Welcome to the second edition of *No Bull*, the newsletter of the state-funded Drought Counsellors. *No Bull* is published by The Bouverie Centre, as part of its role to support Drought Workers and research effective ways to promote social and emotional health in rural communities affected by drought. The first edition of *No Bull* was received very well, which has given us the confidence and energy to throw ourselves into this larger edition. Our hope of increasing contributions from the field is beginning to occur - thank you and keep the ideas and feedback coming!

One of the intriguing discussion points amongst drought counsellors has been the specific nature of drought compared to other natural disasters. It could be argued that as a community we are less organized to respond to drought, than other natural disasters, such as fire and flood. Drought is an insidious, chronic disaster, whereas flood and fire are acute, external, dramatic events, against which the community can rally together to fight. The response to fire and flood is social, as we have seen recently in Gippsland, even attracting volunteers from interstate. The broader community can witness fire and flood in ‘real time’ with dramatic media imagery and hence the victims of fire and flood receive more tangible acknowledgement and messages of support than do victims of drought. In the absence of a tangible external event to blame for their distress, people affected by drought can begin to blame themselves, either for poor decision making or personal weakness. The long term nature of drought can also have an insidious influence on the usual support networks of a community. As money becomes tight, travel becomes prohibitive for some, which over the long term can impact on local people’s capacity to do volunteer work, participate in sporting clubs, school events etc which can place extraordinary pressure on a community’s resilience. In the case of fire and flood, local communities get together for regular updates of rapidly changing conditions, but in drought, the long term and slow nature of the disaster makes it difficult to attract people to regular community meetings. Drought counsellors usually only get farmers to irregular up-date meetings. The chronic nature of drought means it is even hard to pin-point when it becomes critical; is it today, tomorrow, next year or the year after?

I discussed the difference between fire and drought with a wise experienced farmer over lunch during the Victorian Farmers Federation conference held at the Sofitel recently. Bob, a dry land farmer pointed out that whilst farmers prepare for fire more than drought, drought is more likely to occur. Encouragingly, he went on to say that the Kennett Beyond Blue media campaign had made it more acceptable to talk about depression amongst farmers, and he encouraged drought counsellors to “help families at the kitchen table”. Of his rural colleagues, he simply stated, “We need to overcome that feeling that it is a personal weakness to talk about emotional issues and to realize that we are not alone.”

I trust you will enjoy the new sections in this edition: *Contemporary Controversies*, promoting debate and discussion; *Inside Story*, sharing details of drought that is not obvious to non-rural folk; *Original Piece*, presenting ideas in greater depth; *Pitching in*, stories of different groups working effectively together for the greater good; and *News from the Big Shed*, where Sally Rose, from DHS, encourages drought counsellors to work collaboratively with VFF and DPI staff, providing much needed support to each other whilst exploring innovative ways to engage people who would otherwise not seek help. In research notes, I report on an in depth interview I conducted with a couple who speak of the importance of a “friendly stranger!” They candidly describe how their view of counselling changed from “shit” to valuable, once they experienced it.

I hope you get something out of reading all or parts of this edition of *No Bull*. Let us know what you think.

Jeff Young, Bouverie (Editor)
Profiles

Combining counselling skills with community credibility is an important facet of drought counselling. Counsellors cannot be faceless professionals hiding behind a brass plaque waiting for people affected by the drought to contact them. In this and coming editions, No Bull will profile workers from each region about their background and their approach to the work.

Grampians Region

Nicholas Kitchen - 0428 138 476 or nicholask@wimmera.unitingcare.org.au
Wimmera Uniting Care, Horsham - Full time.

Background and Experience
Role/s- Nicholas is a family and generalist counsellor covering the West Wimmera Shire; Edenhope, Goroke, Apsley, Kaniva, Harrow and Natimuk. He also works one day a fortnight in Horsham. Nicholas lives in Edenhope, having moved there last November, with his wife and two children aged 3 and 9 months.

Rural - Nicholas grew up in New Zealand in a small country town called Feilding. He moved to Australia when he was 17. His mother moved over to Australia before he did and at the time she was living in a small country town called Lameroo, which is in the Mallee on the South Australian side of the border. Nicholas flew into Melbourne at 10:00 at night and drove straight through to Lameroo. This was the first part of Australia that he saw which was a shock because it was January and it was about 42 degrees and very dry compared to where he had come from. Nicholas lived in Lameroo for about 9 months, before moving around South Australia doing seasonal work, e.g. harvesting potatoes, onions, picking fruit etc. In 1997 he moved to Adelaide to do more study and spent the next 8 years living there before moving to Horsham in 2005.

Counselling - Nicholas graduated with a Bachelor of counselling from Tabor college in Adelaide in March 2005. He got a position as a family counsellor at Wimmera Uniting Care at the Horsham office in November 2005 and has been in a drought counselling position at Edenhope since November 2006.

Special Interests
Nicholas enjoys reading good books, particularly biographies and novels that make him think, watching a good game of Rugby Union, and increasingly AFL. Nicholas enjoys bush walking and camping out in the bush, and spending time with his wife and two children pottering around the house and in the back yard.

Practice notes
Nicholas believes that in working with farmers and people in rural communities it is important to use a holistic approach. He works from a family therapy and systems approach. “I have found that there is a closer family network in the small communities. Often parents are still on the farms, and if not, they still have a lot of input into the farm. I believe also that a direct and honest approach is the best policy as many of the clientele, from this area at least, are not sure of what counselling is and there seems to be mistrust about counsellors and what they do. Therefore, I always make sure that I explain the theory in a way that the average person can understand so that they can see how I am trying to work with them.”

The Bouverie Centre

Pam Rycroft - 9371 5026 or p.rycroft@latrobe.edu.au
Pam is the Bouverie CIG Facilitator for the Loddon-Mallee region.

Background and Experience
Rural - The closest Pam has come to rural experience is having been married to a ‘would-be’ farmer many years ago, and spending weekends between trying to be a good farm hand on a property on the Latrobe river in Gippsland and being the relieving doctor’s wife in Neerim South during the late 70’s.

Counselling - Pam has done a Masters in Psychology at Latrobe many years ago, and worked in Psychiatry, both inpatient and community-based, ambulance counselling line, private practice and has been Program Manager for Training and later Clinical Services at The Bouverie Centre, with which she has been associated for the last 21 years. She has been part of the original Sexual Abuse Team and the Single Session Therapy team. Currently, Pam is involved in a number of training projects as well as having a role in supporting and promoting family sensitive practice in Aged Psychiatry.

Special Interests
Pam has had interests in a number of clinical areas over the years, including grief and loss, sexual abuse, working with young children in families, working with emergency services personnel, the elderly, and a single session philosophy which makes the most of even brief encounters. She also does volunteer counseling with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in West Melbourne, and runs a multi-family, child-focused program there called “KidsZone”. On a more personal level, Pam has three grown-up children, one adolescent step-son, a partner, five beautiful grandchildren, and a delinquent cat! She loves reading, long-distance walking (having done the coast-to-coast walk across England, and a 2 week trek in Nepal), water workouts, and playing the Bodhran (Irish drum) for stress release.
Gippsland Region

Kevin Dmytrenko - 0429 705 011 / 5159 0125
or ReliefCounsellor@omeohs.com.au
Omeo District Health, Omeo.

Background and Experience
Rural - Within one and a half weeks of moving to Omeo, the fires swept over his roof and his engagement with the local community began via a baptism of fire, literally. Kevin moved to Omeo from Geelong to take up a personnel job at the Glen Valley gold mine, 40 km north of Omeo. After becoming the site manager, he applied for and got the job as the only drought counsellor for 1400 local residents living in an area that stretches nearly 3000 square kms around Omeo.

Counselling - Kevin’s background is in Nursing, Juvenile Justice, Youth Work and First Aide. He was completing a Division 2 nursing course when he moved to Omeo and is currently completing a diploma of counselling with the Australian Institute of Counselling. Kevin is also training to be a community ambulance officer.

Special Interests
Apart from Kevin’s interest in motor sport, (he won the 1985 Australian Off-Road Championship, navigating), Kevin’s background in Juvenile Justice has helped him to deal effectively with conflict, intimidation and violence. Kevin keeps calm, waits for clients to settle, and then talks.

Practice notes
Kevin’s experience working with Juvenile Justice clients has taught him to be direct, along the lines of No Bullshit Therapy, and to “not skirt around an issue”. Kevin says this work has definitely improved his listening skills, “I listen for the hidden meaning.” He is currently doing a lot of community engagement work and beginning to see people with family relationship difficulties as a result of the drought.

Susan Armstrong – 0418 382 540
or susan.armstrong@kilmany.org.au
Kilmany UnitingCare, Leongatha – 1 day per week.

Background and Experience
Rural – Sue comes originally from a small rural town in Devonshire UK but has lived and worked in Victoria for the last 30+ years, 20 of which have been spent on a farm in Gippsland where she and her partner John, also a farmer/social worker, live.

Counselling – Sue has extensive experience in social work and community development project work. Her jobs have included working for community health, child welfare and local service development. She is currently completing a PhD at La Trobe university about women’s experience of depression in a rural community in Gippsland.

Special Interests
Sue and John have bought up four children on their rural property where, in addition to running a dairy farm they also have a small vineyard. There is always a busyness to life on a rural property and although Sue enjoys trips up to Melbourne for coffee, books and company, she couldn’t ever imagine living in the city again.

Practice Notes
What Sue likes about being a rural counsellor is that it is never dull: “You get to hear some great stories of survival and currently we are working with a group of people who haven’t traditionally used counselling services in the past. What is challenging about the job is being able to give a sense of hope when farmers’ livelihoods are being seriously challenged.”

“In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice.
But in practice, there is.”
Jan L. S. Snepscheut

Call 1300 655 969 (3pm – 11pm) for telephone drought support, professional debriefing or contact details of your local Drought Counsellor.
News flash!

At the moment the Mallee is covered in a sea of green, and the farmers are trying to avoid getting bogged in the paddocks. The mood has lifted, and people are saying they haven’t had a start like this since 1983. That year proved to be a bumper harvest the likes of which we hadn’t seen since the mid 70’s. Pity there are so many lean years in between.

Success Stories

In this section we highlight some of the innovative and thoughtful ways Drought Counsellors have engaged with their local communities to build resilience and connection in the face of drought. Unfortunately, due to limitations of space, we are only able to report on a small sample of the many examples of successful activities coming in.

The Herald Sun featured Harrow, a little town where 170 men attended a Men’s night. They sent mini-buses around, all met at the pub, and had a doctor / counsellor attend from Mildura. This was the same town that had advertised to bring city girls up to meet some of the single country men.

Contact Jann Barkman 5032 9755.

A number of regions are running “Digging Deep - Emotional Strength Building for Women” an 8-10 week program which focuses on “emotional strength-building” for women. (eg Kyabram contact Wendy Howe 5857 0243)

We are aware that two CIG members have started a peer support group, inviting people in their area who are in any way related to drought work to join them. This has been a successful venture and has been a great way to create helpful, supportive, communicative networks.

One counsellor says that she went to a local primary school and spoke to the children about the difficulties that may occur in families and communities as a result of the drought. When she spoke about feelings that may come up, “…the kids started to talk about what’s happening at home and how they feel about it.”

Drought counsellors in the Grampians region have found that communities respond to workers and organisations that have been ‘on the ground’ for some time.

The first of a series of Pub Nights, sponsored by the Uniting Church and organised by local drought counsellors in Gippsland occurred in Dargo at the very start of the recent rains, which became floods. Fifty-five people turned up, but no speakers as the date of the event had been changed a week earlier. So Peter Carr stepped in and spoke on drought, to the accompaniment of heavy rain in the background.

Details phone Peter Carr 0438 596 075 or Shirley Millard s_millard@hotmail.com

Nothing inspires more than a success story.

Send your success stories to: Michelle Wills m.wills@latrobe.edu.au

“IT never rains but it pours!”

Our thoughts are with the communities in Gippsland now experiencing flood conditions which, for some, have come directly after the devastation of fire and drought.
Working ideas
emerging thoughts that may be helpful

Models of Drought Counselling: Generalist vs specialist drought counsellor?
Regardless of what the job title is, drought counsellor, support worker, rural adjustment worker, family support worker, whether to employ specialist drought workers or simply add hours to generalist services is a question no doubt currently being asked at a management level.

Here are some thoughts emerging from the regional CIGs.
Sole workers need to incorporate both direct services and community development into their approach and the organization as a whole needs to ensure that there is integration between these two arms. Engaging local community networks is required if engagement of individual clients is to succeed to any significant degree. Consequently, organisations need to develop clear job descriptions which reflect this need for both community development and counselling.

Some services have the view that the drought counsellors should only be centre-bound and only do face-to-face work – which is only possible if services are very well established.

Some advantages of specialist drought workers:
• Ready-made and enthused advocates for people affected by drought on board
• Development and maintainance of specialist knowledge is focussed on
• People with knowledge of both rural communities and counselling are actively recruited
• Liaison and sharing of information about drought work with other specialists across Victoria / Australia is easier

Some potential problems for specialist drought workers:
• Overwhelming load if hours are minimal (7-10 hrs per week not uncommon)
• Need to develop the role with the whole organization as one part-time person can’t do it all
• Can be very isolating if not connected into a support network, locally and across state

Some advantages of adding drought work to generalist hours:
• Can potentially develop a whole agency approach to drought support
• Can orient all services to drought response
• Can spread expertise across all staff if specialist training and support is provided

Some problems of just adding minimal hours of drought funding to generalist hours:
• Hard to get out of the office
• Focus tends to fall on easier issues - extra hours to complete existing work
• If just tacked onto centre-based role, tends to lead to emphasizing office-based work

Emerging thoughts - there are advantages to having both specialist and generalist drought workers. Specialist workers can outreach and keep informed about drought, and can be supported by dedicated support networks, such as the CIG network, but specialist drought workers also need support from their host agency. The drought worker’s job works best when their host agency is responsive to the drought, orienting all services to the needs of people affected by drought (whole agency approach), as well as providing day-to-day support to the specialist drought counsellor / worker.

NEWS
from the
BIG shed (DHS)

The ‘Tackling Mental Health in Drought’ initiative, funding ‘drought’ counselling; Primary Care Partnerships; expansion of Sustainable Farm Families; Bouverie; and the Drought Personal Support Line, will continue until June 2008, under the banner, ‘Sustaining Community Wellbeing’. This will include funding to Barwon South West. Reflecting the local partnerships and integration DHS is building strong partnerships with VFF, DPI, DVC, VicRelief, Centrelink, and working on others. We were all well represented at the VFF Statewide Conference recently. A statewide Rural PCP Forum is on 1st August, and Sylvia Barry, manager with Primary Health is presenting our shared work at the National Rural and Regional Service Delivery Conference in Dubbo, late July.
We are looking for suggestions re the focus of a statewide evaluation of the ‘mental health in drought’ response to be undertaken in early 2008. Capturing the good practice and local research on what makes a difference, is vital for building an evidence base that can inform future program development. And finally DHS, including Rural Health, Mental Health, Aged Care, Public Health program areas, Housing, and Office for Children, have formed a ‘drought working group’. One key aim is Strategic Drought Plan development that will underpin coordinated short-term to long-term initiatives focused on supporting rural communities adapt to and cope with drought and potential climate change and ongoing rural adjustment impacts.

Sally Rose Partnerships Team - Integrated Health Promotion Rural & Regional Health & Aged Care Services.

Email sally.rose@dhs.vic.gov.au

Email Jeff Young j.young@latrobe.edu.au
After the Rains by Peter Carr (Sale)
peter.carr@kilmany.org.au

As drought counsellors we need to be aware that the onset of rain is not the end to our work. The local farming industry reports that it will take about five years for the financial costs of the prolonged drought to be alleviated, provided we have ongoing “normal conditions” (rain).

A number of problems can occur after the rains, including:
• Nitrate poisoning of livestock. Halpin and Hides (2002) describe nitrate accumulation in plants as follows: Plants absorb nitrogen from the soil which they then convert into proteins and other nitrogen-containing substances. Normally this conversion process occurs rapidly in plants, so they contain relatively small amounts of nitrate. However, during periods of drought, reduced uptake by plants and bacterial activity can cause a build-up of nitrogen in the soil. Application of fertiliser at sowing can increase these levels further. Hence, when the drought breaks, nitrate uptake by plants can be high. Cows grazing on plants with a high concentration of nitrate may suffer poisoning and subsequent death. Nitrate poisoning requires urgent attention by a veterinarian who must inject the affected animal with Methylene Blue. Repeated treatments are often required. Annual ryegrass and capeweed are capable of accumulating large amounts of nitrate. It is important to give growing grass time to develop in size to ensure cattle graze on the tops of the plant and not the stems (which contain a higher concentration of nitrogen). With the colder weather and thirty day plus pasture rotation this becomes difficult. While the paddocks look green from the road, they remain unsuitable for use.
• Increased growth of weeds. These include large quantities of local weeds and weeds imported with the purchase of fodder, such as Patterson’s Curse. The introduction of weeds has increased as the quality of fodder has decreased.
• Burnt materials from fire areas being flushed into the waterways, including toxic-runoff, which contaminates them. Those that are used as a source of drinking water must be treated before use, even for stock. Some weirs and dams have already suffered from this process.

In addition, loss of long term family association with the land is becoming a regular occurrence with increasing numbers of children no longer wanting to farm the family property and a significant number of large companies buying up family farming properties. The effect on communities has been seen and may increase over the next few years. For example, sporting clubs are amalgamating to survive and smaller towns are at risk of decline.

Financial strain may last for five years which will mean a long time to recover lost income and assets. With the easing of drought conditions, the stress on farming communities may become too much for some people without the “drought to blame”. After the drought breaks, depression may in fact be greater than during the drought because the “need to get through this drought” has gone and the whole stress of it all suddenly becomes too much. There is still a lot of work ahead, even if the rain continues to fall.

Research notes
By Jeff Young  j.young@latrobe.edu.au

The Department of Human Services has engaged The Bouverie Centre to facilitate a research project to “explore effective counselling strategies for supporting people in drought affected rural communities.” The CIGs (Co-operative Inquiry Groups) in each region are part of this research, as is client feedback and advice. In addition, I am completing a PhD using this data and adding in depth interviews with key informants. What follows is a summary of an interview I conducted with a couple who were very suspicious of counselling, until they saw a specialist drought counsellor for one session. They have given permission for me to share their story, but names and details have been changed to protect their privacy.

A friendly stranger
I recorded the interview in their home, which is outside a small remote town in rural Victoria. Bob and Jean forgot I was coming, “otherwise I would have baked a cake” said Jean. Jean and Bob are in their mid sixties, Bob was a shearer who, after recovering from an injury last year, could not get work due to the drought. “We got really depressed,” reported Jean in the plural. Jean did most of the talking, which suited Bob.

We only saw Barbara, (drought counsellor) because my cousin (who found out about Barbara through word of mouth) rang Barbara and made the appointment. “I don’t believe in that sort of thing, (counselling) and now I do” Jean admitted.

Jean continued, “We only had one session with Barbara. It came at the right time… It was good that she came to our place. She put us at our ease, made a connection, found common ground… It was important that Barbara was someone who would listen, and ask questions… a stranger you could tell things to and express feelings you wouldn’t tell your best friend… You crack hearty with friends and put on a brave face, but you can open up and let feelings out to a stranger.” I asked, “What if Barbara had not been so friendly?” Jean spoke for her and Bob, “If she’d been official or ‘starchie’, we would have got rid of ‘em quick smart.”

Not believing in counselling before meeting Barbara, Jean said she thought it was “shit, airy-fairy bullshit… I thought the counsellor would tell you what to do, tell you where you’d gone wrong. Barbara gave us some suggestions but didn’t tell us what to do. She was really nice, warm, bubbly…. She listened but added advice…. She made us feel good. We realised it wasn’t our fault, which really helped.”

Barbara helped Bob fill out the Centrelink forms. Bob calmly pointed out, “They are very hard, and filling them out makes you feel like a failure.” Jean jumped in with “We’ve never done it before, you feel like a bludger.”

In-home counselling suited Bob and Jean because, as they said, “We’re loners, nothing would get us out.” And Jean and Bob’s advice to others who are in a similar boat, and considering counselling, “Can’t hurt you, but it could help you.”
Organisational Profile: The VFF

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) is Australia’s premier farm peak representative body. Its mission is to advance the commercial, environmental and social interests of Victorian Farmers. The VFF is organized into about 243 local member-branches, representing different produce groups: Pigs, Chicken/Meat, Eggs, Horticulture, Livestock, Dairy (UDV), & Grains. Each branch has a president, secretary and treasurer. On the Management side, there are 5 Regional Managers who are the link between an Executive board and the regional members. There are 8 Policy Councils, including Social Policy, which looks after the social interests of Victorian Farmers. That is why, Sally Rose from DHS is liaising, on behalf of the drought counsellors, with June Owen and Brenda McLachlan, (VFF Social Council). Local drought counsellors are advised to engage with local VFF branches, to explore collaborative ways to work together, to support farmers affected by drought and to help look after their general social interests.

Contact Brenda McLachlan  
bmclachlan@vff.org.au

No Bullshit Therapy

No Bullshit Therapy - with a focus on working with people affected by drought. Presented by The Bouverie Centre and hosted by Local State-Funded Drought Counsellors

Free one day regional workshops  
Open to any counsellors / rural workers

No Bullshit Therapy - Striving towards honesty. “An approach that is ideal for men and people who: don’t like therapy; have had traumatic experiences and are reluctant to trust do-gooders; see counselling and therapy as a middle class wank; don’t like being psychologised; are suspicious of the worker’s agenda or motives; have had a lot of unsatisfactory treatment, counselling or therapy and are hard to engage in therapy.”

Workshops will be held in the 3 major centres of each region over the next 12 months. See below for dates and locations of the first workshops in Gippsland, Grampians, Hume and Loddon-Mallee. Workshops are funded by DHS.

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<td>Traralgon</td>
<td>Peter Carr 0438 596 075</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Leah Henderson 0400 923 799</td>
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<td>Ballarat</td>
<td>Kevin Luttrell 0407 860 356</td>
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<td>Beechworth</td>
<td>Jane Rushworth 0432 701 902</td>
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<td>Ruth Malpass 0432 701 901</td>
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<td>8/11/07</td>
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<td>Susan Conduit 03 9376 9844</td>
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Registration: You must register by submitting an application form to The Bouverie Centre. For future locations, dates & registration forms please phone Susan on 9376 9844 or email s.conduit@latrobe.edu.au Places are limited to 30.
Original Piece - HOPE & DESPAIR
by Pam Rycroft (p.rycroft@latrobe.edu.au), Loddon Mallee CIG facilitator, Bouverie

The topic of hope and despair, so pertinent to drought work (as well as work with mental health issues, acquired brain injury, illness and trauma) has been largely missing, since Jung, from the literature on counselling and psychotherapy. A number of recent exceptions are very worthy of mention. Two articles (Perlesz, 1999; Weingarten, 2000) and a recent book (Flaskas, McCarthy and Sheehan, 2007) stand out for me. You may know of other references: I’d be delighted to know about them. From the above, and in conversations with the Loddon-Mallee CIG group and other colleagues, some interesting and sometimes challenging ideas about hope and despair have emerged. These are discussed below.

“... what we call our despair is often only the painful eagerness of unfed hope.”
George Eliot

First of all, there is a popular notion that hope and hopelessness (or despair) are polar opposites. In fact, the one can’t exist without the other. But neither do they stand in direct proportion to each other (that is the more one despairs, the less one has hope). One of the more compelling findings that comes from clinical research with acquired brain injury (Perlesz, 1999) and from the experience of caregivers of people with HIV-Aids (Folkman, Moskowitz, Ozer, and Park,1997) is that hope and despair co-exist. In her follow up with families after traumatic brain injury, Perlesz (1999) expected to find that those family members who had made some meaning from the accident and experienced personal growth as a result would be less distressed than others. However, this was not the case: some reported discovering strengths and a sense of growth while also reporting clinical levels of distress and family dissatisfaction. Others reported no sense of meaning or purpose alongside low levels of distress. Family members “could appear to make good adjustments to trauma, to be coping well, to be getting on with their own lives, and yet remain ‘clinically depressed’. Similarly, in Folkman’s study of partners of people suffering from AIDS, 99.5% scored very highly on depression scales at the same time as experiencing (and feeling inspired by) a number of meaningful, quality of life events. It is increasingly recognised that positive and negative feelings are independent of each other. In our Loddon-Mallee CIG group, a ‘snapshot’ of the same apparent contradiction was presented by an account of an elderly woman on the land who had lived through a number of severe droughts, and who woke one day to see new grass after the rain. She spoke of the “healing” effect of seeing the green - a tribute to Nature’s determination to regenerate, while being very familiar with the long hard road to recovery following drought. Drought is much more isolating and attracts less community interest than other disasters. Jeff Young from Bouverie has likened fire/flood to an acute illness and drought to a chronic illness. The former attracts concern and empathy whereas the latter is hidden; ongoing and often boring…drought is not nearly as ‘sexy’ as other disasters!

“Hope doesn’t come from calculating whether the good news is winning out over the bad. It's simply a choice to take action.”
Anna Lappe

“Hope is the feeling you have that the feeling you have isn't permanent.”
Jean Kerr

We each (clients and counsellors) bring with us our own ‘relationship’ to the concepts of hope and despair, and our own lived experience and relationship to the feelings associated with both. Sociologists write of the way in which the community (especially in our Western world) passes judgment on these experiences: we tend to applaud hope and condemn despair. As a result, the experience of a feeling can evoke particular feelings about feeling that way…anything from embarrassment, shame, guilt, or fear can attend sadness and despair, depending on one’s relationship with being sad or despairing....while some write of the tyranny of optimism in our society. Sadness can be seen as a problem, when it may in fact be more of a solution. In our work, we are constantly dealing with both hope and hopelessness. If we are not aware of what we bring to our interactions with clients, we can find ourselves in judgment of clients’ stock of hope. We see some people in dire situations who express a lot of hope, and we sometimes accuse them of denial. But others who express only hopelessness can evoke in us either an aversive reaction (possibly because of our sense of powerlessness) or an attempt to work (often too hard) to persuade them into hope, which is usually much more comfortable for us. I remember only too well a conversation with a young woman who spoke of death as a welcome friend. As I sat with her reality, empathy and ‘standing still’ took me down a path where I felt I was colluding with death and betraying life. I wanted to find the ‘right’ thing to say to make her commit to life again, but it was not available to me at that time. She later told me that it was ‘a relief’ to be able to speak openly about despair, but that most people ‘closed down’ such conversations. Some hopelessness cannot be talked away, but may be tolerated together, while hope is being strengthened.
“Hope is not contingent on outcome....Hope is relational in some deep and enduring sense. It sits between us. It is sustained and nourished by memories, expectations, conversations and trust.”

Maisel

In counselling, hope and hopelessness are held in balance by both counsellor and client. Sometimes we hold the balance of hope for our clients, while they deal with the experience of despair. It is a challenge sometimes to hold on to hope while sitting with our clients’ despair and to remind ourselves it is their despair, not ours. In families, the balance of hope and despair can be distributed in different ways. One family member may be the holder of hope while another expresses only hopelessness, or the two may alternate. The difference can be experienced as a distancing in relationships, as individuals do it differently. Whole communities widen the potential both for despair to be shared, and for hope to be felt and enacted, and borrowed from each other. It is certainly the stuff of our work constantly. Carmel Flaskas (2007) offers a number of ‘compass points’ to help guide us through the challenge of working with both hope and despair. While I encourage you to read the whole chapter (I am happy to distribute it among the CIG groups) I will reproduce some of her points here:

- As well as attending to our clients’ experience of hope and hopelessness, and inviting them to speak about this directly, we need to attend to our own experience of this in life, and more particularly in the counselling relationship.

- We can directly invite conversations with clients and their families about their experience of hopelessness and hope.

- When we move beyond assumptions about the oppositionality of hope and hopelessness, we can move beyond talking about, for example, ‘too much’ hopelessness or ‘too little’ hope. Talking about the balance of hope and hopelessness, or the distribution of hope, or the network of hope opens up different ways of thinking and talking with clients.

- To be attuned to the coexistence of strong hope and strong hopelessness, especially in experiences of abuse, trauma, loss and tragedy, allows us to stay open to witnessing more fully the realness of our clients’ experiences.

- Having respectful conversations with families about the way in which hope and hopelessness are distributed within the family heightens the awareness of the impact of this on relationships, as well as the possibility for changing this.

Finally, counselling in and of itself is a context of hope, as are activities that engage communities and get people together. Whilst there are some things that we can’t talk away, the potential is much greater for despair and hopelessness to be tolerated within such contexts of hope.

References:

Flaskas, C. (2007) The Balance of Hope and Hopelessness In Flaskas et al. (op.cit.)


Weingarten, K. (2007) Hope in a time of global despair In Flaskas et al. (op.cit.)
In this section we report anonymously on stories of how people found counselling helpful. It is intended to help explain, in plain language, how talking to a counsellor may be helpful.

If you have a story of how talk helped, please send it to Michelle Wills email m.wills@latrobe.edu.au

Reading other people’s personal accounts of what they endured and how they survived can be some of the most effective medicine.

Drought counselling services are beginning to see more clients as community development approaches engage clients, and as local communities are getting to know that services exist - and will not fold in 3 months.

Given the insidious long-term nature of the drought, linking the client’s difficulties to the normal and expected impacts of drought can be surprisingly therapeutic. Validation and acknowledgement of the stress and trauma clients are facing due to drought, seem to be even more important than in usual clinical practice, because drought does not attract the same community response that other more acute natural disasters do. The broader community can watch fire and flood in ‘real time’ witnessing dramatic and frightening media images that elicit immediate and powerfully healing acknowledgement. When does drought become a trauma - after 2, 3, 5 years? The gradual stress of drought builds up and people can blame themselves or loved ones rather than the drought.

Other clinical themes are raised by the following telephone call. Jim, a 25 year old farm labourer, called the Personal Drought Support Line. It was the first time he had talked about his difficulties and a friend had told him to call. The counsellor reported that telling him that she didn’t know much about his farming specialty really helped Jim open up (talking about something he was confident and knowledgeable about).

The counsellor started talking about practical supports and then gradually moved on to discussing relationship issues. The caller was very resourceful and quite upbeat. He said that despite being down to his last dollar, his girlfriend was very supportive and he managed with the help of his friends. The call seemed a positive experience.

Clinical Themes from this call
- Resourcefulness
- Word of mouth important in prompting call
- Common feeling that “others are worse off than me”
- Reluctance to seek financial aide or income support through welfare - despite being down to last dollar
- Asking the caller about his work helped him open up
- Practical advice about his work helped move from chat to counselling
- Relationship issues was one focus of the work.
Organisational Profile: DPI

The Department of Primary Industries (DPI) supports the agriculture, fisheries, petroleum, minerals, energy and forest industries in Victoria. DPI provides advice and support in Victoria to the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Energy and Resources.

DPI uses a collaborative approach to influence improvements in industry performance and to encourage the adoption of new technologies and development practices. It does this by using its expertise in science and technology to provide information and advice on the use and management of resources. DPI also assists industries by running a range of community education and extension programs.

DPI has over 2,500 staff in more than 80 locations across Victoria who manage and regulate the use of Victoria’s natural resources and encourage industries to develop them in the most efficient way by using our world-class science. DPI, through its Catchment and Agriculture Services division, is Victoria’s leading rural service provider with 750 staff living and working regionally.

DPI staff have a commitment to helping communities understand and adapt to new challenges and opportunities, including a critical role in helping to prevent, respond and recover from natural emergencies and disasters, such as severe weather and fires. It is the local DPI staff that drought counsellors could potentially engage in collaborative strategies to assist farmers cope with the social impact of drought.

Contact Jen Murray by email Jen.Murray@dpi.vic.gov.au

Pitching in

In this new section, No Bull reports on examples of people from different organizations and community groups networking or working together... for the greater good.

Strong Women, Strong Families

Strong Women, Strong Families has been useful to support women who are worried about their families. The women from the community are invited to meet with a variety of service providers at a single venue: Primary Mental Health, Centrelink, Rural Financial Counsellors and Drought Counsellors. The local drought counsellor said, “We give the women strategies about how to help when their husbands are despairing.” Women not only get assistance to apply for various services to which they may be entitled, but also learn helpful ways to deal with their distraught loved ones.

Further information and who to contact: Tina Whittle 9376 9844 Bouverie

Gippsland Women on the Mooove

Diane Robinson (Yarram Drought Counsellor) in conjunction with Yarram Women on Farms and Lisa Price (Gippsland Women and Drought coordinator with the Department of Victorian Communities) assisted 8 women to attend the annual Women on Farms gathering held in Shepparton, entitled Women on the MOOOVE.

Without funding support from The Department for Victorian Communities, Department of Primary Industries, and the Shepparton WoF group who donated 5 registrations, these women would not have been able to attend. Some of the women had accessed the services of the drought counsellor, and some had attended a pampering day held before the event. Di congratulated these women on being able to arrange for their responsibilities to be carried out by others (not an easy task at short notice) and also the other wonderful women & men who took on these tasks and allowed their women to go away. Participants included a young mother of 5 who took her baby with her, and ladies in their 70’s, who as widows had found it difficult to leave their farms for many years. According to Di, “All the women came home in a more relaxed and reinvigorated state, ready to be able to continue through what will be a very difficult winter.”

Contact Diane Robinson on 0400 841 271 or email diane@ruralfamilyresources.com
Working as a counsellor in drought recovery has led me to reflect on the differences between this work and my previous experience in recovery following bushfire and flood. I expected there to be a high level of demand for counselling, much as there had been in the past. However, this has not been the case as, like many other drought counsellors, I have found referrals to be difficult to attract.

Fire and flood are both defined events with often devastating and immediate consequences. In both cases, the Recovery process follows quickly, often overlapping with the Response phase. The community comes together and Recovery is a coordinated and planned process involving many agencies and resources.

Initially I worked with Recovery (fire/flood) in personal support where I met many victims and local health professionals by attending community meetings, visiting agencies and being responsive to all requests for assistance. Many referrals came from the local disaster hotline and they were responded to very quickly. Sitting on the Recovery committee allowed me to be very aware of the issues and available resources.

Some months later my role changed to that of outreach counsellor. Because of my earlier involvement in personal support I had met many community members and had developed excellent relationships with local service providers. I worked closely with a community development worker who had access to resources and who facilitated community events which afforded a great means of meeting potential counselling clients.

Working as a drought counsellor is very different. I have found it difficult to tap into resources and to attract clients. In East Gippsland, the drought recovery process is uncoordinated and I have not found a forum to meet with the other players in the area. Soon after the funding for these positions was announced we had more bushfires in East Gippsland. The fire threat continued for over two months and people were too busy preparing their properties to find the time for counselling. Unfortunately, the fire recovery process was not linked into the drought recovery which prevented the early engagement of the farming community. The lack of an outreach community development position for drought has also limited opportunities to network.

It is my experience that individuals are more likely to seek support following an immediate and traumatic event than they are for the slow, insidious progression of drought. Fires and flood attract media coverage and community concern in the form of donations and volunteers. Communities come together and there are opportunities for the sharing of experiences.

Drought is much more isolating and attracts less community interest than other disasters. Jeff Young from Bouverie has likened fire/flood to an acute illness and drought to a chronic illness. The former attracts concern and empathy whereas the latter is hidden, ongoing and often boring. Drought is not nearly as ‘sexy’ as other disasters.

There is a tendency for farmers to withdraw and many experience feelings of self-blame. Financial problems are extreme, farmers (often elderly) work long hours and cannot afford to hire workers. Many are facing the possibility of having to leave the property which may have been in the family for generations. Reaching out for support is not in the farming culture, relationships suffer, the isolation increases and with it the risk.

As a counsellor, I feel a growing sense of unease at my inability to identify, much less engage those farmers most at risk. A localised coordinated recovery process would increase community awareness of risk, facilitate a sense of shared adversity and provide opportunity for counsellors to engage the drought affected community.

If you have an issue you believe should be addressed in Contemporary Controversies, email Jeff Young at j.young@latrobe.edu.au
Got a photo which expresses the impact of drought better than words?

This is the original "Chinese proverb" has wrongly been translated as: A Picture is Worth One Thousand Words. In fact, the literal translation is: A Picture’s Meaning Can Express Ten Thousand Words.

Please send your photo to m.wills@latrobe.edu.au. We will print photos in subsequent editions of No Bull and readers can vote for the photo which they feel best expresses the impact of drought on Victoria. The photo which receives the most votes will win the photographer a weekend away from the farm or work! More details in the next edition of No Bull.

Our first entry to our drought photo contest was received by John Bell, drought counsellor from Gippsland. The photo is of his own farm near Kongwak.

Said Hanrahan A poem by John O’Brien

“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan
In accents most forlorn
Outside the church ere Mass began
One frosty Sunday morn.

The congregation stood about,
Coat-collars to the ears,
And talked of stock and crops and drought
As it had done for years.

“It’s lookin’ crook,” said Daniel Croke;
“Bedad, it’s cruke, me lad
For never since the banks went broke
Has seasons been so bad.

“It’s dry, all right,” said young O’Neil,
With which astute remark
He squatted down upon his heel
And chewed a piece of bark.

And so around the chorus ran
“It’s keepin’ dry, no doubt.”
“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“Before the year is out.

“The crops are done; ye’ll have your work
To save one bag of grain;
From here way out to Back-O’-Bourke
They’re singin’ out for rain.

“They’re singin’ out for rain,” he said,
“And all the tanks are dry.”
The congregation scratched its head,
And gazed around the sky.

“There won’t be grass, in any case,
Enough to feed an ass;
There’s not a blade on Casey’s place
As I came down to Mass.*

“If rain don’t come this month,” said Dan,
And cleared his throat to speak -
“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“If rain don’t come this week.*

A heavy silence seemed to steal
On all at this remark;
And each man squatted on his heel,
And chewed a piece of bark.

“We want an inch of rain, we do,”
O’Neil observed at last;
But Croke "maintained" we wanted two
To put the danger past.

“If we don’t get three inches, man,
Or four to break this drought,
We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“Before the year is out.*

In God’s good time down came the rain;
And all the afternoon
On iron roof and window-pane
It drummed a homely tune.

And through the night it pattered still,
And lightsome, gladsome elves
On dripping spout and window-sill
Kept talking to themselves.

It pelted, pelted all day long,
A-singing at its work,
Till every heart took up the song
Way out to Back-O’-Bourke.

And every creek a banker ran,
And dams filled ovetop;
“We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“If this rain doesn’t stop.”

And stop it did, in God’s good time:
And spring came in to fold
A mantle o’er the hills sublime
Of green and pink and gold.

And days went by on dancing feet,
With harvest-hopes immense,
And laughing eyes beheld the wheat
Nid-nodding o’er the fence.

And, oh, the smiles on every face,
As happy lad and lass
Through grass knee-deep on Casey’s place
Went riding down to Mass.

While round the church in clothes genteel
Discoursed the men of mark,
And each man squatted on his heel,
And chewed his piece of bark.

“There’ll be bush-fires for sure, me man,
There will, without a doubt;
We’ll all be rooned,” said Hanrahan,
“Before the year is out.”
CIGs - Cooperative Inquiry Groups

All CIGs had to determine how to provide a space to support each other whilst networking and supporting the broader network. Each group came up with a different structures. The main theme of the early CIGs was how to engage potential clients. A recent theme has been how to embrace different and sometimes competing opinions. The specific themes and observations of each region are reported below:

Grampians

**Main themes & observations**

**Theme:** It takes time.

**Observation:** Workers experienced in drought response have normalised the relatively long time it takes to engage with the community and provide trusted help.

**Theme:** The focus is on community development rather than counselling.

**Observation:** Because counsellors are getting good supervision around counselling in their host agencies, the complexities and difficulties around engaging effectively with the community and accessing isolated people who need but don’t seek help has been the main focus of discussion.

**Theme:** The value of different organizations working together.

**Observation:** A local project has helped GPs take the initiative for referring clients to counselling. Time devoted to developing relationships with various rural (farming) organisations is paying off. For example, Elders asked Wimmera Uniting Care to help train their staff in dealing with distressed farmers.

**Theme:** Seeing green is symbolic of healing.

**Observation:** Recent rains have helped create a feeling of hope, even though the impact of drought will be long lasting. The rains and the resulting green at this stage are largely symbolic of hope and healing.

Gippsland

**Main themes & observations**

**Theme:** Gippsland, although close to Melbourne, is isolated in service delivery terms.

**Observation:** Due to mountain geography and small population centres, Gippsland is isolated in service delivery whilst being close to Melbourne.

**Theme:** The CIG reflects broader community.

**Observation:** Finding ways to embrace strongly held different points of view. For example, cold calling is an issue that attracts strong views for and against. Counsellors using cold calling techniques are getting clients, making contact with those most in need of support and some people suggest that cold calling addresses the problem of isolated people not seeking help. Others are concerned that cold calling is an invasion of privacy and is an approach that does little to help build community capacity.

**Theme:** A muti-layered response model is needed for rural people affected by drought.

**Observation:** Community events and community development are essential to make contact with people and to strengthen existing community structures. One-on-one “kitchen table” support is needed for some who can’t travel or feel more comfortable in their own territory and “off-farm” services provide others much wanted anonymity from neighbours and extended family.

Loddon Mallee

**Main themes & observations**

**Theme:** Loddon Mallee has a huge land mass and dispersed, low population.

**Observation:** The tyranny of distance complicates life in many rural regions, but the large distances makes linking up across Loddon-Mallee difficult, including CIG attendance.

**Theme:** Farm-gate “cold calling” vs traditional centre-based counselling.

**Observation:** Both are necessary, and different approaches work in different areas.

**Theme:** Gender issues.

**Observation:** There is a need for both male and female counsellors. It has often been more successful to engage the male clients via their female partners (via pampering days, etc.)

**Theme:** The “Sandwich Generation.”

**Observation:** A decision, for example, to leave the farm out of consideration of the younger generation’s future may, at the same time feel disloyal to the previous generations.

**Theme:** Community resilience.

**Observation:** Community, as distinct from individual resilience has been noted-where whole communities (large and small) have histories and particular experiences of survival.
Hume

Main themes & observations

Theme: The high cost and scarcity of feed.
Observation: Considerable anger that Government isn't doing more to support affordable access to reasonable quality feed.

Theme: Small Businesses doing it tough.
Observation: Considerable feeling amongst small businesses that they can be the forgotten victims in the drought.

Theme: To "cold call or not".
Observation: The group members have differing opinions on cold-calling. While some counsellors have found this to be a very successful method by which to engage people and get their work done by doing "whatever it takes," others point out that some services won't allow it due to Occupational Health and Safety concern for workers; and others are concerned it is potentially intrusive on privacy.

Theme: Stress on the community of support workers and the community.
Observation: A mix of responses to the long term stress of drought. These include feelings of powerlessness to do enough despite extremely hard work, and tension over how best to help given the complexity of the drought response needed. People develop very strong views as the gravity of the crisis continues to grow.

Telephone

Main themes & observations

Theme: Letting people know we're here.
Observation: A new service takes time to get established and needs proper promotion.

Theme: Counselling strategies that work with rural men often seem counter to what is taught in Counselling 101 (ie in basic counselling courses).
Observation: Educational or rhetorical ways of conveying counselling ideas rather than open ended questions or inquiries about feelings seem more effective. For example, “You need this tool to get through this difficulty. We know this tool works.”

Theme: Talking about thinking rather than feeling - can work especially with men.
Observation: Clinical experience suggests asking more about the impact of the drought rather than asking directly about feelings. More of an upfront approach seems to work. A relaxed, less serious, humourous approach seems to be more effective. Creating an expectation that farmers may need to consult about mental health like they engage consultants about other aspects of farm management, could be useful.

Theme: Resilience is a good and bad thing.
Observation: Rural people will often only seek help when they are down to their last drop of water or their last dollar.

Solutions from the front line

A colleague and I have been cold calling the secondary level of drought affected people - water carters, grain merchants, small business operators etc. We have been well received on a personal level but there is a lot of anger out there particularly from small business owners who are doing it really tough and feeling they are not being supported.

Contact Sandy Rodwell: Sandra.Rodwell@gvhealth.org.au

Kevin Dymtrenko, (0429 705 011) drought counsellor in Omeo, organized a Melbourne-based band, The Prairie Oysters, to play at the local pub and then in the shire park the next day. Kevin said, “They were brilliant.” What’s more they will play in drought affected areas for free; they only ask for accommodation and travel expenses. Check them out on: www.myspace.com/oystersonline

Band contact: The Prairie Oysters, Tony Bonnici, 0410 600 197

Important ingredients of drought support work
- Persistence
- Availability
- Agency support
- Active promotion of the agency and services available
- Building relationships with potential referrers
- Sustained processes for dissemination and promotion of services
- Assertive outreach
- A mix of skills including community development, case work, advocacy, and counselling.

Contact via Shane Weir
Bouverie CIG Facilitator, Grampians.
s.weir@latrobe.edu.au
In this section we feature a selection of resources readers have found useful in supporting rural and regional communities living through the experience of drought.

**DVDS**

**The Hard Yard - Stories of Farming Life**
The DPI, in conjunction with the Department of Human Services, has released a DVD entitled “The Hard Yard - Stories of Farming Life.” The DVD features farmers, children and community organisations across Victoria telling their stories about how rural communities manage the tough challenges of farming life, including drought, fires, flood, frost, pests and disease. It also includes a comprehensive list of contact details for a range of organisations offering free support and independent advice. Copies of “The Hard Yard - Stories of Farming Life” are available direct to members of the public from the Drought Information Line on 136 186.

**BOOKS**

**Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family: A Resource Book for Good Mental Health by John Ashfield.**
Practical 307 page manual to help for family members address a wide range of common problems, including depression, anxiety, insomnia, conflict, anger, stress, relationship violence, drugs and grief. The book is available free from Beyond Blue [www.beyondblue.org.au]

**WEBSITES**

http://www.abc.net.au/water
The site is intended to provide a growing resource for communities grappling with "threats to our most precious natural resource". It features news, articles, information and multimedia from the ABC’s network of staff around the country and promises to be “shaped” by public contributions and discussion. Special thanks to Kevin Luttrell Grampians CIG for this contribution.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3928017.stm
“Q & A: Climate Change” - The BBC News website looks at key questions behind climate change and global warming. Special thanks to Belinda Lees Grampians CIG for this contribution.

www.connectcountry.com.au
Connect Country was established by Jeannie Baker, a Primary Producer’s wife who lives in Western Queensland, Australia. In http://www.connectcountry.com.au/about.htm, Jeannie writes: “Our site was developed so rural Australians can communicate openly about issues that affect them in every day life.” Contains live chat rooms and discussion forums. Special thanks to Hume CIG for this contribution.

**CDs**

**A Guide to Relaxation**
Developed by the Wangaratta Primary Mental Health Team and funded by Vic Relief and Food Bank, this useful relaxation CD is available free by contacting Trevor Barker. [trevorb@vrandfb.com.au or 0437001914]. Multiple copies available to organisations. Only cost is postage.

**BROCHURES**

**Tool Kit for getting through the drought**
Practical and well informed four page advice for dealing with stress. Produced by Lifeline’s Just Ask ! Not available in e-copy. Call 1300 13 11 14 and free copies will be sent to you. Organisations can request up to 100 copies free. Similar brochures on different topics also available.

**Coping with stress in our Rural Communities**
Well put together 12 page (A5) brochure with straightforward information about stress and practical dos and don'ts. The brochure addresses the full range of reactions to coping with a rural crisis. Produced by Sea Lake & District Health Service and the Sea Lake Neighbourhood House. Not available in e-copy. Copies (cost POA) are available from Sea Lake Neighbourhood House 5070 1448.

**Support for Workers - Drought Personal Support Line (1300 655 969)**
As well as supporting people directly affected by the drought, the Drought Personal Support Line (3pm – 11pm) has the capacity to provide secondary support to any staff who are part of the Drought Relief Initiative. Supporting people affected by drought can be stressful and demanding, and when you’re on the road, supervision or debriefing may not be immediately available. The telephone counsellors can help talk through any concerns or issues including suicide or self harm. The service is anonymous and confidential, the counsellors are skilled and experienced, and we encourage you to utilise this service, whether a friend, concerned neighbour, family member or worker of any sort. Shaun Walsh, Project Officer DPSL.

Want to join our No Bull mailing list and / or email resource list? Send your contact details (mailing address for hard copy and email address for e-copy) to m.wills@latrobe.edu.au