

Hay there, the Coast is ready to help

As western farmers battle with drought, the Sunshine Coast community has rallied and is ready to "bale" them out, writes ANGELA BENSTED

People lucky enough to live on Queensland's Sunshine Coast have many elegant clubs and restaurants to choose from, venues serving top nosh with a side of sensational views.

Winding down after a busy day or an even busier career, locals could be forgiven for simply taking it easy, drink in hand, turning their backs on the country's parched interior as they watch whales at play and ships sailing by.

Instead, community groups are getting behind Rural Aid Australia's Buy a Bale campaign, raising money to buy fodder for Queensland's struggling farmers.

Caloundra Power Boat Club is spearheading the community's efforts, with general manager Kevin Deguara optimistic about achieving a target of 15 trucks.

"You hear so much about raising money for overseas causes but our farmers here are struggling," Kevin says.

"I had a lovely letter from a lady staying with her parents at Kenilworth with her two kids.

"She told me about her situation, how money was so tight she had to move to the coast to get casual work and raise the



children while her husband stayed out west trying to keep the farm going."

The idea behind the hay deliveries is to keep the breeding stock alive so when things do pick up the farmers have something to go on with.

Once their breeding stock goes, it's very hard for farming families to get back on their feet.

The Power Boat Club hosted a dinner in September with all profits going to the hay run.

Other community groups are behind the drive, running a book exchange and organising a farmers' produce market.

Caloundra Rotary is donating the proceeds from its Melbourne Cup lunch and donation barrels are located

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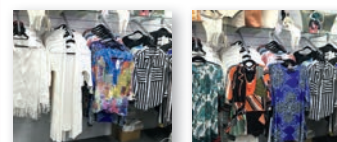


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“You hear so much about raising money for overseas causes but our farmers here are struggling”

throughout the region. The fundraising will culminate in a carnival-like send off for a convoy laden with hay from the Caloundra Power Boat Club on Sunday, November 27.

The club is planning a breakfast and entertainment before police escort the trucks along Nicklin Way as they head west to distribute their load.

Kevin won't know the final destination until just before the convoy departs, once Rural Aid Australia has

determined the neediest areas through its local advisers network.

That organisation will also buy the feed and arrange the transport.

CEO Charles Alder says they try to make a bit of an event at the other end.

“It gives us an opportunity to bring together the farmers who at the height of the drought were just sitting on their properties,” he says.

“They were pretty stressed and couldn't afford the fuel to get off the

properties in some cases.”

There has been some rain in the west recently, so much so the Birdsville annual racing carnival was limited to a one-day event in August after the track was flooded.

Despite the relief in some parts of the state, 35 councils and four part council areas remain drought declared, with a further 82 individual drought declared properties in other parts.

Charles says that even with rain, there are a lot of farmers who don't have the cashflow to feed the animals they have to keep them alive.

“It's as much a financial drought as it is a physical one,” he says.

Fortunately there is no shortage of hay in the state's southeast at the moment and the feed itself is relatively inexpensive compared to the overall cost of the project.

It's the fuel costs which are crushing, with a single trailer costing \$5 a kilometre to transport.

“Whereas the cost of the hay might only be \$1500 to \$2000, for us to carry that hay 1000km is going to cost us about \$5000-\$6000,” Charles says.

While they might enjoy the coastal lifestyle now, many of the Caloundra Power Boat Club's members come from the land and have strong links with farming communities.

FAST FACTS:

**485 bales raised so far.
That is 10 trucks.
The target is for 15
trucks to depart on
November 27**

The club's commitment to local farmers also runs deep and it has recently switched to Maleny Dairies for all its dairy purchases, bringing locally-sourced food up to 90 per cent.

The convoy of hay trucks heading west will include two box trailers of produce supplied by local farmers – one of pumpkins and one of watermelons.

“Food is what we're all about here at the club,” Kevin says.

And whether you come from the land or not, as Kevin points out, “we all eat the food. It's an important part of this country”.

➤ *Rural Aid Australia is a registered charity and all donations are tax deductible. More information at caloundrapowerboat.com.au*

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