

Advances in Natural and Technological Hazards Research

# From Disaster Response to Risk Management

Australia's National Drought Policy

Linda Courtenay Botterill and  
Donald A. Wilhite (Editors)



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# From Disaster Response to Risk Management

Australia's National Drought Policy

Edited by

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## FOREWORD

In 1992, Australia's Commonwealth and State governments announced the introduction of the National Drought Policy. In an important departure from earlier responses to drought, the new policy adopted a risk management approach which received broad support from Australia's major political parties and from important members of the policy community. More than a decade later, however, media and public debate about drought does not always reflect this policy position.

In 2002, Linda Botterill and her colleague Melanie Fisher invited Don Wilhite to contribute a chapter to a book on Australia's National Drought Policy which they were preparing for an Australian audience. Subsequently published as *Beyond Drought: People, Policies and Perspectives* by CSIRO Publishing, the collection was intended 'to place drought on the public agenda as a topic of considerable importance to all Australians' (Botterill and Fisher 2003, p ix). The book was targeted at the interested lay public in an effort to redress the gap between the official policy position and public perceptions of drought. Don Wilhite was invited to contribute a chapter placing Australia's experience in an international context. During a visit to Australia to discuss the scope and content of the book, Don suggested that the themes being discussed would be of considerable interest to an international audience and he proposed that a more academically focused collection along similar lines to the Australian publication would provide a useful addition to the international literature on drought preparedness and response.

The present collection is the result of that suggestion. The majority of the material in this book is new, indeed four of the authors included herein did not participate in the earlier project and of those who did, most have contributed entirely new work. A handful of the chapters contain material published in the Australian book, but with the exception of one chapter the material has been reworked for a broader audience.

Australia has been something of a trail-blazer in the development and implementation of a national drought policy. It is hoped that this collection will provide others moving in a similar direction with the benefit of its experience by highlighting the successes and challenges of a move from disaster to risk management in responding to drought.

Linda Courtenay Botterill  
Donald A Wilhite  
April 2004

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Linda Courtenay Botterill** is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the National Europe Centre at the Australian National University. She has extensive experience in public policy having worked in the Australian Public Service, as a ministerial adviser and as a policy officer in two industry associations before undertaking her PhD in political science at the ANU. In 1993 and 1994, she advised the Australian Minister for Primary Industries and Energy on drought and rural adjustment. Her research interest is agricultural policy in Australia and the European Union and she teaches in the field of Australian public policy. She is co-editor of *Beyond Drought: People, Policy and Perspectives* (2003 CSIRO Publishing).

**Peter Cox** was awarded a PhD in Technological Economics from Stirling University in Scotland. He worked in several developing countries in Africa and SE Asia. He spent eight years with CSIRO (at Narrabri with the Division of Plant Industry, and Toowoomba with the Division of Tropical Crops and Pastures) after moving to Australia from Papua New Guinea in 1988. More recently, he worked with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in India and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Cambodia as part of their social science programmes. His last position was as Regional Technical Adviser for Agriculture and Natural Resource Management for South East Asia with Catholic Relief Services, a US-based NGO. Peter Cox died from cancer late in 2003 during preparation of the chapter for this book. He is missed more than he, with his characteristic modesty, would have imagined.

**Peter Hayman** is Principal Scientist, climate applications working for the South Australian Research and Development Institute, based in Adelaide. From 1999 to 2004 he led the NSW Agriculture agro climatology unit. He is a member of the World Meteorological Organisation expert team on end user liaison and the expert team on weather climate and farming. After completing a masters degree in crop physiology, Peter Hayman worked as an extension officer before completing a PhD in agro climatic risk management at the University of Western Sydney. He has received research grants to work with grain farmers on their management of climate risk in the north-eastern and southern grain belt and with wool producers in the NSW rangelands.

**Greg Hertzler** is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of Western Australia and was Deputy Chair of the recent West Australian Task Force into Multi Peril Crop Insurance. His research interests are in agriculture and natural resources with particular emphasis on bio economic modelling and on managing agricultural and natural systems under risk.

**Janette Lindesay** has a PhD in Climatology from the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, where she led the Climatology Research Group in research into southern African climate variability and drought in the early 1990s. In 1993 she took up an appointment as Senior Lecturer in Climatology at the ANU, where she is engaged in research on low-frequency variability in the El Niño Southern Oscillation and its impacts, and on changing rainfall seasonality in Australia. She has co-authored a

number of papers and an authoritative text on ENSO and climate variability, and has co-authored or edited three other books. Her other research interests include climate change, climate impacts and climatological aspects of wildfire in the tropics and subtropics.

**Bruce O’Meagher** is a former senior public servant. He worked in several national government agencies, including the Treasury and the agriculture and industry departments. He was heavily involved in the development of the Australian government’s response to the 1992-95 drought.

**Deborah Bird Rose** is Senior Fellow in the Centre for Research and Environmental Studies, Institute of Advanced Studies, at The Australian National University. She is the author of *Country of the Heart: An Indigenous Australian Homeland* (2002 Aboriginal Studies Press), *Nourishing Terrains, Australian Aboriginal views of Landscape and Wilderness*, *Dingo Makes Us Human* (winner of the 1992/3 Stanner Prize), and *Hidden Histories* (winner of the 1991 Jessie Litchfield Award). She has worked with Aboriginal people in their claims to land, and is collaborating with the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife on their ‘Totemic Landscapes’ project. Her work in both scholarly and practical arenas is focused on social and ecological justice. Her most recent book is in press with UNSW Press: *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation*.

**Mark Stafford Smith** has worked at CSIRO’s Centre for Arid Zone Research in Alice Springs for two decades, with an emphasis on management responses to climatic variability in rangelands grazing enterprises for most of that time. He has had several encounters with the design, implementation and implications of drought, from input to the National Drought Policy, through surveys and modelling of pastoralists’ responses to drought in different rangeland regions, and involvement in regional adjustment committees, to on-farm analyses of the effects of taxation and other policy instruments on pastoralist decision making. He is currently CEO of the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, based in Alice Springs and networking colleagues across the continent towards better regional outcomes for all people living in outback Australia.

**Daniela Stehlik** returned to Western Australia from Queensland in December 2003 to take up the foundation Chair in Stronger Communities in the Division of Humanities at Curtin University of Technology. She has also been appointed as Director of the Alcoa Research Centre for Stronger Communities, a unique partnership between industry/community/university. Her research interests focus on the intersections of community resiliency, human service practice and social cohesion in regional/rural Australia. Her specific interests are in ageing, disability, gender, power and community development. She has published widely in Australia and internationally and is currently on the editorial board of *Rural Society*.

**Ian Ward** is a Reader in Politics at the University of Queensland. His research interests lie broadly in the area of media and politics.

**David White** is the Director of ASIT Consulting based in Long Beach, NSW. From 1967 until 1988 he worked for the Victorian Department of Agriculture, supervising the development and use of models to analyse livestock production systems. He then moved to Canberra where, as a Senior Principal Research Scientist in the Bureau of Resource (now Rural) Sciences, he assisted in the development and implementation of the National Drought Policy. From 1994 until late 1996 he was the principal scientific adviser to the Rural Adjustment Scheme Advisory Council (RASAC), primarily with respect to drought monitoring and assessment and Drought Exceptional Circumstances. His consulting activities over the past seven years have targeted a wide range of environmental and agricultural issues pertaining to climate variability research, climate change and increasing water use efficiency in the Murray-Darling Basin.

**Donald Wilhite** is Director of the National Drought Mitigation Center and the International Drought Information Center and Professor, School of Natural Resources, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dr. Wilhite's research and outreach activities focus on issues of drought monitoring, planning, and mitigation. He has collaborated with numerous countries and regional and international organisations on drought policy and planning issues. He has authored or co-authored more than 100 journal articles, monographs, book chapters, and technical reports and is editor of several books, including *Drought: A Global Assessment*, published in 2000 by Routledge Publishers as part of a 7-volume series on natural hazards and disasters.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

ABARE	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics
AUSLIG	Australian Surveying and Land Information Group
CQ	Central Queensland
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DPRTF	Drought Policy Review Task Force
EC	Exceptional circumstances
ENSO	El Niño-Southern Oscillation
FMDs	Farm Management Deposits
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPN	Global Drought Preparedness Network
IAC	Industries Assistance Commission
IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
MEI	Multivariate ENSO Index
NDMC	National Drought Mitigation Center (University of Nebraska, Lincoln)
NDP	National Drought Policy
NDRA	Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NSW	(the state of) New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RIRDC	Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation
SOI	Southern Oscillation Index
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WA	(the state of) Western Australia

**GLOSSARY**

Australian Labor Party	Social democratic political party
battlers	Australians with relatively low incomes facing economic hardship or “doing it tough” [a related term]
bush	Traditional term describing rural and regional Australia
Commonwealth government	(see federal government)
federal government	Australia’s national government. The dominant tier of government within a federal system, raising most of the taxes paid by Australians
Liberal Party	Conservative party—traditionally governs in coalition with the National Party
mateship	Traditional term for friendship but carrying additional egalitarian connotations
National Farmers’ Federation	Major rural lobby group comprising state farm organisations and commodity councils and representing some 120,000 farm enterprises through 29 affiliated organisations
National Party	Formerly the Country Party—founded to provide a voice for rural Australia
NSW	New South Wales, Australia’s most populous state, which has Sydney as its capital
Queensland	Australia’s second largest and most decentralised state
rort (v)	Australian colloquialism for trick, dishonest practice

## INTRODUCTION

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Australia's attempt at a national drought policy in the early 1990s and its experiences with this policy over the past decade have intrigued the international scientific and policy communities. Few nations have made much progress on a national policy but it is now being widely discussed by many countries and promoted by United Nations agencies, international development organizations, development banks, and others. For example, under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), countries are encouraged to develop national action programs to combat the effects of desertification and drought. There are also many other national, regional, and global initiatives to promote the need for greater levels of drought preparedness and to formulate national drought policies. The experiences of Australia represent valuable lessons to many countries, developed and developing alike, on the opportunities and challenges of a national drought policy and preparedness strategy. Documenting the policy development process and the lessons learned at each step in the process will benefit all nations that choose to follow this course of action.

For example, the United States has drawn on the experiences of Australia in recent attempts to move towards a national drought policy. Until recently, much of the progress in drought preparedness in the United States has been at the state level as the need for and benefits of drought planning have become more apparent. With the increase in the number of states with drought plans from 3 in 1982 to 36 in 2004, the existence of actual drought plans for states to follow in the plan development process has certainly stimulated this planning trend. Drought plans enable states to visualise how others have applied planning methodologies to meet their specific drought management needs. Likewise, Australian experiences with drought policy have been beneficial to the drought policy debate in the United States. Legislation is now pending before the US Congress on a national drought policy action plan.

However, the implementation of Australia's National Drought Policy has not been without its problems. Tensions within the policy between conflicting objectives have led to ongoing changes to the various components of the policy and, although the rhetoric of self-reliance and risk management is accepted within the rural policy community, the Australian media, the broader community and many farmers appear to retain a view of drought as a disaster or an Act of God. This volume brings together a range of perspectives on Australia's experience since the announcement of a National