisted.

In 2010-11, there have been 15 Rural Financial Counsellors (RFCs) working the Central West region, covering about 60% of NSW. Each RFC has managed an average of 51 cases – 10 more than any other RFCS region in NSW and 18 more than other services across Australia.

In the past 12 months, the number of active clients in the area serviced by RFCS-CW has increased by 34% (as of March 31 figures) to 1,190 active clients. These clients are actively managed cases involving assistance with enterprise action plan, climate change adjustment and even succession planning. Issues driving the increased number of cases include drought assistance reform, climate change adjustment programs, disaster management and the recovery and rebuilding of rural businesses following natural disasters. This is in keeping with trends and responses across Australian agriculture, which is undergoing a period of major structural adjustment.

While the number of cases alone indicates the importance of the RFCS to its clients and the region, research conducted by Charles Sturt University in December 2009 backed this up, finding the service plays an important role in the adjustment processes and enhances the resilience of farmers. 83% of respondents surveyed indicated they had made positive change arising from their use of RFCS services.

Central West RFCs are experienced in working with rural clients to achieve positive outcomes. They understand local issues and are part of the communities in which they work. Each local office receives the support of the regional office and efficiencies are gained at an administrative level so as to channel as much of the funding available to RFCS-CW to on-ground delivery, increasing the number of hours spent on client assistance. Over the past 12 months, RFCS-CW supplied 42.58% of the total client assistance hours for NSW.