Women’s recollection of farming and managing for drought in Australia during 2006-2010: What role for local government?

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This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed ........................................
Janet Maureen Congues

Date: ........................................
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Abstract

Women who farmed and local government may have played key roles in managing for drought in Australia during 2006-2010 but their knowledge and experiences were not always documented or evaluated. Research has demonstrated how agrarian and neoliberal ideologies and Australia’s negation of women who farmed from the national census resulted in knowledge and experiences of women who farmed being marginalised and discounted by agricultural leadership organisations and decision making processes.

Smith’s (1990a) feminist standpoint theory was used to establish the everyday lives of women who farmed and locate their experience as significant to enhancing agricultural knowledge. Prioritising their recollection of the drought enabled the women to recognise the importance of their ideas, experiences and expertise. Other theoretical tools such as Bourdieu’s (Swartz 1997; Raedeke, Green, Hodge & Valdivia 2003) notions of ‘habitus’, ‘capital’ and ‘field’ along with Heller’s (2005) theoretical perspective about ideology were used to enhance the theoretical framework. Qualitative methods of in-depth interviews and text analysis of documents were used to gather and analyse the data.

The study was located in the latter four years (2006-2010) of Australia’s Millennium Drought and focused on the Goulburn Valley, a mixed farming region of Australia’s south-eastern state of Victoria. A thematic analysis of eleven in-depth interviews from women who farmed in the Goulburn Valley during that time formed the foundation from which findings were analysed and discussed. This was followed by an interpretive text analysis of the role local government played during that drought using, with permission, the Greater Shepparton City Council’s Drought Program reports written at that time.

Evidence suggested initially agrarian and neoliberal ideologies provided some support for women and men who farmed during Australia’s Millennium Drought. As the drought continued, norms around notions of preparedness and resilience appeared to fragment and issues arose regarding the impact of hardship, providing appropriate services and preparing for the longer term impact of recurring droughts and climate change.

The thesis found that women did have experience and expertise that could enhance the knowledge of people who farm to better prepare and manage for future droughts in Australia and they identified how local government could be better utilised to support rural communities more effectively.
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**Acronyms**

ACT: Australian Capital Territory  
CWA: Country Women’s Association  
EC: Exceptional Circumstances  
Lab: Labor Party  
NFF: National Farmers’ Federation  
NSW: New South Wales, state of  
QLD: Queensland, state of  
SA: South Australia, state of  
SWOT Analysis: Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats Analysis, is often referred to as  
SWSF: Strong Women Strong Families  
TAS: Tasmania, state of  
VIC: Victoria, state of  
Victorian DPI: Victorian Department of Primary Industries  
WA: Western Australia, State of
Remembering

Women who farmed in the Goulburn Valley during the Millennium Drought made courageous decisions that supported and kept their families together. Some women remained in the home, helping out around the farm alongside their husbands and children. Other women worked off-farm bringing in a regular income that kept the family fed and household utilities paid between harvests and production payments, while a third group of women were either farmers themselves or farmed in partnership with their husbands as a farmer. At the same time these women were the carers, the housekeepers, the taxi-drivers for their children, the sport’s mum, the cooks, and the ones who managed the farming accounts.

At the many meetings attended during the drought, when ‘farmers’ were invited, the gendered majority seemed to be male. When attending events, such as seminars or information workshops run by the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, the majority of people, including industry related professionals and farmers, appeared to be male. At local government drought meetings, the majority of people working in a social role such as social workers or counsellors or community volunteers, seemed to be predominantly female.

Working in local government, at the Greater Shepparton City Council as a drought worker, there was an impression that the majority of people calling for information about available drought support services were women. In many cases, they requested this information because they perceived their husbands were struggling and determined that they might get permission to access support if they had the information they could act on when he finally did ask for help.

Community events held during this time for women were generally well attended and feedback included comments such as ‘What about the men?’, ‘How do we get more of this?’ and ‘I needed this time out’. Men on the other hand only seemed to turn up in big numbers if there was a sporting hero or famous person involved, but once they did turn up, made the most of what was offered and valued the opportunity for the health checks provided. Often these events were attended by social workers, councillors and other drought workers who were the
faces of the Federal governments’ drought support packages. Meeting in such a social setting meant that questions could be asked discreetly, stories could be swapped as part of general conversation and when the time arose both men and women potentially felt more comfortable to seek support.

Angry women were observed; women who questioned other women’s legitimacy to call themselves farmers in their community, women who made other women feel bad and made other women cry. I never quite understood where this came from, other than a possible feeling of hopelessness that they could not control the out-of-control spiralling into chaos they were feeling and seeing around them because of the drought. That hateful, insidious drought, that crept into the pores of people’s sense of being and sucked it dry. There was so much destruction and devastation experienced by so many people throughout rural communities; drought was akin to a salty ocean that battered away at the cliff face, gradually eating away at the very foundations of what made a cliff a cliff.

In 2007 I met women who were passionate, energetic and determined to ensure that the members of their communities remained socially connected. They were the community volunteers, applying for funding to put on community events, dropping in on neighbours to see how they were going and attending meetings to make sure community groups kept going. These same women, in 2009, were tired, exhausted and drained of any energy to keep going; they needed a break. They heard the criticism that other people were sick and tired of them ‘running everything’. Some people had moved into town or left the district completely. Neighbours for generations had moved away; there were few animals left in the paddock, orchard trees were being culled and harvests were poor. The changes were immense, but with the longevity of the drought, it was almost impossible to pinpoint, much less understand where and when it all turned sour.
Chapter One. Women, farming and managing for drought

Women who farm and the local government system in Australia may have played key roles in supporting their rural communities to manage for drought in Australia during 2006-2010, but women’s knowledge, experience and expertise has not always been recorded or evaluated. Agrarian and neoliberal ideologies in Australia negate prioritising women’s farming expertise, marginalise their experiences and fail to incorporate their representation in agricultural leadership organisations and decision making processes. Using a feminist theoretical framework that draws on the sociological scholarship of Smith, Bourdieu and Heller, this thesis aims to better understand what happened during the drought years of 2006-2010 so that strategies can be identified to assist rural communities and their local governments better plan and prepare for future droughts.

The location for this study is based in the Goulburn Valley, a region in the state of Victoria in Australia as highlighted here in the map and which will be introduced in more detail in Chapter three.

Figure 1. Map of Australia indicating the Goulburn Valley (Australian Street Maps 2012)
The study involved interviewing women for their recollections of farming and managing for drought together with an analysis of a number of drought reports collected from the Greater Shepparton City Council. Together these identified opportunities for local government to play a vital role supporting their rural communities in times of crisis such as drought. The Goulburn Valley is an important location because of the variety of farm industries and that the impact of drought affects each industry differently. The opportunities as identified in this study may also be useful to implement across other local government locations around Australia, especially given the accepted predictions that drought will be a constant feature of Australia’s climatic outlook.

This thesis argues that women who live and work on farms in Australia and who have contributed to the management of drought have been rendered invisible within the agricultural sector and their knowledge, expertise and experiences have been lost. Therefore the questions that guided this research began with:

- What knowledge do women have that assists them to farm and manage for drought in the future?
  - How did they manage for drought during 2006-2010?
  - How can this knowledge and experience be utilised to prepare and manage for drought events in the future?

Subsequent to the analysis of the interviews and local government reports further questions ensued:

- What role is there for local government?
  - What can local government do to promote preparedness for drought?
  - What can local government do better to support women and their rural communities?

This extension of the research questions enabled not only to identify and gather the knowledge of women and how they farm and manage for drought but also generated a means of agency both for women and local government to work proactively into the future.
The thesis is divided into seven chapters. This introductory chapter presents some of the critical background elements of this thesis including the questions from which this thesis was designed. The second chapter establishes the theoretical framework using Smith, Bourdieu and Heller. Chapter three provides a snapshot of the Goulburn Valley and a more detailed examination of the impact of drought. This is followed by the methods used to gather and analyse the evidence to support the findings of this study. Chapter five establishes the standpoint of the women interviewed for the thesis and Chapter six offers a text analysis of the key reports written during that time. Chapter seven concludes with analysis of the findings.

The rest of this chapter will begin by broadly examining significant international and Australian studies to develop a definition for the term ‘women who farm’ and how this term contests normative understandings of what it means to be ‘woman’ and ‘farmer’. The international studies used are consistent with Australian research and therefore contribute to and enhance an understanding of the experience of women who farm. A point to note is that the research used to follow this section includes a literature review that primarily comes from the discipline of sociology and rural sociology but also draws on some historical and political research to enhance the clarity needed to best represent the complex nature of adopting a gendered approach to farming and drought. The literature that imbues the premise of this thesis stems from the work of sociologists and rural sociologists publishing during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; the early years of what became known as the Millennium Drought. After defining the term ‘women who farm’ an outline of how Australian history has depicted women who farm will be presented, and the chapter then explores their roles within the agricultural sector. The next step will be to examine the research which has been completed to date about how women who farmed managed the crisis of drought within the framework of Australia’s risk management approach to drought. This will be progressed by looking at the role of local government within Australia and establishing the purposes for this study to be located within the years of 2006 through to 2010. Finally, the chapter provides a more detailed outline of each chapter in the thesis and an introduction into Chapter two.
1.1 Intersectionality and the term ‘women who farm’

When considering the knowledge that women have that assists them to farm and manage for drought in the future, it is important to understand that within the category of ‘woman’ there exist critical points of difference. Identifying these generates a fuller picture of the levels of inequality that exist within as well as between, categories. When considering factors such as race, education, economics and status women are not equally positioned.

By drawing on a feminist analysis of intersectionality, this thesis will consider how rural women are identified through gender and work more generally, and how the term ‘women who farm’ specifically reflects the layered complexity of how women negotiate who they are as women and as farmers.

This thesis suggests that any literature which focuses on rural women should be read in light of the term ‘intersectionality’ as this is inclusive of both the multidimensional positionality of women and the layers of oppression they contend with because of who they are as women and who they are as women in the workplace. Phoenix and Pattynama (2006, p. 187) define intersectionality as a term that makes ‘visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it’. It has also been described as offering a theoretical framework where

‘multiple social categories intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro, social-structural level (Laniu & Hassel 2015, pp. 114-115).

Intersectionality highlights that individuals cannot be classified as ‘an essential, stable category’ (Laniu & Hassel 2015, p. 118) rather other factors, such as the role of social class and access to economic resources impacts on their ability to combat social oppression (Pelak 2011, p. 329; Laniu & Hassel 2015, pp. 118-119).

The concept of intersectionality within the literature has been used to consider how women are ‘simultaneously positioned as black, working-class, lesbian or colonial subjects’ (Phoenix & Pattynama 2006, p. 187) or, as Lykke (2010, p. 50) suggests, how ‘other sociocultural categories such as race, ethnicity, class,
sexuality, age, dis/ability, nationality’ highlights that women can be oppressed simultaneously through the multiple dimensions of how they identify themselves and also are identified within society (Trauger, Sachs, Barbercheck, Kiernan, Brasier & Findeis 2008, p. 433; Bryant & Pini 2010, p. 112; Choo & Ferree 2010, p. 133; Jerneck, Olsson, Ness, Anderberg, Baier, Clark, Hickler, Hornborg, Kronsell, Lovbrand & Persson 2011, p. 76).

This thesis therefore argues that ‘women who farm’ cannot be considered as sharing any homogeneity but that it is more accurate to recognise their multi-positionality. Women who farm have everyday experiences that reflect their individual lives within the broader framework of societal institutions and cultural practices, and it is more accurate to address their positionality as women who farm because it is inclusive of the sociological implications of their work-identity with/on the farm.

Women who live and work on a farm are generally described as a farmer’s wife, an off-farm worker and as a mother because their role on the farm is seen only in relation to their husband’s role as farmer. This is most obvious in those who married into the farm business (Saugeres 2002a, p. 380; Cummins 2005, p. 291; Bryant & Pini 2009, p. 54; Alston & Whittenbury 2013, p. 118). However, descriptions such as this fail to generate the full extent of women’s contribution to the farm business as unpaid labour on the farm; cropping, milking, irrigating, as well as acting as decision-makers, book keepers, information researchers and marketing specialists (Jennings & Stehlík 2000, p. 64; Trauger 2004, p. 292; Hall & Mogyorody 2007, p. 289). This has been put down to the subjugation of women’s role in agriculture across the western world due to patriarchal, agrarian practices that have rendered women who farm as second class citizens (Davidson 2001, p. 204; Saugeres 2002c, p. 646; 2002b, p. 156; Trauger 2004, p. 297; Cummins 2005, p. 299).

Riley (2009, p. 678) advocated that women benefitted from such patriarchal practices because it allowed them agency to make advantageous choices for the benefit of the farm such as no longer having to physically work out on the farm but rather only in the house. Some scholars also argued that women who farmed often condoned patriarchal agrarianism because they agreed with the values it
promoted (Dempsey 1989, p. 94; Riley 2009, pp. 671-672) while yet others suggested that upholding a notion of being “old fashioned” enabled some women to come to enjoy the work of farming through the adoption of their husband’s lifestyle and interests (Cummins 2005, p. 291). Conversely, Brandth (2002, p. 108) argued that some women judge the importance of ‘feminine values’ within their daily lives and therefore prefer to maintain a gendered division of labour.

This highlights that women who embody farming as their career, often understand that they are perceived as transgressing social norms because visually their farming attire and ‘rough, reddened, work-worn, or dirt-stained’ skin made them appear unfeminine (Trauger 2004, pp. 301-304). Women as farmers challenges the normative ‘division of labour along a domestic/productive divide’ (Davidson 2001, p. 208) and contests agrarian ideology that constructs farmer as a masculine identity (Bryant 2001, p. 214). The literature reviewed for this thesis highlights how finding a definition for women who live and work on the farm as other than ‘farmer’ needs to acknowledge their intersectionality: the value of women as female as well as their roles, experiences and expertise in and contribution to the agricultural sector. The concept of ‘women who farm’, contests both how society defines the term ‘woman’ and the feminine and the patriarchal order of what constitutes the role and work of ‘the farmer’. The term, ‘women who farm’ denotes intersectionality. This is because the term ‘women’ is representative of the oppressed positionality of being female within a patriarchal society and also because women are rendered invisible within the term and image of ‘farmer’, as is their work and contribution within the agricultural sector.

Within this understanding of women and gender as well as women and work is the acknowledgement that as a group women cannot be universalised as representative of all women who farm. The women interviewed for this study depict the shared commonalities associated with being female and working within the agricultural sector. At the same time they each represent a multi-dimensional capacity to combat power relations within society. Therefore, the term ‘women who farm’ is defined as adult women who live and work on a farm in a voluntary or employed capacity, whether they are doing the bookwork, are a business partner or part of a farming company and involved in the decision making processes, or whether they work off-farm to support the farming family income
and/or manage the farm family. This definition is irrespective of their marital status and is deliberately broad so that it incorporates a range of women who contributed to farming, whether they themselves perceived themselves as farmers, farm wives, homemakers or as their off-farm occupation or profession. Any reference to ‘women’ in this thesis also refers to women who farm unless otherwise indicated.

1.2 Historical Perspectives

This section considers four particular aspects of the way women who farm have been represented in Australia. The first looks at how their role has been promoted, followed by the Australian Governments’ decision to remove women from the official census, through to the use of nationalism and finally through the use of both fictional and biographical narratives about women on farms. While this section is about the historical and agrarian subjugation of women who farm in Australia, disturbingly it also confirms that the struggle continues to have women’s ability to contribute knowledge, experience and expertise to the agricultural sector recognised.

The history of women’s role within the agricultural sector is important to understand because it shows how those in power structured society to promote the hegemonic position of men over women even though women’s labour was essential to land settlement in Australia. In the early twentieth century, Australian women who farmed were considered the ‘noble helpmate’ and it was routine to have women working in farm production, especially in dairying (Lake 1987, p. 178; Coldwell 2007, p. 96). Simultaneously, society demanded that women take their rightful place in the home as mothers and housewives and not usurp a man’s place as the producer and providers of the family (Lake 1987, p. 179; Voyce 2007). Socially, women’s work outside the home was condemned because it was deemed to interfere with the vital task of reproduction (Lake 1987, p. 180). Women who married into the farm were ‘often seen as secondary’ and subordinate to their husband and other members of their husband’s family (Dempsey 1989; Alston 1995, p. 7). Nevertheless they were also important to their husband for their roles as child bearer, and ‘helpmate’ which were integral to the success of the farm (Dempsey 1989; Alston 1995, p. 7; Pini 2003, p. 172).
Women who farmed were deemed responsible for their role within the home, considered necessary helpmates to their farming husbands, responsible for the development of Australia’s underpopulated continent, blamed for the loss of infants in childbirth, and obliged to maintain appropriate hygiene within the home (Lake 1987, p. 181). Women were also judged responsible for the physical and moral well-being of their husbands and were ‘exhorted to look to their husbands’ and children’s well-being (Lake 1987, p. 181). This discourse shows how women are not given a sense of ‘farming’ identity other than one in relation to their husband. Rendering women who farmed as invisible to the agricultural sector then took a literal turn when the Australian Government redefined what it meant to be a woman who farmed.

In 1893, the Australian Government decided that ‘the extent of women’s involvement in farm work in Australia needed to be hidden from view’ (Lake 1987, p. 179), as Australia did not want to give the impression that women were in the habit of working on farms. It was deemed to be shameful to have a young progressive nation admit that women still worked in the fields as did women from less developed countries (Lake 1987, p. 179; Haslam-McKenzie & Stehlik 2005, p. 540). From the 1893 census until the 1996 census, women’s involvement in farming and related activities was not included and, as a consequence, this has made it difficult to know exactly how many women have worked as farmers in Australia, in the past (Lake 1987, p. 179; Alston 1995, p. 3; Haslam-McKenzie & Stehlik 2005, p. 540). As sociologist and traveller, Jessica Ackerman (1981/1913, p. 60) wrote in 1913:

No words can express the part women have taken in the settlement of Australia. They should have place in the new Hall of Fame. Their names should be written large in the history of their country. They never will be. It is not the custom. There is no kind of toil to which man has put his hand, but woman has bravely and heroically taken her share, bearing and rearing children as well as performing unlimited and unnamed drudgery. [Author’s emphasis]

Despite the toil and work undertaken both on the farm and within their households, women were deemed as unsuitable to be counted as ‘farmers’ within the national census of a young, progressive nation and their knowledge, experience and expertise as farmers rendered insignificant and invisible within Australia’s agricultural sector. At the same time history demonstrates that women
were also rendered invisible within the wider community in Australia through the
development of iconic imagery and discourses used to build up Australia’s sense of nationalism.

In Australia women who could have identified as farmer would have clashed with the traditional, masculinist image of ‘farmer’. Lake (1997, p. 43) argues that towards the end of the 19th century, in an attempt to separate Australia’s identity from its ties with the British motherland nationalists:

…seized on the emergence of a new “national type” – a type of man. He was independent, egalitarian, resourceful and loyal to his mates – characteristics thought to be most clearly displayed by the bushman, the stockman, the man from the outback.

Other such images still include convicts, settlers, pastoralists, drovers, swagmen, bushrangers, mates, ‘diggers’ (which is Australian slang for soldier) and of course farmers. Significant traditional national celebrations also uphold masculine images and discourses and include events such as Australia Day that celebrates the landing of the fleet at Botany Bay led by Captain James Cook, Anzac Day as the tradition of the Australian and New Zealand armies landing in Gallipoli, Turkey, plus the more popular sporting events such as the Australian Football League Grand Final and the Melbourne Cup which is a horse race that ‘stops a nation’. Women’s role in this patriotic nationalism was of course to ‘give birth to the nation’ (Lake 1997, p. 43; Nagel 1998, p. 256).

These traditional, iconic images and events conjured social connection and patriotism for many Australian men and women but reflect a masculine national identity that is exclusive to men and in particular Anglo-men while rendering women invisible from the nation’s telling of history and national identity. While many of these terms could be seen to be non-gender specific, because hegemonic masculinity remains entwined within Australia’s nationalism when used, the image that immediately comes to mind is that of a man. Lake (1997, p. 48) suggests that women were oppressed by the continual promotion of these masculinist icons and histories but Nagel (1998, p. 258) makes the point that when a country feminises masculine iconic images by showing the images as a woman instead of a man, it can be perceived as undermining how men perceive their manhood and what it means to be a man. In her article, Lake (1997) goes
on to present the actions and reactions of Australian feminists to address the
invisibility of feminine icons in Australia’s national identity. Despite this, the
contestation of Australia’s iconic images and discourses continues to this day.
One of the ways in which women have tried to contest this imagery has been to
rewrite both fictional and biographical narratives of what it means to live and work
on a farm.

Narratives about women who farm have overlooked the role of women as
relevant, active agents in the construction of meaning and activity in the
agricultural sector (Feldman & Welsh 1995, p. 30). Traditional Australian
narratives about women who farmed represent the female in relation to the male,
at the mercy of their husband’s decisions whether he is present or not and as
passive agents subject to the needs of their husband – such as the female
protagonists from ‘The Chosen Vessel’ by Barbara Baynton (2001/1902, pp. 132-
140) and ‘The Drover’s Wife’ by Henry Lawson (1986/1892, pp. 19-26). In each
of these stories the women can be imagined as heroic in some way for their ability
to manage the farm without her husband, but they are terrorised by the male
stranger and the savage, isolating environment within which they live and by the
constant threat of losing both their own and their children’s lives. In the story of
‘The Chosen Vessel’ the woman is brutally and savagely raped and murdered by
the ‘bushman’ (Baynton 2001/1902, pp. 136-137). This story attempts to
challenge the image of the iconic bushman by calling him a ‘swagman’ and
representing him as someone capable of premeditated rape and murder (Baynton
2001/1902, pp. 133-137). In ‘The Drover’s Wife’ it is the woman’s male dog
‘Alligator’ who protects and rescues her from the ‘evil’ snake as well as by her
eldest male child swearing to always stay and protect her (Lawson 1986/1892, p.
26). This story represents how a woman needs to have a man around for her
protection and safety, even if it is in the form of a dog or a male child. These are
important examples of the kinds of early 20th century fiction used to both challenge
and promote the place of women who lived and worked on farms. They are also
well-known stories used to study Australian literature in schools and universities;
thereby illustrating how today the image of women managing to farm the land
continues to be represented.
Over the last 30 years there has been a shift to publish biographies and autobiographies of women who successfully farm the land. It is often considered an anomaly that women can be farmers, much less successful farmers. Books such as the autobiography “From Strength to Strength” by Sara Henderson (1992) and more recently the book Liz Harfull (2012) published “Women of the Land”, both identify and highlight women who farm successfully. While biographies of successful women who farm are fundamental to promote women as prosperous within the agricultural sector and promote women as successful farmers, their individual accomplishments can fail to resonate with every day women who farm and uphold agrarian values because they may see this as challenging their husband who ‘should’ be seen as the farmer unless he has died or become incapable of farming (Pini 2003, p. 180). It could be argued that the success of Henderson’s autobiography was because her story actually did fit with this tradition of admiring women who can successfully take over from their husbands once he had died. These stories, continue to contest the traditional imagery of the role of women living and working on farms in Australia and create a narrative of possibility and opportunity for women wanting to contribute to the agricultural sector.

The way women who farm have been represented in Australia both historically and more recently, confirms that women have been socially constructed as invisible to the public sphere of Australia’s agricultural sector. As discussed earlier, women have been rendered invisible through historical and social discourse, removing them from being counted in the census, developing a national identity by promoting only masculinist iconic images and by narrating terrifying tales of what happens to women when they are left to farm without a man nearby to protect them. The more recent publications of women’s autobiographies and biographies are representative of actions being taken to contest women’s relegation to the private sphere within the agricultural sector. The chapter now moves to consider more specifically the roles women have within the agricultural sector.

It is important to understand the role women actually play on the farm and in the decision making processes of the agricultural sector because there is a division between what they do and what is acknowledged. The farms referred to more
generally in this research are family farms which are denoted by the characteristics being a place of both work and home (Jennings & Stehlik 2000, pp. 63-64; Cheshire, Meurk & Woods 2013a, p. 6). The decision making processes of the agricultural sector refer to industry based organisations such as Fruit Growers Victoria, United Dairyfarmers Victoria as well as larger representative bodies such as National Farmers Federation (NFF). The following discussion draws on the concepts of public versus private that designate work as the public sphere and home as the private sphere (Turner 2011, pp. 481-482) which in the farming sector is often referred to as working ‘outside’ and inside, respectively (Stehlik, Lawrence & Gray 2000, p. 47).

1.3 On the farm

On the farm itself, there is a dichotomy upheld by agrarian ideology that men work ‘outside’ in the public realm while women work ‘inside’ in the privacy of the home. As research has shown the contribution of women to the agricultural sector continues to receive very little recognition much less the role of women being promoted as crucial for sustaining the productivity of the farm (Feldman & Welsh 1995, p. 30; Jennings & Stehlik 2000, p. 63; Sheridan & Haslam McKenzie 2009, p. 11; Food and Agriculture Organization 2011, p. 7; Andersson & Lundqvist 2014, pp. 305-306). More recently the financial value of the unpaid on-farm and off-farm labour that women contribute to the overall sustainability of the family farm has been recognised (Feldman & Welsh 1995, p. 30; Jennings & Stehlik 2000, p. 63; Cummins 2005, p. 292; Bock 2006, p. 3; Anderson 2009, p. 348; Bryant & Pini 2009, p. 50; Sheridan & Haslam McKenzie 2009, pp. 1, 5 & 76). Prior to the 2011 census in Australia, it was argued that 49% of real farm income came from the input of women through both on-farm and off-farm work (Sheridan & Haslam McKenzie 2009, p. 1), however when considering current Australian statistics reported for the 2011 census, of the 157,000 people counted as farmers in Australia only 44,700 (28%) were women (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, pp. 2-3). These figures only accounted for women employed in the farming sector and did not include other women who farmed but were counted for their off-farm employment (35,100) and their unpaid domestic work in the farm home (16,000)
(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, p. 3). Given that women who worked off-farm and who were designated as unpaid domestic in the home also contributed to the farm’s unpaid workforce these numbers suggest that some 51,100 women were excluded from these statistics.

The lack of recognition for women’s role on the farm can be attributed to the way the family farm is structured as work and home. The lines between the public and private are blurred because they cohabit the same location; that is the family resides on the farm. Cummins (2005, p. 292), also points out that doing the laundry, preparing meals and being available to play a lackey’s role around the farm is seen as less important than the more visible work of the ‘man on the land’. The introduction of technology and mechanisation of agricultural practices and its subsequent appropriation by men, further segregated and excluded women from farming the land and contributed to marginalising their role in the farming enterprise and therefore reinforced the public/private divide (Brandth 1995, p. 24 & 123; Roy & Venema 2002, p. 79; Saugeres 2002b, p. 186; 2002a, p. 381; Brandth 2006, p. 649). Scholars concur that there is a gendered division of labour on family farms that promotes the value of men’s ‘outside’ work while denying the significance of women’s ‘inside’ work in the home (Roy & Venema 2002, pp. 78-79; Pini 2003, p. 172; Cupples 2004, p. 11; Bock 2006, p. 4; Holmes & Slater 2008, p. 35; Arku & Arku 2010, p. 116). The relegation of women to the private sphere where their work in the farm enterprise is most often rendered invisible was not contained just to the family farm.

A review of the literature has found that women have been ostracised from contributing knowledge and expertise to the public realm and regardless of women’s substantial contribution to farming, a dominant masculine culture persists where men are the principle players in agricultural representation and decision making (Liepins 1995, p. 616; Hassanein 1997, p. 256; Alston 2003a, p. 474; Sheridan & Haslam McKenzie 2009, p. iii; Meinzen-Dick, Quisumbing, Behrman, Biemayr-Jenzano, Wilde, Noordeloos, Ragasa & Beintema 2010, p. 30). Boyd (2002, p. 75) proposed that some women assume that their opinions would be better expressed by their husbands who attend agricultural meetings but the counter argument is that other women want to contribute their knowledge and expertise into the public realm but find that traditional agricultural bodies,
highly populated by men, tend to view and treat women as trespassers or transgressors (Hassanein 1997, p. 256; Jennings & Stehlik 2000, p. 66; Alston 2003a, p. 484; Trauger 2004, pp. 300-301). When women attempt to participate in or express their views at meetings, their contributions are often ignored, ridiculed or minimised (Hassanein 1997, p. 256; Alston 2003a, p. 482; Trauger 2004, pp. 300-301). It is not a surprise therefore that women wishing to participate in agricultural decision making processes prefer to participate in women focused or alternative networks that are more favourable towards the participation of women and the sharing of knowledge (Hassanein 1997, p. 256; Halpin & Martin 1999, p. 44).

In Australia women contribute to almost half of farming enterprises’ economic successes but their knowledge, expertise and experiences also fails to be represented within the decision making processes of the agricultural industry. For example, in 2009 the NFF which is viewed through media as the primary voice for all people who farm in Australia (Halpin 2003, p. 138), had no women elected to their Board and only two women on a 19 member Industrial Representative Committee (National Farmers’ Federation 2009). At the time of writing (2015), there are now two women on the NFF Board of nine and of the 38 people on the Members’ Council Representative committee there are six women (National Farmers Federation 2015b, 2015a). This verifies that despite the research that has proven the contribution of women to farming, their knowledge, expertise and experiences continue to be disproportionately represented in traditional agricultural decision making bodies (Alston 2003a, p. 477 & 484). This lack of women’s representation within the Australian agricultural sector is also the result of both direct and indirect discrimination and the gendered construction of the work environment (Alston 2003a, p. 482; Sheridan & Haslam McKenzie 2009, p. 7). Sheridan and Haslam McKenzie (2009, p. 66) argue that ‘the unequal division of labour within the household remains a barrier for women’s greater participation in leadership roles’. The exclusion of women who farm from major agricultural decision making bodies such as the NFF ensures that the decisions and policy directions are then made in men’s best interest while presented as gender neutral.

In analysing this evidence this study concludes that the dominant ideologies underlying current practices, behaviours and thinking in farming renders women’s
contribution to knowledge as, at best, fragmented. It is difficult to think of women living in Australia, as ‘victims’ to patriarchy, but the contention of this research is that victims or not, the ‘taken-for-granted’, unspoken, unquestioned dominance of patriarchy and agrarianism results in an inability to consider the ‘other’ as valuable and necessary. In contemplating how to best develop strategies about drought support for people who farm, it can be concluded that male-dominated agricultural decision making bodies actively negate women’s involvement within the agricultural industry and have therefore also overlooked women’s knowledge, experience and expertise about managing for drought. This thesis suggests that asking women to recollect their experience and to make sense of how they farmed and managed the drought is vital because through the narration of their stories these women could make sense of what had happened and start the process of interpreting their knowledge as integral in managing for drought in the future (Anderson 2009, p. 342; Rundell 2011, p. 147).

1.4 What place for local government?

This thesis argues that local government plays a critical and central role in times of crisis by strengthening social cohesion, understanding and supporting the impact of drought on local communities and facilitating coordination between the different drought services available. Australia has a three tiered government system of federal, state and local governments where local government is the only tier not recognised in the constitution (Bell 2006, p. 172). This means when it comes to funding activities at a local level there is a process whereby the Federal government provides funding to the state governments who then deliver funding to local government (Bell 2006, p. 172). As such this can lead to a ‘mish-mash of inter-government arrangements that are largely ad hoc and lack any real cohesion’ (Bell 2006, p. 173). Local government primarily provides essential local services such as rubbish collection, repairing local roads, collecting rates, planning regulations, recreation services, welfare, childcare and health services, regional development and retail services including water, sewerage and transport services (Bell 2006, p. 177). Other services that have now been added onto local government services include managing local arts and culture resources, health,
alcohol and drug problems, community safety and accessible transport (Bell 2006, p. 177). Local government has also often been referred to as the ‘lame-duck’ of Australia’s federal system of governance (Brown 2006, p. 12).

On the 16 October 2006 the Federal government declared that most farming districts in Victoria were experiencing an extreme drought event and therefore released funding to the State government (Brissenden 2006, p. 146; Botterill & Hayes 2012). The State government then decided how this funding would be shared through offering drought support programs from six months to 18 months in length. With $100,000 over two years provided by the Victorian State Government’s Department of Human Services to the Greater Shepparton City Council to target community resilience, I was appointed on a six month contract to work as the drought recovery officer, starting on 4 January 2007 (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b, p. 3; 2007a, p. 2). At this time, I lived with my husband on a dairy farm in the neighbouring Moira Shire Council. Later that year, the impact of the drought and our financial inability to purchase the farm from his parents saw him decide to exit farming and move into town. As a drought worker I met many people across the Goulburn Valley and saw the effect drought was having on them. In February 2009 I began a part-time Honours program researching the social impact of drought in the Goulburn Valley (Congues 2011). This study, which was completed in November 2010, used a text analysis of the minutes of the Greater Shepparton City Council and the Moira Shire Council Drought Meetings framed in conjunction with the aspirations of Australia’s National Drought Policy and the findings of the drought policy reviews published in 2008-2009 (Federal Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs 1992; Hennessy, Fawcett, Kironoa, Mpelasokaa, Jones, Batholsa, Whettona, Stafford Smith, Howdena, Mitchell & Plummer 2008; Kenny, Knight, Peters, Stehlik, Wakelin, West & Young 2008; Productivity Commission 2009).

1.5 Drought comes to the Goulburn Valley

In 2006, drought was officially recognised by the Federal government as a crisis but it was also anticipated to end shortly. It continued for another four years and
brought to the Goulburn Valley a new kind of drought; drought without access to irrigation water.

Drought in Australia is socially constructed and historically has not been officially recognised until the agricultural sector has reached a point of crisis (Botterill 2003b, p. 62). This is important to note because, as will be discussed in Chapter three, during what is now referred to in hindsight as The Millennium Drought was then more often referred to as ‘The Big Dry’ (Alston & Kent 2008, p. 135; Kiem, Askew, Sherval, Verdon-Kidd, Clifton, Austin, McGuirk & Berry 2010, p. 14) and later also (following the National Drought Review) was referred to as ‘dryness’ (Kenny et al. 2008, p. 3).

Parts of the Goulburn Valley were largely irrigated and many farmers held the belief that through the construction of irrigation channels from its many rivers, the Goulburn Valley had drought-proofed itself (Gibbs 2009, p. 2976). Up to the 2006/07 irrigation season, it could be argued that irrigators felt somewhat immune to serious impacts of drought. However, as the drought continued, the Goulburn Valley experienced two top ten consecutive driest years in 2006 and 2007 (Goulburn-Murray Water 2008, p. 27). This meant that for the first time since the 1992/93 irrigation season, people relying on irrigation water failed to receive their full allocations (Goulburn-Murray Water 2008, p. 26) and so receiving less than a 100 per cent minimum water share, changed the meaning of drought for many people who farmed in the Goulburn Valley. This period offered a timeframe for this study.

The impetus for this project, primarily came from an early drought meeting during which a woman stated that while it was good to have a local government drought worker within the community for six months, the short term nature of this appointment meant that ‘they would just get the person trained up and the contract would finish’: an all too familiar story. The complaint was that short term funded positions meant that people working in the role too often moved on before a decision was made to continue funding and this led to a new person being employed each time. A new drought worker also meant a loss of history, knowledge and experience. This point became one reiterated by other community members and drought workers across the region, and as the drought stretched...
out over the months with no obvious end in sight, this became a dilemma that meant a great deal to people in the community. My experience as the newly appointed Drought Recovery Officer for the Greater Shepparton City Council as that information about previous drought workers’ projects and reports about drought and the Goulburn Valley were difficult to find in my local government and elsewhere. My experience highlighted how women in rural communities and women working on farms became significant contributors to the development and maintenance of drought programs and keeping them alive and I therefore decided to research the role women played in managing for drought and in drought and how local government helps or hinders this process.

The following chapter will focus on the theory that informs the analysis of the research. This is Smith’s feminist standpoint theory which also draws on the work of Bourdieu to discuss place and Heller to discuss ideology. In considering the ideologies subjugating women, this chapter will develop a better understanding of the field of farming and how women who farm have knowledge and expertise that can contribute significantly to the future sustainability of the agricultural sector managing for drought. Chapter three introduces the Goulburn Valley, the location of the study. This is followed by a detailed examination of drought, how it is defined, and the way in which it is no longer considered a natural disaster in Australia. A summary of a parliamentary debate is also outlined that provides some background to the political complexities that contribute to understanding how drought impacted on the Goulburn Valley. Chapter four describes the methods and design of this study and introduces the women interviewed. This chapter also focuses on the methods chosen to interview the women. One of the significant aspects of this research was the access granted to study the drought documents held by local government. As will be discussed this is an underutilised resource that has the potential to enable a deeper appreciation of rural communities and to better appreciate the feedback from those communities about their perceptions and what they would want to happen in times of drought. Chapter five will present the findings of the interviews with the women, particularly analysing the common findings and the significant differences. Chapter six will provide a document analysis of the reports gathered from the Greater Shepparton City Council and discusses its relationship between the interviews and the findings from the previous chapter. The final chapter draws the thesis to a
conclusion by considering closely the suggestions made by the women about how to better manage for drought in the future and presents an alternative for local government to adopt a better management strategy in the future.

This chapter has presented an outline of the study and established how women have been and continue to be rendered invisible in the development of knowledge and expertise within Australia’s agricultural sector. It has foregrounded the way Australia’s census historically only counted women employed in the sector and omitted women whose primary roles were either working off-farm or as unpaid domestic help. This is despite the recognition that these women are still integral to the success of the farming enterprise. The chapter has outlined that there is a lack of female representation within agricultural decision making bodies such as the National Farmers Federation which further hinders women from contributing their knowledge to the sector. Finally following a brief summary of the current role of local government and some insight into the ‘mish-mash’ of intergovernmental relations between the three tiers of government, the chapter begins to introduce the impact of drought on the Goulburn Valley.

To summarise, three unique aspects offer the Goulburn Valley as ideal for this study. First, this location, (discussed in detail in Chapter three) is the site of many different farming industries which entails a better understanding of how each industry is affected differently by drought. Second, some members of the Goulburn Valley who had access to irrigation water had never faced the full brunt of drought as they believed themselves to be drought-proofed. In 2006 and 2007 their full share of water was denied to them for the first time in 14 years. Finally a further significant aspect of studying the Goulburn Valley is having unique access to the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought program reports. These reports recorded what happened at the time and together with the narratives recollected by the women provide a great insight into the role of women who farmed managed for drought at that time and what role local government played to support their rural communities. This evidence therefore establishes the credibility of the choices made to study women who farmed and how they managed for drought within the Goulburn Valley during 2006-2010.
The thesis now presents a theoretical framework for the study which uses a feminist ontological position drawing on the work of Smith, Bourdieu and Heller. In particular this chapter focuses on how feminist standpoint theory helps identify the everyday experiences, expertise and talents of women who farmed, setting this within their everyday experience of living and farming in the Goulburn Valley, Victoria, Australia during 2006-2010. This exploration of the location of the everyday also draws on the work of Bourdieu and the concept of field and integrates an exploration of Heller's theory of modernity. This integration focuses particularly on ideology and how, when historical imagination is used in conjunction with technological imagination, the 'double bind' fails and extreme outcomes are more prevalent. Chapter two establishes the lens through which the findings of the interviews and document analysis are explored in subsequent chapters.
Chapter Two. Ideology and invisibility: A framework analysis

This study has developed its theoretical perspective by incorporating key aspects of Smith’s feminist standpoint theory, Bourdieu’s concept of field and Heller’s theory of the double bind of modernity to establish a conceptual framework through which to view the findings. This chapter explores key concepts of Smith’s feminist standpoint theory including standpoint, the everyday, situated knowledge and promoting the perspective of the subject as the knower. Bourdieu’s notion of field provides a basis through which the everyday could then be framed. Heller’s theory of the double bind of modernity assists in exploring some of the reasons why the influential ideologies of agrarianism and neoliberalism used in drought policy and governance have failed to support people who farmed to manage for drought. Together these theories are instrumental in how the evidence was gathered, interpreted and analysed. They also aided in setting the scene so that by foregrounding the expertise, experience and talent of women who farmed, which had been rendered invisible, they may contribute to informing the public and private agricultural sector about viable interventions that might deliver more effective outcomes for preparing for and managing drought in the future. The chapter takes each of these frameworks and begins to explore their value and usefulness for the study.

2.1 Feminist standpoint theory

The primary value for using feminist standpoint theory is that this study was located in women’s experience, which to date, has failed to be recorded as a significant contributor to the enhancement of knowledge within the Australian agricultural sector. Feminist standpoint theory argues that women are the centrepiece of the discussion and that their knowledge is located as the primary aspect of research. Developing this approach was not so much about women producing something that was different to the knowledge that was already available, but that they may have knowledge and expertise that enhanced what was already known. It is important to foreground women’s experience of a phenomenon so that they see their narratives as part of knowledge making and
thereby understanding their agency in dealing with crisis situations. This also recognises and establishes a place for women’s ideas, lived experiences and knowing.

This thesis situated knowledge from the standpoint of women in their everyday by placing women as the centrepiece of the study, focusing specifically on their perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expertise within their world. In this way, the women become represented as voices of authority. As Smith (2012/1987, pp. 175-176) argues, the authoritativeness of their voices is not to universalise women’s knowledge in juxtaposition to men’s knowledge, nor is it to be ‘the’ voice for all women; rather it is about hearing the stories of those who are most often silenced and rendered invisible. This is achieved through the provision of a space where their narratives about what they contributed to the knowledge about farming and managing for drought can be recorded, transcribed and chronicled (Smith 2013, p. 107). The recollections of the women of this study provide an insight into how they managed to farm throughout the crisis of drought and contributions they make to better manage for drought in the future. This next section focuses on defining three, highly interconnected, relevant aspects of feminist standpoint theory; standpoint of women, the everyday and situated knowledge, which together establishes the ontological position taken in this study and why making the decision to focus only on women who farmed was made.

### 2.1.1 The embodiment of time and place

In essence ‘standpoint’ is the embodiment of a particular time and place, which is conceptualised as a real and concrete place and is one ‘situated outside textually mediated discourses’ (Smith 2012/1987, pp. 177-178). Smith (2012/1987, p. 178) argues that women’s place in the world remains excluded and rendered invisible from the ‘ruling apparatus’ that governs, coordinates and perpetuates ‘a universalized system of ruling mediated by texts’. This patriarchal hold over scholarship has resulted in a governance of social relations and philosophical knowledge that has been controlled, managed and dominated by privileged, white, educated men who owned property (Kourany 1998, p. 5; Code
This began during the Enlightenment as ‘networks of knowledge institutions’ transformed universities, libraries, learned societies, laboratories and museums into scientific enterprises for scholarly communication, peer review and global knowledge sharing and collaboration (Peters & Fitzsimons 2012, p. 12). Smith (2012/1987, pp. 20, 177 & 178) argues that this transformation of centralising the textualisation of knowledge placed the control of societal structures and institutions in the hands of those with hegemonic power, therefore further distancing women from contributing to knowledge. Women were denied a role in ‘the making of cultural and intellectual discourse’ because the standpoint of the ruling apparatus represented its own knowledge and expertise as universal. Smith (2012/1987, p. 177) suggests that standpoint can also be viewed in the organisation of women’s work and how it plays an integral role in mediating between ‘the relation of the impersonal and objectified forms of action to the concrete local and particular worlds in which all of us necessarily exist’. In other words, the primary roles organised within society for women have historically been those roles of managing the home, rearing children, supporting their husband to work in gainful employment and then, as women entered the workplace to primarily play ancillary roles of secretary, receptionist, assistant, supporting their male managers and supervisors in the public sphere of decision making and knowledge production (Smith 2012/1987, p. 177). This can be seen very clearly in the example of the standpoint of women who farm. Most usually, they are the housekeeper, the domestic help, the community volunteer, the mother, the wife and the unpaid labourer on the farm. If they do work off-farm, they tend to take on a part-time or casual role so they can earn some money to support the household and farm and continue with their other, more valued, farm-based roles. In a review of the agricultural literature about what it ‘means’ to be a farmer, this reality of women is generally not written into the story unless the role of women on farms is mentioned; in which case it refers to women as ‘farmer’ and ignores their roles as house-wife and/or off-farm profession.
2.1.2 Everyday lives

For Smith (2012/1987, p. 146 & 158) the everyday world “is what we experience directly” and “is an actual material setting, an actual local particular place in the world.” It is both concrete and actual and it is what constitutes what is women’s way of relating to the social. It is the common, every day and the ‘normal’ in the lives of and socialisation of women. Smith (2012/1987, p. 158) defines the everyday as the physical location of the standpoint; the space in which women embody a particular time and place. In addition, the everyday is a recognition of how social relations are organised and the way in which they are ‘not fully apparent…nor contained in it’ (Smith 2012/1987, p. 150).

In other words, the everyday is inclusive of all that is contained within women’s daily lives: their activities; their work; the way in which they think about the world and how they function within their social settings. The everyday can be described using language such as common, taken-for-granted, normal, ordinary, regular, unthinking, routine, non-questioned, and assumed. For Smith what is particular about the everyday lives of women, is that this is how their lives were positioned in the ordinary; where what they do remains unrecognised as being anything particular or spectacular. For example, most scholarly writing about everyday farmers, tends to assume that what was being written was about men who farmed.

Chapter one explored how women have played and contribute to playing a significant role despite tradition upholding the men who farmed as farmer and rendering the women who farmed as the housewife, helper and carer. The everyday for women can be seen as that which is rendered unimportant and invisible yet remains integral to the organisation of patriarchal society. Smith (2012/1987, p. 162) points out when the everyday is prioritised it is ‘the “inner” organization generating its ordinary features’ that need to be sought out and this is achieved by examining ‘the externalised and abstract relations of economic processes and of the ruling apparatus in general’ (Smith 2012/1987, p. 162).

The definition of the everyday for this thesis therefore refers to how the respondents embodied who they were in relation to their lives as women who
farmed, as wives, as mothers, as off-farm workers and as carers. It also foregrounds their relationships to their farm, their family, their partner, their community and the local area in which they lived.

2.1.3 The situated as particular

Smith (2012/1987, p. 177) suggests the location of the everyday standpoint of women enables knowledge, expertise and experiences to be uncovered. Such knowledge is referred to as ‘situated knowledge’ and it contests the common, traditional way of constructing knowledge. Situated knowledge is specific, localised, value-laden and often criticised as partial (Haraway 1988, p. 590; Feldman & Welsh 1995, p. 31; Anderson 2011, pp. 2-3, 23). It is about the community rather than just the individual and it ‘seeks out those ruled by partial sight and limited voice’ to unearth ‘the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledge makes possible’ (Haraway 1988, p. 590). A challenge emerges as the everyday situation cannot be universalised because it is particular. Haraway (1988, p. 581) refers to ‘situated knowledge’ as feminist objectivity while Harding discusses it as ‘strong objectivity’ (Brooks 2007, p. 66 & 79; Harding as cited in Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007, pp. 16-17). Within a feminist epistemology, situated knowledge is one of the central concepts of feminist standpoint theory (Anderson 2011, p. 2). While Smith (2012/1987, p. 80), herself, does not coin this term, it can be explained through how she defines the ‘standpoint of women in the everyday’.

Smith (2013, p. 59) argues that when the experience of those not of the dominant social group fail to be recognised or interpreted it is often referred to as a ‘point of rupture’. Historically it is now well understood that men tended to be the ones who spent more hours in the ‘public’ workplace while women who worked in the public workplace still contended with the everyday running of the family, purchasing, planning and cooking the evening meal, organising the children and pursuing the educational aspects of their children's lives or taking time off work to look after those who were sick (Smith 2012/1987, pp. 136-138). Focusing research on the experience of women who farm has meant a focus on
unformulated and unformed experiences that lack ‘symbolic forms, images, concepts, conceptual frameworks, methods of analysis’ and ‘self-information and self-knowledge’ (Smith 2013, p. 58) recognisable within the ideological spheres of agrarianism and neoliberalism as will be outlined further in this chapter. Up to this point, the domain of women who farm in their everyday has been reflected in the ideological standards of government and the agricultural industry which has predominantly relied on the experience and knowledge of men and patriarchal rule.

Using feminist standpoint theory as the theoretical framework for this thesis could be viewed as controversial, as feminist standpoint theory relies on situated knowledge that is ‘partial, value laden and context bound’ (Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 134) and contrasts significantly with the positivist paradigm that calls for an objectivity that is clinical, impartial, unbiased and that produces knowledge to transcend the particular to the universal (Smith 1990a, pp. 32-35). The concept that knowledge is situated challenges and then contests and undermines the political hold traditional knowledge making has on society (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983; Haraway 1988, p. 589; Smith 1990a, p. 61). It is a paradigm shift that has generated a different way of producing knowledge while at the same time, it undermines the very core of what most people take-for-granted as ‘authentic’ knowledge. This research supports the argument that the ability for knowledge to be universal is flawed because of the inability of the academic tradition to recognise its inherent partiality for male values, interests and activities (Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007, pp. 14-15). Situating knowledge within a feminist framework should not be viewed superficially as being anti-positivism or anti-constructivism. Rather, it defines that knowledge as formed within a patriarchal paradigm offers a deeper articulation of knowledge within a feminist paradigm. Feminist standpoint theory has generated a feminist paradigm in which to uncover and shape knowledge with a feminist methodological consciousness. It explicated ‘the actual social processes and practices organizing people’s everyday experience from a standpoint in the everyday world’ (Smith 2012/1987, p. 151) and has proposed ‘an inquiry intended to disclose how activities are organized and how they are articulated to the social relations of the larger social and economic process’ (Smith 2012/1987, p. 152). It offers a framework in which to generate a viewpoint or a platform from which to observe and discover
knowledge that has been overlooked or rendered unseen within masculinist methodology.

The failure to reflect the experience and knowledge of women came about because the focus was on the public sector, dominated by men and by the interests of male dominated research institutions and governments who make many of the decisions about research funding and research projects that are deemed as important. Feminist standpoint theory insists that women be the centrepiece of the discussion and that their knowledge be located as the primary aspect of the research. As Harding (2009, p. 195) argues, such standpoint projects ‘study up’ from the point of view of those who are excluded and oppressed and seek to uncover that which is below the ideological surfaces, and assumed to be ‘natural’.

In developing a framework, this study also draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Agnes Heller. In particular Bourdieu’s notion of ‘field’ is used in conjunction with feminist standpoint theory to locate the physical place of the everyday of the women. Heller’s definitions of technological imagination and historical imagination are drawn on to enhance an appreciation of the ways ideologies are used to influence and govern societal norms and ways of thinking. While it is recognised that neither of these theories or theorists uphold feminist epistemology, these aspects of their theories can provide useful mechanisms for guiding the analytic process here. All three frameworks informed the researcher’s position and can be seen as overlapping and influencing the approach to how the evidence was understood. The next sections of this chapter develop an explanation of these theories to clarify the framework through which the study was theorised. A point of interest is that all three theorists, Smith, Bourdieu and Heller draw heavily on the work of Karl Marx thereby sharing a theoretical platform for the development of their own perspectives.

The next section explores how Bourdieu’s notion of ‘field’ used in conjunction with Smith’s ‘everyday’, develops a stronger sense of the everyday place within which the stories of the women interviewed are situated. To do this, the following section begins at the point of defining the term ‘field’ which is then followed by a broad
description of the field of farming. The section then develops the concept of field to the everyday field of women who farmed.

2.2 Understanding the field

Swartz (1997, p. 119) argues that there are three ways that the concept of field embodies Bourdieu’s ‘metatheoretical’ agenda for sociological thinking. The first is that ‘field’ as a conceptual construction is founded on a ‘relational mode of reasoning.’ It seeks the primary, invisible relations shaping action that draws ‘attention to the latent patterns of interest and struggle’ used to form observed actuality (Swartz 1997, p. 119; Wacquant 2008, pp. 268-270). This approach therefore contests the assumptions that social and cultural norms are presented as ‘common-sense’. Second, ‘field’ attempts to simplify the concept of class, whereby it shows how everyone within the field shares the same platform, set of rules and relational conflicts (Swartz 1997, p. 119; Bourdieu 2007, p. 291). This can be conceptualised as a level playing field where the rules are set down as similar for everyone regardless of the social standing of the individual. Third, the field helps to identify the ‘social conditions of struggle that shape cultural production’ (Swartz 1997, p. 119 & 121; Bourdieu 2007, p. 292), or as Wacquant (2008, pp. 268-270) argues it is ‘an arena of struggle through which agents and institutions seek to preserve or overturn the existing distribution of capital’. Any analysis of a field includes an overarching understanding of the characteristics and actions of the institution that contribute to the cultural practices, capital and relations of the individual. In this way, field analysis identifies the struggles between resistance and domination and encourages a more relational view of the world (Swartz 1997, p. 121). Specifically for this thesis the field of farming is considered and the following explores how this concept can be considered at this, more practical, level.

Bourdieu’s ‘field’ can be described as a framework that encompasses the strategic positioning between individuals and structures (Raedeke et al. 2003, p. 68). Commonly associated with the concept of ‘the game’, the field can then be described as the board or the pitch on which the game is played and through
which social relations can be observed (Calhoun, Gertieis, Moody, Pfaff & Virk 2007). The pitch, for example, as ‘field’ has little to no influence on the players or the way to play the game other than to contain the game within a setting, a set of rules and strategic opportunities to contest position within the game. In many ways the game of soccer could be used to illustrate how Bourdieu’s notion of field operates because the pitch (field) remains the same. Anyone who has played soccer knows exactly where the players and referees are positioned, where the technical box is and who is permitted to be there as well as the location of the spectators. Even though each player begins playing when the whistle is blown by the referee, depending on who takes the kick off, which direction they kick the ball and who each person decides to pass to will affect who ends up with the most possessions, scores the most goals or ends up with the most penalties. Those who were familiar with the rules will have developed well-honed skills that mean they participate more fully and confidently in the game and generally will not think twice about making decisions. However, someone new to the game would have to think about each decision they made, listen out for the coach’s instructions and try to remember the rules as they play. While potentially there is an element of luck with any game as to who wins or loses, it is how the game is played, the fitness and skill levels of the players and the quality of the referees decisions that can impact on which team wins or loses.

Therefore in considering the field of farming, people who farm do not act alone but depend ‘on a vast array of actors occupying various positions connected to them and each other’ (Raedeke et al. 2003, p. 70). Consequently when studying the field of farming, it is important to understand it in terms of the structures, players and practices that are involved. For example, there are scientific and environmental factors, government and policy factors, social factors and commercial and economic factors and within these structures, there are individuals adopting a specific role. This means that within the field of farming there are more players than just people who farm; just as there are more people involved in a game of soccer than just the soccer players: referees, coaches, team managers, the game’s governing bodies and spectators. In the field of farming, there are those who farm, their immediate and extended families, employees, lessees, people who share-farm, agricultural suppliers, financiers, accountants, industry decision makers, government officials, politicians and local
community members. The notion of field can be considered a framework that recognises and understands these social relations and practices between individuals and structures (Raedeke et al. 2003, p. 68). Each of these players also functions within their own professional fields, such as an accountant who functions within the field of farming and is also part of the field of accounting.

Due to this interaction between the different fields, for Bourdieu the influence for change depends on those who hold the balance of power and the balance of capital. For example, in productive years, the people who farm may hold the balance of power because their capital had risen and the various professions, such as commercial agents, are keen to have their custom. In the down years, such as when a drought hits or when market prices drop, others hold the balance of power. As such, the ‘border’ of the field becomes moveable and dependent on the contestation and struggle for the balance of power to maintain the position or to make changes (Bourdieu 2007, p. 295).

The next section moves the discussion to develop this concept of field in relation to the field of the family farming enterprise. This is followed by a description of the field of women who farmed and why the field is included as a concept despite Bourdieu’s theory failing to recognise feminist epistemology.

### 2.2.1 The family farming enterprise

How people interact within the field is dependent on the way the individual and structure are related. For example, within the field of farming, there is a structure of the field of the family farming enterprise. As a farming business it can consist of two or more family members participating as business partners, a company or corporation, as owners, people who share-farm, lessees or as some kind of financial stakeholder. For Bourdieu the interaction between the field of farming and the family farming enterprise is understood as being economic. The positioning of players in the field depends on who holds the balance of resources such as the economic power or the labour/time resource for managing and working the farm.
At the same time, within the field of the family farming enterprise, there are the structures between generational farming and the family farming the land. This suggests that players within the structure of generational farming are related both culturally and economically. In Australia, often either the son or the daughter inherits the farm, although usually the latter only when there is no son, or the son has rejected the offer and the daughter wants the farm. This inheritance process, while generally guided by cultural norms and legal regulations, also has monetary value placed on estate ownership and so marketplace economics can impact on the reasons whether or not the succession process has been successful or not.

The structure of the family farm means that there are social relations as well as cultural relations. The family farm, in Australia, tends to have the family live on the farm and therefore socially the family relates concurrently to the farm as both business (workplace) and home (Jennings & Stehlik 2000, pp. 63-64; Cheshire et al. 2013a, p. 66). At the same time there are cultural practices influencing the farm family; such as the roles of women and men on the farm and the roles of children. Culturally, men continue to be positioned as the one who farms and therefore considered the ‘owner and decision maker’, in relation to the field of farming, in this way the male ‘farmer’ tends to be publically visible while the wife and children remains relegated to the background as invisible ‘helpmates’.

These examples of the field of farming and the field of the family farming enterprise demonstrate the way individuals and structures of the field are interconnected, relational and influenced, depending on how well the players and structures are resourced. They also demonstrate the non-static nature of the field, the structures, the capital and the players. The context of field remains a site of contestation. It does not remain static, but is actively influenced by the actions of its players. It also demonstrates that there can be fields within fields.
2.2.2 The field of women who farm

An important field within the agricultural sector is that of women who farm. In farming there remain a range of rules, conditions and expectations of women who farm and the roles they play. How women enter this field varies. In Australia, it is generally anticipated that women enter the field of farming through marriage although some have also come from a farming family (Bryant 1999, p. 237; Barr, Karunaratne & Wilkinson 2005, p. 11; Pini 2007, p. 42; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, p. 4; Alston & Whittenbury 2013, p. 117). Women, together with their partner, may have bought into farming at some stage during their marriage and adopted farming as a new business venture or career change, moving from one field to another (Pini 2007, p. 42; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, p. 4; Alston & Whittenbury 2013, p. 117). Other women involved in farming without a male partner, generally have taken over the farming side of the business due to the death of the husband or parents or through divorce (Stehlik et al. 2000, p. 42). With this in mind and anticipating the analysis of the interviews in Chapter five of the women who farmed in the Goulburn Valley, three largely typical roles, were initially identified as important to understanding the field of women who farm. The first role considered was those women who took on a more traditional role as a woman who farmed, by assuming the role of ‘farmer’s wife’. These women are also referred to as ‘stay-at-home-mums’, and are primarily responsible for managing the household and rearing their children. These women can be considered as ‘traditional’ women who farm because while their primary roles was in the privacy of the home, they often assisted on the farm when required and in many cases were mainly responsible for the farm business’ book-keeping. At the same time they were frequently involved within the community both socially and in a range of voluntary capacities.

The second role for women who farmed was that of women who worked off-farm anywhere from a few hours a day to full-time. These women rarely considered themselves as a farmer, but rather considered their working identity as that of their profession or job; for example, teacher or nurse. They would therefore consider that field to be where their primary influence lay. As Chapter five describes, when needed on the farm these women also undertook the farm business’ book-keeping, performed other tasks needed on the farm and remained
responsible for the management of household and child rearing. Even though they still may have participated in some social and voluntary aspect of the community this was often minimal because they were largely time poor. At the same time, the work they did off-farm was a crucial financial injection into the farm business, especially during times of hardship and crisis such as drought. As Chapter five describes, frequently this financial contribution was perceived to support the family household rather than contribute to the economic sustainability of the farm.

The third role for women who farm, was those played by women who were responsible for, or partners in, the farm business. These women worked most days on the farm and often were the decision makers or co-decision makers regarding the direction of the farm business. While they still remained predominantly responsible for the household and rearing of children, they also took responsibility in the financial stake of the farm and the farming business. There is some evidence that they were often positioned outside the family business because they did not directly invest in the farm financially. These women considered themselves as ‘farmers’ and tended to be dedicated to farming and agricultural politics.

The interesting aspect to understanding the field of women who farm is that regardless of the role, all women who farmed were spatially located in the home, although they often viewed their world through other locations within the field. The ‘traditional’ farming woman would be strongly located in the family home, but also within the local community. This suggested that in terms of capital, her wealth lay in the social where, through her identification as a farmer’s wife, she was disposed to being well connected within her community and generally financially well positioned because of the family business. The ‘off-farm working’ woman, while she too was strongly located in the home, due to her experience and education was disposed to be better culturally resourced and therefore identified by her profession or career. She was also more economically independent and positioned financially outside the farming business. Those who worked in the business as owners or ‘equal partners’ were frequently located primarily on the farm as a farmer with some spatial reference to the home. These women were often wealthier because of their financial position as owner or
partner in the business. As to the distribution of capital for these women, all women who farm possess a blend of social, cultural and economic capital although for each typical role the ratio of the blend differs and this in turn potentially impacts on their sense of importance and connectedness within the agricultural sector.

This brief overview of the positioning of women within the field of women who farm provided a starting point from which the design of the research methods for this project began. Significant to the stability of this base point was the recognition that the concept of field was moveable and potentially transformable (Brasier, Sachs, Kiernan, Trauger & Barbercheck 2014, pp. 305-306). Therefore starting with a typical description of the protagonists, allowed for the misrecognition of when descriptors did not fit the reality.

2.2.3 The everyday and the field

Bourdieu has been critiqued for his lack of recognition for the way in which women had been written out of knowledge and rendered invisible socially within the public sphere. As others have observed, Bourdieu has had little to say about women and he tends to ignore gender difference as relevant, rather he considers that the social encompasses both (McCall 1992, p. 839; Mottier 2002, p. 350; Adkins 2004, p. 3). Bourdieu’s concept of ‘field’ is logically presented and enables a dynamic and in some ways organic, concept. However, when positioned within the rigours of the social structures of farming and agriculture, it is obvious that the controllers of this field are not women. Despite more inclusion of women within society, as this chapter describes further below, within the strategy of mainstreaming, which at its core is about removing the need for the ‘us’ and ‘them’ juxtaposition of gender, the field of farming continues to use non-generic terms to uphold a powerfully masculine image.

To draw the two frameworks together, this thesis suggests that, feminist standpoint theory offers a conceptual approach while Bourdieu’s field is structurally logical. In relation to the taken-for-granted understanding people have
of knowledge, trying to come to terms with why it is necessary to discuss the
everyday is not always easy to explain. The field draws on the images that are
already written into history, and how men have written women out of history,
excluded them from the creation of knowledge and positioned them in the private
sphere. Consider, for example, as discussed in the previous chapter, Australia’s
policy to stop including women who farmed in the national census and to only
count them as ‘wife’. This was not done to attract women to Australia but to attract
a better quality of man to immigrate to Australia and have the ability to convince
his wife that she would not have to live as a ‘peasant’ farmer working in the
Farming in Australia without the unpaid labour force of wives and children would
have been impossible. Therefore the main difference, as understood by this
thesis, between the terms such as ‘the everyday’ and ‘the field’ is that the concept
of the everyday is inclusive of women and, recognises for the purpose of this
thesis, that it is founded on the concept that women have been excluded from
knowledge. This thesis argues that not only do women have a story to tell and a
role to play but that, to date, neither have been considered important or significant
enough to be written into public knowledge in the field of agriculture. The
everyday is part of and yet more than, the field. It is inclusive of feminist
epistemology and the knowledge of women. While the field can be viewed as
representative and inclusive of all that pertains to the agricultural sector, it does
recognise the inherent exclusion and marginalisation of women and their
knowledge, experiences and expertise.

When considering the lives of the women in the everyday it is vital to consider
their roles and how they have been relegated to being invisible within the field of
farming. The everyday lives of women who farm are so invisible for any agenda
within the agricultural sector that within the field of farming they appear to be
irrelevant and almost non-existent. The way in which the structure of this chapter
has been developed shows that when discussing the field, in order to get to the
everyday lives of the women, the first step has to consider the field of the industry,
then the field of the family farm and then finally the field of women who farmed.
By contrast, feminist standpoint theory starts with the everyday lives of women
and is both explicitly and implicitly aware that there is knowledge missing from
the field of the agricultural sector that could improve the social, economic and cultural capital for all.

For Bourdieu the field of farming helps an understanding of the social structures in relation to the individual and about who and how the capital is controlled within the field. The field in this thesis is inclusive of the agricultural sector, the technological practices of farming and the individual ‘farmers’ who own and manage the land. The means for maintaining this field comes in the form of social, economic and cultural capital; all of which is valued within agrarian and neoliberal ideologies. Perhaps it would be easy to suggest that the field encompasses the everyday but the everyday could be consumed by the field; by the contestation of and for position within the field.

The value of the concept of the field is that visually, it is easier to recognise the everyday as both encompassed within the field and external to it. Understanding the field in this way also generates a vantage point where it becomes better appreciated why the everyday must be presented as external to the field. This thesis argues that the everyday standpoint of women, while part of the field of farming, must be presented as external to the field because that standpoint comes from a place where situated knowledge is recognised and derived from the knowers who are not representative of a masculine hegemonic position. The next section explores one powerful aspect of this hegemonic practice: that of ideology.

2.3 Ideologies at play

This thesis argues that agrarian and neoliberal ideologies significantly affect farming families and their local communities and how such ideologies influence and are conceptualised within society. Smith describes ideology

…as those ideas and images through which the class that rules the society by virtue of its domination of the means of production orders, organizes, and sanctions the social relations that sustain its domination (Smith 2012/1987, p. 54).
She draws on Marx and Engel's use of ideology where the views, ideas, images, and symbols of people’s experiences was

…given social form not as that neutral floating thing called culture but as what is actually produced by specialists and by people who are part of the apparatus by which the ruling class maintains its control over society (Smith 2012/1987, p. 54).

Smith’s definition of ideology is useful to centre her focus and concern about ideology and the role it plays oppressing women, as well as understanding and identifying ideology. However, this approach does not provide enough substance in terms of understanding how ideology comes to play that kind of role. Bourdieu (2011, p. 188) has argued that ‘the most successful ideological effects are those which have no need for words, and ask no more than complicitous silence’. Similar to Smith, he also draws on Marx and Engel's work to describe how ideology functioned but his focus tends to be to understand what it means. To enable this thesis’ framework to take into more account the power of ideology within the field of agriculture and its impact directly on women, I have turned to Agnes Heller and her theory of the double bind of modernity.

Heller conceptualises ideology as a mechanism that gives meaning to the way society structures itself (Heller 2005, p. 75). Her definitions of technological imagination and historical imagination provide useful tools for understanding the role that ideology plays in providing a structure for societies and for recognising the impact ideology has on society or parts of society. Heller's use of concepts such as ‘technological imagination’ and ‘historical imagination’ enables a way of better identifying just how the ideologies of agrarianism and neoliberalism have influenced the status of women within the agricultural sector and how these have then impacted on people contending with the crisis of drought. For the purposes of this thesis Heller’s understanding of ideology will be used to explore in more detail the way certain ideologies influenced agriculture in Australia both now and in the past.

For Heller (2005, p. 77), ideology remains deeply ‘rooted in collective historical recollection’ and she suggests that while it is neither good nor bad, it ‘can be mobilized for great and dignified actions, but also for acts of pointless revenge and the consolidation of the friend/foe dichotomy’. She argues that ideology can
be considered to represent three aspects of the Enlightenment which included rationality, reality and universality (Heller 1999, p. 101) and she defines ideologies as ‘collective beliefs that centre around one of the ethical powers, reinforcing it and protecting it’ (Heller 1999, p. 102).

In order to better understand this, it is essential to consider how technological imagination and historical imagination work and the way in which, when working together, the ‘double bind of modernity’ falls apart and extreme outcomes are often generated within society (Heller 2005, p. 78). Heller (1999, p. 72) defines technological imagination as how things are done and the accrual of knowledge which can be seen in the laws that are written to guide society, the ‘how-to’ procedures that provide a method to achieve an outcome and the policy documents prescribed by governments that are geared to problem solving in a rational manner. She describes technological imagination as

...future-oriented: it gives preference to the mental attitude of problem solving; it takes the correspondence theory of truth for granted; it operates in terms of a goals-means rationality; it treats things – both nature and men – as objects; it includes a faith in progress and in the accumulation of knowledge; it prefers the new to the old; it puts the highest premium on utility and efficiency (Heller 2005, pp. 68-69).

Historical imagination can be described as the recollections, myths, narratives and stories that people use to describe or give meaning to who they are as a people. It ‘is past- and tradition-sensitive, feeds on recollection, and mobilizes the human capacity towards expanded meaning-oriented thinking’ (Heller 2005, p. 69). It is founded in recollecting, remembering and self-understanding (Heller 1999, p. 72). In this way, historical imagination can be mobilised to open up in peoples’ minds a past world from which to reflect on their present world (Heller 2005, p. 77). It is at that point that the recollection can be utilised to legitimate new actions and initiatives in the present as ideology (Heller 2005, p. 77). In this way, Heller offers a useful pathway for understanding how ideology becomes so embedded in the psyche of people and how new action can be adopted without question so long as it ‘fits’ with that ideology.

An example that Heller uses to exemplify how the technological imagination and the historical imagination work in conjunction with each other draws on the writing of a constitution (Heller 2005, p. 75). She suggests that a constitution in and of
itself is a document to be used as a tool to provide guidance around the mechanics of how a society is to function (technological imagination) (Heller 2005, p. 75). That is all the constitution is until it is given meaning and adopted by the people. People only adopt a constitution when they concur that what is contained in the document is in their best interests and it collates with their experience of who they are and how they function within that society (historical imagination) (Heller 2005, pp. 75-76). Ideology, therefore, is much more than just deeply rooted collective meanings for how a society understands itself. It can also become a tool that can be used to implement new action or new initiatives that may or may not be in the best interest of those people. Ideology can become a powerful tool that provides governments with strategic options to develop laws and policies to mechanise an action as consistent with the historical narrative of how people see themselves, so as to maintain power and control.

Ideology, presented in this way, is a complex challenge. For Heller, when the historical imagination is used in conjunction with the technological imagination, ideology becomes so naturalised that it is difficult to question, much less to contest. As she says:

...the double-bind characterizes the world of moderns: problem-solving and interpretation, planning and collection, calculation and reflection. The double-bind needs to be “double”; it needs to bind modern men and women to different historical places and spaces, to different activities, different evaluations (Heller 1999, p. 107).

When both imaginations pull in the same direction that is when Heller suggests danger looms large (Heller 1999, p. 107; 2005, p. 78) and despite ideologies being necessary to the modern world without the ability to examine, critique and question them, events, issues and phenomena tend to end up as critical situations and only then are people able to understand where it all went wrong (Heller 1999, p. 102; 2005, p. 77). Historically events have shown that in the process of reaching this critical point there has been massive destruction, tragic outcomes and irreversible damage. For Heller, this explains totalitarianism and genocidal atrocities such as Auschwitz and the Gulag, and importantly, how the people consented that their governments carry out these acts in their name (Heller 2005, p. 78).
Two crises inspired this study. First, the writing of women out of knowledge which remains a critical issue within the Australian agricultural sector as it continues to uphold a patriarchal tradition underpinned by agrarianism and in tandem with neoliberalism. The second crisis was the impact of drought and how during the Millennium Drought, the neoliberal approach failed government policies and failed the people. Both agrarianism and neoliberalism are deeply historically and culturally embedded within Australian society and this thesis contests that most people who live and farm in rural Australia have adopted these values and function within these frameworks without too much conscious decision making. Further, this thesis argues that these ideologies continue to oppress women and locate them in secondary, undervalued roles regardless of what they may have achieved as leaders and innovators. The next section draws on Heller to further analyse agrarianism and the Australian ‘farmer’.

Agrarianism is an ideology that has been used across many nations to inspire people to participate in some form of agriculture. Post Federation, at the turn of the 20th century, aspirations were that Australia become renowned as a modern progressive nation. This in turn inspired Australian settlement across the continent. Part of the construction of Australia’s national identity with farming and the rural can be attributed to a deeply engrained idealisation of the English yeoman and agrarian ideology (Lake 1987, pp. 3-24; Barr & Cary 1994, p. 123; Voyce 2007, p. 141; Henderson 2008, p. 98; Beilin, Hill & Sysak 2011, p. 212; Askew & Sherval 2012, p. 299). As Davison (2005, p. 01.01) points out, the ideal of ‘a green, well-watered land of farms and villages’ was deeply lodged in the early settler collective consciousness. Historically the word ‘yeoman’ was used in a variety of ways but during the nineteenth century, in Britain and Australia, the term narrowed to refer directly to small freeholders – family farms (Lake 1987, p. 13; Gray & Lawrence 2001, p. 53; Beilin et al. 2011, p. 212). In particular its emphasis was on family production and self-sufficiency and in Australia its ‘real significance’ was ‘to establish a yeomanry compatible with Australian democratic ideals and men’s expectations of equal opportunity’ (Lake 1987, p. 13). Embedded in this yeomanry ideal, was a fundamental belief that the quality of the future of the Australian race depended on the development of a landed gentry (Lake 1987, p. 18; Barr 2009, p. 111). The yeoman was considered the salt of the earth, the backbone of the nation and gave quality ‘breeding-stock’ to the
future of a nation (Lake 1987, pp. 17-19). As Rickards (2008, p. 6) has observed, ‘…throughout Australia, farming families are a symbol of rural life and remain central to our national history if not national identity’. Establishing an agricultural industry was as much as about growing a nation through ideological persuasions as it was about food production. Following Federation came a concern about the growth of the urban population and the lack of settlement on the land and the promotion of better health outcomes for children growing up on farms was used to dissuade people from leaving the land to work in the city (Lake 1987, pp. 18-22; Davison 2005, p. 01.03; Barr 2009, p. 111). At that time, the countryside was presented as very different to the city, which was viewed as filthy, unwholesome and potentially dangerous (Davison 2005, p. 01.03).

Throughout the 20th century agrarian ideology has promoted rural living as an ennobling virtue where through living on the land, through both the labour and the contact with the land, man can become most fully human (Craig & Phillips 1983, pp. 410-411; Cummins 2005, p. 290; Davison 2005, p. 01.03). Such romanticised narratives of rural life have been used to ‘legitimise the subordination of women’ and to encourage people to take up small-scale farming (Brandth 2002, p. 107; Holzner 2008, p. 431). Agrarianism has promoted the patriarchal values of the farmer being male and fully supported by his wife and family and as such promotes a patriarchal hegemony favouring men over women (Cummins 2005, p. 290). Typically farming men are portrayed as strong, tough, rugged individuals who have great access to resources and power and when faced with adversity are stoic in their ability to survive (Liepins 2000, p. 612; Saugeres 2002c; Alston & Kent 2008, p. 136 & 144; Bryant & Garnham 2015, p. 75). Men who farm are ‘inscribed by moral worth because they are male farmers’ and associated with ‘hard work, honesty, forthrightness, longevity in the community and generational knowledge of agriculture’ (Bryant & Pini 2009, p. 54). These images are constructed around male dominance over women and over land and it involves the pre-eminence in public life, ownership and control over most of the resources in agriculture, and providing a significant source of power in rural communities and politics (Pini 2003, p. 172; Alston & Kent 2008, p. 136). The dominance of the masculine in the field of farming is ‘so normalised it is usually invisible, and all other positions relate to this norm’ (Alston & Kent 2008, p. 136). With the masculine constructed as universal, the feminine is
re/constructed and rendered inferior and therefore 'women are marginalised and excluded from the culturally defined realm of masculine activities' including the right to recognise the female image of women as farmers (Saugeres 2002b, p. 145). This normalisation of the hegemonic position of the male is so imbued into the way women and men who farm function within society, that the ‘universal citizen’ and the inevitable natural order seems unquestionable and both women who farm and men uphold an unquestioned hegemonic position of the male farmer (Saugeres 2002b, p. 146).

The Australian government used agrarianism to inspire people to take up the challenge to family farm land in Australia and despite being renowned as the driest continent in the world (Bureau of Meteorology 2013), a romanticised narrative was used to ensure people persisted with farming enduring unending hardships to validate the successful meeting of standards set by this ideology. This thesis argues that the ideals presented here to represent agrarianism are indicative of the historical imagination as to how Australian people and especially people who farm identify themselves economically and socially. As an ideology it is tradition-sensitive, feeds on recollections of the past and provides people with an understanding of who they are and where they fit in Australian society. The historical imagination of who someone is as ‘farmer’ is consistent with a patriarchal hegemony of power, strength, wealth and prestige over others. At the same time, agrarianism has provided governments of their day with a means of moving people out of the over-populated cities and into the country. Post the world wars in order to open up the land, agrarianism became a means of providing returning soldiers with employment by giving them property to farm whether they were capable of farming or not, at the same time promoting Australia as a young, progressive, modern nation and a land of opportunity (Keating 1992, p. 59; Botterill 2004, p. 203; Cockfield & Botterill 2006, p. 71; Barr 2009, p. 11). At the same time, western governments were adopting highly protectionist policies deliberately to protect agriculture (Bromby 1986, p. 224; Schmitt 1986, p. 334). Australia experienced a great ‘shock’ when Europe joined the Common Market in the 1960s (Bromby 1986, p. 224). The challenge is that embedding the collective memory in the concept of Australia being a ‘green’ land akin to the motherland of the beloved England, failed to account for Australia being the driest continent in the world; failed to account for drought being a
regular feature of Australia’s climate and has subsequently meant that people came to perceive drought as an aberration rather than the norm (Hennessy et al. 2008, p. 3; Kenny et al. 2008, p. 9).

The concept of the yeoman promoted an affiliation with the landed gentry and made the man who farmed the lord and master that equated the woman’s position, role and identity to that of ‘a lady’, who was wife, mother and noble helpmate and secondary to the status of men. The technological imagination for the development of a progressive, modern nation drawing on the historical imagination of the romanticised notion of what it means to be a ‘farmer’ means that agrarianism fails to uphold a ‘double bind of modernity’ that can be questioned and challenged (Heller 1999, p. 107); rather it renders the situation difficult for people who farm to ‘fail’ in their business enterprises as their experiences will not match the expected agrarian successes of ‘good farmers’ being viable. It also means that it is extremely problematic for women to deny the agrarian role of what it means to be a woman on the land and for agrarianism to be inclusive of women and to recognise them as farmers because they are not male; as was exemplified by the lack of women counted as farming in the most recent national census data presented in the first chapter. Agrarianism is so firmly embedded in the collective consciousness of Australia that to fail often leaves the men who farm feeling helpless and self-destructive while to question or contest its value to Australian society and sense of nationalism, is to be seen as unpatriotic and disloyal. Agrarianism became less dominant in the course of the 20th century, as another, more powerful ideology, took centre stage. This next section outlines this ideology: that of neo-liberalism.

In 1938, a group of intellectuals determined that classical liberalism, as drawn from Enlightenment values, had failed the state and that a new liberalism – neoliberalism – was needed (Busch 2010, p. 332). In this way, and through open competition in the marketplace would come greater individual liberty (Busch 2010, p. 332). The election in the early 1980s of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Regan in the United States of America and their subsequently successful neoliberal economic reforms that promoted free market values, influenced other western democracies and neoliberalism rose to its current powerful hegemonic position within the global economy and governance.
Centeno and Cohen (2012, p. 318) argue that for the past thirty years, the global political economy has been reshaped by neoliberalism and that more broadly it ‘stresses the necessity and desirability of transferring economic power and control from governments to private markets’. Wacquant (2012, p. 69) presents neoliberalism as a ‘triadic combination of deregulation, privatisation, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of provision.’ Neoliberalism, in Australia is played out as being a minimalist government approach to the markets and to the introduction of policies where the individual must compete on the open market. The reduction in protectionism, an extension of the free market and governments reducing activities supporting a welfare system, promotes the benefits of a ‘user pays’ system where individuals prepared to work hard and be entrepreneurial in their approaches are predisposed to prosper (Stehlik, Gray & Lawrence 1999, p. 23; Gray & Lawrence 2001, p. 23). Lockie and Higgins (2007, pp. 1-2) suggest that neoliberal strategies are ‘consistent with discourses of small government, fiscal austerity, individual freedom and private property rights’ and other ‘more upbeat discourses of community empowerment, partnership, capacity building and social capital’ have also been included. In Australia, it was after the election of a Federal Labor government in 1983, that the economic models of neoliberalism were adopted by the new Hawke Labor government, and these in turn were subsequently to have profound implications for drought policy (Cockfield & Botterill 2013, pp. 134-135).

This thesis suggests that these two ideologies of agrarianism and neoliberalism also need to be understood as impacting on rural Australia politically. In fact the two ideologies are embodied politically in a ‘quasi-permanent alliance’ between the Australian Liberal Party and the National (former Country) Party formed in 1923 and remains in effect to this day (Costar 2011, p. 29). This Coalition of the political centre-right has seen the Liberal National Coalition form government federally for 60 of the past 80 years (Costar 2011, p. 29) with the Coalition currently in power since 2013 (Museum of Australian Democracy 2013). Oya (2004, p. 131) argues that ‘neoliberal policies have diverse effects on the rural population, with some people gaining and others losing’. Agrarianism is firmly based on a collective notion – the family farm model – while neoliberalism focuses on the individual – the farm business model. The next section will look at the
impact neoliberal policy has had on people who farmed. The chapter will then move to consider the impact of the Federal government’s incorporation of gender mainstreaming which was detrimental to the leadership of women within the agricultural industry. It is important to present these two examples, because they both exemplify how neoliberal ideology, together with agrarianism, has written women out of agricultural politics and demonstrated the extreme challenges women face contesting what, for all intents and purposes, continues to be seen as completely ‘natural’.

A new, and radical, National Drought Policy (Federal Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs 1992) was based on neoliberal aspirations of minimalist government promoting self-help, entrepreneurialism and self-regulation and was introduced by the Hawke/Keating Labor government in 1992 (Halpin & Guilfoyle 2004, p. 95; Lockie & Higgins 2007, pp. 1-2). Until 1989, drought periods were dealt with by governments under the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements (Botterill 2003a, p. 51). The 1992 policy determined that technically drought would not be seen as a ‘sudden and unforeseen natural disaster’ because as we were living in the driest continent in the world, farmers should expect to experience dry seasons as part of a common feature of the Australian climate (Federal Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs 1992, p. xi & 2). It was argued people who farmed could be expected to manage for drought as they would any other risk to their business (Federal Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs 1992, p. 1) and this was further supported by the 2008 National Drought Policy review (Hennessy et al. 2008, p. 3; Kenny et al. 2008, p. 9). Successfully removing drought from the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements required developing a collective understanding and recognition that drought in Australia could not be viewed as a natural disaster because dry seasons were a common feature of Australia’s climate. That people who farmed should expect and be ready to experience periods of drought was logical and it made sense; after all farming in Australia had always been seen as a risk or a gamble (Kenny et al. 2008, p. 11). In his description of actuarialism, Simon (1988, p. 772) described the nature of this logic as practices that are difficult for the collective to dispute because it makes sense in terms of the bigger picture but fails to account for the marginalised or the minority that are negatively affected. In this way, the logic used to articulate the
obvious becomes a mechanism for silencing the people because it is difficult to argue against such rationalisation. It is clear to see in this example how historical imagination was used in conjunction with technological imagination to generate a policy that could not fail to be adopted by the people because of its ‘naturalness’. It became understood that people who farm should adopt drought as a part of their business risk management strategy therefore reducing it to one risk among many others. It is in this inability to dispute the logic of the policy that Heller (1999, p. 107) would argue the two imaginations were working together and that this in turn suggests the potential for a less than positive outcome.

Australia’s National Drought Policy was based on neoliberal ideology and put in place to reduce the Federal government’s responsibility to financially support people who farmed during the crisis of drought. This was ‘sold’ to the people using the historical imagination of agrarianism and what it meant to identify as a farmer in the driest continent in the world. This neoliberal approach made sense to the people who farmed because while they upheld the agrarian ideal of who they were as farmer, the ‘salt of the earth’ and that ‘backbone of the nation’, the neoliberal idea of entrepreneurialism and self-regulation became a powerful means to measure how viable and thereby successful they were as a farmer. This individualistic approach became widely adopted because people who farmed had a sense that as farmers this was about what they already did and therefore the shift from the concept of the ‘family farm’ to a ‘farming business’ did not seem too extreme to them, at that time.

However, as the rest of the chapter discusses in detail neoliberal aspirations of a risk management approach to managing drought failed to curb the crisis brought on by the Millennium Drought. The severity of the Millennium Drought saw the plight of people who farmed during the drought become a national crisis because during this drought there were no ‘traditional good years’ that followed a drought year. The major state capital cities also began to run out of water, so the Federal government had to step in and fund numerous services and projects to ensure the survival of the agricultural industry and food security as well as provide water for its rural and urban communities and the environment. The previous chapter discussed how, during the years of 2006 and 2007, the Goulburn Valley experienced its worst recorded rainfall years and with the region having thought
itself drought-proofed through its irrigation water infrastructure, the neoliberal policy of self-regulation, self-help and entrepreneurialism failed to resonate with their experiences with the preparation and planning they had done. The ‘marriage’ of agrarianism and neoliberalism may have fallen apart during the Millennium Drought but it must also be noted the National Drought Policy was all about the individual ‘farmer’ and ‘the farm business’ being viable, while the ‘family farm’ that formed the collective that also included the women and children became obsolete and further marginalised – indeed the term ‘family farm’ has come to mean more directly a ‘business’.

The second example offered here is the introduction of gender mainstreaming and how it was used by the Howard Coalition (1996-2007) government to further marginalise women in Australia. At the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, International Women’s Conference, it was determined (perhaps with the best of intentions) that it would be in women’s best interests if there was a ‘mainstreaming’ of gender perspective across all policies and programs (Alston 2009, p. 139; Prugl 2009, p. 174) and this meant that gender mainstreaming was to target

...the state as an apparatus that produces and implements policies [and] aims to develop ‘gender expertise’ among bureaucrats and policy makers, and deploys tools of public management to produce polices, programs and projects that do not inadvertently disadvantage women, and indeed that incorporate a gender equality agenda (Prugl 2009, p. 176).

Alston (2003a, p. 486) has argued that the biggest problem with addressing the gendered experience of drought and the subsequent development of drought policy was that the advice for government about rural policy was ‘shaped around a masculinist position, presented through dominant male organisations and women’s concerns and positions [were] ignored.’ Pini, Panelli and Sawer (2008, p. 177) argue that between 1972 and 1996, women-focused policies had gained momentum and ‘produced significant gains for women and Australian feminists.’ However, under the auspices of neoliberalism and the privatisation of public services came the idea that ‘focused services’ needed to be incorporated across government services rather than being compartmentalised and separated (Pini et al. 2008, p. 182). This saw a ‘discursive shift to governing for the mainstream rather than providing access to equity for all groups’ (Pini et al. 2008, p. 182).
1996 election campaign of the conservative Howard Coalition government was "to stop listening to ‘special interests’ and to instead ‘govern the mainstream’" (Pini et al. 2008, p. 182). In the first budget, of the Liberal/National Coalition government, 40 per cent cuts were made to the Office of the Status of Women and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and operational subsidies for community based child care centres were abolished (Pini et al. 2008, p. 182). The Howard conservative government drew on the fact that the United Nations backed the concept of gender mainstreaming to justify its 'dismantling of the structures and processes responsible for gender analysis of policy', particularly for this thesis, in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (Pini et al. 2008, p. 182). By 2004, the Regional and Rural Women’s Unit had also been dismantled (Pini et al. 2008, p. 183), and simultaneously, the Howard government ‘detached itself from international agendas relating to the status of women’ (Pini et al. 2008, p. 183). It becomes clear to see that, the case of gender mainstreaming in Australia, rather than being a transformative process where gender equity becomes embedded, gender equity was marginalised and silenced (Alston 2009, p. 142). Ignoring minority groups or groups that are specialised, such as women, when the mainstream, dominant discourse upheld a masculine hegemony, meant that the knowledge produced, conformed and promoted a masculine hegemony. By using the logic of concentrating on the mainstream majority to appeal to the masses, the Federal government’s neoliberal approach negated all other knowledge that could produce a potentially broader and more dynamic approach to policy. It particularly overrode any lingering agrarian sentiment. This example demonstrates the extent to which neoliberal ideology has been used to not only marginalise the visibility of women in the public arena but has appealed to people’s sense of logic that governing for the majority makes sense. It is, however, also a mechanism to diminish the role of those who do not belong to the dominant group by terming them as a minority group.

Even though the concept of gender mainstreaming was purported to be a positive action imbuing ‘the universal’ with a more inclusive knowledge of the feminine and the masculine, it failed to be adopted as a transformative policy tool. Rather than using gender mainstreaming to transform policy to be inclusive of women, the notion of gender mainstreaming was used to validate the Federal
government’s intent to remove the influence of ‘special interest groups’ (Alston 2009, p. 143). At that time, in investigating the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries websites for this study, it was found that the successive Federal governments from 1996 through to the 2013 have made every effort to remove all remnants of government support for women who farmed and other minority groups by eradicating programs such as the Rural Women’s grants, the Indigenous grants and the Community Adaptation Program which now no longer exists. In this way the Federal government has continued to promote the universal ‘male’ farmer, scientific and economic discourses and development while maintaining and further embedding the neoliberal, actuarial approach to managing crises such as drought. Almost a decade ago, it was recommended that the government reject gender mainstreaming and re-establish women’s units within government departments so that opportunities for women in the workplace could be enhanced (Sheridan & Haslam McKenzie 2009, p. xi), however, this has yet to happen. In Chapter six the impact of gender mainstreaming will be explored further as the evidence suggests that during the crisis of the Millennium Drought, local government relied heavily on women and women-based projects to disseminate information to communities and to men.

2.4 Women and the Goulburn Valley

Throughout this thesis, the ‘standpoint of women’ refers to the knowledge, expertise and experience positioned outside the cultural, taken-for-granted norms of masculine hegemony. Moreover, the standpoint of women in this study related directly to the women who farmed in the Goulburn Valley during the years of 2006-2010 and who participated in the in-depth interviews analysed in Chapter five. The entry point in which the theoretical framework is based is at the everyday standpoint of women who farmed beginning at their recollection of farming and managing for drought during 2006-2010. In this thesis, situated knowledge informs the role of women, what they had done in a time of crisis, how they thought about drought and farming and the future viability of farming. At the same time the research uncovered aspects of ideological influence about expectations of themselves and the roles they identified for themselves. Such influence was
also found in the document analysis of the Greater Shepparton City Council reports. As Chapter six discusses in detail, more often, it was the women who planned, organised and participated in the Council’s drought program. Exploring in more detail these definitions within a feminist standpoint framework has generated a more informed understanding of the kind of language that is used theoretically, of the way in which the choice of methods for gathering evidence was informed and the lens through which the analysis took place. It was also important to ensure that women’s experience of a phenomenon was reflected as their experience, that they could see themselves as part of the knowledge and that there was a place for their ideas, experiences and their knowing.

Bourdieu’s notion of field enables a theoretical concept. Within this thesis, the everyday will be the primary term used to discuss how knowledge is situated from the standpoint of women but the term of field will be used when discussing the field of farming and the field of agriculture.

Significantly, by drawing on Heller’s definition for ideology, the discussion about the impact of agrarianism and neoliberalism has shown how both ideologies marginalise the role of women within society and deny their contribution to the accumulation of knowledge. The impact of appealing to people’s sense of who they are through historical imagination to implement technological strategies that favour the ruling apparatus have failed to provide any sort of avenue to move beyond patriarchal control. Through Heller’s concepts of technological imagination and historical imagination this thesis is better positioned to recognise the perpetuation of these ideological values and how they have influenced the women and local government within the Goulburn Valley.

This chapter has developed a theoretical framework that provided a means of reading and validating the findings of the evidence gathered through interviews and local government reports analysis, primarily using Smith’s feminist standpoint theory supported by work from Bourdieu and Heller. It has recognised the lack of knowledge recorded and textualised from the standpoint of women located in their everyday. The nature of ‘the everyday’ and how Bourdieu’s notion of ‘the field’ could better demonstrate how the everyday was both consumed by the field and external to it, consistent with feminist epistemology was outlined. This was
followed by an elaboration on the nature of ideology and how Heller’s tools of technological imagination and historical imagination could assist in uncovering how such ideology can be wielded to control the masses which, when not critiqued or questioned can result in catastrophic results. In particular it considered the ideologies of agrarianism and neoliberalism and how these are visible in the Australian political context.

The next chapter generates a picture of the Goulburn Valley and explores the context of that region during the drought and the impacts of agrarianism and neoliberalism. The region will be described and critiqued through maps and agricultural industry statistics and the political atmosphere of the region in relation to Federal, state and local government politics will be presented. This then establishes a field from which the everyday standpoint of women who farmed in the Goulburn Valley are situated; a region that thought itself drought-proofed.
Chapter Three. The Goulburn Valley

There has been very little detailed research published specifically about drought and agriculture in the Goulburn Valley, as most of the Australian studies about women, farming and drought outlined in the opening chapter and discussed further here were located elsewhere.

The Goulburn Valley lies between the Great Dividing Range of eastern Victoria and the scrubby flats of the Mallee in the west which gives it a wide-ranging topography which includes mountainous and hilly areas, river-ways, wetlands, forests, and flat terrains of irrigated and dryland paddocks and therefore supports many and varied agricultural industries. During the drought, this meant that different parts of the Goulburn Valley were affected differently. This chapter focuses on this region as a location to explore the recollections of women who farmed and managed for drought during 2006-2010. The significance of choosing the Goulburn Valley for this research is founded in its history, geography and culture. It is a mixed agricultural region where the farm owners’ histories include those from original selector families, soldier settlements and more recently, those who are newcomers to farming. Climatically, the Goulburn Valley’s weather is extremely variable and it is a region accustomed to droughts, floods, bushfires and more recently, even tornados (ABC News 2008; Shepparton News 2013). Importantly for this thesis, it is also an area that considered itself to be sufficiently drought-proofed and the experience of the Millennium Drought severely tested this commonly held assumption.

This chapter will consider the geographic and demographic position of agriculture within the Goulburn Valley, and will describe what actually constitutes the Goulburn Valley and how this is publically characterised, while remaining highly contested. The chapter discusses how drought is defined and explores the risk management approach Australia has taken to managing drought and how this affected the Goulburn Valley. The chapter introduces the three tiers of Australian government and how local government ‘fits’ within this framework. It then concludes with a discussion as to how 2006 can be seen as the year in which the deeply-held assumptions underpinning agrarianism and the neoliberal ideology which supported a risk management approach to drought began to break down.
3.1 Knowledge, landscape and water

One of the fundamental challenges which faced those who tried to manage during the Millennium Drought was the power of the historical imagination about the nature of drought in Australia. The early settlers brought with them a context of farming within a British and European cultural framework, where the

… men of the land (it was mainly men) carried out farming as if it was merely a matter of applying a fine work ethic to subdue the country into a reliable European image (Stafford Smith 2003, p. 9). [Author’s qualification]

These settlers found learning to deal with the very different Australian climate as ‘an unfair imposition from on high’ that challenged their Euro-centric experiences (Stafford Smith 2003, pp. 9-10). As these colonisers sought to transform the Australian landscape, they were constantly challenged, and in some cases, defeated, by the unpredictability of rainfall and access to a reliable water supply (Powell 1989, p. 30; Gibbs 2009, p. 2967). Australian Indigenous nations seemingly thrived under such an unpredictable water regime through the development of their own ‘complex system of ephemeral and permanent water’ as well as by a deep understanding of the ‘interconnections between land and water, and by rights to and responsibilities for water’ (Powell 1989, pp. 22-23; Gibbs 2009, p. 2967). Those established systems were not honoured by the early Australian colonists and land selectors and despite many of these early explorers and settlers relying heavily on Australia’s Indigenous people for their survival, this Indigenous knowledge and understanding was silenced and discarded in preference for a more modern, Euro-centric approach to managing the land and water (Powell 1989, p. 25; Keating 1992, p. 24; Gibbs 2009, pp. 2964 & 2966-2967). Gibbs argues that this privileging meant that ‘early settler expectations of land, water and livelihood were based on the regularity and predictability of European water regimes’ (Gibbs 2009, p. 2966). This approach inevitably led to drought being viewed as an ‘aberration’ of the Australian climate rather than a natural climatic reality affecting agriculture and this in turn, led to the introduction of terms such as ‘drought-proofing’ and ‘drought mitigation’ (Kenny et al. 2008, p. 9; Gibbs 2009, p. 2976).
Located in the colony of Victoria, the Goulburn Valley, both geographically and climatically, was lauded as a landscape similar to that ‘back home’ in Great Britain (Powell 1989, p. 26; Keating 1992, p. 6). As Keating puts it:

…to the settlers who had given up their old lives to come to a strange, new land there was every incentive to presume that the moderate aspects of Victoria’s climate were the norm, and the occasional flood or dry period, a complete aberration which would not return if steadfastly ignored… (Keating 1992, p. 6).

From this fundamental position, an idea developed that appropriate engineering strategies, such as irrigation and tapping into artesian bores, could be used as a ‘primary tool for making the land productive’ and, in the process, support the development of Australia as a modern, progressive country (Powell 1989, p. 111; Keating 1992, p. 9; Gibbs 2009, p. 2968). Irrigation became an important mechanism to manage the variable climatic conditions that until then had hindered the success of the farming community. In December 1884, Australia’s future Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, chaired a Royal Commission on Water Supply and headed the campaign for governments to fund the implementation of irrigation, arguing that this strategy opened up opportunities to develop ‘profitable and more secure forms of intensive farming’ (Powell 1989, pp. 104-110; Keating 1992, p. 59). At the time, there were dissenters of this irrigation project who questioned its viability and its capacity to impact significantly enough to balance against the unpredictability of rainfall (Gibbs 2009, p. 2968). Most often such ideas were derided and ‘branded as ‘unpatriotic” (Gibbs 2009, p. 2970). Ultimately these views became silenced because governments wanted to promote Australia as a modern, progressive nation so as to entice the ‘right kind’ of immigrant to populate the continent, and as a result, any planning for drought was not promoted (Keating 1992, pp. 6-7; Barr & Cary 1994, p. 207; Gibbs 2009, p. 2968).

It can be seen that the historical imagination was influenced by the idea that the Australian landscape only needed access to water to be farmed according to the British experience. This in turn hindered the ability for the land selectors and early settlers to adjust to manage for drought as a common feature of Australia’s climatic conditions. This view has continued to influence the still on-going debate about whether drought in Australia is a ‘natural’ disaster and crisis or a period of
dryness that can be managed for. It also influences the agrarian approach to land management, as the land ‘stewards’ (farmers) are increasingly being regulated through water structures, and their access to irrigated water becomes less reliable because it is drawn from fragile systems.

The Goulburn Valley is a region in Victoria where irrigation was meant to have ‘drought-proofed’ the farming land. The Goulburn Valley consists of land that encompasses the Goulburn River. Our understanding of Indigenous history describes that prior to the European colonisation of Australia at least three different Indigenous language groupings: the Taungurong, Ngurai-illamwurrung and Yorta Yorta, were intersected by Victoria’s largest river now called the Goulburn River (Victorian Department of Transport Planning and Local Infrastructure 2015). The Yorta Yorta people called this river Gaiyila, meaning ‘father of waters’, and used the words Gungupna for deep waterholes and Koninner for that section of the river that met with the Dhungala or the Murray river (Victorian Department of Transport Planning and Local Infrastructure 2015). In 1824, explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell, searching for grazing land beyond the Great Dividing Range, recorded their first encounter with the river and its peoples, subsequently naming it as the Goulburn River after the then British Under-Secretary for New South Wales, Major Frederick Goulburn (1788-1837) a man who never actually visited the Colony (Goulburn River 2015; Parsons 2015). By the late 19th century, newspaper articles suggested that it was common knowledge that the Goulburn Valley began at Seymour, even though the source of the River was subsequently found to be located much further east (Weekly Times 1897, p. 1).

The area of the Goulburn Valley follows the Goulburn River’s course through the settlements of Nagambie, Murchison, Shepparton and finally where it meets the Murray River at Echuca (Weekly Times 1897, p. 1; Cannon 1981, pp. 24-30). There are approximately 100 wetlands, reserves and forests in the region including the world’s largest Red River Gum forest, The Barmah Forest (Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries 2013). In research undertaken for this thesis, a strange paradox emerged with the discovery that, despite its long history of human association, no political or geographical ‘map’ of the Goulburn Valley officially existed until very recently. Today, Goulburn Valley
Tourism has a map of the Goulburn Valley, as does the Goulburn Valley Wine region and Goulburn Valley Agricultural Chemical Control area, and nonetheless each map’s geography is different according to the interests of each organisation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) does not refer to the ‘Goulburn Valley’ as a region at all, rather it uses a regional profile called Goulburn and the ABS statistical map is therefore also different to the abovementioned ‘Goulburn Valley’ maps. The Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries (2013) (DEPI) use the ABS regional profile of Goulburn but in describing the area constantly refers to it as the Goulburn Valley. This ‘imagining’ of an undefined region known as the Goulburn Valley is indicative of how knowledge can be rendered publicly and politically invisible even though it exists and is recognised. For the purposes of this thesis, the map as used by the DEPI and replicated in Fig. 2 (below) is offered as the physical, political and geographic map of the Goulburn Valley. This incorporates the Local government councils of Campaspe, Moira, Greater Shepparton, Strathbogie and Benalla.

Figure 2. Map of Goulburn Region (Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries 2013)

The Goulburn Valley is often referred by those who live in, and those who seek to describe it, as being the ‘Food Bowl’ of Australia. This taken-for-granted position of people in the Goulburn Valley has been challenged by other regions that also use the same descriptor: such as the Riverina in New South Wales
the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District along the Murray River in Victoria (Victoria's Food Bowl 2011) the Riverlands in South Australia (Best Wineries: Riverland Wineries 2009) and the Liverpool Plains in New South Wales (Lock the Gate Alliance 2011). For example, in her welcome speech to the first meeting of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in Canberra in 2009, the then Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, claimed that this meeting was ‘a key milestone in the 92-year history of managing the water resources of Australia’s food bowl (Colson 2009). The Goulburn Valley could, however, be considered a genuine food ‘bowl’ because of the range of foods it produces without one agricultural industry dominating. Statistics derived in 2010 show that in the region there were nearly 3,000 commercial dairy farms, with 12 factories processing milk for export and domestic consumption, butter, cheeses, yoghurt and dried milk products. In addition, there were around 400 fruit growers that harvested a wide selection of fruits such as apples, apricots, peaches, pears, plums, nectarines, nashi, kiwi fruit, oranges, lemons, limes and cherries as well as the factories that processed them (Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries 2013). Other foods grown in the region include tomatoes, grapes, and oilseeds as well as a range of vineyards producing quality wines for export and domestic consumption. There are other industries such as wheat, maize, canola and barley, and animal husbandry such as beef cattle and sheep for meat and wool (Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries 2013). To summarise, the Goulburn region included over 5,600 farming establishments that had a production value of around $AUD1.2 billion (Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries 2013). Statistics from the 2010-2011 year show that for one particular section of the Goulburn Valley, the Shepparton Region, the most important commodities were milk production (dairy – 31 per cent), fruit production (orchards – 30 per cent), cattle and calves (10 per cent) and wheat production (six per cent) (Trestrail & Martin 2013, p. 3).

To better understand some of the dynamics of the Goulburn Valley and why it offers a unique insight into the social impact of drought, a description of the area follows as well as some further detail about its agricultural industries. Figure 3 offers a closer depiction of the terrain in the Goulburn Valley. The Great Dividing Range runs along the east coast of Australia from Queensland through to the south-west of Victoria. At Figure 3, it is east off the map and rounds down to the
west of Victoria in the southernmost part of the region. To the east, the towns of Euroa and Violet Town are located near the Strathbogie Ranges, while further east Benalla and Mansfield are situated closer to the base of the snowfields in the Victorian Alpine region.

Figure 3. Map of the rivers within the Goulburn region (Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority 2013)

As the Goulburn Valley extends to the north-west and west, the land becomes flatter and is then divided into sections by the catchment of rivers and creeks; all of which flow north into the Murray River. These rivers include the Goulburn, the Broken, the Campaspe, and Broken Creek. The Goulburn River starts at Lake Eildon, a massive man-made dam, built between 1915 and 1929 in response to the demand for irrigation certainty and that holds the water storage for farmers on the Goulburn irrigation system. Irrigation water for the northern part of the Goulburn Valley comes from the Murray River via Lake Mulwala at Yarrawonga. Townships were built on this river system and small communities such as Numurkah and Nathalia have the Broken Creek running through them, while the Goulburn River itself divides other larger centres such as Shepparton and Mooroopna. Intensive horticulture farming and orchards surround these urban
centres while further out are dairy farms with dry land farming country the furthest from any waterways.

Although not marked in Figure 3, smaller rural communities such as Yalca and Karramomus can be located by a district hall that has become the meeting place for local farmers. Yalca is approximately 20kms north of Nathalia and Karramomus is about the same distance south of Shepparton. These small districts formerly included a school but most schools have now been centralised and the students attend school in the nearby town. For over 80 years the Yalca Hall has remained the venue for that district’s Christmas gathering. Next door to the district hall, the community voluntarily staff their own Country Fire Authority brigade and some still play tennis and cricket on the nearby sport facilities. Karramomus has a model aeroplane airfield and holds an annual Shepparton Mammoth Scale Fly-in. This description of these smaller, almost invisible areas of the Goulburn Valley provides insight into the way local people who farm gather. Community in the Goulburn Valley is not restricted to townships but is more focussed on smaller farming districts and this is where the everyday of women’s lives on their farms and orchards take place.

Throughout the Valley, eucalyptus trees and native grasses can be found scattered along roadsides. Using some imagination, one gets a sense of how the landscape may have looked before the explorers and settlers began changing it. Much of the settled land is now carved into square or rectangular blocks where grids of tarred and dirt roads run off from the main roads and act as boundaries between farms. The Goulburn Valley often looks green, especially where the farms are irrigated, such as the dairies and the orchards. The passing of the seasons can be measured through the orchards where the trees blossom, burst into fruit, are pruned and look bare until the spring blossoms come again. The land throughout summer appears dry, golden and sun-bleached and where properties no longer access irrigation water, the landscape continues to be noticeably drier.

The next section now considers how drought and other key terms used in this thesis are defined. Such definitions become important to enable an understanding of the influence of drought policy on drought discourse and how government
responses to drought impacted at an individual and community level. In particular, the following will highlight how the neoliberal risk management response to drought played such a key role in undermining the agreed capacity for governments to maintain an ‘arms-length’ approach to the plight of people who farmed. The many variables associated with drought definitions, and its characteristic as being different to other forms of ‘disaster’ suggest that dealing with drought, especially in terms of policy and drought service support is not easily managed. This is also important because for the people in the region, their historical imaginations that had generated a narrative of who they were, no longer correlated with their lived experience and the demands brought on by government policy decisions. These can be seen as instances of rupture as discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

3.2 The complexity of defining drought

Drought is as complex to define in Australia as it is in Europe, Asia, Africa or the United States of America. The many definitions of drought reflect the variables associated with it, particularly in relation to the different climatic characteristics of each region and the impacts this climatic variability has on the agricultural sector (Wilhite 2011, p. 13). It also needs to be re-stated here that even within a climatic region, different agricultural industries experience drought differently. Recent literature suggests that drought should be defined as meteorological, hydrological, agricultural and/or socio-economic (Botterill & Chapman 2002, pp. 9-10; Botterill 2003b, p. 62; Botterill & Fisher 2003b, p. 3; EurAqua 2004, p. 7; Boken 2005, pp. 3-4; Zamani, Gorgievski-Duijvesteijn & Zarafshani 2006, p. 679; Productivity Commission 2009, p. 49; United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification 2011, p. 12; Wilhite 2011, p. 13; Hayes, Svoboda, Wardlow, Anderson & Kogan 2012, p. 3). These definitions include characteristics such as below average rainfall, shortfalls in accumulated water and loss of soil moisture during the growing season. Drought is also described as a different dryness to that of arid areas that generally experience a low rainfall. It is recognised as having a different economic impact on society (White & Walcott 2009, p. 600). Such impacts are distinguished by a complexity of factors including: impacting
significantly on people’s sense of well-being and on common water use practices (Zamani et al. 2006). Globally, current climate change predictions suggest that droughts will increase in intensity and frequency (EurAqua 2004, p. 9; Folger, Cody & Carter 2012, p. 1; World Meteorological Organization 2013) including in Australia (Hennessy et al. 2008).

While often characterised as a slow-onset disaster, drought is largely defined and thereby constructed in hindsight rather than the immediacy associated with fast-onset disasters such as floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis and bushfires (Wilhite, Hayes, Knutson & Helm Smith 2000, p. 699; Alston & Kent 2004, p. 217; Zamani et al. 2006, p. 679; del Melo Branco 2009, p. 262; Wilhite 2011, p. 13; Folger et al. 2012, p. 21; Hayes et al. 2012, p. 3). Drought is also described as a natural, hydro-meteorological hazard, a creeping phenomenon that develops over time and a climatic event that wreaks its destruction progressively over large geographical areas (Wilhite et al. 2000, p. 699; del Melo Branco 2009, p. 262; United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification 2011, p. 12; Folger et al. 2012, p. 21; Hayes et al. 2012, p. 3). Boken (2005, p. 4 & 8) suggests that agricultural drought generates soil moisture stress that impacts significantly on crop harvests and that predicting when it starts could improve the sustainability of food production in the future. However, despite increased technological advances in meteorological sciences, such predictive capacities are still to be commonly available. Given that people who farm work in an industry that is dependent on rainfall at particular times of the year and being able to access water consistently for food production and animal husbandry, their experiences mean that they are often the first to notice drought and be aware of the deteriorating environmental conditions (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 17; Zamani et al. 2006, p. 679; Kiem et al. 2010, p. 40; Shaw, Pulhin & Pereira 2010, p. 1; Wilhite 2011, p. 14).

It has been argued that drought is socially constructed because it is dependent on and relative to the needs and norms of each community and region (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 54; Botterill 2003b, p. 62; del Melo Branco 2009, pp. 262-263; Folger et al. 2012, p. 5). In part this is because there is no prescriptive amount of rainfall that constitutes a drought as each country, region and locality is different and has different societal norms (Boken 2005, p. 3; Sivakumar 2011, pp. 3-9). For
example, Sivakumar (2011, pp. 3 & 6) describes how, in the Great Horn of Africa, drought is defined only when there has been two years of repeated failures to rain, whereas in China it may take only five months of no precipitation to declare drought. Texas, USA experienced ‘exceptional drought’ after 10 months and England and Wales were experiencing drought after enduring their ‘driest spring on record’; which equated to just three months (Sivakumar 2011, pp. 7-8).

Del Melo Branco (2009, pp. 262-263) argues that droughts should also be seen in light of a country’s political agenda and the globalisation of the economy which suggests that long term measures of preparedness for drought are put off in preference to short term political gain. Drought continues to remain a contested notion that cannot be understood as an absolute. This in turn means that drought policy cannot be over prescriptive because each country’s experience and each region’s experience of drought is relative according to circumstances and priorities (del Melo Branco 2009, pp. 262-264; Sivakumar 2011, p. 10; Wilhite 2011).

Over the past two decades, debates in Australia regarding drought have focused on concepts associated with its fundamental meaning, which in turn impacts on whether governments should or should not, intervene. This has meant that terminology as to whether drought can be defined as a natural disaster or hazard or whether it requires a risk or crisis management response have been the focus. The following section considers some of this terminology as it has influenced Australia’s position on drought policy and the nature of delivering drought support at the local level, such as Chapter six describes in the Goulburn Valley.

3.3 Drought policy: risk, hazard, disaster

When the Federal Labor government introduced its National Drought Policy in 1992, it was based on the principle that managing for drought was about managing risk, self-reliance and better farming practices. In this way, drought in Australia was to be viewed as one risk among many that people who farmed needed to manage in order to remain a viable business enterprise (Stehlik et al.
Removing drought from the previous National Disaster Relief Arrangements was a specific strategy designed to shift responsibility from government back to the farm sector. Drought was no longer to be a disaster or crisis but instead to be seen as a natural hazard and ‘normal’ feature of Australia’s climatic conditions. Fundamentally, these changes in policy were focused on the way in which governments could reduce expenditure as the National Disaster Relief Arrangements were increasingly too expensive to manage for the future (Botterill 2003b, pp. 63-64). Drought was now no longer considered a disaster but ‘a normal, recurring feature of climate’ and therefore a ‘defiant optimism’ and ‘holding out for better seasonal conditions’ was no longer considered adequate for agricultural sustainability (Hayman & Cox 2003, p. 155; Kenny et al. 2008, p. 11; Hayes et al. 2012, p. 1). This led to an introduction of neoliberal terminology such as ‘risk’ and ‘risk-management’ that demanded a shift conceptually: people who farmed were to be managers of businesses; the family farm became less bound up with agrarian values and more akin to a small business, within neoliberal values.

Risk can be defined either as a chance of loss for some through a variability in a resulting outcome or as ‘uncertainty with consequences’ (Hayman & Cox 2003, p. 157). Risk is also the probability of an event occurring and having negative consequences (Tierney 1999, p. 217; United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification 2011, p. 13). As such ‘risk’ can be seen as socially constructed as it is defined with a specific or quantifiable goal in mind and based on calculations, knowledge and past experiences that can be guess-based (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 7; Tierney 1999, p. 219; Higgins 2001, p. 302). This form of risk is dynamic in nature and in a continual flux depending on the phenomena, what is known about the possibilities and hazards associated with that phenomena and how the social actors respond and behave in relation to the phenomena (Tierney 1999, p. 228). Risk management can then be considered an actuarial approach that seeks ‘to manipulate the choices of rational actors, predict behaviours and situate subjects according the risk they pose’ (Simon 1988, p. 772). As discussed in the previous chapter, risk management is associated with neoliberal strategies aimed at developing minimalist government, fiscal austerity, individual freedom and private property rights (Lockie & Higgins 2007, p. 2). When referring to drought risk management is used in a positive way to emphasise the need for
‘preparedness, mitigation, and prediction’ that together with early warning measures implemented before drought, have the potential to reduce the impacts associated with crisis and aid peoples’ abilities to manage their farm businesses sustainably (Wilhite et al. 2000, p. 698).

However, although farmers do consistently plan for a range of climatic events because the element of risk or gambling has been associated with people who farm in Australia, there has also been the understanding that some droughts remain as an aberration to the norm (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 18; Kenny et al. 2008, p. 11). While the impacts from region to region vary and can be wide ranging, a risk management approach to drought suggests that farmers should be entrepreneurial, self-reliant and viable in the long term (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 36; Higgins 2001, p. 314; Botterill 2004, p. 210; Lockie & Higgins 2007, p. 1; Sivakumar, Pulwarty, Wilhite & Ginnetti 2011, p. 128; Hayes et al. 2012, p. 2). Terms such as ‘risk’ and ‘risk management’, now very common in the sector, infer that there is an expectation that people who farm will plan for and calculate what they need to do to prepare for and implement mitigation strategies that will better support them during times consistent with drought conditions. The following section now considers how terms such as disaster and hazard are defined.

It has been argued that the way disaster is defined is influenced by political, emotional and economic outcomes (Zamani et al. 2006). Globally, statistics show that drought is one of the major causes for loss of human life, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and both short and long term economic losses (Zamani et al. 2006, p. 678; Shahid & Behrawan 2008, p. 292; Hayes et al. 2012, pp. 1-2; World Meteorological Organization 2012; Agazzi 2013; World Meteorological Organization 2013). In Australia, there has long been a debate about the predictability of drought. As it continues to remain a disaster that cannot be predicted, or planned for, or that its impact cannot be anticipated this debate continues (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 35; Higgins 2001, p. 300). As a review of literature highlights, in the past two decades this debate about drought, in Australia and elsewhere, continues to suggest that in order to manage drought as one risk among many rather than as a crisis, drought as a ‘disaster’ needs to be more clearly redefined to being an increasingly common climatic feature that can be managed and prepared for, in much the same way as anyone would
shift of drought from a disaster to a hazard is significant on a global scale and therefore the terms have been defined drawing on how the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) definitions.

The UNDP defines ‘hazard’ as

A potentially damaging phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption and environmental degradation (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification 2011, p. 12).

In contrast ‘disaster’ is defined as

A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society that involves widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification 2011, p. 12).

Using these definitions, hazards or the hazard of drought only become a disaster when there is an amalgamation of hazard factors impacting on an ‘exposed, vulnerable, and ill-prepared population or community’ (Shaw et al. 2010, p.2) or, as is often described in relation to Australians who farm, it may also infer evidence of bad management practice or inflexible approaches to farming and management strategies (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 37; Higgins 2001, p. 305). While drought may be perceived as a manageable risk with preparatory steps often taken to mitigate its impact, drought continues to remain one of many hazards faced by people who farm; a hazard can exceed a rural community’s ability to cope without government intervening to assist.
The legislation associated with a revised National Drought Policy in Australia was promulgated in 1992. When the Millennium Drought began in 1997, this Policy and its underlying assumptions became sorely tested and as the drought then entered its 12th season in 2009, it was understood as much more than just a lack of rainfall. It became understood to be a lack of rainfall over a long period of time, with a subsequent soil moisture diminution that impacted on the growing season and meant a prolonged moisture deficiency in the surface and subsurface water supply. This subsequently affected market supply and demand for water (Productivity Commission 2009, p. 49). During the early 2000s, the Millennium Drought was referred to as ‘the Big Dry’ and the Bureau of Meteorology marked the period of 1997-2009 as the lowest average rainfall since 1900. For southeast Australia, 2001-2009 saw 10 consecutive years of below median rainfall (Kiem et al. 2010, p. 22; van Dijk, Beck, Crosbie, de Jeu, Liu, Podger, Timbal & Viney 2013, p. 1040). Throughout this study the Millennium Drought includes the period between 1997-2010, while remaining mindful that this too has been socially constructed post the event.

Between 2006 to 2010 and the longer the drought continued, the more it became evident that the people who farmed in Australia were struggling to even make sense of farming as their historical imagination of what was ‘normal’ in terms of weather, environmental conditions, water entitlements, farming practices and even drought, became severely challenged.

Chapter one described that during the years of 2006 and 2007, the rural communities in the Goulburn Valley recorded an unprecedented two consecutive ‘top ten’, driest rainfall years (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008a, p. 5). At the same time, distinct from previous years of drought, people who farmed who were also irrigators experienced a loss of water as the water regulatory body, Goulburn-Murray Water, was unable to guarantee irrigation water supplies (Goulburn-Murray Water 2008, pp. 26-28; Greater Shepparton City Council 2008a, p. 5) which led to drought becoming known as an ‘irrigation drought’ (Productivity Commission 2009, p. xx; Askew & Sherval 2012, p. 295). Throughout the earlier years of drought, people tended to be compliant with a risk management response to drought, as it appeared to make sense to manage for the risk of drought as one of a variety of risks that could impact detrimentally on their business. However as discussed further in Chapter five, these long years of drought saw any monies saved, any hay banked and any water savings made,
eaten away. As a result, rural communities and their local governments began to agitate for supportive measures to people affected by drought.

Why defining drought as a disaster became such an important issue in understanding the impact of drought at the Goulburn Valley level, and its subsequent impact on local government, forms the substance of the next section. This considers some aspects of Declarations of Exceptional Circumstances (EC) and the debates used to apply pressure on the Federal government to intervene and support people who farmed.

3.4 The drought and Exceptional Circumstance declarations

In 1992 when Australia removed drought from the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements and implemented a risk management approach to drought there was a provision made to account for times that were considered 'exceptional' in relation to the impact of drought. As Botterill (2003b, p. 63) highlights, the one element maintained in Australia’s neoliberal response to drought was that while ‘normal’ drought did not require government assistance, should drought be determined to be ‘severe’ then State governments could apply to the Federal government for assistance. Even before the impact of the Millennium Drought, it was understood that there would be such an event. What was not anticipated, however, was the extent and length of such a time as experienced through the Millennium Drought. The approach adopted by the Federal government was to determine whether a particular region impacted by a drought could be deemed as 'exceptional' and localised; if so, it would qualify for Exceptional Circumstance (EC) support (Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2008, p. 6). The government body that made those recommendations was known as the National Rural Advisory Council (NRAC).

Within the Goulburn Valley, prior to 16 October 2006, EC declarations had been declared for particular agricultural industries and certain parts of the region (National Rural Advisory Council 2006, pp. 44-45) while post 16 October 2006 the entire region and all industries were covered by the EC declaration (National Rural Advisory Council 2007, pp. 55-56). All EC declarations for the Goulburn
Valley expired on 31 March 2011 (National Rural Advisory Council 2010, p. 23; 2011, p. 29). Clearly, making an EC declaration was not a straight forward process nor inclusive of all farms as different agricultural industries were at times excluded from receiving EC support. For example, the dairy industry was excluded during 8 January 2005 to the 7 June 2006 (National Rural Advisory Council 2006, p. 45). In addition, different areas within the Goulburn Valley had also excluded such as the Moira East SLA, a sector within the Moira Shire which by the end of June 2006 was now included (National Rural Advisory Council 2006, p. 45). The whole experience of EC declarations highlights the, at times, convoluted nature of the boundaries which criss-cross the Goulburn Valley. Most of the boundaries of the Goulburn Valley are within the State’s Hume region but also include part of the Campaspe Shire that lies within the State’s Loddon region. Figure 4 below, outlines the Hume region with the Goulburn Valley charted in green and the region referred to as the Northern region outlined in red. This confusion of boundaries impacted directly on people who farmed in the Goulburn Valley and who lived under the same climatic conditions but were not always entitled to the same level of government assistance (Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2008, p. 5). What was particularly significant about the 16 October 2006 announcement from the Federal government in response to drought was that it was only then that such borders were ‘removed’ and all farming land in the State of Victoria were declared to be experiencing an exceptional drought (Howard 2006, p. 1). This declaration was inclusive of all regional borders and all industries (Howard 2006, p. 1). The government also extended the timeframe for the EC declaration period to 18 months to account for time people who farmed would need to recover (Howard 2006, p. 1). This announcement can be seen, as Botterill (2003b, p. 65) puts it, as a form of ‘fine-tuning’ of the National Drought policy.
Exceptional Circumstance declarations were created to support farmers during a once-in-a-life-time drought that surpassed the usual drought experience. However, neither Federal, state nor local governments were prepared for the extent and length of the Millennium Drought. The risk management strategy failed in part because at no stage since the introduction of the National Drought Policy had there been consecutive prosperous seasons enabling the implementation of long term preparatory and mitigating strategies. In addition, and importantly for the Goulburn Valley, the whole system was predicated on access to irrigation water in the Murray Darling catchment which was also fed into by the Goulburn River. This system failed dramatically in the Millennium Drought.

From 1992 onwards, it became no longer acceptable to think of drought as a natural disaster or an aberration to normal conditions. However, when considering the neoliberal ideology guiding this policy, the shift was about minimising government influence on the agricultural industry as well as maximising the influence of the free market. Australia’s National Drought Policy could also be considered as an actuarial tool used to deny a collective challenge to government policy and to negate government responsibility to financially support people who farmed during periods of drought, thereby challenging their deeply held agrarian values about what they could expect of the land, the climate and the government. This policy appeared to promote the principle that people...
who farmed did not already manage for risk that they did not prepare for drought, and that only those who did would be viable to manage drought. The reality, as indicated by some of the women interviewed for this study and as discussed further in Chapter five, is that people had accepted the neoliberal argument, and did manage for drought as they would any other risk to their business. They managed for a drought that usually lasted one to two years and was within their recollected experience. Goulburn Valley people who farmed, usually had access to irrigation water therefore shared a common experience of a ‘green’ drought because even in periods of dryness they still usually had access to water for their crops, animals and orchards. While many people who farmed often had access to bore water, dryland farmers who did not have access to irrigation water, still had their dams, bores and their water tanks that were fundamental to their risk management response. These technologies provided water for their animals and potable water for their households but when these dried up they then had to transport in water from standpipes located on the edge of their local town. Access to water became an unprecedented and critical issue for people in the Goulburn Valley.

This was further exacerbated because throughout this drought, rivers were drying and water reservoir levels were dropping faster than any rain or run off could top up, including the water reservoirs for the major cities (Stehlik 2013, p. 122). The whole of southeast Australia faced an unprecedented situation where running out of water in major cities became imaginable for the first time in living memory. In a country where the majority of the population was urbanised (Hogan 2003, p. 60), this was an impending disaster. Politically, running out of water shifted the ideological concept of drought being a common feature of the Australian climate, and one to which only people who farmed had to respond, to drought being perceived once again as a natural disaster which was also affecting urban Australia (Stehlik 2013, p. 122). The longer the Millennium Drought continued, the more the pressure on governments to address the social welfare of farmers and rural communities increased combined with a response for water management from city dwellers. On 16 October 2006 the Australian government finally determined that for most parts of rural Australia, this drought, one which the Prime Minister called ‘a huge heartache’ (Howard, 2006 p, 1) was considered an extreme climatic event; a once in a generation experience where the downturn
in production was impacting significantly on agricultural economics and therefore the conditions were consistent with the National Drought Policy’s Exceptional Circumstance criteria (Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2008, p. 6; National Rural Advisory Council 2011, p. 20).

The following section suggests how 2006 became the moment where the neoliberal aspirations of Australia’s National Drought Policy failed to be reconcilable with the lived experience of managing this drought as ‘normal’.

3.5 Political implications

Chapter one briefly outlined how Australia’s governance is divided into three specific areas of federal, state and local government. This means that as local government remains unrecognised by the Constitution, the Federal government disperses funding to the state governments who, in turn, then decide on funding distribution for local government. In the case of drought policy this means unnecessary delay as each step becomes politicised. The Handbook developed during the drought and used by the Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (2008, p. 5) stated that only state and territory governments could apply to the Federal government for an area to be considered for an Exceptional Circumstance Declaration. Any organisation such as local government applying on behalf of their region, could only do so, via the express support of their State government (Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2008, p. 5). This meant that the decisions about whether or not a particular region was declared to be experiencing a ‘normal’ drought or a ‘severe’ drought was left to the Federal and state governments and largely depended on their priorities and their political strategies. Despite having any desire to do so, local governments could not deal directly with the Federal government on the issue of drought as it affected their local residents.

The further implications of drawing out the process of determining whether a drought was normal or severe were that the process of applying for and waiting for a response plus the process of the distribution of funding through the different
levels of government meant that by the time a region was declared to be experiencing Exceptional Circumstances, the situation those people who farmed were in had, in all probability, worsened and become even more critical. This, together with the historical imagination of the rains usually coming within a year or two, meant that services that were implemented at a local government level were short term and focused on managing a crisis rather than working strategically with rural communities to build up their capacity to maintain their resilience. As Chenoweth and Stehlik (2008, p. 49) suggest local governments have a potential role to play in building community resilience. However, focussing on an emergency response, especially one that was tied to boosting community morale rather than building social capital, meant that when funding did become available the *ad hoc* delivery of services left people confused and unsure of which services they needed, who to contact and were they still available. An emergency response also means that there is a loss of confidence within the service because it may or may not be there when actually needed, while actively building social capital can be seen as a long term investment in building trust and reciprocity between people and their service providers. These are crucial elements to strengthening ties to the community and the capacity for people to band together and support each other (Stone & Hughes 2002, p. 1; Hughes & Stone 2006, pp. 242-244).

Most of the drought programs, such as the ones that will be discussed further in Chapter six, only received short term funding that generated a sense of urgency for a quick response, rather than encouraging any longer term planning. These programs considered men who farmed too ‘difficult’ to access quickly, so women who farmed became the primary point of contact for drought workers. This thesis argues that as women were considered better networkers than men, known to have more of a tendency than men to be volunteering within local community groups, and therefore more easily accessible and well networked, as well as prone to taking up appropriate information, this investment became commonplace. Despite this appreciation of the prominent role women played within rural communities, drought policy decisions and drought service provision were actually made with the men who farmed in mind. Women may have been considered the ‘glue’ holding farming families together but the welfare of the men who farmed and the future of the agricultural sector (as a male project) became
the primary focus of government funding and drought service provision for rural communities.

In the same week that the Prime Minister announced the broadening of the EC criteria, a matter of public importance – rural policy – was debated in the Federal House of Representatives. The following highlights just how the ‘Big Dry’ continued to remain political and how different actors within this political debate used the drought to make their points. Fundamental to this debate are the underlying ideologies associated with agrarianism and neoliberalism. Within Australian politics the National Party (previously the Country Party) continues to be represented as the political party for country people by upholding an agrarian ideology. As discussed in the previous chapter, in order to maintain some power within Australia’s political system and to ensure that the Australian Liberal Party governed, the Nationals formed a coalition with the Australian Liberal Party that upholds conservative right neoliberalism. Together they created a ‘marriage’ of sorts between agrarianism and neoliberalism that continues to be promoted as a better political alternative for people who live on the land than what is on offer from the Australian Labor Party. Both groups are sent as essentially centrist, however, the drought exposed their fundamental ideologies. This debate can also be seen as reflecting on the fragility of the Murray Darling Basin, and the power of science to persuade politicians to adopt certain measures. The debate was introduced to parliament by the Independent Member for New England (NSW), Tony Windsor (a former National Party politician) (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 92), and took a particularly ‘agrarian’ turn as the announcement of the EC extension and funds associated with it were discussed.

The news media had been calling on the Australian government to provide assistance to those in the agricultural sector dealing with the ‘crisis’ of drought while at the same time, others, including some scientists, were arguing that those in the agricultural sector who needed support obviously were unviable and should not be ‘propped up’ using taxpayer subsidies (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 92). Some media reports promoted an image of people who farmed and who were in need of government support as being unviable because they had failed to adapt to Australia’s climatic variability (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 92). This introduction into the debate by Mr Windsor
suggested that this was more about ideological positioning than concern about issues of drought, water, agriculture, natural resource management and what was actually happening to the people who were farming the land. For Mr Windsor, the criticism of people who farmed as being unviable and needing to exit the industry because they were unable to be self-sufficient during such an exceptional event was ‘driving people to suicide’ and in the debate, he called on those people accusing them of being unviable to ‘shut up and listen to what is actually going on in the farming sector’ (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 94).

The ensuing political discussion drew on topics such as the viability of people who farmed, statistics of men who farmed and committed suicide, the impact of climate change and the timeline of the drought. There was some discussion about how people who farmed should be supported, such as Mr Windsor’s suggestion to set up a national natural disaster scheme (similar to the one which the 1992 policy had replaced) but whereby every Australian contributed one dollar per week that would be inclusive of all disasters including drought, ‘hail, mudslides, earthquakes and cyclones’ (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 94). The overall emphasis of his contribution to the debate was that people who farmed were in desperate need of support and the Federal government needed to put measures into place to secure the agricultural industry and the plight of people who farmed in Australia.

The debate offers an interesting insight into how parliamentarians try to adhere to political party lines while concurrently vying to be perceived as supportive of the plight of people who farmed. There were arguments both for and against the neoliberal politics of the National Drought Policy that required people who farmed to manage for drought independently of government support. Some appeared to blame people who farmed for high levels of greenhouse gas emissions and land degradation. There was an overt challenge to governments to stand back and allow people who farmed to exit the industry. Implicit in the neoliberal, risk management approach to managing for drought, was the suggestion that people who farmed did not prepare for drought and therefore it cannot be government’s responsibility to subsidise those in farming to survive drought with their farm businesses intact.
Another Independent, the Member for Kennedy (QLD), Bob Katter, and also a former National Party member and somewhat renowned for using shock tactics, claimed that people who farmed were leaving the industry because things were so bad that they were committing suicide (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 105). The shocking statistics of one male person who farmed committing suicide every four days (Page & Fragar 2002, p. 83) became, at the time, a driving force that counteracted and undermined arguments about farmer viability, climate change impacts and managing drought through risk management strategies. While no one directly addressed the risk management goals of Australia’s National Drought Policy during the debate, it was argued that people who farmed were the ‘stewards of the land’ and therefore more than capable of making their own decisions about how much land they needed to run their farm, about the practical steps taken to off-load their stock upon the first signs of drought and about building dams on their properties that then provided water for the flora and fauna in the environment (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 103). The National Party Member for Page (NSW), Ian Causley reminded the House of the agrarian values held by rural people and their ability as stewards of the land to ‘have toiled and battled drought’ throughout Australia’s European history (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 101). Mr Causley used agrarian ideology to claim that farmers were already managing drought and managing the land (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 101). Both Mr Katter and Mr Causley used arguments that were counterintuitive to neoliberalism, but drew heavily on agrarianism, by re-imaging the farm business as people who live and work on the land in the traditions of the early settler yeoman; the landed gentry that built the nation.

During the debate, the Millennium Drought was not named, nor was there a sense of an unending drought. While each Member of Parliament who spoke acknowledged the severity of drought, there seemed to be very little consensus about the drought’s past and future time frame. The Labor Party Member for Corio (Vic), Gavan O’Connor’s concern was that people who farmed were still to recover financially from the single year, 2002-03 drought. He said that ‘they have been plunged into despair as a result of the dry conditions that are now gripping the nation from east to west and throughout Central Australia’ and were now facing an El Nino effect that could prolong the current dry condition for a further
12-18 months (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 99). The Liberal Member for Hume (NSW), Alby Schultz claimed that the drought had been going for five years and was now in its sixth (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 105). Mr Windsor, suggested that the drought had continued for four years while Mr Causley questioned whether it was, in fact, the most severe drought ever experienced in Australia (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 101).

At the same time that the longevity of the drought was being contested, debate about climate change being significant or not was also aired. Significantly, the Liberal Party Member for Farrer (NSW) and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Sussan Ley, suggested that blaming people who farm for climate change was particularly unhelpful because farmers were not in a position to do anything about it and that while farming would continue into the future, discussing climate change was not significant to this debate (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 96). She stated that:

I would encourage those who want to have the climate change debate to have it but not to draw farmers into it as if somehow they are part of it, somehow they are responsible for it and somehow they are completely helpless in the face of it. It may be an inconvenient truth for some but farming and agriculture are here to stay. They are here to stay for the future and for the long haul. They are the best land use for much of Australia (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 96).

In response, Mr O’Connor (Lab, Vic) called the Liberal Coalition ‘a danger to the rural sector’ because it was not tackling the climate change issue head on (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 100). He highlighted the many challenges facing Australian agriculture that ‘will test its resilience and viability’, including ‘the new global trading environment, climate change and associated issues of water management and salinity, the availability of new technologies, the animal welfare debate, the depletion of our soils and sustainability imperative’ (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 98). The Labor Party Member for Grayndler (NSW), Anthony Albanese, also argued that addressing climate change was to deal with the issue of water and then he accused the Coalition Party of upholding a dual strategy of both undermining climate change and supporting it (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 108). This was because the then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard had previously said that he was unconcerned about the state of Australia and the world in fifty years, while,
at the same time, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull claimed that climate change was real and occurring now (Federal House of Representatives 2006, p. 108).

This one example drawn from Hansard in the crucial year of 2006 clearly demonstrates just how much pressure the Australian Parliament was experiencing to address drought while being asked to attend to the environmental concerns of climate change. In particular it is important to note that the Independent (former National) and the National Party Members were the speakers who called on agrarianism and the historical imagination of the plight of the ‘stewards of the land’ while the Liberal Party promoted a risk management approach, and the Labor Party speakers highlighted the impact of climate change and called for drought to be seen in light of climate change. The debate also highlights the confusion about what constituted a severe drought and disagreements about how long the drought had lasted or would last, into the future. In fact, by the end of 2006, the drought was so severe that only those holding a very close allegiance to neoliberalism could not sanction the Australian government stepping in to support people who farmed to manage for drought nevertheless even this small group began to realise to that not be seen doing something could be political suicide. The drought continued, as did the political debate, well into 2007 and the Federal election in November of that year, during which not only did the Liberal National Coalition lose government, but Prime Minister John Howard, also lost his seat. The drought continued.

Significantly, the voice of women was lost throughout this period. Drought, drought policy, the plight of people who farm and manage for drought are all gender neutral terms, but the presentations of these arguments were not about women who farmed or women on farms committing suicide. This debate and the subject of the debate, the farmers was about men who farm the land. The concern and statistics about suicide was about the men who farmed. The one woman who did speak and as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry held authority to speak on behalf of the agricultural sector, maintained the gender neutral discourse. Points raised by the Independent and National Party Members that drew on agrarian ideals were not inclusive of women; they did not refer to ‘stewardesses’ of the land, and neither the women
nor children were considered as primary causes for concern. The neoliberal terminology of ‘viability’ was also about arguing the pros and cons of supporting businesses to survive the drought which typically ignores the lived experience of most farm businesses actually being structured as family farms where the family members both live and work.

Table 1, on the following page, has been included because it outlines some historical events that contributed to understanding the many complex issues impacting on rural communities occurring throughout 2006-2010. This included the International Panel on Climate Change Report which stated, for the first time, that human activity was one of the drivers inducing climate change (Bernstein, Bosch, Canziani, Chen, Christ, Davidson, Hare, Huq, Karoly, Kattsov, Kundzewicz, Liu, Lohmann, Manning, Matsuno, Menne, Metz, Mirza, Nicholls, Nurse, Pachauri, Palutikof, Parry, Qin, Ravindranath, Reisinger, Ren, Riahi, Rosenzweig, Rusticucci, Schneider, Sokona, Solomon, Stott, Stouffer, Sugiyama, Swart, Tirpak, Vogel & Yohe 2007, p. 37). While this list is not exhaustive of everything that impacted on the people of the Goulburn Valley during that time, what it does specifically identify are phenomena that impacted considerably on the people who farmed in the Goulburn Valley. Many of these issues, divided people within their local communities between those who had access to resources, and those who did not, but also ideologically. For example, some people accepted and championed climate change, while others fought to stop the building of the Sugarloaf pipeline. Some people campaigned against the Murray-Darling Basin water buy-back scheme while others presented their cases at government-led community consultation processes.

Importantly, as Table 1 shows, the people of the Goulburn Valley experienced intense party politics throughout the drought: including little-to-no access to irrigation water, the implementation of the irrigation modernisation project, regional and capital cities running out of water and taking water from rural rivers, environmental degradation of the rivers and the Federal and state governments intervening to manage the water. These more localised issues were in addition to the ongoing politics of the climate change ‘crisis’ (and was the drought part of it or not?) which appeared to threaten the everyday lives of people and some political futures. These were all national and state issues, being played out on a
daily basis in the Goulburn Valley. Understanding this dynamic generates a better sense of the uncertain times people were living with and it demonstrates how the ideologies that had held people who farmed together during good times came undone in the misrecognition of an event which was unprecedented.

### CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IMPACTING THE GOULBURN VALLEY AGRICULTURAL REGION 2006-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2007-2010</th>
<th>Climate Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>IPCC - humanity responsible for climate change (Bernstein et al. 2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Australia signs Kyoto Protocol under new Labor Government (The Age 2007)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>National Drought Policy scientific review finds that with climate change farmers can expect droughts to be more frequent and more intense (Hennessy et al. 2008, p. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Labor Government fails to get Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) through parliament with Liberal/National Coalition infighting over ETS topping the opposition leader (Taylor 2010 and Coorey 2009)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>2007-2010</th>
<th>Murray Darling Basin Authority</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Water Act changed to allow Australian Government to assume responsibility for the environmental aspect of the Act (Franklin et al. 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Australian Government negotiating with state government to relinquish responsibility for water regulation of the Murray-Darling Basin (Robertson 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2009</td>
<td>Water buy-back scheme implemented i.e. to remove water from irrigators and return it to the river systems (Federal Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Rural Community Demonstrations against MDBA (Dunlevy 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<th>2007-2010</th>
<th>Sugarloaf Pipeline</th>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Foodbowl Irrigation Modernisation Project announced (Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment 2007, p. 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>Rural community demonstrates against the building of Sugarloaf Pipeline (Gardiner 2008)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Campaspe farmers vote to close irrigation system (Long 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Review includes a scientific, economic and social assessment of drought (Hennessy et al. 2008, p. 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation meetings with rural communities and agricultural businesses take place (Kenny et al. 2009, p. 94)</td>
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<th>2008-2010</th>
<th>Global Financial Crisis</th>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Lehman Brothers crash sparks Global Financial Crisis (Wolff 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Australian Government stimulates economy (Robinson 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Black Saturday Bushfires, 7 February</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twelve day heatwave with many day over 40 degrees Celsius prior to the fire (National Climate Centre 2009, p. 2) 
Culminates in 173 deaths, 5,000 people injured, 2029 homes lost, countless animals, over 4,500 square kilometres land burnt out (Davies 2009) 
Fruit on the trees in orchards cooked in the middle (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009e, p. 6) 
Shift in the workforce with some drought workers re-locating into fire recovery and contracts ran out (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, 29 July)

**Table 1.** Chronology of events impacting on the rural community in the Goulburn Valley during the drought period of 2006-2010.
The Goulburn Valley offers a good deal of complexity to understanding how drought was experienced. Geographically, demographically, climatically and politically the years of 2006-2010 were steeped in complex, ideological arguments and political uproar. The drought exacerbated all of this and people who farmed had to contend with the highs and lows of political decision making that tried to keep in line with a neoliberal risk management approach to drought. This chapter has also highlighted how the three tiered government system impedes the ability of local government to deal directly with the Federal government during times of drought; instead relying on the State government to make an application on their behalf. In describing the Goulburn Valley and the politics and events that played out during the Millennium Drought, the voices of women, the roles of women, and the significance of women to the agricultural sector remain publically invisible.

These two points about the inability of local government to deal directly with Federal government and the invisibility of women in the geographic, demographic, climatic and political discourses are of significance to this study and can highlight the power struggles below the surface of what is seen as the public domain. This thesis argues that not only do women do have a role to play in the agricultural sector, so does local government and particularly during times of crisis.

It is with this understanding of the Goulburn Valley, that understanding how drought was defined and appreciating the complexity of the politics of the day that the thesis shifts now from this contextual background, to considering which methods would be most useful to uncover the knowledge, expertise and experience of the women who farmed during those years.

The following chapter looks at the methods used to gather and analyse the evidence used in this study. In particular it reflects on methods implemented as well as those considered and rejected. It describes some of the ethical decisions that needed to be made, introduces the women who were interviewed and outlines how the local government documents from the Greater Shepparton City Council were accessed.
Chapter Four. Creating a space for an absent subject: methodology and methods

This chapter presents the methodology and the methods chosen for this study. It introduces the women interviewed and whose narratives form the centrepiece of this thesis. It outlines the ethics process for interviewing the women which included an insider/outsider positionality of the researcher and how the reports used in the document analysis were accessed through the Greater Shepparton City Council. In particular, this chapter presents the methods used to ensure the integrity of the evidence gathered is drawn from these narratives, and how the women’s ideas and experiences they believed to be important to better understand how to farm and manage for drought in the future, were determined. The decision to focus on women who farmed was a deliberate act for two reasons. First, to provide such women with a unique opportunity within which to recollect and talk about their experiences, values, interests and activities; and second, to recognise and acknowledge their individual expertise which could then be drawn on in the management of future droughts.

As discussed in Chapter two, the approach taken is consistent with an ontology of feminist standpoint theory, and offers an insight into the everyday world of the women (Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 113; Kiem et al. 2010, p. 45; Smith 2012/1987, pp. 175-176). Feminist standpoint theory argues that to give voice to those who continue to be subjugated by the very industry within which they worked and by the ideologies that shaped these industries requires research to foreground these women and their experiences.

The in-depth interviews conducted for this study provide a personal, experiential recollection. The document analysis enables some further insight into ‘official’ versions of what was recorded. Using both methods aimed to take the experience of individuals from the subjective to a broader consideration of the implications their narratives may have for rural communities managing for drought in the future.

My personal experience as the Drought Recovery Officer for the Greater Shepparton City Council offered an opportunity to access networks of women
across the Goulburn Valley who had participated in different drought related projects held during 2007-2009. I had kept in touch with some of these women and subsequently invited them to participate. Rhizomatic sampling was used to engage other women who had heard about the research and asked to contribute their story to the study because it supported a non-linear networking approach to sampling (Stehlik et al. 2000, p. 41; Stehlik 2004, p. 40).

This chapter begins by outlining the methodology underpinning the three most important elements for developing knowledge within a feminist standpoint theoretical framework. The methods used to gather the evidence will then be presented in two parts: first, by considering some of the different approaches that were initially considered prior to selecting to use the qualitative approach of in-depth interviews and second, by outlining why and how a thematic and interpretative document analysis was chosen to explore in detail the Greater Shepparton City Council documents that reported on the Council’s drought program.

The chapter then outlines the ethics approval process where issues of risk and confidentiality are discussed. The decision making process determined in order to gather the information required to complete this study is presented, including the intent that determined who to interview, an introduction to the women, how the interviews were conducted and how the transcribing and coding of the recordings were made.

4.1 Feminist standpoint methodology

Adopting a standpoint of women does not mean universalising ‘a particular experience’ but it does enable a means to create ‘the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience’ where the space is ‘filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking for and in the actualities of their everyday worlds’ (Smith 2013, p. 107). Feminist standpoint theory’s base assumption is that in the universalisation of the conceptual order, women’s experiences and ways of being have been excluded from the development of
knowledge and the institutional structures that govern society. This challenges a more traditional understanding of ‘knowledge’ as proposed by Sullivan (2009, p. 283) when he suggests that knowledge is defined as related to objectivity, truth and rationality and can be understood as a ‘justified true belief, according to the most widely accepted definition’. For Horsthemke (2008, p. 136) however, knowledge can be distinguished by three kinds of knowing: knowing a person or a place; knowing-how as in practical or procedural knowledge and as ‘knowing-that’ as in theoretical, factual or declarative knowledge. Both of these approaches can be considered as relatively deterministic; that is, that there is knowledge that fits with these definitions but that there is other knowledge that does not and this infers that knowledge that concurs with these definitions can be understood as privileged and that other knowledge is lesser and therefore disregarded (Anderson 2011, p. 1; Smith 2013, pp. 17-18; Code 2013/1995, p. 163).

d’Avignon and Stone (2007, p. 986) argue that privileged knowledge is ‘generated and disseminated by professional researchers, policy makers, marketers, or development personnel’ and ‘delivered from formal institutions of knowledge’ and, in doing so, has rendered invisible other knowledge such as ‘traditional environmental knowledge, indigenous technical knowledge, ethnoecology, folk science, and local knowledge’ as well as women’s and gendered knowledge. Anderson (2011, p. 1) argues that hegemonic knowledge practices that marginalise women include ‘excluding them from inquiry, denying them epistemic authority’ and ‘denigrating the “feminine” cognitive styles and modes of knowledge’. The development of feminist epistemology therefore played a critical role in centring research on the knowledge of women. Such epistemology bases itself on the situated knower and the situated knowledge that represents their perspective on the subject (Code 2000, p. 170; Brooks 2007, p. 56; Rouse 2009, p. 202; Anderson 2011, pp. 1-2). Drawing on this epistemology, Dorothy Smith argues that feminist standpoint theory enables a methodology that requires three features. First: it begins with the everyday voices of the women (Smith 2013, p. 110), second: it uses methods that preserve women’s voices so they are not objectified (Smith 2013, p. 111) and third: it accounts for the researcher who is embedded within the women’s everyday world (Smith 2013, p. 127). These three features provide the framework which guided the research of this study.
Smith (2013, p. 110) argues that drawing on the everyday voices of women means that evidence comes from what the women speak about, what they remember, what they did and what happened to them. Harding (2009, p. 195) takes this further by suggesting that the primary criteria for using feminist standpoint theory is to base a study in ‘the daily lives of oppressed, exploited or dominated groups’. This could be considered to have the potential to be problematic for the women interviewed for this study as they may not consider themselves as an ‘oppressed’ group. This raises an issue as to whether the researcher could be misappropriating the subject to benefit her work because women who farmed would rarely portray themselves as exploited or dominated. As this study progressed it became clearer that ‘oppression’ cannot only be considered as a literal translation of the subjection of women to harsh treatment, instead, and relevant to this research, it is also about the way in which the everyday lives of women, their experiences, interests and values continue to be overlooked, rendered uninteresting, subservient and negated from the standards of so-called ‘universal’ knowledge (Acker et al. 1983, p. 424; Smith 1990b, pp. 11-12; Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 13; Smith 2013, p. 388). Recalling how ‘women who farm’ was defined in Chapter one, it demonstrates how, through the intersectionality of women as women and women in the workplace, it is plausible to establish women who farm as a category that experiences social inequality and oppression regardless of how they may identify themselves.

In this study, feminist standpoint theory was used to situate the women as the primary voice, the protagonist and the knower of what it was to work as a farmer and manage for drought. By situating this research within the concrete, life experiences of the women, they formed the centrepiece and it was their knowing that was used to reflect and represent knowledge within that locale (Brooks 2007, pp. 55-56). This study prioritises the life experiences of some women within the agricultural sector of the Goulburn Valley and centres on defining the relationship between the women’s narratives as being situated within the agricultural sector and how they and their communities managed for drought. While the women may not have necessarily agreed with identifying themselves as an oppressed or misrepresented group, they would most undoubtedly agree that the everyday lives of women who farmed was a story worth telling because of its continued absence within agricultural knowledge.
When undertaking a sociological analysis, Smith (2013, p. 110) suggests it is not enough to simply tell a story; instead it is ‘the relations that shape and determine the everyday’ that need to be identified. This study investigated methods that would shape the analysis so that the presence of the actual subjects was preserved while uncovering the social relations of the everyday world in which the women’s narratives were embedded (Smith 2013, p. 111). In effect, this meant that consistent with feminist practices, it was important not to objectify the women as the ‘other’ (Smith 2013, p. 111). Haraway (1988, p. 592) argues that feminist objectivity and theory relies on ensuring the subject has agency to express their narrative as they see fit, rather than through the researcher claiming to ‘know’ the subject. The methods selected for this study were chosen to enable the women to maintain their agency so that they remained positioned as the ‘knower’.

While it can be suggested that many researchers do not see themselves as having power over their respondents, nevertheless, even within the feminist framework there is an element of potential for that to happen. Situated knowledge argues for acknowledgment and the use of partiality, admission of values and the recognition of context boundaries, so that the researcher can generate an awareness of the factors that play into accessing evidence, the interaction with the subject and the limitations of the context. Feminist objectivity was aimed for in this study by clarifying the influences that impacted on the respondent, the researcher and the context. Therefore, to summarise, this study is clearly situated within a specific location, the Goulburn Valley, Victoria, during an actual time, 2006-2010 and within a particular context of farming during a drought, while being influenced by the masculine hegemony of the agricultural sector, agrarianism and neoliberalism as discussed previously in Chapter two.

The third feature of feminist standpoint methodology was to recognise the relationship between the researcher and the women interviewed. This thesis recognises that the role of the researcher, what persuaded her to undertake the study, how she was influenced by the subject and how the subject was influenced by the researcher is critical and requires foregrounding (Smith 2013, p. 127). Further, feminist objectivity supports the need for strong reflexivity whereby the gendered assumptions and personal biases of the researcher are acknowledged.
For this study, the researcher was positioned as both insider and outsider. Insider status meant that between the researcher and the interviewee there were shared characteristics with the group situation (Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 140). This insider status pivoted on three particular aspects. The first was the common ground of being women, followed by shared experiences as women who farmed. The third characteristic of shared experience was connected with the time the researcher worked as a drought worker for local council; a position from where the researcher originally met most of the women interviewed. Outsider status related to the differences between the interviewees and the researcher where it could have made it difficult to gain access to the interviewees’ situations and their confidence (Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 140). Points of difference here revolved around the researcher having exited the agricultural industry during the drought and her preference for urban-style living; the women interviewed survived the drought and were still farming today. The main difference however, was the academic positionality of the researcher. The methods used to address this relational status between the researcher and the interviewees is further discussed in the following section of the chapter.

The research paradigm for this thesis locates women as both the subjects and knowers throughout the study and addresses the need to encourage a sociological consciousness for women, as current conceptual practices have tended to situate these women outside traditional frameworks and reject their knowledge and experiences (Smith 2013, p. 109). This does not suggest a blaming of the oppressor for misrepresenting knowledge as universal when it only accommodated men’s interests, values and activities. Rather it argues that the knowledge and experiences of women can be viewed as elucidating the discovery of knowledge that could complement and build on what is already considered as ‘known’.

In summary, the three concepts that Smith outlined for the use of feminist standpoint methodology were adopted as the framework for this research project: that the research must be undertaken from the perspective of the woman situated in the everyday; that the researcher must take every action to preserve the perspective of the participant as subject and knower, while exploring the relations in which the everyday is embedded; and in order to maintain a level of objectivity,
the researcher must acknowledge their relation to the subject and to the topic of inquiry.

### 4.2 The Methods

The following section outlines the process used to select the most appropriate method for this study. In the beginning, focus groups were considered as a possible approach. This would engage a group of women, who, during the process of collectively telling their stories could draw some confidence from the sharing with others who had had similar experiences (Madriz 2000, p. 842; Pini 2002, p. 343). Initially, it was felt that focus groups could benefit and enhance existing knowledge. However, on consideration, it was also recognised that people can often be reserved about expressing personal experiences of hardship in front of others who may be relations or neighbours or connected in some way. In the Goulburn Valley, people who farm can often be related and know each other. This highlighted the need to a shared value of trust. Therefore, this, more ethnographic approach, was not considered possible in the time available. Therefore the use of focus groups in this study was rejected on consideration of these confidentiality and trust issues (Madriz 2000, p. 848; Pini 2002, p. 348).

The next option considered was that of blending an auto-ethnography with an ethnographic approach (Anderson 2006; Defrancisco, Kuderer & Chatham-Carpenter 2007; Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang 2010; Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Given the position of the researcher as both ‘insider and outsider’, this method could have offered value, but was rejected on consideration of the timeframe (post drought) and my limited role (I was now a student, not a drought worker). A further method considered was the use of a grounded theory approach to analyse inductively the in-depth interviews and documents gathered for the study (Evans 2013, p. 37; Saldana 2013, p. 51). On reading the literature about the effectiveness of using grounded theory, it did offer some methods of analysis that aided in the location of theory in the participant’s world and that it also assisted in moving away from the ‘confines of androcentric theory’ (Henwood & Pidgeon 1995, p. 19). Again, on reflection, and taking into account the various
criticisms associated with this methodological approach (Henwood & Pidgeon 1995, p. 19) it was concluded that as the ontological position of the researcher was grounded in feminist standpoint theory and this theoretical framework offered a challenge to uncover that which has yet to be explored.

It was agreed that this study would apply a deductive approach to the evidence gathered from two very different sources (Charmaz 2000, p. 511; Evans 2013, p. 37) and two methods were then used to gather that evidence. The first was to undertake in-depth interviews and the second, with permission from the Greater Shepparton City Council, to access various reports written during the drought about programs undertaken by the Council. These reports spanned the period 4 January 2007 – 24 December 2009 (see Appendix A).

Scholars have long argued for in-depth interviews as an appropriate approach in highlighting a subjective view of particular issues which provide opportunities to create and explore the hidden experiences of the everyday lives of women (Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 118; Smith 2012/1987, p. 290). For example, Denscombe (2010, p. 210) suggests that in-depth interviews allow respondents to express their mind, develop their own thoughts and use their own words. With a focus on using a feminist framework, Reinharz (1992, pp. 18-19) also suggests that feminist interview research generates non-standardized information that offers researchers ‘access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words’ and looks for differences as much as similarities. She also suggests that the interviewing process, using open-ended questions, provides an opportunity for connection between the researcher and respondent as well as offering agency to the respondent as the researcher does not control the conversation (Reinharz 1992, p. 20). The use of in-depth interviews in this study was also important to gain an insight into sensitive issues around farming and drought while privileging the women’s voices as the knowers of such information.

The document analysis undertaken focussed on the role women played in the Council’s drought programs and enabled the incorporation of factual details about these programs that would not be available through the interview process, but would complement the narratives of those interviewed (Caulley 1983, pp. 19-20). Reinharz (1992, p. 158) suggests that document analysis using public documents
provides insight into the ‘cultural milieu’ of the time. Together with private
documents, or in this case in-depth interviews, it provides a deeper insight into
more than just hearsay and vice versa about an official version. Document
analysis through a feminist lens often challenges conventional knowledge, and in
this study offers insight into how the Council managed for drought and engaged
with women in the community. Some of the benefits of document analysis,
especially public documents, enables others to access and verify this information
as it forms official documents (Denscombe 2010, p. 275).

An ethics application was made prior to any field work commencing. This next
section details the ethics process, risks identified and how confidentiality was
planned for and maintained.

4.2.1 Ethics

This study was presented for ethical approval from the Australian National
University Human Research Ethics Committee on 8 August 2013 and approval
was then received on Thursday, 15 August 2013 (Protocol: 2012/616. see
Appendix B). As a result, several ethical considerations were raised. While this
research was not directly related to farmer suicide and memories that could be
upsetting, the Committee questioned the potential of risks to the interviewees
should such topics arise. The Committee also asked for more detail as to the
skills of the interviewer to handle such a situation should it occur. Given the nature
of the study, and its location, the Committee also sought further assurance about
confidentiality. These issues were addressed in a response to the Committee by
outlining the strategy adopted to ensure that a safe environment for the interviews
was established, and that every effort would be made to ensure full
confidentiality.

This study was not designed to focus on the mental health and well-being of
women who farmed, but rather on their recollections and experiences of the
drought event, and on their personal approaches to managing the drought. Four
deliberate approaches were included in the research design to address the
potential risk of stress to the interviewee. The first was the decision to hold the interview (where possible) in a public space such as a coffee shop. This location enabled a conversation in a relaxed, public environment and minimised the potential to become too intimate. The second strategy was to immediately avoid any probing questions when recalling any incidents that caused the interviewee to become upset. The interview questions broadly focused on farming and drought management, however there were times when feelings resurfaced. When this did happen, there was no probing into the emotional side of what the interviewee was saying. Instead, there was a recognition that the interviewee’s emotional response remained private and personal, and the researcher did not move the conversation into an area that could cause detrimental emotional or psychological harm. The third strategy was to acknowledge any such emotional response if it did occur and invite them to take a break, to stop the interview or to reassess if they want to continue. This would enable the interviewee to have a few minutes to recollect herself and at which point the researcher stopped recording any conversation. If needed, the interviewee could also have stopped the interview for that day and made a future arrangement. All the women approached were advised that they could end their involvement in the research at any time during it. Anyone who chose to end and withdraw from the project was advised that any recordings would be deleted and any notes made would be shredded. The interviewer was prepared with a list of relevant counsellors or social workers if the interviewee became distressed. This process, and a list of professional assistance was provided to them at the beginning of the interview.

It may be useful here to provide some detail as to my personal experience and competencies. During my employment as the Drought Recovery Officer for the Greater Shepparton City Council, the Council implemented workplace mental health and well-being training for all staff which was facilitated by Beyond Blue, a non-government agency experienced in mental health and wellbeing training (see https://www.beyondblue.org.au). In March 2008 I undertook a short course provided by the Victorian Health Department, ‘Promoting Mental Health and Well-being’. As a component of my experience in Council’s drought meetings, I also gained skills in ‘warm hand overs’, cold-calling, how to talk with people who were highly stressed and, importantly, became very familiar with available support services in the Region. A warm handover was something that a drought worker
did when they needed to bring in a different service provider for the client they were with; for example if someone came into Council asking for help and in the process became distraught, then with the person’s permission, the Council person with them would ask someone skilled in counselling or social work from an appropriate agency to come in and help the person. The way a handover was done could mean the difference between someone receiving the help they needed or leaving both service providers with the feeling that they had been discarded by the first service provider. ‘Cold calling’ meant visiting people, usually strangers, without making a prior appointment. This was not so much a skill I learnt for myself, but a skill that I helped others to learn based on my experiences dealing with stressed people coming into council. It was found that during the drought occasionally volunteers, social workers and counsellors would visit people without an appointment to find out if they needed any support. There were concerns for volunteers who were untrained in counselling, that they might inadvertently cause more problems because they walked in on a family experiencing a crisis or that they might offend people who farmed by offering help when it was not requested. Therefore this was an important skill to understand. I also gained on-the-job experience dealing directly with people who farmed and who sought help from the Council via phone calls or face-to-face appointments. I therefore became experienced in providing advice without falling into an unauthorised counselling role. For example, I used the drought information brochure (see further in Chapter six) as a talking point about how best to access drought services and support and the referral list of support services given to the interviewees became a means to assist them to seek professional services and advice if needed. I also gained important experience using a technique of engaging people who were upset in very general conversations that were not too personal but that related to more basic information such as the number of children they had, what were their favourite pets or animals on the farm and if they were a member of a community group. This was a technique that could move an upset person from a more emotional state into a numerical, logic mind-set, which sometimes helped them to gather themselves back to a point where they felt less emotionally troubled.

To summarise, it was made clear to the Ethics Committee that, as a sociology student, I did not have the experience or expertise to act as a counsellor for the
women I was proposing to interview. However, I was ready to provide details of those that were experienced to the women should the need arise. These four strategic approaches were detailed to the Ethics Committee which then expressed itself as satisfied and granted approval.

Confidentiality became a critical factor in developing my ethical approach to the study. While locating the research in the Goulburn Valley was an advantage because I had previously worked for the Council, and I was also a resident of the district, it also became extremely important to ensure that there was full confidentiality maintained at all times during the study. While the rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee presented few difficulties in moving into an in-depth conversation, this familiarity, however, meant that anonymity needed to be strictly managed. Confidentiality was offered and maintained by avoiding characteristics, locations and specific identifying details to ensure that when described in the final dissertation, the interviewees would not be recognised. Two approaches were used to address issues of confidentiality. First, options were provided on the consent form for the interviewee to be identified by their real name, a pseudonym or to remain completely confidential. Second, only those locations with populations of more than 1,000 people were to be referred to. This meant that smaller rural districts not connected with an urban centre but which offered a risk of an individual interviewee inadvertently being recognised, are not used in this dissertation.

This discussion has outlined the ethics process that provided due consideration to factors that would support the women interviewed to be confident of a process that enabled their voices to be prioritised, to draw out evidence of their everyday experiences and to ensure they remained in a safe environment where they felt comfortable to share their stories. Prior to introducing the women and the strategies used to ensure the interview process upheld the feminist standpoint methodology and that the evidence remained ethically gathered, the following considers reflexively the position of the researcher as both insider and outsider.
4.2.2 The researcher – insider/outsider

Earlier, this chapter described the decisions associated with this thesis’ methodology. This section deals with some aspects which have influenced how I have addressed concerns associated with being an ‘insider’ as well as determined some of the positives associated with being positioned as such.

Establishing an insider perspective on the social setting made it possible to present a more nuanced appreciation of the culture of the women interviewed and recognise impacts within the context of that culture (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, p. 3; Bryman 2008, p. 403; O’Reilly 2009, p. 3). In particular, self-narration and representation enabled a more reflexive analysis of my experience through consideration of the agenda, the assumptions and what experience was brought to the study (Ngunjiri et al. 2010, p. 2; Ellis et al. 2011, p. 3). I have been both insider and outsider throughout the course of this project. I can be considered an insider because of the roles I had as both a drought worker within local government and as someone married to a dairy farmer during 2006-2007. While there are some benefits to this positionality there have also been necessary strategies implemented to ensure that throughout the process, the focus remains on the findings of the data gathered, rather than attempting to match others’ experiences and knowledge with my own (Bryman 2008, p. 409). I have drawn on my ‘outsider’ role as an academic to ensure that the strategies used to manage this have been effective in drawing out the information within the narratives and the document analysis.

The insider role was also more than the work and lived experiences that I brought to this study. There was also a common ground I shared with most of the women in terms of race, gender, work, age and status and in some cases education (Hesse-Biber 2007, pp. 139-140). I had met most of the women throughout my time as a drought worker, where I was open about my connections with dairy farming and together with the above mentioned classification, this meant that it was relatively easy to move into open dialogue and to quickly establish trust (Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 140). The trust between myself and the women was an important ingredient to conducting the interviews as there developed a shared understanding. It also assisted in their appreciation that this study was trying to
capture their knowledge of how their rural community had managed for drought in the past. The women interviewed also understood and trusted that I was capable in representing their narratives because of the way I conducted myself during my time as the drought worker and in my subsequent achievements as a student.

Hesse-Biber (2007, p. 143) suggests that the insider/outsider status can be fluid and this became evident in the way points of difference were also identified throughout the interviews. For example, when discussing particular farming industries, those who were not from a dairying background often moved into the position of ‘knower’ as they explained the impact of drought on their particular industry. I also found that while I had some kudos associated with being married to a dairy farmer, I had not taken on the role or commitment to farming that these women had and therefore, even for the women involved in the dairy industry, there were moments when they had to explain the intricacies of what it meant to be in dairying.

The second point of discussion relating to insider/outsider status that required a deeper understanding is in relation to the documents selected for the document analysis. While they are discussed more specifically later in the chapter under the section titled ‘Document Analysis’, it is important to point out here that I was the author of those documents and the person managing each of the projects and also in personal attendance at the Greater Shepparton City Council drought meetings. The advantage of this lies in the style of writing which required a very precise, informative notation as the reports were written to inform Council. As the author of these, I therefore bring to the analysis a deeper appreciation of what actually occurred at these meetings, and have some insight into the reasoning why items were recorded or not. The challenge has been to present the data that is there and to synthesise it with what was found in the interviews.
This section outlines the rationale adopted for the interviews themselves. First, a number of factors were taken into account when considering the sample size. It was of primary importance that any sample included women who farmed in different industries across the Valley; were from different generations, and were involved in some ‘public’ way during the drought crisis. The initial approach to developing the sample was to purposively approach such women (Morse 2007, p. 885; Palys 2008, p. 698; Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 50) while others who were included came from opportunistic meetings and suggestions from those who had agreed to be interviewed and still met these requirements (Phua 2007, p. 198; Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 51; Salkind 2010, p. 255). The second phase for growing the sample can therefore be described as following a ‘rhizomatic approach’ (Stehlik 2004, p. 39). This method of sampling characterises metaphorically a networking and relational practice that is inclusive of potential multiplicities through which the sample was developed, rather than being suggestive of an inexorable snowballing effect (Stehlik 2004, pp. 39-40).

The sample criteria also took into account other aspects. All the women were local to the region, were known in some way to the interviewer and were relatively convenient to access. It became obvious very early in the study that these women held differing perspectives about how best to manage for drought and about the role government bodies played in supporting people who farmed during times of crisis. They also participated in different ways in the agricultural sector, and came from different industries within that sector. As outlined in the previous chapter, such experiences were all fundamentally associated with the assumption that the Goulburn Valley, prior to the Millennium Drought, was drought proofed. The next chapter outlines how each of the women subsequently approached this issue from a different perspective as framed through their personal experience within their industry.

The sampling strategies used are consistent with qualitative feminist research practice that aims to focus on the process or meanings the women assign to their particular social situation (Bryant 2001, p. 215; Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 119). Eleven (11) unstructured, in-depth interviews with women who farmed were
subsequently undertaken to focus on gathering evidence on the recollection of their experiences of managing drought of 2006-2010 and how that drought impacted on them, their farming businesses, families and communities. Maintaining an exploratory sample size ensured that each of the participants was given the opportunity to have their voices reflected in the findings of the study and that their recollections could each be suitably probed for new insights into farming and managing for drought (Morse 2007, p. 885; Denscombe 2010, p. 24; Hesse-Biber 2010, pp. 50-51). The size of this sample of participants meant that detailed qualitative data, representing the intersectionality of the interviewees as women and as people who worked in the agricultural sector, could be gathered and analysed closely (Bryant 2001, p. 215).

There were some challenges associated with gathering this sample. For example, planning for interviews with the women who worked on orchards became problematic as fieldwork was originally scheduled during their apricot and cherry picking season, which was quickly followed by the peach and pear picking harvests. Fortunately, the orchardist who did participate had extensive leadership experience within the industry and had introduced a number of initiatives into the Valley. Following each interview the women were asked if they could suggest another woman to participate in the study. This was particularly successful for the dairy industry cohort. On invitation, only two women declined the offer to participate outright.

Of the thirteen interviews arranged, eleven were completed with women from dairy farms, orchards, and dryland farms contributing. Two interviews failed to be recorded by the technology but fortunately detailed notes were made at the time. The age of the women ranged between 30 – 90 years with one interviewee over 80 years old. All of the women were married and only one woman had no children. Some had children still at school, and three were grandmothers. As the next chapter explores in more detail, one of the women suggested that her children were planning on taking over the farm. At least six of the women lived on farms that had belonged to their parents and could be considered generational farming. One woman was farming on land that had been in her family for four generations. Four of the women came from farming families prior to their marriage and seven of the women were involved in some way with the Greater Shepparton City
Council's drought program. These women’s stories recollecting their farming life and managing for drought during 2006-2010 will be drawn on in more detail in the following chapter. Table 2 provides a snapshot of those who participated in the in-depth interviews with their agreed names.

Table 2. Respondent demographic information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (As per agreement)</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Children*</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Primary Role**</th>
<th>Place for Interview</th>
<th>Taped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAIRY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Ellie</td>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Yes - M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Trad/Off-F</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Susan</td>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Yes - M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Trad/On-F</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sarah</td>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>On-F/Off-F</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Zoe</td>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Yes - S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>trad</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rena</td>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Yes - S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Trad</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Joan</td>
<td>Dairy to Beef</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Yes - A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Trad/Off-F/On-F</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORCHARD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Catherine</td>
<td>Orchard</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Yes - A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>On-F</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DRAFLAND</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Confidential</td>
<td>Cropping</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>Yes - S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Trad</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Plain Jane</td>
<td>Cropping</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>Yes - M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>On-F</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jennie</td>
<td>Beef &amp; Sheep</td>
<td>80+</td>
<td>Yes - A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Trad/On-F</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Chris</td>
<td>Cropping &amp; Sheep</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Yes - A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>On-F</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*S = School age, M = young children and adults, A = Adults
**Trad = traditional farmer’s wife, Off-F = Off-farm employment, On-F = active participate in the farming business.

It can be noted that women from non-English speaking backgrounds and Indigenous women who lived in the Goulburn Valley and who farmed, are not represented here. My own experience includes a recollection that, early in 2007 at a community social gathering, I did meet one Indigenous woman whose partner was a tomato farmer and I also recall at a late 2008 meeting, a Filipino woman whose husband was an orchardist. Both these women had attended community functions but had not approached Council for support. Despite personal invitations, neither of them were able to participate in organising community activities. I recognise the personal challenges associated with being ‘the only’ Indigenous or woman from a non-English speaking background involved. In the course of my employment at the Council, there were occasions when information about available drought services was sourced by people from a non-English speaking background, however because of the private nature of our conversations, it is not appropriate to disclose those here, nor was it ethical.
to contact them for the purposes of this study. During the drought, the Victorian Department of Primary Industries employed a man from the Punjabi community to work directly with the Punjabi people and other non-English speaking people who farm in the Goulburn Valley. During the development of the Strong Women Strong Families (SWSF) Program (see further in Chapter six), I contacted him and he gave me the details of a woman who could act as a connector between the broader regional community and the Punjabi community. At that time she was unable to participate in any of the planning or activities for the Council programs, but she did remain on the email distribution list that provided people with a link to updates of drought information.

In keeping with the epistemological position adopted in this thesis, providing women with a privileged position to narrate their stories of farming during the Millennium Drought was an overt way of affording them a position of power to express their experiences and to highlight their ideas about how to best manage farming in the future. Recollection offers a means for positioning the women as the ‘knowers’ and then prioritises what they remember as occurring during that time. In Chapter two an historical imagination defined that recollection can be associated with interpretation and creativity and the stories people tell that make sense of who they are both temporally and spatially (Grumley 2005, p. 227; Heller 2005, p. 77). Further, Ellis et al. (2011, p. 3) describe recollection as a means of negotiating those ‘intense moments’ in time that remain with a person long after the crisis that they are recalling has passed. Denscombe (2010, p. 234) suggests that using recollection offers a way for the individual to mediate between ‘the world out there’ and what they experience. Importantly, it also assumes that there is some form of interpretation.

Another act of providing agency to the participants was to invite them to choose the environment in which the interview would be held. Most commonly, this became either at a coffee shop or in their own home. The interview time included some light refreshments which encouraged them to relax and enjoy themselves and was also meant as a show of appreciation and value of their time. Some of the woman did tell me that it was a pleasure to be taken out to a café of their choice and treated to some afternoon or morning tea. Two of the interviews were held in an interviewee’s home and I brought along cake to share. One of these
home-based interviews was held over lunch while the second was held during morning tea. This second interview was undertaken with two women who were close friends. In total, two interviews were completed as such 'double-interviews'. In each case, the woman I initially contacted had asked if a friend who also farmed could join in and this was accepted. With respect to confidentiality the two double-interviews are categorised in Table 2 as individual interviews. These conversations were lively at times and there seemed to be more prompting going on from each other, with my own interjections only occurring when they were looking for the next topic.

In this relatively safe environment that the interview established, women were encouraged to talk about farming and the drought through the use of open-ended questions that allowed them to generate a narrative of their choice – see Appendix C (Kiem et al. 2010, p. 45). This was a practical mechanism designed to symbolise the shared agency between the researcher and the participants (Madriz 2000, p. 841; Deliovsky 2010, p. 887).

These interviews relied primarily on audio recordings with some field notes. This way, a permanent recording was made of the conversation that was suitable for downloading onto a computer to be later transcribed and analysed (Bryman 2008, p. 451; Denscombe 2010, p. 187; Saldana 2011, p. 39). The recording of interviews also means that the researcher leaves the interview with data suitable for analysis (Travers 2013, p. 243). In particular, these interviews were recorded using a Samsung Galaxy S3 mobile phone. As with all technology, malfunctions can happen and in one of the earlier interviews I discovered that the recordings automatically turned off if there was an incoming message or phone call (Bryman 2008, p. 452; Saldana 2011, p. 39). This completely affected one of the interviews where there was no recording and I had to make do with the notes I had taken. Subsequently, more care was taken during the interview to check that phone feature was turned off (Travers 2013, p. 243). Using the mobile phone as a recording device also offered a topic for casual conversation with the women, as most had not used that aspect of their phones. The process of setting up the phone came to act as a kind of prelude to conversation prior to the actual interview process and removed any anxiety about the recording process itself (Bryman 2008, p. 452; Denscombe 2010, p. 187; Saldana 2011, p. 38). For three
interviews the interruption of the recording did affect the flow of conversation as we had to re-enter the recorded conversation. The reason for continuing to use the phone was that it provided a better recording of the interviews in what in many cases was a noisy environment than a digital recorder and it also made transcribing less challenging.

The interviews were designed to develop an in-depth, unstructured narrative whereby the women were given the opportunity to talk about farming and managing drought as they remembered it (Hesse-Biber 2007, pp. 118-119). At the beginning of each interview all respondents were introduced to the study, and invited to share their memories of the Millennium Drought. It was explained to them why we were focussing on the years from 2006 to 2010. Some of the women compared this drought with other drought periods they had experienced. All respondents were invited to talk about themselves or the farming business in light of their role or their memories, a typical day, their family or their community. The choice of what they spoke about was left for them to make. They were also encouraged to speak about what they wanted to say rather than what they thought I wanted to hear. The second aspect of the interview was to discuss the drought itself and how it affected them, the farm, the family, the community and the decisions they made. The interview then moved to discuss the kinds of changes they made, the services they accessed and what it was such as farming after the drought had been declared ‘over’. The final aspect of the interview was to focus on the future viability of farming. This included discussing their aspirations for the future, opinions about climate change, managing for the risk of future droughts and the pros and cons of drought support along with ideas they suggested for governments to consider in the future. While there was a list of questions that I drew from to guide the interview process, often the women’s narrative covered the specific themes of the question sheet without any prompting. Towards the end of the interview, the women were asked to add anything they thought they had missed during the interview. I found that the majority seemed to forget about the recording technology and the conversation flowed quite naturally. On occasion, I would prompt them with a question to encourage them to continue, and gave them positive feedback at all times (Hesse-Biber 2007, pp. 126-127). My experience was that for Jennie (the oldest respondent) there was a certain reluctance to her storytelling compared with the
other women. This may have been that she seemed to think that what she had to say was not ‘important’ enough for academic research. To manage this, I simply asked more open-ended, prompting questions to encourage her to keep going with her story and reaffirmed her each time she spoke that I did want to hear what she had to say and that her narrative was an important contribution.

A priority of the research design was to ensure that each woman understood the purpose of the study and that she had a choice to participate or to withdraw at any time (Hesse-Biber 2007, p. 120). Prior to the commencement of the interview each woman was given three sheets of paper (See Appendixes D, E & F). The first was an information sheet about the study, the second was the consent form she was required to sign and the third was the referral list of counselling services. Once each of the sheets were discussed, read and the consent form was signed, a protocol for responding to distress was highlighted so each person was made aware that they could stop the interview at any time without fear of any repercussions. One woman who had agreed to be interviewed, pulled out a couple of days before the interview took place. While she was very apologetic, I refrained from asking any questions and reassured her it was acceptable. In another interview, a woman became distressed twice: once, in remembering her father who had passed away and second, in speaking about her current situation. In this case I reminded her that she could stop the interview, but she was keen to keep going. After the interview was over, we informally discussed the support mechanisms she had in place for herself and I reminded her of the details I had given her should she need further assistance.

At the beginning of each interview, the participants were reassured that particular care would be taken to ensure that they were not identifiable by the information they provided. At all times throughout the interview process, consent was regarded as a process of ongoing mutual negotiation where if there were any difficulties arising, they could be discussed. There was no recording of any of this discussion as it was not part of the study but contributed to the integrity of each person’s narrative.

Prior to the interviews starting, negotiation commenced with the signing of the consent forms and the women nominating their confidentiality status for the
research project. This proved of some considerable interest to me as a researcher, but it also gave time between us to establish rapport. Some women chose to maintain their first name; others chose a pseudonym and one woman by the end of the interview asked to remain completely confidential, which meant that I could not use her story directly in the analysis. Those who opted to maintain their first name usually did so because they felt their story was already relatively public, so being named in a research paper was of no concern to them personally. Some women took great delight in choosing a new name and did so with great care and consideration while others chose what they determined would be a fun name to be called and there was often much laughter about this new, chosen identity. Those who wanted anonymity did not say why; nor were they asked. In the one case a participant started out as using her name and then during the interview chose to use a pseudonym. At the end of the double interview and after her friend had suggested that she too could call herself a ‘farmer’, she decided that she would become anonymous, as referred to above. I deliberately did not ask questions about her choices because I did not want to influence or put pressure on her or any of the women. My approach was aimed at reinforcing the women’s right to make decisions about how and what they wanted to contribute to the study.

The final step in the interview process itself was the transcription of the recordings, and I used Dragon’s Naturally Speaking’s speech-to-text feature, where what was spoken was transposed to text in a Microsoft Word document. I found that while Dragon’s Naturally Speaking program does have the capacity to transcribe recorded speech into text automatically, because of the background noise of the cafes and the distance of the speakers from the recording device, a more manual approach was adopted. I then transcribed the interviews using ‘unfocused’ transcription where the intended meaning of the interview was recorded rather than illustrating all the nuances of speech (Gibson & Brown 2009). In order to ensure the accuracy of representing in text what was recorded, once the initial transcription was completed, I then re-listened to each recording numerous times and checked the accuracy of the wording typed into text. Once this was completed, I began coding.
There were a number of steps involved in the coding process. However, because it was important to focus and draw out of the interviews the key points that the women thought were important, I started by using grounded theory; specifically open coding. This allowed me to identify what the women were referring to and under what conditions. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, I became more cognisant of the grounded theory requirements to not view the data through a theoretical lens, I realised a different approach was required (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter 2000, p. 77; Saldana 2011, p. 116; Garson 2013, p. 13).

I chose instead to use a thematic analysis and began to code the interview data by examining for commonality (Gibson & Brown 2009, p. 128). In particular, the focus drew on inductive coding where themes emerged from the data (Gibson & Brown 2009, p. 130; Lapadat 2010, p. 926; Willis 2013, p. 325). The next step was to explore how to interpret the categories identified by the coding through the writing of notes and memos. These helped to contextualise the data in relation to the broader research topic as well as to explore in more depth what was the intended meaning given by the women (Willis 2013, p. 324). It also helped to identify the similarities and differences between what other women were saying and to explore how different people may have interpreted a particular theme (Gibson & Brown 2009, p. 128 & 134). At the same time that I was doing the coding, I would also listen and re-listen to the interviews while reading the transcripts to confirm the development of the analysis. Having established some commonalities and differences, I used an Excel spreadsheet to set up a matrix to generate some visual data for how the themes related (Gibson & Brown 2009). I then compared this to the questions to identify any evidence that emerged. When it came time to write these ideas up, I began asking myself, what does this tell me? How is this important? How does this relate to the topic?

4.2.4 Document Analysis

The second component of the evidence gathering involved analysing text drawn from various documents associated with the Greater Shepparton City Council and its activities during the drought. While a document analysis is understood to be a
convenient and economical means of gathering data it was also useful in this study to draw out relevant evidence that could not be accessed through interviewing of individuals recollecting what happened during the drought (Caulley 1983, p. 20). It offered a form of ‘member checking’ to the evidence gathered at interview.

The approach taken draws on an interpretive document analysis in which the research qualitatively analyses the documents used by drawing on the perspective of the social group being studied (Reinharz 1992, p. 151; Corbetta 2003, p. 297; Bryman 2008, p. 385). As White (2013, p. 303) argues, critical interpretation ‘makes it possible to reflect on the social meaning of official documents’. This offered a textual and historical analysis which was both temporal and spatial. The documents appropriated for such purposes can include personal documents such as letters and diaries, historical records such as church records, literary material from books or journals and institutional documentation such as memos, reports and financial statements (Reinharz 1992, pp. 146-147; Leavy 2007, p. 227).

As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, three tiers of government in Australia (federal, state and local) are all involved in drought management in some way, and there are important texts chosen from all three. However, the primary focus here remains the local government documents as provided to the researcher by the Greater Shepparton City Council. These reports were written for Council consideration as to what was undertaken within its drought programs and what impact these had on those involved and the broader community. They provided an institutional perspective of what can be termed as ‘found data’ about the different meetings and events which can then be placed alongside the evidence drawn from the interviews (Reinharz 1992, p. 148). Evidence gathered from this document analysis can be divided into two parts: federal and state governments and then local government.

The political environment of drought within Australia from both Federal and state government perspectives included analysis of a range of speeches, Hansard question-time responses, and media releases and media articles. These were analysed to establish the complexity of the context to the politics that impacted
on successive Federal and state governments’ attempts to deal with and respond to the climatic, economic and social impacts of the drought. The analysis of the Federal and state governments’ documents focuses on some historical aspects but also highlights the complexities of the Millennium Drought and how the subsequent failure of drought policy impacted at the local level.

A challenge experienced during this document analysis phase was gathering the evidence was that as the Federal and Victorian government only having three to four year terms, and with both the Federal and State governments changing at elections during the timeframe of this study, this meant that a decommissioning of websites occurred and an incoming government’s website established. The consequence to this study was that there may be references in the Reference List where the specific web address is now no longer available. As the study progressed, I was able to use the extension application NCapture in conjunction with software program NVIVO which then enabled a snapshot and archiving for some of these websites. Prior to this option becoming available, I also archived some printed hard copies, and was also able to draw on existing research about particular events to validate this evidence.

The primary focus of this interpretive document analysis was to consider the recorded findings of local government, specifically within the Greater Shepparton City Council, located in the Goulburn Valley. All of the reports used in this analysis were written during the implementation of the Council’s drought program and are inclusive of both public and semi-public documents. One analysis, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter six, included identifying the number of women attending the Council’s drought meetings and subsequently determining which topics were of priority from the meetings and looking at how they were represented. These documents were used to establish what happened in the region during the drought from a local government perspective and to monitor any changes evident from them as to how the community managed for drought. The primary documents included were evaluation reports of the Council's drought program and community projects, minutes from the Council's drought meetings and the drought brochures (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2009e, 2009d, 2009c). In combination, these documents provided a unique resource to better understand the purpose, rationale and history of a
government-funded program in a time of crisis. These reports provided documentation and evaluation of the Council’s drought programs and accounted for state and local government funding allocated to these programs. A particular focus for this study were those local government reports in which women were identified as playing a significant role organising, promoting and participating in different community events. In addition, community feedback from some of these programs, most particularly for the SWSF projects which recorded in the evaluation the comments by the women in the region who attended, provided insight into the issues that were important to them. These documents were written between 4 January 2007 and 24 December 2009 and were archived in and accessed from the Greater Shepparton City Council’s records system.

Prior argues that that the authenticity and reliability of the text must be questioned when undertaking document analysis (Prior 2000, pp. 14-16). In addition, Scott (2004, pp. 282-284) suggests that for the document analysis to be effective the researcher must recognise and account for the authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning of the documents being used. Further, there is a usual assumption that the social researcher who undertakes such document analyses are usually involved in producing such documents (Corbetta 2003, p. 287). This is the case in this study where the documents described above were all written by the researcher, who at that time was the Drought Support worker for the Council. This meant that all the reports for the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought program and most of the minutes recorded for the drought meetings were written by the researcher. Within the Council structure however, such reports and minutes were approved by senior staff. These reports were not written at a time when this study was being planned, or even on the horizon. Instead these reports and minutes were written with the intent to document and evaluate the programs for the Council so that they could demonstrate how the grants involved were spent. As described in the previous chapter, these grants were received through funding from the Victorian State government (from the Federal government under the drought policy) as well as from within Council’s budget. The contents of these reports were also shared with other organisations that were involved in the planning and organisation of the various events. The drought meeting minutes were also shared with those who had attended the meetings and who requested to remain on the email distribution list. Some reports
were also subsequently used as support documents to secure further grant funding.

This interpretive analysis generated an understanding of how local government understood and attempted to manage the impact of the drought in the Valley through the eyes of the women involved, and offered insight into lessons for future drought management. To summarise, throughout this evidence gathering stage, careful consideration and subsequent reflection was given to each step. Undertaking interviews and incorporating document analysis the everyday lives of women who had farmed throughout 2006-2010 to emerge, in conjunction with what was happening within the region through the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought programs. Together, these methods enabled the study to remain faithful to the standpoint of the women who were interviewed (Hesse-Biber 2010, p. 3).

The following chapter presents an analysis of the findings from the interviews. It begins with an overview drawing on the women's sense of the history of their farm, the impact of the drought and how they survived that experience. The chapter also describes the future of farming from their perspective and particularly as it plans to contend with the prospect of recurring droughts.
Chapter Five. **Women who farm: their recollections**

The thesis to this point has provided the context for women and farming and the gendered ideologies that support a hegemonic masculinist paradigm of society. It has focussed on the impact of drought and more specifically reflected on the location of the Goulburn Valley. The previous chapter described the methods used to gather and analyse the evidence gathered through the interviews with the women and the document analysis of the Greater Shepparton City Council reports. This sample of women was critical to enable a centering on each woman’s narrative and in ensuring their place in the study as ‘knowers’. It was also critical to an understanding that the women’s recollection of farming and managing for drought was focussed on in interview in order better understand how they negotiated the event, their experiences and then made sense of their memories of that time of crisis. This chapter presents the evidence that emerged from the interviews structured under three broad headings: their ‘everyday’, being resourceful, networked decision makers and planning for a ‘drier’ future.

### 5.1 Their ‘everyday’

Local government identified rural women as the most effective means to get information to the farming men in the region, who were understood to be the ‘real’ targets in drought support. Women were considered to have a tendency to be well networked, socially connected and easier to access. In part this was due to generalised statements that suggested that farmers ‘bunkered down’ during tough times and that this isolates them and therefore renders them more prone to commit suicide. This was despite recent evidence that shows rural women form the largest demographic for people tending to experience mental illness (Johnson & Ragusa 2014, p. 209). This chapter identifies the very real experiences of women during this time to better appreciate their roles in farming in the Goulburn Valley, the decisions they made that ensured the survival of their farms post the crisis of the Millennium drought and what hopes they had to better prepare, plan and manage for future droughts.
The interviews conducted in this study provided evidence that supported the hypothesis of this thesis that women have knowledge, expertise and experiences that are not utilised to their best capacity during times of crisis such as drought. To consider this evidence in more detail, this chapter is divided into three broad themes. The first is the history of the farm and how the women came to be on their farm and how that farm came to belong to her family. This enables a sense of the everyday lives of the women to develop, and by drawing on each women’s perspective, explores some of their own history as well as that of their husbands and their families. The second theme identified relates directly to the practicalities of what happened during the drought how the women came to manage and survive the harsh impact drought had on their lives and on their farms. In particular this section focuses on three aspects: resourcefulness, decision making and networking that highlighted the incipient relationships between women and local government and how these could be better leveraged in the future. The third theme explores the women’s views on the future of farming and their reflections on climate change. These reflections can assist in better managing for future drought, and specifically, ways in which local government could better support their rural communities.

5.1.1 Becoming ‘stewards of the land’

Chapter two provided a broad description of the field of women who farm and highlighted that the classification of women as traditional, off-farm worker or business entrepreneur was not clear-cut. The women interviewed for this study were described as ‘moving in and out’ of these categories depending on what was happening in their lives, the opportunities that were available to them and what they perceived as being of benefit to their family farm. It also described how, while women may officially be rendered as invisible to the farming sector, they in fact play a proactive role that supports their husbands, their children and the family’s farm business.

This next section examines further the field of the women who farmed by drawing on the way the women who were interviewed spoke about how they came into
farming and their relationship with the land. The starting point for determining their everyday standpoint is by exploring how the women came to be farming in the first place. The information gleaned from the women’s stories for this task emerged as a way of them telling their story. The majority of the women spoke of the different ways they ended up living and working in the agricultural sector except for Catherine (60+, orchards) who started her interview by discussing her involvement with the wider agricultural community. This section describes the different ways each of the women interviewed established themselves as living and working on a farm and this in turn frames the everyday standpoint base from which their stories unfold.

One way of moving into farming was through marriage: specifically, when a woman who lived in town or from the city and married a man who farmed. For Susan (50+, dairy), she came from the city (Melbourne) and had married her husband, who at the age of 17\(^1\) had purchased the farm ‘down the road’ from his parents’ farm where he grew up. Susan’s everyday standpoint was as someone who knew nothing about farming prior to her marriage nor did she own any part of the land that she came to live on.

> I married a dairy farmer and worked on a dairy farm for 18 years. I learnt a lot about the dairy industry and how to manage a farm and run a farm (Susan, dairy).

While the literature identifies that this is generally one of the more common means for how women came to live and work on the land (Alston 2003b, p. 168; Cummins 2005, p. 291; Bryant & Pini 2009, p. 54) in this sample this is the least common.

Another means of entering the agricultural sector was through farm ownership via inheritance. Generally in Australia the inheritance process remains patrilineal unless there is no son and it was in this way that women came into sole ownership of the land (other than becoming a widow) (Alston 2003b, p. 168). Jennie’s (80+, beef and sheep) story of how she came to own the land that she farmed was by inheriting it from her father after he died. Her story, however, starts much earlier

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\(^1\) Susan’s husband had received a payout from the accident he had two years earlier and together with his parent’s help was able to purchase the farm at such a young age.
than that, as Jennie’s great-grandfather originally selected the farm. While Jennie did not nominate exact dates for her property, Fahey (2011, p. 101) writes that land in the northern Victorian plains was opened up for clearing and selection in the early 1870s and that by the 1880s there were 4,500 settlers working in what is now known as the Goulburn Valley. This suggests that the land was selected, claimed and developed in accordance with the Free Selection Act 1869 (Fahey 2011, p. 99). Jennie had also grown up on this farm prior to marrying her husband.

I was born here in town and lived on the farm until I went to boarding school in Geelong. Yes the ‘45 drought. I can remember. I can remember my father being a very worn out man by the end of it (Jennie, beef and sheep).

While Jennie’s husband had also grown up on a farm, he became a teacher and they spent much of their married life living in other parts of Victoria; wherever he was posted. When Jennie’s father died in the 1980s, he bequeathed her a share of the land and together with her husband they moved back to the family’s property.

There was a group who were interviewed who had grown up on a farm but the pathway by which they came to be on their current farms varies. Joan (60+, dairy to beef) also grew up on a farm where, after her father died, her mother continued dairy farming and while living at home, Joan continued to help with the dairying until she married.

Well 35 years ago [my mother] was still milking. [I remember] because she’d had a mastectomy and that was just before I got married so I quit my job at the airport and I was milking until she got herself back going again and then I got married (Joan, dairy to beef).

Similarly to Jennie, she married someone who was not a farmer; rather Joan’s husband was a painter. As Joan and her husband had children, they kept moving onto bigger blocks of (residential) land until they moved to a three acre property just outside of Melbourne. Joan kept ponies for her daughters to ride and wanted the extra land to support this hobby. This block proved too hilly for her young children to ride their ponies safely and as the rest of Joan’s family had continued owning and working dairy farms her husband,
...decided in his wisdom that he didn’t want to paint anymore. So from a beautiful two story place in... ‘Yuppyville’ with bellbirds, he came up to [the Goulburn Valley] (Joan, dairy to beef).

By this time, Joan had four young daughters although one was a little baby. Later they moved to a second dairy farm where they currently live, still in the Goulburn Valley. The puzzling aspect to this story is that Joan claimed that her husband made the decision to farm however when she began her interview, called herself a ‘third or fourth generation’ dairy farmer. This suggests that Joan had more involvement in the decision making process than she was prepared to say.

I wanted to find something that we both would be happy with but not [where] we were going to milk cows because this is only 70 acres. We weren’t going to milk cows because hubby was going back to painting. To build your business up that takes a long time. He was still going over to Nathalia to paint. So basically I said to mum, we had 20 heifers because, they weren’t particularly that well-bred [and] a house that had to be completely redone inside and out. Anyway we went out, mum and I and bought...another 20 possibly 30 cows so I was up and milking with 50 (Joan, dairy to beef).

There are two significant issues to highlight here about Joan’s everyday standpoint. The first is that in this aspect of her story and throughout the rest of the interview, Joan always returned to the point that her husband was the one in charge; a common characteristic for many women who hold agrarian values. The second is that, in contrast with some of the women who came to farming because that is what their husband wanted, Joan appeared to have been happy to take up dairy farming. It was not possible to ascertain whether ownership of the farm is in both their names or just in Joan’s husband’s name.

Chris and PJ also grew up in farming families but these two women both married men who were already working and continued to work on their parents’ farm with the parents in charge. Chris (60+, cropping and sheep) grew up on a farm with her parents and grandparents. When she married, her husband worked with his parents on the family farm which they had owned for 60 years and where they bred sheep and did cropping. Plain Jane (PJ, 40+, cropping) grew up on a farm that had started in beef, moved to dairy including milking goats and she eventually undertook a farming apprenticeship as a dairy farmer to work professionally alongside her father.
I grew up on a farm – beef farmed and they got into dairy in the 80’s. I was finishing high school and always very keen on the farm so I got back into dairy cows…we used to milk goats years ago – we had dairy goats (PJ, cropping).

PJ married a grain farmer who was working with his two brothers and their father on the property. This meant that her expertise and physical contribution was not in much demand and so she continued to help work her mother’s farm two to three days each week. As with many of the women’s stories about how they came to the farm there are often similarities but there are also just as many differences which highlights the level of complexity required to gain insight into the everyday lives of women who farm. In their interviews both Chris and PJ talked about the properties ‘belonging’ to their husbands, but the implication is that because the parents are still there or in Chris’ case were there during their years of marriage, that there has been or is some kind of succession plan in place. This is different to the experienced of those women introduced next.

This group of women spoke of purchasing their farms together in partnership with their respective husbands and in doing so procured the farm that their husbands had grown up on. Ellie (50+, dairy) together with her husband, purchased his father’s farm after his father had retired because this had been the farm that he had grown up on and he wanted to continue the family legacy of running that farm. He also knew that the capacity of this farm to be productive. Rena (30+, dairy) and her husband bought the farm that he had grown up on from his parents. This partnership was one where Rena stated that her husband was the ‘businessman’ and that she worked alongside him. That these two women refer to purchasing the farm outright from the parents suggest that this was not about succession planning but about the parents retiring and the sons taking the opportunity to move back to the farm. In comparison, Zoe (30+, dairy) and her husband purchased the property next door to his parents and then share-farmed both properties together with his parents. While her husband’s father has since died, these arrangements have remained the same with his mother, and Zoe’s husband now does all the farm work himself. This can be seen as an attempt by Zoe’s husband to get back to farming the land that he grew up on and when considering all three stories, this can be seen to link back to a ‘rural idyll’ of farming the land of the parents and possibly grandparents and establishing a primacy of generational farming and thereby of both identity and of belonging to
the land. Of particular note to make regarding how these women came into farming is that each of these three women came into farming in partnership with their husbands but the land that they purchased was from their husband’s parents. Despite this, the partnership was one where the women seemed to be ‘partners’ in name only as throughout the interview they referred to that farm as their ‘husband’s farm’. There was however, a legal ownership.

The final approach was through equal partnership where the wife and the husband have both moved from a non-agricultural background into farming and have established a business partnership. This story is of interest because it suggests a shift in the way some people are moving into the business of farming rather than opting for the family-farm tradition. Sarah (30+, dairy) and her husband’s land purchase was based purely on selecting a property that would support a progressive farm business and their connection to that land was based purely on the property’s economic viability. Both Sarah and her husband worked the farm together but despite the more modern arrangements in ownership their roles seem to echo more traditional agrarian values. Sarah suggested that:

I suppose we’re a team but he does a lot of the on-farm decisions with cows...and I do a lot of the books and sourcing of things that he needs, like feed (Sarah, dairy).

Sarah has also forged a significant career off-farm within the agricultural sector. This suggests that perhaps there is some downplaying of the level of sourcing that Sarah undertakes for the farm and there is an implication that she manages the computerised side of researching and resourcing information appropriate for the business of farming in the 21st century.

The predominance in research that has gone into understanding women and farming, how they came to be on the farm and the family’s history with the land has suggested that ownership of the land was with the men and their families (Stehlik et al. 2000, p. 40; Cummins 2005, p. 291; Pini, Panelli & Dale-Hallett 2007, p. 571; Food and Agriculture Organization 2011, p. vi; Alston & Whittenbury 2013, pp. 115-116). In the Goulburn Valley, the women interviewed for this study highlighted a wider spread of ownership with four of them identifying that they purchased their farms with their husbands. Only one of these women, Sarah,
spoke of farming the land as a business in partnership with her husband. This suggests that while there could be a shift to thinking of farming solely within a neoliberal ideology (as a business), agrarianism still plays a strong role in how both women and men relate to each other. In each of cases presented and even in Catherine’s story, the men were the ones who spent most of their time ‘outside’ working the farm. The women demonstrated their capacity to understand the business of farming, and had recollections that spoke of their expertise farming the land and it became clear that most of them were involved with the book work, sourcing of feed and helping out as required by their husbands. As Jennings and Stehlik (2000, p. 64) found the women’s farming activities were both outside on the farm and inside within the farmhouse. This introduction to how the women came to farm suggests that, for many of the women, being on the farm was more to do with what their husbands wanted than driven by their own desires for a career in agriculture. The following section considers how women negotiated their identity and concept of self in relation to their husbands, who in most cases owned the land outright. This is an important step in developing the everyday standpoint of the women because their everyday is more than how they came to the farm but about the position they claim for themselves within that standpoint.

5.1.2 Balancing ideologies

To better understand the current everyday standpoint of the women who farmed the analysis of the interviews examined some of the current conditions the women found themselves in. What emerged from this analysis were certain aspects that further demonstrated the way in which the women’s historical imagination of who they were and the role they played impacted on their everyday and came to hinder their capacity to be seen as more than a farmer’s wife.

In Chapter two it was argued that women who uphold agrarian ideals have a sense of belonging, and of being part of the farm through the supportive role they played for their husbands (Gray & Phillips 2001, p. 57). These ideals tend to keep the women in that role, because it is an ‘accepted’ means of acting and behaving within society and therefore has societal approval. As Trauger suggests to do
otherwise tends to be viewed as transgressing social norms (Trauger 2004, p. 297).

An example of women upholding and being upheld by agrarian ideology can be explored further in Jennie’s story. When Jennie talked about her family, her reference base was always the men in her life – her father, her husband, her son, her father’s dad and father’s granddad. Her mother may have made the decision for her to go to boarding school, but she spoke always of returning to the farm to help her father, not her parents.

I came back to do the book work for the farm and then I married a schoolteacher and so we moved around the state. But I’ve always had an interest in the farm and had to come back and look after dad at times and all those sort of things (Jennie, beef and sheep).

This is a significant point because in Jennie’s life she lived with three sisters and a mother as well as her father; nevertheless it is the male figurehead who was the person she spoke of most fondly. In part this may be due to the close relationship she had with her father, but in part this aspect of her story is tied up with her beliefs about who made the final decisions on and about the farm. This will become clearer as her story develops.

When Jennie’s father died and bequeathed her a share of the property, Jennie returned to the farm and together with her husband they continued farming it. In the three months prior to the interview, Jennie’s husband had fallen ill and had almost decided to leave the marriage. Simultaneously Jennie, who was at an age where most people would be contemplating retirement, spoke to her husband and son about selling the farm but they were not ready for that decision to be made. Her son offered to come up (from the city) as often as he could but otherwise the routine running of the farm was left to Jennie.

I said we better sell the farm [and he said] ‘no don’t do that mum I think I can keep that going’ – so long as mum can keep going (Jennie, beef and sheep).

As to be expected of people upholding agrarian ideology where women are rendered subservient to the men who farm, Jennie felt completely disempowered to make the important decision to sell the farm even though it was in her best
interests and her health and well-being. This was Jenny's predicament despite the point that she owned the land and that legally she could make that decision herself.

Another part of the dilemma was that Jennie was also reluctant to sell the land that had been in the family since it was selected by her great grandfather. She felt guilty that she would be the one to end the family ties to the land. As she said:

"It's a very hard decision because it's been in the family for a long [time]. Well, they selected the land (Jennie, beef and sheep)."

Jennie’s reality was that there was no next-generation son or daughter willing to farm the land and to whom she could pass on ownership. This sense of guilt links with some of the literature that explores how agrarian ideology is tied to stewardship of the land and the passing of the farm onto the next generation (Stehlik et al. 1999, pp. 89-90; Stehlik 2009, p. 146). The reason being that to sell off the family property can be viewed as the person who farmed failing and also underlies the neoliberal value of only non-viable, incompetent farmers being the ones who exit farming (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 78; Aslin & Russell 2008, pp. 44-45). In Jennie’s case, her historical imagination of who she was and the technological imagination of how things ‘should’ be done in connection to the land, were tying her down to a way of life that meant she was ‘stuck’ in a situation where she could not make a decision that benefitted her needs. She was still putting the farm and her husbands’ desires before her own and the patriarchal hegemony of agrarian ideology that had held her in good stead over the years left her unable to make a major decision such as selling the land even though she owned the land outright and doing so would aid her own health and well-being.

Jennie’s current everyday standpoint demonstrates that agrarian ideology is still a very strong influence on both women and men’s lives and on decision making processes in the agricultural sector. It suggests that while she is permitted to make routine decisions a major decision such as selling ‘her’ land can only be done in conjunction with the approval of the men in her life, which in this case is a very ill husband and a son who lives some distance away and works outside the agricultural sector. That both men are incapable of farming the land in their
own right but have the right to refuse to sell the farm tends to confirm the patriarchal, agrarian nature of this situation but, as will be discussed further in this chapter, it also sets into play the position from which Jennie recollected her role safeguarding the viability and survival of her farm throughout the drought.

When parents and their children work on a farm, it usually means that the different families also live on the same farm but in different houses. Chris’ experience of growing up on a farm where her father and grandfather worked the farm together was not positive. Therefore, when she and her husband first married she spoke of trying her

...hardest to get [her husband] away from his parents but he wouldn’t...his parents needed him to be there. So to get him away from the farm [now] is going to take a while because that’s been his life (Chris, cropping and sheep).

At the time of the interview, Chris had had enough of farming because she did not think she could face another drought and was focused on doing what she could to encourage her husband to come to the same view. She wanted to sell the farm and travel and was

...trying really hard to talk him into actually putting the property on the market. He’s 62 – nearly 63 next year, he’s not physically all that well and I think...why work ourselves to the ground, you know he’s not well and I want to travel. It’s as simple as that. I think we can farm exit. We just have to be financially independent...by the time we sell the farm (Chris, cropping and sheep).

Exiting the farm meant that Chris wanted for herself and her husband to sell the farm and leave the industry altogether. With the debt they had accumulated during the drought, being financially independent was about clearing all debts and still having enough money to purchase a home and to travel, so part of the process was to wait for the property market would be favourable. Clearly Chris knows her mind and is prepared to say what needs to be said but she also realises that exiting the industry has a finality about it and therefore she continues to farm alongside her husband as he is not ready to give up farming. Her husband had even suggested to her that if they had a son, things would be different but Chris’ response was:

...no, I wouldn’t be much happier, really, I’ve had enough. And I think the drought’s pushed that (Chris, cropping and sheep).
Jennie’s and Chris’ stories confirm the power of agrarian values and in particular the legacy of wanting to pass the farm and land onto a son. While Chris was entitled to have an opinion, her husband still had the final say and she was unable to change the situation or to have any control over what they did or where they lived. In addition, Chris’ husband’s success in running the farm relied on her working the farm. Chris’ everyday standpoint is tied to the history of land of her husband’s farm while the position from which she recollects her story is from the point of wanting to leave the farm with her husband because she can no longer face dealing with drought. From this perspective, Chris’ recollection of drought can be thought of as both similar and different to Jennie’s. It is both the similarity and difference that is threaded here that establishes the everyday standpoint of the women. While each woman’s story is different because of their individual circumstances, many similarities can be found through their attachment to the ideological values of agrarianism and neoliberalism.

What emerges from the analysis of these interviews is that women are limited in their authority within the farming business irrespective of their involvement in the farm or their family history of farming. The control of the land remains with the men they have married; even Jennie, who was bequeathed the farm by her father. Jennie may have owned the land, but she was still tied to her husband’s decision. Regardless of how the women identified themselves or how they came into farming, they still wrestled between the experience of farming and having little control over whether to stay or go.

Women have been disempowered from an active role outside farming the land through the mechanisation of agricultural practices appropriated by men (Feldman & Welsh 1995; Roy & Venema 2002, p. 79; Saugeres 2002b, p. 186; Trauger 2004; Cummins 2005; Riley 2009). It has been argued that the technological advances in farming practices have essentially terminated women’s physical activity working in the paddocks and thereby given them a much easier life on the farm than what they had in the past (Brandth 1995, p. 24 & 123; Saugeres 2002b, p. 148; Riley 2009, pp. 675-676). It was argued that driving a tractor went against the natural biology of women and therefore if a woman did enter the masculine domain of tractor driving she did not acquire a better status within the agricultural sector but instead became devalued and derided for trying
to act as a man and trying to dismantle ‘the hegemonic order of masculine authority’ (Saugeres 2002c, p. 649; 2002b, pp. 149-150; Brandth 2006, p. 25). The findings of these studies are echoed in PJ’s story where despite her great love of farming and working on the land, the technological advancements that were introduced to the farm included much larger machinery that diminished her confidence to drive the much larger tractors and thereby reduced her involvement in farming, especially on her husband’s farm.

PJ’s love of farming started when she was a young child, following her father around their farm:

I would just follow dad around like a little dog when I was little; always on the tractor, just followed him around (Plain Jane, cropping).

After her father moved from beef cattle into dairying during the 1980s, PJ decided to complete a four year dairy farming apprenticeship and then returned to the farm to work with her father. When she married, she left her parents’ farm to live on her husband’s dryland cropping farm where he ran the farm together with his other two brothers and parents.

When I first was married I helped [her husband] out a bit but [the properties] just got so big and they’re three very capable [brothers]. They had a little truck so I used to drive [it], but they’ve got semi’s now and I don’t have a semi licence so the tractors are triple the size of mine and I’m a bit intimidated by them now…I don’t really do too much just a go-fer, a lackey, the farmer’s wife where you’ve got to bring the lunches, help them shift paddocks and stuff like that (PJ, cropping).

To compensate for this, for two or three days a week, depending on how busy she was, PJ would go and work on her mother’s farm where she now farmed goats, just because she loved farming and could not get enough of it.

PJ exemplifies an educated woman, qualified to farm, who also loves working outside on the farm. Her husband, who has no formal education past year 11, his two brothers and father cannot (or do not) provide her with a role on the farm that supports her desire for a career in farming. Instead, PJ drives an hour each way, back to her mother’s farm so that she can complete meaningful work over there. Her story suggests that had her husband and his family encouraged her to get her semi-truck licence when they first moved into the larger vehicles, she might
have continued farming with them. Now she is at the stage where she feels intimidated by the size of the machinery.

More importantly, PJ, who ‘absolutely loves farming’, has no place where she can ‘farm’ in her own right. Her mother will not undertake succession planning with her, although she will get a share of the property on her death. As she said:

It’s ridiculous! I don’t even know where I stand now – which is wrong – with the farm – so mum and I have 50-50 share of the land but nothing else is concrete. I think it’s the stigma [that] I wasn’t the son. I’ve got a brother who was not interested and they adopted a boy; they had three girls and they adopted a boy – so you can understand where they were coming from. He was not interested in the farm and is still not interested today. So I’ve always had a battle – as ridiculous as it sounds – with my mum and dad…it’s silly to say but I’ve never had the support not really – even making decisions on the farm I try to be a bit more modern and dad was really stuck in his ways (PJ, cropping).

Meanwhile on the land where she lives with her husband and two sons who are nine and eleven years old, she is fully aware that it is her husband and his family who run the place, make plans for it and work the business and where in the future, if her sons want to go into farming, they will have the opportunity to do so through succession planning.

PJ’s story is an example of what can happen to women with continued introduction of mechanisation into farming. It powerfully underlies the argument that the mechanisation and technological advances in agricultural practices have contributed significantly to alleviating women’s physical involvement on the farm and further segregated women from being considered a valued asset to the farm business; even if they were qualified farmers. Further PJ’s story demonstrates how mechanisation determined the division of labour for her on her husband’s farm as well as her loss of having any value-add in contributing to farm productivity. Her knowledge, experience and farming qualifications are excluded from enhancing the knowledge pool in her husband’s family’s farm business simply because she is not allowed a credible role farming the land. PJ’s everyday standpoint is one that resonates with disempowerment based on gender and while this could be considered relatively typical of agrarian practices, PJ’s standpoint is particularly poignant because she chose a career in farming and sought agricultural qualifications to back up her credibility to farm but she found
herself taking up a mundane role of the ‘farmer’s wife’ and feeling obsolete even from the farm she grew up on and continues to work, with her mother.

In a different set of circumstances altogether, Sarah (dairy) spoke about purchasing the farm together her husband as a partnership. They had bought the farm in the 2006/2007 financial year, without realising that this was a turning point in Australia’s farm history. It was the same month of October 2006, when they walked onto their property, that the then Prime Minister, John Howard announced that all farming land in the state of Victoria were to be given an Exceptional Circumstance declaration (Victorian Office of the Premier 2006a, 2006b; Jooste 2014) (see further in Chapter three). Sarah spoke of the day as achieving

…a lifelong dream and [we] landed on the farm as the drought hit and it was a drought that no one had predicted; not even our farm adviser who was one of the key advisers in the region. We had six percent water allocation [for irrigation], an extra 80 head of cattle and six rolls of hay and the grass that was in the paddock (Sarah, dairy).

Having come from the city, Sarah also spoke of having never seen a drought before and how their first year turned into a time when both Sarah and her husband suffered life-threatening situations due to illness and an accident with a bull respectively.

The importance of this story is that in part it is totally different to the other women’s stories because it highlights how a young, educated woman wanting to take on the role of farmer in her own right began working in partnership with her husband. Sarah and her husband exemplify how young, educated people envisage farming in the future. Sarah’s story might begin with achieving a personal goal of owning their own farm, but their first twelve months of farming saw them both experience more than their fair share of hardship, on top of farming in the worse drought conditions seen in the Goulburn Valley. Both Sarah and PJ have a great love for what they do as people who farm and as people who have a career in farming however, in Sarah’s case she and her husband share the balance of power in the productivity of the farm, the economics of ownership and in the decision making about the future of their farming business.
We? My husband and I – so I suppose we’re a team but he does a lot of the on-farm decisions with cows… and I do a lot of the books and sourcing of things that he needs like feed (Sarah, dairy).

It could also be argued that Sarah and her husband are more influenced by neoliberal values of self-reliance and calculated risk than agrarian values of being stewards of the land, but for their keen sense of community and value for social capital. Both Sarah and her husband were still happily working the farm in 2014 when they were nominated for an award in the Australian Farmer of the Year competition as Farmer of the Year in the Dairy Farmer of the Year category (Jooste 2014). Sarah’s everyday standpoint suggests one whereby there is a greater sense of empowerment and authority in her role as a farmer and owner of the business and land.

The everyday standpoint of these women who were interviewed came from the physical location of the farm and the history of their connection to the land through the people they loved. Chapter two argued that the everyday lives of women as the field of women who farm was consumed by the field of farming. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way most of these women came into farming, in the way the balance of power is entwined within agrarian ideology that preferences the role of men as farmers rather than including women as farmers. Farming was not the career choice for most of the women interviewed but rather what it meant to marry their husbands; the women understood part of the deal was to play the ‘farmer’s wife’. In some ways, it could be argued that these women have bought into agrarian values because it gave them a sense of who they were, even if it was only as a farmer’s wife, the helper or as PJ says ‘the lackey’ and as the mother of their children.

Cummins (2005, p. 296) discusses the women she interviewed in Canada as adjusting their lives around their husbands and subordinating their needs for the needs and desires of their husbands. When Rena and Zoe started to open up about the difficulties of being on the farm and managing drought and all the things they did for their husbands to help them to remain on the farm, I asked them both, ‘What’s in it for you? Why are you still there?’ Rena’s response was: ‘Don’t ask me today, not today of all days’. Clearly these women had sacrificed much in order for their husbands to become farmers on their former family properties and
to stay with their respective husbands and families had become more important for both Rena and Zoe than what they may have wanted from life. This supports earlier work by Alston who writes:

Australian farm women continue to construct their identities within the context of their lives and work in farm families, bound by policy that implicitly affects them (Alston 2006, p. 158).

This section has further developed the concept of the field of women who farm to include how the women came to the farm and how agrarian ideology impacts on their sense of self and authority as farmers. In doing so it establishes the everyday standpoint for the women as both similar and different, which in turn, supports the validity and credibility of each woman’s standpoint in this thesis as ‘knower’. While research to date has suggested that agrarian ideology ultimately renders women invisible to the public realm of the agricultural sector, this study has highlighted that it also binds the women to their respective husbands and the farms, generates a connection to the land as ‘home’ and provides them with a sense of identity about who they are as a farmer’s wife. This thesis argues that it is from this standpoint that the women have taken steps to enable themselves to be more involved in their farm businesses as ‘farmers’. Their everyday standpoint as women who farm may have been generated from an invisible space within the agricultural sector but the women interviewed for this study chose not to remain in that space and instead contested their everyday standpoint within the agricultural sector and their rural communities to demonstrate that they had more to offer than being relegated to the private sphere of the home.

It is with this understanding of the everyday lives of these women as both linked to their husband while proactive in finding self-identity both within and off the farm that this chapter now moves to explore how the Millennium Drought years of 2006-2010 impacted these women’s lives and the decisions they made to support their husbands and farms to survive the crisis that hit the Goulburn Valley. It is from this evidence that analysis will inform and develop the idea that there is indeed a role for local government to better support their rural communities manage for drought in the future.
5.2 Being resourceful, networked decision makers

This section of the thesis considers the impact drought had on the women who farmed followed by a summary of the actions they took to manage this impact. Some of the impacts included a lack of feed and water, a loss of animals, crops, fruit and trees, financial hardship and in some cases a loss of neighbours who exited farming and moved away. The women endured financial stress, grief, a heightened sense of the importance of mental-health and well-being, regret over decisions made that failed, the exacerbation of existent problems and changes in farming practices. While politically drought was meant to be experienced as a risk that could be planned for, it becomes clear that this drought was experienced as a disaster and the social impact on people was experienced as a loss (Caruana 2010, p. 86). Central to how people survived this drought is understanding what impacted on the women’s lives and in determining what decisions and actions the women undertook to address this crisis of drought. This part of the chapter has two main sections. The first will consider the impacts of the lack of feed, loss of water, culling of animals and loss of fruit, and the impact drought had on mental health and well-being. The second part examines some the actions the women took to combat drought and survive with their farm businesses operative to this day. The three aspects which emerged from this analysis are: resourcefulness, decision making and networking. The study found that this was where the women excelled in contending the impact of drought in their lives and on their farms. This knowledge that needs to be made visible so that strategies about managing for drought and designed to support people working in the agricultural sector can be included when dealing with future droughts. Identifying these aspects also enables some understanding of the role local government could play in the future to enable this expertise to be better utilised and supported.

Susan summarised the impact of drought in the Goulburn Valley when she said,

[My husband's] been there since he was 17; he’s put everything into that place; so did I. I remember working long hours to get it to where it was. It’s really hard and disheartening to see that kind of being slowly taken away from you – you’ve got no control. You’ve got no control over the weather. The orchardists are probably just as bad because they’re at the mercy of the weather, where we can still milk cows, even if it’s a drought. It’s hard. We’re
not really making money – we’re losing money – but we could still keep the cows going. If their trees die they’ve got to replant the trees and that’s another five or seven years until production – so they’re in big trouble (Susan, dairy, italics added).

The loss of control that Susan expressed here was palpable and even three years later, was still painful to recall. The women had faced many hardships but the ones that are presented here reflect what the women remembered and recollected. These glimpses into these women’s lives is based on what they believed was important and there are similarities as well as differences. To draw these recollections together four elements have been identified: no feed for their animals, lack of water for the land and animals, the culling of animals and loss of fruit, and the mental health and well-being of those who were farming. Where possible different women’s stories have been used to ensure that each woman’s story contributes to the findings.

During 2007 access to hay ran out in the Goulburn Valley and people who farmed resorted to all kinds of foodstuffs to feed their animals. For example, Sarah spoke of accessing some palm-kernel extract (PKE)\(^2\) to add to the straw she was feeding the cows.

PKE’s like a high-protein coconut oil coffee sort of smell and we mixed it with [the straw]. But those bales of hay – hay’s normally $160-$180 a tonne – the straw was costing us $180 a tonne so it was not cheap (Sarah, dairy).

Her reason for doing this was that the straw was a source of fibre and acted as a filler but provided no other sustenance. The PKE acted as a nutritional additive. Susan recollection of feeding her cows during this time was quite detailed. She sourced a variety of foodstuffs for her cows including bread and hot-cross buns, marshmallows, ice-cream cones, straw, peaches, oranges and orange pulp, bicarb soda, molasses licks and pellets. Susan also spoke of the risks she took accessing hay that people had cut from the sides of the road.

We got this truckload of hay and it had Coke cans in there and newspaper. It was cut from the side of the road you know how people throw the rubbish out. [It] had some weird weeds, so when you fed it out…all these weeds that you’ve never seen before [started] growing

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\(^2\) Palm kernel extract (PKE) ‘is a by-product from the manufacturing of palm kernel oil by the mechanical extraction of palm kernels. It is a dark brown protein meal with relatively high oil and high fibre levels and is a good source of protein and fat (for energy) for cows’ (Riverina (Australia) Pty Ltd 2011).
on the farm. And some of them were dangerous too – the Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*)³...hay was expensive but people were queuing up and if you didn't take that load the next guy would ring up and take it...people were desperate for food for the cows (Susan, dairy).

She recalled that when she fed her cows bread, she had to be strategic in the distribution because too much bread all at once and the cows would end up with bloat (*Ruminal tympany*)⁴ from which they could die if not treated properly. While Susan and I laughed when she described the first time the cows saw the marshmallows in their pellet feed holders as they walked into the dairy, this example can be seen as an indicator of the lengths the women went and the risks they took sourcing feed for their animals so they survived. Importantly, the example illustrates the devastating situation people faced farming in the Goulburn Valley.

Simultaneously, many farmers ran out of water stored in their tanks and underground bores and faced a loss of irrigation water. As discussed in Chapter three, the Goulburn Valley was a region that thought it was drought proofed. The year 2006 was the first time irrigators in the Goulburn Valley did not receive a full allocation of water at the beginning of the season. The irrigation seasons for 2007 and 2008 began with zero percent allocations and, as a result, people’s worlds were turned upside down. Further to the irrigators not getting full water allocations, their growing season could not be well-planned for because there was no guarantee they would have the amount of water they needed at the right growing time. Access to irrigation water was a drought proofing strategy consistent with the existing Federal drought policy that risk management was the responsibility of the individual land manager. Little to no access to irrigation water directly challenged the underlying neo-liberal principle because suddenly people who farmed and irrigated could no longer rely on this strategy and because this had never happened before, there was no back-up plan.

³ ‘Known as ‘devil’s berries’ or ‘death cherries’, the deadly nightshade plant and its berries are very poisonous and contain tropane alkaloids that cause hysteria, hallucinations, erratic behaviour and delirium’ (*Australian Geographic* 2012).

⁴ ‘Bloat is an over-distention of the stomach regions with gases of fermentation, called primary, frothy bloat or secondary, free-gas bloat. It is predominantly a disorder of cattle but may also be seen in sheep’ (*Constable* 2015).
In addition, no matter how little water the irrigators received, they were still expected to pay their full water bill. It was this that made Susan extremely angry because she felt it was not fair that they had to pay for water, but would not receive their full quota\(^5\).

People were still angry that they had to pay their full water bill during the drought. If people down in Melbourne and had to pay for a full tank of petrol and they only got quarter of a tank there’d be an uproar (Susan, dairy).

Rena spoke about her husband’s decision to keep one paddock irrigated. This was the paddock nearest to the house and one that the cows being milked walked through to get to and from the dairy. The reasoning behind this was that it gave the cows some access to some fresh grass, plus having a green paddock within sight of the dairy and the house provided her with a sense of hope and, for him, took the edge off seeing the effects of the drought everywhere else. Catherine spoke of the pain of having to pay $1,400 a mega litre for water when the starting price was usually around $300-400 a mega litre.

It became expensive for us as orchardists...because water went up to $1400 a mega litre and we bought water at that price. It was my job on the farm to buy the water because my husband couldn’t do it (Catherine, orchards).

Orchardists had to have water to protect growing fruit from the frosts, and for Catherine this equated to spending ‘the equivalent of a house in Melbourne - $250,000 on water over those three years’. Catherine had saved this money to purchase a house to accommodate her two boys while they attended university in Melbourne. That could no longer happen.

Making decisions about the culling of herds and of loss of fruit on the orchards was heartbreaking for most people who farmed. Chris recollected the time, when shortly after purchasing a mob of 300 sheep, they became ill and more than 150 died:

\(^5\) Susan could not recall that in fact some funding had been made available by the Federal Government to subsidise a part of the water bill (Tomazin & Guerrera 2006).
That was the worst thing I’ve ever done…pull dead sheep out from under trees and create a fire… (Chris, cropping and sheep).

This tragedy had occurred because at their previous owner’s property they had eaten a weed called Common Heliotrope (*Heliotropium europaeum*). It emerged that others had sent their herds or selected certain animals to go to the slaughter yards because they could no longer feed them. As the women spoke about their animals, it was the heartache they felt with the loss of life that could still be heard in their voices as they recounted their stories.

Joan told how she cared for ‘her’ cows and how it nearly broke her heart to see her cows carted off to the slaughter yards. She spoke about the time she had to return home, call for help and then race back to the paddock with ‘a knife in my hand because I thought I’d have to stab’ a bloating cow; this action would have stopped the cow from dying. Joan also spoke about the day she forced her husband to stop the truck so she could get out because she could no longer manage sending a calving heifer to the slaughter yards. There was a deep sadness in her voice as she described visiting her cows when they were supposed to be parked in a “better” environment only to witness them being poorly fed or left with nothing but weeds to chew on. Joan talked about her sense of helplessness when she realised that some of the cows had not been returned from where they had been parked.

So we brought them home but there’s – I don’t know 12, I don’t know – never came home. Never came home. Oh they must be there, they must be there…John couldn’t have coped and he was not coping at all. I used to go up there and I couldn’t come home. If I didn’t have my mum – I’d call in on my mum and I’d just – it was heartbreaking. Heartbreaking to see your cows…heartbreaking to know that they’ve gone through one drought to go up there and go through that (Joan, dairy to beef).

There was still a deep feeling of grief as she spoke of finally selling their entire dairy herd to someone in Tasmania. While dairy, beef and sheep farmers battled

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6 ‘Heliotrope is not very palatable to livestock and consequently tends to be avoided; however, some individuals continue to eat it indiscriminately. Continual ingestion by livestock of large amounts of heliotrope plants (either fresh or dried), or of their seeds as contaminants in stock feed, can cause liver damage and reduced productivity. All affected livestock species may become jaundiced and experience varying degrees of photosensitisation’ (Dellow, Bourke & McCaffery 2004).

7 In a “cow parking” agreement, the farmer receiving the cows incurs all costs of maintaining the larger herd, but also reaps any profits from the extra milk produced. ‘For dairy farmers unable to afford feed for their stock and facing the prospect of selling their cattle to abattoirs, it is the least devastating option’ (Guerrera 2006).
the loss of animal life, orchardists faced a battle on two fronts; one with drought and the other with frosts.

As orchardists faced the drought in 2006, they also had to contend with major frosts that killed much of their fruit, in particular apricots and cherries (ABC News 2006). Catherine began by speaking of the disastrous frost that occurred in 2004, that she believed was the beginning of SPC Ardmona, the local fruit cannery, opening the Australian market to importing such fruits from overseas and contracts being drawn up with those same countries for a long term supply. Ultimately this impacted significantly on local growers as SPC Ardmona, had to fulfil their contractual agreements and began to reduce their orders of the fruit grown locally. To Catherine, it seemed as if ‘overnight’, contract prices between growers and SPC Ardmona were downgraded:

The amount of money we’re getting for fruit now and the amount of money the cannery gives for fruit now, is the same money the cannery [paid] since 1988…the cannery [price] has not increased with the cost of living going up…They don’t care, they’ve never really cared and that’s the feeling people have about this (Catherine, orchard).

As a result, Catherine and her husband have now changed the varieties of their trees so that they now no longer grow for the cannery but grow for the fresh food market and the supermarkets. As if the drought and frosts were not enough, in February 2009, after two weeks of an intense heatwave that culminated in Black Saturday bushfires killing 173 people (See Ch. 3, Table 1), Catherine and her husband lost much of that season’s pear and apple crop because the fruit had been ‘cooked on the inside’ during the ten days of 40° plus temperatures. Between the culling of animals and the loss of fruit the hardship experienced by the people who farmed in the Goulburn Valley was extreme and while the impact of drought on each of the agricultural industries may have varied but the relentlessness of the crisis touched everyone.

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8 SPC is the largest producer of premium packaged fruit and vegetable in Australia. [Its] facilities are in the heart of the Goulburn Valley, and…processes approximately 150,000 tonnes of fruit and tomatoes a year (SPC Ardmona 2015).
These hardships also affected the health and well-being of the women and their families. Susan spoke of crying for no reason and Chris hated giving up paid off-farm work but felt she had to so that she could better support her husband.

It was my decision to leave work was made by me, not in partnership with him nor in consultation with him. I thought, no I can’t deal with this; I just said the farm had to either sink or swim and it will either sink or swim (Chris, cropping and sheep).

Ellie spoke of being ‘torn’ because she had to go with her son who was having major surgery in a hospital in Melbourne while being unsure about the decisions her husband might make about his life while she was not at home. Some of the women also spoke of other men who farmed who they knew had attempted or were known to be contemplating suicide. Catherine spoke of people’s vulnerabilities being found out because drought exacerbated problems that were already present. She reasoned:

…that women who tended to be loners and didn’t have much attention for themselves would be much worse and would close up even tighter. Women who had a tendency for depression would definitely become [more] depressed and women who had tendencies of overeating or under-eating or whatever – that would get worse – because of the stress levels (Catherine, orchard).

Meanwhile all the women spoke of the debts they were still paying off or had just finished paying off three years after the Millennium Drought had officially ended. Many had accessed the Exceptional Circumstance interest relief subsidy and payments to subsidise their incomes but those who owned their farms outright, such as Jennie, did not qualify for any support. This discrepancy about who qualified for support and who did not, affected people differently and for some, such as Jennie, it seemed as if they were being punished for not having any debts and managing their risks.

This brief summary of the impact of drought demonstrates that these women farming in the Goulburn Valley experienced the drought years of 2006-2010 as severe and it affected their sense of normality considerably; even normality for a drought. As a nation, Australia was recorded as experiencing this drought as more severe and widespread than the mid-1990s drought (Stehlik 2013, p. 122).

The first section of this chapter established the base of the everyday standpoint
of these women’s lives and this last section has added to that by describing how the everyday lives of these women had been turned on their head and how the everyday was no longer about ‘normal’, but about survival: the survival of their farms, their livestock, crops and trees and their own, their husband’s and their children’s senses of well-being. The next section of the chapter concentrates on the strategies used by the women to manage for drought. It also begins to identify some points of rupture for how women who farmed survived the drought using their own initiative, expertise and knowledge.

One of the aspects of agency that becomes apparent when listening to and reading back over the women’s recollection of drought and how they made sense of what happened, is that these women were extremely resourceful. A reading of the literature on resources and resourcefulness stresses men and their businesses, their ownership of the land, their capacity for being entrepreneurial in their approaches and of holding the balance of power and wealth to accomplish that kind of success (Lake 1997, p. 43; Shortall 2006, p. 20; Cheshire, Willing & Skrbis 2013b, p. 100).

A reading of the disaster literature also highlights that women are the most vulnerable and that statistically they are the most affected because their numbers are often highly representative of the poor and the elderly (Sachs 2007, p. 16). Evidence gathered during this study supports Sachs (2007, p. 16) view that the capacity women have to be resourceful and seek help when it is needed, to know what to do and how to go about accessing it in order to ensure the safety of their family, remains underestimated. One of the difficulties in representing these women as resourceful is that much of what they talk about in the interviews is about ‘we’ and this is partly because the women uphold the position of the farm as being something undertaken in partnership with their husbands or that they do because of their husband. In this study, resourcefulness is defined as the ability to access what is needed at the time to best find a solution to a problem or a difficulty (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2015) within a time of crisis.

The women spoke of adding to the farm business through their own initiative, such as Susan learning about farming, Sarah using traveling staff to help resource hay, and Catherine introducing the idea of overhead irrigation to her
orchard. These were initiatives enacted by these women and they benefitted farm productivity. In presenting the resourcefulness of these women three case studies are described and they each represent different levels of impact. Susan in accessing education did so at an *intimate* level of benefitting her immediate family. Sarah in sourcing the feed through others widened that level to be *inclusive* of her personal network. Catherine, by introducing new technology to her farm benefitted *the whole* of community and the fruit industry.

Susan married into farming and when she first began speaking about farming and the drought, it was mainly about her role supporting her husband, bringing up their daughters and working off-farm as necessary.

> I just raised the three kids there and they liked the farming lifestyle and that’s when I started to learn a bit more because farming is actually a business; you can’t say it’s a hobby – you’ve got to make money off it to actually pay all the expenses and to survive (Susan, dairy).

She went on to undertake insemination courses to improve their herd genetics, chemical courses so she could spray the farm site as well as a fertiliser course. She spoke of learning from other people and from the company representatives who came around asking about fertilizers, laser levelling the soil and other farming aspects. During the course of the interview it emerged that Susan’s husband had an acquired brain injury from when he was a teenager, and while he owned and worked the farm, she ended up being the decision maker and the book-keeper as well as a co-worker with her husband. What is most interesting about Susan’s story is that for the first part of her interview, her husband was presented as the farmer and the decisions as made by both of them. The more she recollected, the more she began to realise how much she had contributed to the farm. Susan’s story is particularly significant because in 1994 when she married, as she said earlier in the chapter, she knew nothing about farming however now, telling this story, Susan was an accomplished farmer who had the initiative and resourcefulness to do what was needed to help improve the efficiency of their farm business so they could improve their productivity.

Sarah reflected how it was her role on the farm to source what her husband needed. At one stage she was working off-farm and asked her co-workers who were visiting trainees around Northern Victoria to help her with sourcing some
hay. In 2008, the region had run out of hay again and she ‘ended up having a combination of hay-straw coming from Ceduna in South Australia’ which was just over 1,400 kilometres north west of the Goulburn Valley or over 15 hours to drive by car. Sarah spoke about how this straw was the only lot they could find in all of Australia at the time and they also shared this find with six of their neighbours. At a time when everyone was experiencing the drought as severe and resources such as feed for animals was extremely difficult to find, Sarah and her husband were prepared to also share that find with their neighbours rather than to keep it all for themselves. This kind of resourcefulness is reflective of a collective response to managing drought where Sarah’s entrepreneurial actions benefitted others.

During 2004, Catherine managed to go on a trip to Tasmania with a ‘Women in Horticulture’ Tour. It was there that she first saw overhead irrigation being used to prevent frost damage to cherries. Overhead irrigation also meant that together with overhead netting on hot days, growing fruit could be kept up to seven degrees cooler. While it is difficult to know when Catherine’s husband moved to implement the idea, it is clear that this was something that Catherine brought back to her husband and believed would work. More than that, she used her contacts within the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to have the idea implemented and appropriately researched so that it could be approved and used by others in the community and across the industry.

It was because of the DPI networks that I had and Maurice had…I used to be on working groups for farming, so I knew all the DPI guys. Anyway connecting up really helped. That’s why it important I think to pass on the information that you learn to everybody (Catherine, orchards).

This improved technique is now used by many in the area. When I asked her about how her husband came to accept the idea in the first place, Catherine was very quick to downplay her role introducing this idea to her husband. The interview focused on the role of her husband, the workers and the Department of Primary Industries who had used their farm as a research model for the area. The significance of Catherine’s resourcefulness was that for her, this was not about how she could save and protect her fruit and trees, but about how this idea could be of benefit to others in the wider community and across the fruit industry.
These three examples were chosen because they were moments in the conversation where the women spoke of themselves doing something independently to acquire a benefit for their farms and orchard. This illustrates that the women interviewed had the initiative and resourcefulness to proactively improve the productivity of their farms across different levels of society. These are also acts that are not recognised as what ‘farmers’ do traditionally. The more Susan became aware of what was needed to improve farm productivity, the more she educated herself on different aspects that would improve the productivity of her cows. She represents those women who are proactive at a personal level within society. In Sarah’s case she sourced feed that at the time was extremely scarce and shared that resource with her fellow neighbours. Sarah used her resourcefulness to benefit others in her local community, thereby keeping productivity at a community level. Following an interstate trip, Catherine innovated their irrigating practices that went on to be useful for others in the region and throughout the fruit industry.

Another common characteristic of these women’s resourcefulness was that it also entailed seeking help off-farm and seeking assistance where it was needed through using the expertise of others. These women demonstrated resourcefulness, showed initiative and were entrepreneurial in their attempts to improve their farm’s productivity for the individual, for the community and for the industry. They also made these decisions in response to the impact drought was having on their livelihoods, trying to address the crisis that was going on around them.

This thesis has argued that women who farm are often in a disadvantaged position when it comes to making decisions because of agrarian values that place women second to men and because men are acknowledged as the primary land owners and owners of production (Shortall 2006, p. 20; Alston & Whittenbury 2013, pp. 115-116). This study found that this position should be considered as more fluid, and the following demonstrates that the women interviewed were independently making decisions about what was need to be done in order to keep the farm and their families functioning during the drought. For example, Susan and Ellie kept more detailed financial information from their husbands because of the stress they perceived their husband to be in. In Chris’ case, she reluctantly
quit her off-farm paid employment so that she could support her husband and farm during the drought while Sarah was in a position where she had negotiated to leave work if she was needed to be at home on the farm.

In her first year on the farm, Sarah learnt very quickly to get ‘over the mentality of saving all the animals’. She went on to say that there were times when the herd had to be culled and ‘basically you’re looking for heads to roll’. Sarah believed it was important to learn how to make decisions effectively such as considering whether a cow was in calf or through herd records, keeping an eye out for cows not producing enough milk. She reasoned that:

…not making a decision in drought is the worst decision you can make. You need to have a plan in place and you need to move forward…even if it’s the wrong decision and you make a mistake, you move forward. Treading water and just hoping things will be okay is unrealistic (Sarah, dairy).

Sarah represents the many other women who during the drought found the strength to make life and death choices about their animals. While this would not necessarily be easy for everyone, it is also not a typical area in which women would be considered capable of making such harsh decisions.

In the life of the women who were interviewed, often one decision was impacted on by other decisions or that one decision was the beginning of many. Chris spoke of the decision she made to quit her off-farm job and return to the farm full-time. Chris demonstrated her capacity to make major decisions in her life and articulated how that capacity was developed. As she recollected this time it emerged that this was a decision that was extremely difficult to make for her personally, but one that she felt she had to make because of her concern about her husband’s health.

I used to work off-farm and in 2004 I left work because I would ring two or three times a day while I was at work and hubby would be stressed to the max yelling his head off at the dog and I was having nightmares that he was having a heart attack and I thought [blow] the money, I need to be home (Chris, cropping and sheep).

As she elaborated on the decision, she spoke of having completed the Fairley Leadership program. This was a program based in Shepparton designed to develop leaders within the Goulburn Valley region (Fairley Leadership 2015).
Chris described the program as making participants ‘…really look at where you were at and where you are at within your community and within yourself’ and is what she credits with helping her to take the ‘leap of no regular income’ (Chris, cropping and sheep). Chris went on to speak of having already lived through the 1982 drought on the farm and being used to droughts only lasting one to two years. This ‘ten year drought’, as she described, was different and in hindsight, she reflected that the decision she and her husband made to maintain their stock levels, so that when the drought broke they would have stock to sell to people who had sold up, cost them financially. She said:

You would feed in the morning and water in the afternoon, particularly in 2006 when it was stone dry because we had stock on troughs the whole way through on all the properties. I think we leased two properties and owned one so it was just constant and every day. Before you’d feed stock, you watered stock; before you fixed the machinery you’d broke the day before…you just didn’t do anything else…the ground was bare. I took heaps of photos because they needed to be recorded. It is good to look back on the bare paddocks – the then and now when they’re the beautifully green and lush (Chris, cropping and sheep).

Of particular interest, at this point, is that in the middle of all this devastation, and farming know how, Chris decided to record what happened during that time through photography. This tiny twist in the conversation from the everyday drudge of hard work to the art of photography alludes not only to Chris working the everyday chores starting with providing water to the animals but having the mindset to keep a photographic record of what happened on the farm. In her ‘everyday’ of managing for drought, deciding to keep this photographic record was important because it gave her the opportunity to combine the harsh reality of the everyday mundane with being creative through one of her hobbies. It speaks to the idea that Chris was already thinking about a time when the drought was over, and she could recall the recovery of her property after the crisis. It suggests the possibility that there is a useful historical, visual record of the Millennium Drought that has been recorded but is unknown because it is kept in the privacy of a person’s computer. It raises the question of how many other people who farmed have done something similar.

However, it needs to be recalled that not all the decisions women made were positive. Many women who farmed were also the ones who managed the books and dealt directly with the accountants. Ellie pointed out that while her husband
was spending money to address farm needs, it was she who had to juggle paying the bills each month regardless of how much money was incoming. The case study used here, is part of the conversation held with Susan (dairy). Susan did all the book keeping and because of her husband’s health and the stress it caused him to deal with book work, she ‘used to do all the paperwork and say to him ‘just go out and milk, don’t worry about it’. Her decision not to share the burden of paying the bills meant that she carried the stress of the situation on her own. Her husband

…didn’t know what we owed…he didn’t know anything about that so I had to try to budget and think how we were going to pay for this next load of hay. And I don’t like animal cruelty so you know the cows had to be looked after because they were our number one priority (Susan, dairy).

Susan was making numerous decisions about the farm based on her concern for her husband’s health and well-being: these included not talking to him about their financial struggles or discussing the accounts. Susan also made the decision that cruelty to animals was to be avoided and so prioritised the feeding of the cows so that they would survive and remain healthy.

In recollection, Susan described herself as becoming depressed and how she would just start crying for no reason but on recollection said that ‘it was just the stress of the whole drought…because it was weighing on [her] shoulders’. At the same time she talked about trying to hide the stress from others; her husband, her children and her friends. She recalled that a decision she made then was to visit her local doctor and talk to him about what was happening and agreed to go on anti-depressant medication for nine months and found this helped. The significance of this story is that often the women carried such narratives about decisions made to keep information from their husbands in order to protect them from being more stressed than what they were already. In doing so, however, these women jeopardised their own mental health and well-being. The positive aspect here is that in Susan’s case, she also had the frame of mind to decide to seek help as things became too hard, unlike her neighbour who, she then went on to speak about, attempted to take his own life instead of seeking help. From her perspective, to have this happen only next door confirmed for her that this could have been her husband and that the decisions she had made were the right choices.
Making decisions in a farm business was extremely important and in some ways, what this demonstrated was the capacity for women to make necessary decisions for the long term sustainability of the farm and the people working the farm, but that these decisions are not necessarily tied directly to the everyday running of the farm. The men might be out there in the paddocks being the practical workers on the farm, making the decisions about farm productivity, but the women seem to be the ones who have insight into a broader picture of farming that is inclusive of the well-being of others, the well-being of their stock and trees and the long term sustainability of their farm business which is inclusive of the people doing the work. This suggests that the traditional focus of the agricultural sector on farming practices and the aspirational policy direction of the family farm being transformed into a farm business and failing to recognise this kind of decision making as being important means that valuable resources are being squandered.

One of the dominant themes that came through the interviews (and as will be discussed in the next chapter was also recorded in the GSCC drought reports) was that women were proactive about maintaining and building social and professional connections with others during the drought. Whether it was starting up their own friendship/support groups, meeting a friend for coffee, seeking advice from a GP or participating in larger community or industry based groups women sought support off-farm that enabled them to survive the drought with their well-being intact. To some degree, the ease at which women were able to network and socialise in the Goulburn Valley could be put down to the relative closeness of regional centres. As mentioned in Chapter three, the capital of the state of Victoria Melbourne, is only a two hour drive from Shepparton. The next largest town to Shepparton, Mooroopna is only ten minutes away and the furthest towns in the Goulburn Valley from Shepparton are Yarrawonga, about an hour and a half drive north east and Seymour, about a one hour drive south towards Melbourne. While getting around the Goulburn Valley may have been difficult for women who lived out of town because of the price of fuel, the distances people travelled when they did go out were relatively manageable compared with some regions in Australia where it may take an hour to drive to the nearest neighbour, much less an actual town.
Some of the community based social activities these women initiated included Catherine organising with a group of women to hold the Women on Farms Gathering in Shepparton during 2007 (McLennan, Harvey & McLennan 2010) because she felt that women who farmed needed something to encourage and support them. She also actively engaged with her local Council to gain support from them to help financially with in-kind access to function rooms. Sarah became involved with the Victorian Farmers Federation and Murray Dairy and worked towards drought policy changes that better supported new farmers in the industry. Joan was involved with United Dairyfarmers Victoria as their secretary and through their auspices helped to access grant monies to provide social events for local farming families.

Networking was more than just catching up with friends or being active in volunteering within the community just as it was more than just dealing with the isolation of living out of town on a farm and seeing no-one but husband and children. The networking these women recollected was about the actions they took in order to survive the drought with their well-being and their family’s well-being intact. It is important to remember that these were women who were primarily involved with the agricultural sector because of their husband’s involvement with farming. Their work and identity was based around their commitment to their husband, the needs of the farm and the needs of their family. Networking, and in particular networking within community groups associated with farming, were both a legitimate way in which women could connect with others while at the same time they could actively engage in actions that could influence change and address challenges faced by their community or agricultural industry. McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 9) define a sense of community using four points of criteria: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Each of these elements are useful to better understand how networking through different groups of people enables people to generate a sense of belonging, of being part of a collective movement that has the potential to influence change which in the process also fulfils a personal need along with others who share similar values. Further, as was discussed in Chapter one, women who farm have tended to network with other female dominated groups because within these networks their ideas, skills and knowledge are more inclined to be taken seriously than their experiences.
with predominantly male gatherings (Hassanein 1997, p. 256; Halpin & Martin 1999, p. 44; Alston 2003a, p. 474). The case studies presented here include Catherine’s discussion about her ‘bongos’ group, Chris’ actions to address her fears of leaving work and being left isolated on the farm, and Jennie’s volunteer work in her local community.

Catherine recollected about a group of friends she had who met every second Friday of the month during the drought. The idea for this group came from one of the sessions presented at Shepparton’s ‘Women on Farms Gathering’ and is often referred to as the ‘bongos’ group. ‘Bongos banging women’ was a concept based on a way women, in a part of Africa, signalled to each other using bongos to let the nearest person know they need to gather and that person then sounded their bongos for their neighbour and so on (Women's Health Goulburn North East 2008, p. 2). The idea was brought back to the Goulburn Valley and used to demonstrate the ease and simplicity of getting a group of trusted friends together especially during times when people were feeling that they were not strong enough to ‘host’ a gathering according to more social conventions (Women's Health Goulburn North East 2008, p. 2). The process involved in the Australian version meant one person ringing someone, then they would ring the next person and so on until everyone was notified about where and when. Then each woman would bring one thing to eat and drink from their pantry, so no one person was left to feed everyone. The other rules were that there was to be no dressing up or tidying of the house, that women were to let go of those expectations and to come as they are. Catherine’s group of six friends began meeting this way in 2007 and continue to this day. As she said:

Those sort of things to come out of the drought have served us really, really well now and its ongoing and helps for uniting and keeping women together; helping women to talk to each other and strengthening relationships between women and consequently [has] given women a bit of a barrier of safety. I think that’s really what we need especially when you’re farming (Catherine, orchard).

This case story underlies how isolating it can be working on the farm and reaffirms the actions women would take to ensure their own well-being so they were better positioned to support their families. This is also an example of how one person has enacted an idea presented at a forum and through her personal skills has
found a mechanism that has provided her with the support she needed to farm throughout the drought. In this particular case too, this was a woman who was extremely well connected with the agricultural sector but who chose to speak about this very personal action she took to support herself and a group of her friends. At one level, networking here was personally motivated and women were deliberately sought to address the isolation factor but also to counteract some of the negative experiences they had in functioning within male dominated environments and organisations.

This next case returns to Chris’ decision to leave her job and sacrifice her personal financial independence in order to support her husband with his farm. The focus here is about what she set in place for herself before she left work. In order to leave work, Chris required a strong network of activities with other women. As she recalled:

What I did was before I left work was to set up a network around myself so that I was very involved in the Landcare group but it was a monthly meeting; I joined the craft group where we meet once a month. I also do tai chi once a week with neighbours so I had women around me all the time. That was the thing I would miss the most [about leaving work] – that social network (Chris, cropping and sheep).

Chris further recalled that during this time she became a board member with Shepparton Access, an organisation that provides services to people with disabilities and mental health problems and that she had been Chair for both Shepparton Access and Landcare during the drought. Chris was also involved in a farming women’s network that met once a month for six months of the year. For Chris, ‘that didn’t just happen [organically, she] very much planned not working so that [she] didn’t fall into a hole.’ Evidently Chris’ loss of her social networks and fear of being socially isolated once she was working on the farm alone with her husband was challenging. There is a direct correlation between social isolation as a signifier for potential mental health break down (Nansen 2006, pp. 8-9; Greenhill, King, Lane & MacDougall 2009, p. 319; Berry, Hogan, Owen, Rickwood & Fragar 2011, p. 122S). Farmar-Bowers (2010, p. 146) suggest that getting involved in a range of social activities is a means of avoiding feeling isolated and trapped on the farm. The employment that Chris left was a professional job where she gained a sense of self-purpose in what she did. Being
involved with these different organisations while addressing her personal concern of being isolated or ‘falling in a hole’, also addressed her desire to continue having a sense of self-purpose. Being the chair of community boards indicates that her community involvement was about having influence and power to address different challenges faced by the community in an environment that appreciated her personal knowledge and expertise. While this level of networking is personal it can also be seen to be maintaining and developing professional skills that support a woman’s sense of purpose and validates the knowledge and expertise she has to offer professionally.

This third case example considers Jennie’s role as a volunteer with the Country Women’s Association (CWA). The aim of the CWA is to ‘improve the conditions for women and children and make life better for families, especially those living in rural and remote Australia’ (Country Women's Association of Australia 2015). Jennie’s involvement with the CWA had been long term and she expressed great affection about her membership:

Yes I love my CWA – and I can’t go to everything that’s on [now] but I love to go to my local branch meeting. I’m actually the secretary for the regional group too because you can never find people for these jobs (Jennie, beef and sheep).

Jennie went on to recollect what happened in 2006 and what services she was able to access or not. It was a pretty grim time for Jennie, with many animals dying of starvation while not being able to access any Exceptional Circumstance support because she and her husband owned their farm outright. When asked what help she wanted to see offered to farmers, she suggested that:

Some help for food and that for the family – I mean it was only my husband and I mostly then but we always had our own vegetable garden but just a little would have helped a lot (Jennie, beef and sheep).

This response is included at this point because it represents her dire circumstances. It implies that Jennie and her husband were ‘cash poor’ even though they were ‘asset rich’. It also points to the way women such as Jennie could do much for their community but how these same people were overlooked as needing help and support themselves. Evidently Jennie kept her personal circumstances from those at her local CWA. Jennie went on to say:
So can I just say because I did all that work for relief for the community with CWA – that got me through because I was too busy having things to do (Jennie, beef and sheep).

This comment suggests how volunteering with a group such as the CWA was not just about being a volunteer, but was also a legitimate and credible reason to leave the farm and simply get away (Jennings & Stehlik 2000, p. 69). It also gave Jennie the strength she needed to be able to return to the farm and manage the impact drought was having on her and her husband’s life. At the same time, she used the opportunity to help others to actually forget for a time about her own circumstances and to regain a sense of purpose for her self-identify as someone with a valuable contribution to her community. Working for community relief also meant that Jennie had some control and influence about addressing others needs and it made her feel as if there was something that she did that was successful. This level of networking was also a personal response but the outreach of the CWA was local, regional, state and national. It was a direct means to gain a sense of belonging and purpose, of having influence to provide services during times of crisis such as the drought and then the Black Saturday bushfires and it was working within an organisation that validated women’s knowledge and expertise to achieve positive outcomes within their communities.

When drought was finally declared to be exceptional and severe, social connection focussed on getting people together over a barbeque and having a ‘chat’. The wide variations of the way this small group of women networked across the whole sector indicates that social connection was not just about a ‘good time’ but was about generating opportunities for social connection that were ongoing, sustainable, informative and productive. While some women who farmed were highly involved in their rural communities, others were involved in the personal and/or through organisations off-farm. Each level of social connection was important to the way these women managed the drought and dealt with each crisis as it occurred.

This section has provided insight into the everyday lives of these women who farmed, lived through and managed drought in the Goulburn Valley during the Millennium Drought years of 2006-2010. Their stories have generated a picture of women in action who have not been idle sideliners allowing themselves to
become victim to the crisis of drought. These women, although they had adopted agrarian values and what it meant to farm as a woman, demonstrated the capacity to be self-reliant and entrepreneurial in their management of both their lives and the farm and to be proactive in seeking assistance when needed.

Within the neoliberal ideology of Australia’s National Drought Policy, these women exemplify a capacity to manage for drought through their resourcefulness, decision making and networking. During the Millennium drought the women also had the knowledge and expertise to recognise when self-reliance was not enough. These women’s everyday standpoints were not as stand-alone individuals but in connection with their husbands, their family, their farms and their community. The thesis now considers women’s standpoint on the future of farming and considers what they think about climate change.

5.3 Planning for a ‘drier’ future

The discussion above has been based on what the women remembered about the drought and their recollections how they make sense of the experience and based on what they believed was important for this study. From here, the findings move into how they have understood what happened during the drought and how their knowledge and experience of that time informs their aspirations for their future and the future of farming. In particular the women were asked about the future of farming, their impressions of climate change and the predictions that future droughts will be more frequent and more intense, and, based on their own experiences, what government support or interventions they would prefer to see in place to better help people who farm to manage for drought.

The future of farming was a contentious issue for some of the women. The hurt and anger as they recalled their experiences during the drought showed in the way they spoke about this topic. Some women did see a future in farming and they believed that there were opportunities available to those who were passionate about a career in the agricultural sector. By asking women to recollect how they farmed and managed for drought positions them as survivors as they
lived through the Millennium drought and now continued to farm and prepare for
the next drought. In effect, these are women who have the experience and
knowledge of how they did survive and understand what it means to continue
farming knowing that there will be further droughts to face. This section of the
findings draws on the ideas, the concerns and the aspirations the women had for
what farming might resemble in the future based on their knowledge, expertise
and experience of farming and managing for drought. Then it considers how the
women viewed climate change. Finally, it also considers the kinds of support and
intervention required by government to better support rural communities manage
for the crisis of drought in the future.

In the design of the questions the future of the agricultural sector and what it might
resemble was not qualified in any way. As a result, each woman addressed the
question personally through their imagination of how the future of farming might
look, based on what they believed was necessary to move successfully into that
future. The points of similarity involved whether or not they or their husbands
were competent enough on the computer and about how young people might
gain access to the agricultural sector especially if they did not have access to
succession planning or inheritances. Points of difference raised issues such as
the contestation of farming land by the mining companies and implementing
drought preparation strategies now.

This discussion about the future of farming will draw on three case examples.
The first focuses on Chris’ response because of her very personal response that
related particularly to their ability to respond to the modernisation strategies. The
second example will be based on PJ’s response because she talks about
possibilities for future generations while the third case example will examine
Jennie’s concerns about the impact of mining on the agricultural sector.

The first case example considers the very personal reasons why some people
who farm struggle to see a future in farming. In Chris’ case, while she personally
would prefer to leave the farm, her reason for seeing no future in farming is based
on her belief that the agricultural sector was a young person’s game where:
You need to be extremely computer savvy. You need to be able to extend and to be able to take on new farming processes or practices far more readily than a traditional farmer (Chris, cropping and sheep).

Wilkinson, Barr and Hollier (2012, p. 29) suggest that a means of improving farm efficiency is to increase management skills, change farming practices or investment. At the time of the interview, Chris and her husband had decided to change their farming practices and were in the process of shifting from Merino sheep bred for wool to prime lamb which are bred for meat. However, Chris’ husband was struggling to come to terms with those changes and she recounted that there were many arguments about traditional practices as opposed to the new practices needed to make the change successful.

He’s not taking it on – this shift from Merino to prime lamb…he needs to be moving to two rotational breaking systems and we argue all the time (Chris, cropping and sheep).

This dilemma also represents difficulties many farmers face as they get older and farming practices change and today, become more computerised. As Wilkinson et al. (2012, p. 35) argue it was generally the ‘stage of life and the resulting changes in personal and family circumstances’ that encouraged people who farmed to move off the land. Chris can see no future in farming for her and her husband and she was biding her time to allow for her husband to be ready to make that decision with her. This case example highlights the immediate challenges faced by the agricultural sector with an aging population still owning most farming businesses and a new generation of people wanting to farm drawing on new, innovative practices supported by technological advances.

The next case example considers PJ’s argument that there is a future in farming and within the agricultural sector. In part this is due to PJ’s personal love of farming but it is also because of the opportunities she sees for young people to move into the agricultural sector via succession planning or inheritance processes or through direct employment. It is now well appreciated that the Australian farming population is aging and that in part this is because the people farming are older, but it is also due to the lack of young people moving into the sector (Aslin & Russell 2008, p. 50; Stehlik 2009, p. 136). When asked about her ideas about the future of farming, PJ’s argued that it needed young people entering the industry as she believed that because of the advancements of
technology it was important for the next generation to be appropriately qualified to work in the sector. PJ also was insistent that anyone wanting to farm had to be ‘dead set’ that they wanted to farm and ‘passionate’ about the sector.

It all boils down to doing what you want to do. So if you’re dead set you want to be a farmer – like I have to say I was…I just enjoyed it; I loved it…it all boils down to how passionate they are; what they want to do; if that’s what they’re focus is on; but certainly I would encourage them if that’s what they want to do (PJ, cropping).

However, PJ was mindful that for young people wanting to farm it was much easier to do so if you came from a farming family where quality succession planning processes were in place. She went onto comment further that it should be a job, not a lifestyle:

If you weren’t lucky like we are to have family in farming, I’d say go and work for a farmer. Never own a farm – just go and work for a farmer. You get your pay packet at the end of the week without the stresses. I mean you share them but once you go and work for a farmer, don’t try and own a farm. But we’re lucky… (PJ, cropping).

Usually when people talk of building a career in farming, they are referring to owning a farm, leasing a farm or share farming; they are imagining the family farm with wife, husband and children. PJ has suggested that there is a place for people to farm as employees and that if not in a position to purchase through succession planning or inheritance to not move in that direction. This is not traditionally seen as an option for people wanting a career in farming, however others have also suggested that the future of farming may look very different. Some envisage a future where farming means the home and the workplace are separated and people travel out to the farm to work each day, rather than live on the property (Barr 2009, pp. 126-127) and there are examples of this happening in the state of Western Australia (Haslam-McKenzie & Stehlik 2005, p. 543). This was one of the directions of farming due to more women preferring the ease of access to the employment opportunities, services and amenities available in urban settings (Barr 2009, pp. 126-127). In this case example, PJ’s narrative supports a future for the agricultural sector but argues that the means for which the next generation move into farming will be different and that in some ways this will provide less stressful options for people to farm without the worry of owning their own business.
The third case example is Jennie’s concerns about the impact of mining companies exploring for iron ore deposits on farming land. When first asked about the future of farming, Jennie immediately linked it to her having to make the decision about whether to sell her property or not when she said:

I’m very worried about it...you know in trying to make this decision to sell or keep [the farm]. As to what is the future? Are we being stupid as usual or not? I think how they handle these foreign investments is going to have a big say. We also have the business, out on my farm, of the Vic Iron\(^9\) is wanting to drill for iron underneath out there... It will only be detrimental to our land. I think they’ll just wreck it and then walk away as per usual. You know I mean we’ve sort of put as many obstacles as we can in their road at the moment (Jennie, beef and sheep).

This raises a new issue about land use and the contestation between the agricultural sector and the mining sector. Mining does not play a big role in the Goulburn Valley, but these comments suggest that the impact of mining companies looking for rich mineral deposits may impact significantly on the agricultural sector in the future. Currently in other areas in Australia, such as the Liverpool Plains in New South Wales, people, particularly the people who farm, are trying to stop the mining company, Shenhua Watermark Australia from starting an open cut mine in the area and thereby potentially destroying prime farming land (Caroona Coal Action Group 2013). While the point has been made that mining diversifies regional areas from being heavily reliant on agriculture, especially given the impact of drought (Marsden Jacob Associates, RMCG, EBC Consultants, DBM Consultants, Australian National University, McLeod & Cummins 2010, p. 159), others have argued that food security has to remain a priority for Australia given the impact of drought should the predictions of climate change occur (Slade & Wardell-Johnson 2013, p. 16). This contestation for land use, is a primary concern for Jennie when she thinks about the future of farming. She does not want to see the farmland in her region transformed into ‘great big holes in the ground’ and as she has already stated, there were actions that she was taking to try to stop the mining company, Victorian Iron Pty Ltd from exploring her land.

\(^9\) Victorian Iron Pty Ltd is a member of the Minerals Council of Australia (2013) and as a member is ‘involved in exploration, mining, mineral processing and the supply of services that enable these activities to be carried out effectively and sustainably’. The Minerals Council of Australia website link to Victorian Iron Pty Ltd is no longer current at time of writing.
The three case example described here draw out some of the issues people who farm face now and are concerned about for the future and they touch on possible changes in the way farming may be undertaken in the future. There are genuine issues associated with the aging demographic of people farming in Australia and the struggles many of these more traditional ‘farmers’ have updating agricultural practices as well as adopting to and keeping up with innovative technological advances that in this digital age keep developing. The way people farm by living on the land is also predicted to change. The more developed the neoliberal principle of the farm being treated as a business becomes, the more probable the agrarian farming practices of living and working on the farm will change. There are women who want to farm but there are also women who would prefer their own career and treating the farm as a work place that the person who farms travels to, could appeal to many farming families who also work off-farm. The final point to make about this section of farming in the future is that people who farm may indeed be challenged by advancing mining companies seeking untapped mineral sources. This raises concerns about the destruction of landscapes and potentially impacts further on Australia’s food security and the ability to be self-reliant in the production of food.

Asking this question about the future of farming became important because, at the time of the interviews, climate change was fully embraced by the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and still research was highlighting that farmers were not convinced by the arguments of science. Climate change debates on top of this prolonged drought and talk of climate variability, and people who farmed needing to be viable into the future, generated a range of opinions between those convinced that climate change was real, those who did not believe it was real and those who did not know and did not particularly care because they were too busy dealing with the drought (Milne, Steneke & Russell 2008, p. 2 & 39; Evans, Storer & Wardell-Johnson 2011, p. 227). The Federal government’s 2008 review of Drought Policy also reached a conclusion that droughts in the future would be more frequent and more intense (Hennessy et al. 2008, p. 19). The interview included questions about dealing with climate change given the predictions of the impact climate change would have on future droughts.
Climate change was, in some ways, a difficult subject to bring up. In part this was because people who farm are renowned for not believing in climate change. However, it was only Ellie who openly contested the climate change science. However, as she began talking about climate change she became extremely hesitant. Ellie and her husband did not believe in climate change but as she began to respond to the question it became clear that she was not sure if she should say what she wanted to say. This was interpreted as Ellie not wanting to say the wrong thing for the study and through the nodding of my head and indication to keep going, she eventually stated her opinion that it was not climate change but rather cycles of weather that saw some cycles hotter than others and some periods experiencing more extreme events than others. She said:

The climate is always changing. We don't think, [my husband] and I don’t think all the climate change stuff that we get on the radio and fed to us constantly is actually accurate. It’s very convenient for some people to have us believing in climate change and basing all their policies on that, but we don’t actually believe that it’s as bad as what they say (Ellie, dairy).

When asked about climate change and how it would impact on the future, PJ was also unsure:

I don’t know, has it really changed? They certainly had their dry conditions in the good old days. Does it just go around in cycles? Is it changing? Leave it to the experts – the scientists...it’s still there in the back of your mind of course. At the end of the day you want to have a good season so you will do everything you possibly can to enhance that (PJ, cropping).

Jennie also questioned whether it was climate change or not and believed that as ‘quite a student of history’ it just appeared to resemble cyclical weather patterns, while Catherine and Susan both believed that climate change was real. Susan commented that:

Climate change is real. Look at all the stuff we are putting into the air, all the pollution and everything... I don’t know what we can do about that but just teach our kids and just be more efficient and be a bit wiser (Susan, dairy).

Interestingly, both Joan and Sarah avoided commenting directly on climate change itself, with Joan speaking about the impact of environmentalists and greenies and Sarah talking about strategies for managing drought in future years and thereby avoiding the topic altogether. However, all the women believed that
drought was an inevitable fact of life and that it would be a regular climatic event in the region in the future.

Understanding the women’s perspectives on climate change suggests that they are more interested in preparing for and managing extreme climatic events such as drought rather than trying to address any challenges presented because of climate change. Given the longevity and severity of the Millennium Drought it is also possible that the women were too focused on surviving the drought than implementing even more strategies and practices to address the broader, more complex issue.

As Chapter three outlined, the drought and especially the years of 2006 through to 2010 were extremely intense and because of the impact the Millennium Drought had on water supplies in the capital cities, it became a crisis that impacted on everyone and not just people who farmed or lived in rural and remote areas. Climate change knowledge is an area that needs to be addressed by people who farm and with recovery from the Millennium Drought there may be time for this to occur; although at the time of writing, there are some areas in Queensland which are still experiencing more severe drought and therefore the focus may continue to be on managing for the short term rather than the longer term.

Women interviewed were also asked to reflect on the strategies that had been introduced by the Federal government to manage drought, which included access to the EC Interest Relief Subsidy and Payments and the Farm Management Deposits (FMD) where people who farmed were able to put away savings without being taxed so that they had funding for such times of crisis. Both Chris and Ellie wanted to be paid for the products they produced. This is suggestive of some kind of subsidisation for their respective markets which was contrary to the neoliberal ideology of the free market. Chris’ argued:

…I believe whether it’s drought policy or not…that agriculture in Australia should be subsidised. I’d like to be paid to produce sheep. I don’t want a lot of money because we live quite cheaply but I’d like something. Because if you look at the cost of everything and then look at the income that you currently receive the margin’s not there. So saying a drought policy will encourage farmers is [not right]. Why not just have an agricultural policy and drought becomes part of that (Chris, cropping and sheep).
Ellie’s argument was that instead of paying welfare to people who farmed based on the amount of debt they had, the government could pay farmers based on what they produced so that the gap between what was produced and the overheads was enough for people to pay their bills and earn some kind of living. Ellie reasoned:

It’s really hard because every farm is in a different situation – so that’s why I think if [support] is [based] on the cost of what you’re producing then everyone gets a fair share, based on your production…because how else can you fairly distribute help… If it’s on your interest rate then it’s skewed against people who might have worked damn hard to have all their debts paid but then they’ve got no food on the table…they can’t access anything because their assets are too high and you can’t just sell a farm during a drought. You can’t sell a paddock so you can buy the groceries (Ellie, dairy).

Susan supported this idea but her reasoning was that the overheads associated with farming have increased immensely but that market price for food production has not and therefore she would prefer to see farmers subsidised through means testing. Significantly, she suggested:

It could be means tested on your production. So if the farmers were smart and bit greener and bit better towards the environment, they might get more money…that would encourage the other ones too because [if] they’re all going get the same sum they could just sit back and not worry about the environment or their impact…They’ve got to do certain courses to meet the criteria [such as] using fertilisers, on watering more efficiently, on using chemicals, …parcel these things and [do] an audit…if they pass… (Susan, dairy).

These points were sensible and measured from their standpoint. These were not ideas thought up on the spur of the moment but had been given due consideration as to how they could be implemented. It needs to be pointed out that while the idea of subsiding people who farm goes against the values of the free market, what these women were doing was actually pointing out where the free market had failed the people who farmed in Australia because the prices they were receiving for their produce barely covered their costs anyway, much less helping them to prepare for future droughts. They were also making suggestions based on their personal experiences of drought support and what they saw happening to others in their community. As discussed earlier, these women had numerous networks and through these they would have heard others’ stories. What is also useful about these ideas is that there is substance here to work with and that whether they are practical or not, they are ideas that could possibly address some
of the challenges governments have faced when trying to implement the neoliberal aspirations of the National Drought Policy with the ‘loophole’ of Exceptional Circumstances.

A strategy that women from the different agricultural industries within the Goulburn Valley called for government to consider makes the final point to be presented in this chapter and connects back into some of the strategies the women used to combat drought; the strategies of resourcefulness, decision making and networking. One of the main strategies for managing for drought in the future from the women interviewed for this study called for the Federal government to invest in social capital. Sarah, Chris and Catherine were adamant that:

...we need to value our social networks...part of the policy needs to be putting human capital needs...to have a value put on it. But it’s going to need to be given a financial value in terms of the position or a person to do it as a job and that needs to be there all the time because to network with people you’ve got to have a foundation to network from - not just six month contracts... (Sarah, dairy)

Your personal network had to be strong and you had to drag the men with you. [Events] have to be put on... (Chris, cropping and sheep)

They used those services successfully and now they want to use them again but they’ve gone and that’s really sad because the government needs to know that they should continue those services because that will help stop depression... (Catherine, orchards).

Sarah explains more fully:

...we need to value our social networks and we need to fund our social networks. There used to be a playgroup at every school; there used to be things where people got together that were provided for by local government, Federal government, whoever... People who get together need a facilitator and an organiser and that isn’t valued... Part of the policy needs to be putting human capital where it needs to be; to have a value put on it. But it’s going to need to be given a financial value in terms of the position or a person to do it as a job and that needs to be there all the time. Because to network with people you’ve got to have a foundation to network from – not just a six-month contracts (Sarah, dairy).

What is being recognised by these women is the potential effectiveness of having drought support services available throughout times of crisis, as opposed to their experience of people being contracted and services being set up for six months at a time and then disappearing; as was discussed in Chapter one. In the
Goulburn region, once Exceptional Circumstances had been declared, from October 2006 through to the end of December 2009, there were positions created across all three levels of government to address the needs of the rural community dealing with drought. In part this included providing opportunities for people who farmed to access EC support via the Federal government, in part it was about the provision of specialised health and technical services through state governments and in part it was through the provision of rural community workers in local government.

During the then Rudd Labor Government Drought Policy Review it was found that the drought had already impacted significantly on the social capital of rural communities where there was a breakdown of social networks, community life and social organisations (Kenny et al. 2008, p. 22). Further, the cost of the drought included the loss of people willing to volunteer because they no longer had the time, the money or the energy to continue giving (Kenny et al. 2008, p. 23). For Sarah, being able to employ someone to network across the community and across the agricultural sector has to be a long term proposition aimed at supporting the social networks and community organisations to withstand the assault of a crisis such as drought. The women argued that an investment in social capital also suggests that this role would also work with the rural community to help them to prepare for the risk of future droughts and other climatic events such as floods or bushfires. One such possibility was that a role could be positioned within local government.

This was the moment I realised that there was congruence between the women’s narratives and the findings of the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought reports’ document analysis presented in the next chapter. The significance of this will be further drawn out in Chapter 7.

In conclusion, as women who farmed and survived the Millennium Drought, the insight gained from these interviews reflects a knowledge, expertise and experience these women have to contribute to better understanding the social impact of drought and possible strategies that could be implemented to improve people’s ability to prepare for future droughts.
This chapter established the everyday standpoint of the women within the field of farming by considering the history of how the women came to farming. It also considered the way agrarianism had impacted on their lives to the point that it both rendered them invisible to the public realm of the agricultural sector and bound them to their respective husbands and the farms. This way it generated a connection to the land as ‘home’ as well as providing them with a sense of identity about who they are as a farmer’s wife.

Through this standpoint the chapter went onto explore the impact drought had on their lives and how it affected their ability to maintain their stock, gain access to water, deal with the loss of their animals and fruit and to manage their mental health and well-being. The chapter described how, through this hardship, the women challenged their standpoint as farmers’ wives by developing and putting into action their ability to be resourceful, make quality decisions and to develop strong networks. The findings demonstrated that although the women were influenced by agrarian values and what it meant to farm, they also demonstrated the capacity to be self-reliant and entrepreneurial in their management of both their lives and the farm and to be proactive in seeking assistance off-farm when needed.

Finally the chapter examined the women’s ideas about the future of the agricultural sector considering the implications of climate change and what could be useful to better manage for drought in the future.

The women interviewed for this study came from a standpoint that was both internal and external to the field of farming, but by exploring it as external to the field, there has been an exciting number of ideas, strategies, processes and actions presented that have the potential to enhance how the agricultural sector better manages for drought in the future. The starting point for these women may have been one where they were bound by and they embraced agrarianism when they married their husbands, but for the most part, these women’s recollection of farming and managing for drought in Australia during 2006-2010 has demonstrated that they do have knowledge, experience and expertise for enhancing drought management practices both in preparation for and throughout the event itself.
The original question of ‘What knowledge do women have that assists them to farm and manage for drought in the future?’ has led this study to discover the proactive response of women in crisis. These women combatted drought through their personal resourcefulness, ability to make decisions and their capacity to network and seek support when needed so that they could better support their families and local communities. This analysis has culminated to the point where it has become obvious that for the women, there is a role for local government to play supporting rural communities to prepare for and manage drought through the support of and building of, social capital.

The next chapter explores the role the local government of the Greater Shepparton City Council played in supporting its rural community manage for drought during the years of 2007-2009. In doing so, it analyses the drought reports written during that time that evaluated the different programs implemented throughout the drought and considers these findings in relation to the findings of this chapter with the aim of exploring ‘what role for local government?’
Chapter Six. More than information exchange: Local government responses

Chapter three described how during 2006-2010 the people of the Goulburn Valley experienced having little-to-no access to irrigation water while at the same time having to come to terms with the implementation of the irrigation modernisation project, on top of a drought which also meant that regional and capital cities were running out of water for the first time. In addition, decisions were being made by Federal and state governments that included building pipelines to send water from rural rivers to city reservoirs, to better manage the Murray-Darling Basin (including protecting rivers from environmental degradation) as well as the increasing politics of a climate change 'crisis'; all of which began to threaten the everyday lives of people who farmed.

The previous chapter has offered some insight into the women’s knowledge and experience of managing drought that highlighted their ability to be resourceful, to be active decision makers and to use their networks to better survive the crisis. It needs to be re-stated that people who relied on farming were becoming increasingly desperate at this time. Community consultation became a ‘hot topic’ in the media and for many, the world they thought they knew, was irreversibly changing. At this moment, as the declaration for Exceptional Circumstances (EC) meant that local government could become actively involved for the first time, it was clearly with a sense of urgency that local government needed to quickly manage a potentially catastrophic situation.

This chapter describes and analyses the responses adopted. It does so from the perspective of those involved in actively delivering programs on behalf of local government, by utilising the findings of document analyses of the reports written from within the Greater Shepparton City Council. The chapter’s overall purpose is to consider whether there can be a future role for local government which enhances support for their rural communities particularly as Australia faces more frequent and more intense droughts in the future. These findings indicate that

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there was some correlation between what was recorded as happening during the drought by local government and what the women interviewed stated was important to improve rural communities’ capacities to better manage for drought in the future.

The Greater Shepparton City Council is the largest shire in the Goulburn Valley, inclusive of most agricultural industries in the region and, together with the Moira Shire Council, was one of the first local governments to be funded in October 2006 to employ drought workers to work with their respective rural communities. The reports are a combination of the periodic evaluation reports of the overall program, the drought meeting minutes recorded for the Information Exchange meeting and the two reports specifically relating to the Strong Women Strong Families (SWSF) Program.

This chapter considers the role local government played during 2006-2010 and how local government supported people who farmed to manage for drought. It begins with a general description of the drought program that was implemented by the Greater Shepparton City Council and focuses more closely on three aspects of this program. These include: the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought meeting, known as the Information Exchange Meeting; an assessment of the Rural Community Brochure and an analysis of the SWSF program.

6.1 Greater Shepparton City Council’s Drought Program

Chapter two detailed Australia’s National Drought Policy’s neoliberal aspirations of a risk management approach to managing drought and how this failed to curtail the disaster of the Millennium Drought. This individualistic, entrepreneurial ‘farm business’ approach failed to support the agrarian farming collective of the ‘family farm’ to manage drought. Given the length and extreme nature of this drought, the Federal government was pressured into admitting that this drought was highly unusual, that it no longer constituted a ‘normal’ event and that financial support for people who farmed was urgently required. This declaration of ‘Exceptional Circumstances’ became the trigger that released funding to the state
governments and these governments subsequently allocated monies at the local government level.

The Victorian State government’s strategy was to provide such funding as one component of other measures that supported a collective well-being approach to managing drought. Fearful that stressed farmers would tend to isolate themselves and their families, it was deemed a suitable response to employ local individuals to coordinate community events to enable farmers to remain socially connected and, at the same time, to boost community morale (Victorian Office of the Premier 2006a). The funding that was allocated to the Greater Shepparton City Council was specifically to support community resilience rather than an emergency (Greater Shepparton City Council 2006, 2007b). Community resilience can be defined as a measure of a community’s capacity to bounce back after a major stressor and implied that a well-resourced community would be “able to return to its pre-existing state relatively quickly” (Maguire & Cartwright 2008, p. 4). Promoting community resilience at this time was viewed as a consistent policy response towards the drought because precedents appeared to show that the historical experience of drought was that as a climatic event it usually only lasted one to two years. The longevity of this drought had lured people into thinking that those who farmed would soon be shifting into recovery mode. The assumption underpinning this strategy was that the drought would break soon. The appointment of such a position was initially to support the farming community to get through the ‘tail end’ of the drought and in doing so, keep them motivated and socially connected so that they could ‘bounce back’ to their sense of ‘normal’ quickly.

However, these assumptions were challenged almost immediately, as by the time someone was employed to work part-time for six months in the role of the Drought Recovery Officer at the Greater Shepparton City Council, the drought was continuing, the crisis worsening and during that initial six months of the drought program, all drought workers across the Goulburn Valley were addressing drought as an ongoing emergency crisis and a natural disaster (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b). By the end of May 2007, the key issues for farming families, as identified by the local drought workers, included access to food for farming families, local community activities, available outreach services
relating to mental health and well-being, the coordination of information, access to fodder for farm animals and financial hardship (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d). It needs to be stated here that, within the Goulburn Valley, all the local government drought workers appointed during 2006 – 2010 were female. As the drought continued and the contracts of the drought workers both at Council and across the Goulburn Valley were extended from the initial six months to a further 18 months more people were employed to work in drought support across all levels of government and also within other non-government organisations. As a result, community-based programs continued to be developed to address the collective health and well-being of farming communities.

At this point it is important to provide some context to the drought program implemented by the Greater Shepparton City Council and the documents written during that time. The drought worker was initially appointed as the Drought Recovery Officer for nineteen (19) hours per week for six (6) months. The appointment began on 4 January 2007. In October 2007 and with further funding from the Victorian State government, the position then became full-time and remained so until 24 December 2009 when no further Victorian State government funding was made available (Victorian Office of the Premier 2007). The Drought Recovery Officer was originally located within the Emergency Management section of the Council, but by the end of the first six month contract, the role was placed within Community Development, a new department within Council where all the project officer roles were filled by women, except for the role of manager. The Community Development Manager was answerable to a male director who was accountable to the male Chief Executive Officer. Within a feminist standpoint framework, this structure highlights how the position of the Drought Recovery Officer within the organisation relied on approval through a masculine hierarchy. Being a member of the Community Development team meant that there were clear goals provided for the role that included coordinating a regular drought meeting, organising an information brochure and administering a small amount of grant funding to support local community events. Further initiatives including the SWSF Program were introduced by the Drought Recovery Officer with

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11 It is understood that where the Victorian State Government funding ran out, the Greater Shepparton City Council continued to support the position until such time as it was confirmed no further monies from the state government would be made available.
approval from the Community Development Manager, as the crisis continued and after the contract was extended and became full-time.

What becomes apparent when analysing the documents written for the Greater Shepparton City Council is how these reports use a style of writing that presents the minimum use of words to generate an essentially non-emotive account of events being reported. This was for two reasons: the first was due to the requirements of keeping councillors up to date with enough information that kept them informed of the outcomes of the program. The second was that the drought program was only one of many aspects of councillors’ scope of work, and little time was available to devote to it. Reports were therefore minimal and factual. These reports were based on an assumption that the people who were farming were dealing with drought as a crisis. This is important to note because the reports are written using a very different tone to that of the women recollecting their stories of what happened during the drought as outlined in the previous chapter. It can be stated that while Council was extremely supportive of the drought program, nevertheless it was left to women such as those interviewed for this study, to more strongly influence the direction and facilitation of community support for the farming community. Some of the women interviewed in the previous chapter also contributed significantly to the direction of the Council’s drought program however they will not be highlighted here as this will breach confidentiality.

There were a number of projects developed over the three years that the Greater Shepparton City Council managed within their drought program. These included: the Minor Community Grants Rounds, Grant Writing Workshops, and a series of men’s health nights called ‘A Healthy Look at Barley’. For the purposes of this study, two major components of the program are analysed: the Council’s drought meeting called the Information Exchange and the development and dissemination of the drought brochure which came to be known as the Rural Community brochure. Also considered is an analysis of a community project known as SWSF. These aspects of the broader drought program were chosen because they offer some insight into what happened during the drought in the years between 2006 and 2010 as well as being indicative of those involved as drought workers and as participating community members. The first component
of the Council’s drought program to be considered here is the Information Exchange Meeting.

### 6.1.1 Information Exchange (Drought) Meetings

The Information Exchange Meetings were originally meant to be formal drought meetings as convened and managed by the Greater Shepparton City Council. At the time, there were a number of such ‘formal’ drought meetings being held across the region including the neighbouring councils of Moira Shire and Campaspe Shire. In addition, the fruit growers were holding regular meetings and those who had been employed across the different council regions were attending at least one of these ‘monthly’ meetings nearly every week and hearing similar information. While it was essential that drought workers did meet across the different regions within the Goulburn Valley, what was missing in the running of these more formal drought meetings, was the opportunity to network, get to know each other and to understand what others’ roles were across the region as well as what programs and initiatives they were involved in and how best they could work together more collegially. The Greater Shepparton City Council approved a suggestion that the ‘drought meeting’ would be an ideal opportunity for drought workers to meet and to exchange information that would be useful in supporting the work they did across the Goulburn Valley.

The meeting’s format became structured into three parts. The first to provide an opportunity for each person to report on what they were doing, the second to share morning/afternoon tea so that people then had time to connect with others undertaking similar initiatives, and the third was to provide up to date information to the whole group. This format was flexible and minutes were recorded which were sent to all on the Information Exchange Meeting email distribution list as well as to the appropriate people at Council. There was no formal ‘acceptance’ of the minutes during the meetings however any queries or misinterpretations recorded were then amended. These meetings were facilitated by either the Community Development Manager, the Drought Recovery Officer or, for meetings focusing on skills development, by a guest facilitator. The minutes were
recorded either by the Community Development Administrative Officer or the Drought Recovery Officer.

The minutes of these meetings represent an official record at a local government level that is akin to a photograph or snapshot of what drought workers and attending community people reported as happening in rural communities across the Goulburn Valley. They provide insight into the ways drought workers were working across sectors to coordinate different programs together so that there was minimal repetition that consumed valuable resources unnecessarily.

The people who attended these meetings represented a wide range of organisations including: Federal, State and local governments, agricultural industry bodies, financial institutions, the health and mental health sector, the employment sector, non-government organisations, charitable organisations (including church bodies) and community groups. While this is an extensive list, not everyone attended every meeting and different people were employed in different organisations at different times depending on when a position was funded. This meant that meetings were fluid and to some extent, organic in structure.

Government agencies from each of the levels of government were represented, including Centrelink as the Federal agency that managed the Exceptional Circumstance (EC) registration and payments process for individual people who farmed. The Victorian State government had representatives from different departments attend including: the lead agency for drought, the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI), the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Department of Human Services. Local government representatives included Moira, Campaspe, Benalla and Strathbogie Councils and these representatives were drought workers who joined in as the different councils received funding to employ someone in that role. While local government attendance at drought meetings across the region rarely included representation at the executive or councillor level it should be noted that the Moira Shire drought worker was often accompanied by senior management or a
Councillor\(^{12}\). Such local government representation usually only occurred once a drought worker had been appointed which suggests that while the influence of Council was important at a local community level, these activities were not seen as a major priority for executives or Councillors as they delegated drought workers at a project officer level to make representation on their behalf. This could also be as the position was funded by the State government and in short bursts, such executives believed that managing drought service provision was not viewed as a ‘normal’ role for local government but rather it was a role that local government ‘accommodated’ on behalf of the State government. Therefore while such drought workers worked at a local government level, the nature of their work was not prioritised by executives or Councillors over the regular services offered by each council.

There were a number of health related organisations represented at the Information Exchange Meetings that came under the auspices of Goulburn Valley Health, the region’s public hospital. Other health related organisations included FamilyCare, Relationships Australia, Goulburn Valley Area Mental Health, Moira Healthcare Alliance, Centacare, Goulburn Valley Division of General Practice, and Goulburn Valley Primary Care Partnerships.

Financial institutions that were represented included Rural Finance and the rural financial counsellors from Goulburn Murray Hume Agcare. These organisations were also responsible for assisting people who farmed to access EC Interest Relief Payments. There were representatives of employment based programs attending such as Rural Skills Connect, a Victorian State government initiative and Central Victorian Group Training Recruitment Agency and Hume Employment Services that both managed the Drought Force program, a Federal government initiative.

Agriculturally based industries tended to be represented by local community people who farmed and who also worked voluntarily for their respective industry groups which included: Fruit Growers Victoria, Goulburn Valley Women in Horticulture, United Dairyfarmers Victoria, Victorian Farmers Federation, Murray

\(^{12}\) It needs to be noted that local government Councillors were elected representatives over three year periods, while the Executive consisted of paid employees in long term employment.
Dairy and Goulburn Murray Landcare Network. In addition, there were organisations represented that supported emergency relief efforts such as the St Vincent De Paul Society, Moira Foodshare, Salvation Army, Vic Relief Foodbank, the Country Women's Association, Uniting Care Cutting Edge and Anglicare. Those who participated were representative of the wide variety of organisations who contributed more regularly to the information exchange process.

In analysing this process, a gender breakdown of the people attending the Information Exchange Meeting is a useful beginning; followed by a detailed analysis of three meetings held in the first part of each year in the life of the program. These meetings provide a record of what each of the drought workers and/or community people contributed to the meeting, compared with other meetings where there was a more facilitated process to support the work of drought workers.

Below, Table 3 outlines the topic for each Information Exchange Meeting held throughout the Councils drought program during 2007 to the end of 2009. The topics provide information about what was discussed during the meetings and the final three columns break down the attendees according to their role and their gender. Drought service providers were those who were employed by an organisation as drought workers while the community people are those who volunteered within their rural communities and who were known to have strong networks within their farming industries. This table highlights both what was discussed at the meetings and who was in attendance.
Table 3. Gender analysis of people attending the Greater Shepparton City Council’s Information Exchange Meetings, 2007 – 2009 (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Information Exchange Meeting Topics</th>
<th>Drought Service Providers</th>
<th>Community People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 15 Mar 2007| Introductory Meeting – Outlook for the drought  
Guest speaker: Jason Leeman, DPI                                                               | 15   | 14 (48%)               | 7 incl. 5 women |
| 24 May 2007| Service Mapping  
Guest facilitator: Cathy McGowan, McGowan Consulting                                      | 10   | 12 (55%)               | 2 incl. 1 woman |
| 17 Aug 2007| Irrigation Water Update  
Guest speaker: Mark Bailey, Goulburn-Murray Water                                               | 8    | 7 (47%)                | 1 woman only    |
| 1 Nov 2007 | ‘Caring for the Carers’  
Guest facilitator: John Tudor, Stafford Consultancy Services                                     | 5    | 6 (54%)                | 0               |
| 22 Jan 2008| S.W.O.T. Analysis of available services  
Guest facilitator: Cathy McGowan, McGowan Consulting                                               | 7    | 15 (68%)               | 3 incl. 2 women |
| 13 May 2008| DPI – Future Farming Strategy  
Guest speaker: Katie Le Blanc, DPI                                                               | 6    | 16 (73%)               | 1 woman only    |
| 16 July 2008| Warm Handovers – cancelled  
General meeting held                                                                                   | 6    | 8 (57%)                | 0               |
| 17 Sep 2008| Irrigation Water Update  
Guest speaker: Mark Bailey, Goulburn-Murray Water  
‘Providing a reassuring service in the current crisis’  
Guest facilitator: Tim Elberg, Faming Answer                                                      | 8    | 10 (56%)               | 0               |
| 26 Nov 2008| Facilitated discussion  
Guest facilitators: Terry Reedy, FamilyCare & Chris Cummins, Area Mental Health                   | 4    | 10 (71%)               | 2 women only    |
| 21 Jan 2009| ‘Where do we go from here?’  
Guest facilitator: Peter Bourke, Greater Shepparton City Council                                  | 7    | 12 (63%)               | 0               |
| 29 Jul 2009| Winding up of services  
Guest facilitator: Cathy McGowan  
Rural Services Directory & Referral Pathway  
Guest speaker: Sue Crowther, Cobram District Community Health Centre                             | 5    | 11 (69%)               | 0               |
| Total      | Meeting attendees:                                                                                     | 81   | 121 (60%)              | 16 incl. 12 women |

It can be seen from this table that in the early stages of the drought program, when personnel from the Victorian DPI or Goulburn-Murray Water had been invited to speak that the numbers attending increased to include more men. This implies that the scientific, technical information to be gleaned from those organisations was more important to men than when information sessions were deemed to too similar to a ‘warm, fuzzy’ session dealing with issues such as ‘Caring for the Carer’ or ‘How to manage warm handovers’ which did not attract any interest at all. Neither the Victorian DPI nor Goulburn-Murray Water attended meetings other than when they were invited to speak. No other water management organisations attended any of the meetings, despite being invited
each time. Later in 2008, the Victorian DPI did send a female representative who was new to the role more regularly rather than the male Extension Officers who were working in the field and had been happy to attend when asked to present. It has to be concluded that such organisations did not prioritise attendance at local government-level meetings. Considering the nature of Australia’s three-tiered approach to governance, this raises a question as to whether drought work at a local government level was not prioritised because it had little to no influence on the decisions made by the Victorian State government much less any decisions being made by the Federal government.

Table 3 shows that during 2007 there is an even spread of men and women recorded as attending the Information Exchange meetings, with the lowest attendance figures being recorded for the one program that dealt with the social impact of daily dealing with drought affected people and communities, namely ‘Caring for the Carer’. What these attendee numbers highlight was the significant rise in the discrepancy between female and male attendance. As the drought became both extensive, long term and unending, the number of female attendees to male attendees increased significantly. In effect, drought was becoming normalised as a typical climatic condition the longer it continued and this also resulted in more women than men being employed to work as drought workers. The implication of these findings is that during this time there were different ways in which people approached the role of the drought worker and there is an indication that the men tended to prioritise information and technical details and positions over networking and the social.

The first Information Exchange Meeting, held in Shepparton, was an introductory meeting designed to provide an opportunity for the drought workers to get together along with some key community people involved in local community groups. This was an opportunity to network and hear what was happening in the community, what services were available and who was planning what social events as well as to obtain the latest information from Victorian DPI about the projected meteorological and production outlook for the coming year. This kind of meeting was essential because many of the drought workers were new to their role and so the whole meeting was designed to get to know the kind of service each person within their organisation was offering. The minutes were kept to
provide a record of each meeting and to highlight aspects that might also hold useful information for those not attending. One of the significant issues at the time was that as there was a great deal of funding being distributed to different organisations under the ‘drought’ banner, it was important, where possible, that there be no doubling up of services or repetition of events. In addition, an important issue was whether the services being provided were of actual use to local farming communities. Table 4 outlines the topics and themes mentioned by the attendees in the first Information Exchange Meeting held in Shepparton, on 15 March, 2007.

Table 4. Concerns identified at Information Exchange Meeting 15 March 2007 (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Exchange Meeting Concerns 21 January 2009</th>
<th>Service Providers (W)</th>
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<th>Community people (W)</th>
<th>Community people (M)</th>
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<td>Political Lobbying</td>
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<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Top 3 Concerns:
- Mental Health and Well-being 13 (8)
- Social Events 10 (8)
- Information Access 9 (4)

The evidence from Table 4 indicates that the drought workers were highly concerned about the mental health and well-being of people who farmed and that integral to the implementation of community the programs, positive mental health and well-being strategies needed to be promoted. Concerns were also raised about suicide prevention, financial support to pay household accounts, access to food and drought assistance payments. There was also some discussion about the efficacy of getting information out in a timely manner. Information was required for the community about available drought and emergency support
services, mental health and well-being information, and keeping people socially connected through social activities. The drought workers and community people both agreed that regular updates of the drought situation were needed as well as activities arranged to be able to connect regularly to share information.

Two unintended, but useful, consequences of the Information Exchange Meetings can be identified here. First, that people who farmed in different industries and who were also from different parts of the region gained a broader understanding of the impact of the drought because they were hearing stories outside of their own neighbourhoods and their particular industries. Second an email database was developed that enabled further easier delivery of up to date information. This database became a portal for the dissemination of information about drought, drought service provision and other actions that were occurring as a direct result of the drought impact. In this way, people on the database were able to access the latest news about what was happening as it became available to local government and community volunteers on the database also had up to date information that they could then share with the people they knew. This accessed was confirmed during the interviews as the women reflected on how they had used the information gathered.

The focus on mental health and well-being, the need for more social events and more information suggests there was a sense of urgency to ensure the safety of people who farmed by making sure they remained socially connected and well-informed of their options. The drought workers understood that social events and appropriate information were instrumental in helping people to remain engaged with others and to know how to seek help when it was necessary. They also understood that social events provided a powerful opportunity to meet people in a way that put a ‘friendly face’ behind the services within a casual setting. As other research has found, attending social events and community activities was often one of the first things farming people stopped doing because of the extra demands on the family to address the needs of the farm (Stehlik et al. 1999, p. 76; Sherval & Askew 2012, p. 358). So dire was the situation in 2008 that by the time drought workers were employed there was a sense that their roles were focussed more on promoting immediate suicide prevention rather than supporting people to manage for drought for the long term. Therefore this very basic
approach to supporting rural communities to connect was undertaken with a grim sense of urgency and resolution. The other aspect which impacted on this situation was that most of the drought workers were on limited contracts and they felt a pressure to try to do something to redress the situation facing the rural community and social events were both an expedient means of engaging with rural communities and disseminating information.

For this first meeting there were a number of community members in attendance and for this study, the community women’s comments are included here as indicative of broader issues. The information they provide here focuses specifically on social and community events. These women clearly wanted it known that the people in their rural communities were struggling, that providing simple things such as a shared meal gave people the chance not only to eat but also to catch up with other local community members. Importantly, they made the point that as the drought continued, the volunteer base to support such activities was dwindling. The following quotations (taken directly from the minutes and therefore in a 'short hand') have, where possible a location and industry for each speaker. The locations mentioned are all within the region.

Firstly would like to say thank you for the hampers and vouchers; they are really appreciated. Problem that we are facing is lack of energy and lack of motivation. People are suffering from mental exhaustion. Finding it hard to get people to come along to functions, it always seems to be the same people. Want to find ideas and ways to link people with different groups from today’s meeting. Organised a Christmas party – it was a great community event. Things are pretty flat at the moment so hopefully these ideas can be taken back to the community (LB, farmer and Undera Community Group).

Finding it terribly hard to get people to events. Feel that even if you don’t get many to an event, even if you get one or two along it has been a success, because someone has attended. In Congupna [they are] providing support by handing out meals at cricket club. Katandra [has] a night coming up (JB, farmer Katandra and United Dairyfarmers Victoria).

Toolamba community have started a market. Also started a newsletter that is produced by the community – with gardening tips, getting people involved and being active. Provide support for children within the schools – counselling. Started twilight tennis (MC, Toolamba).

Started monthly meals - $5.00 per head – about 100 people attended. Tennis club runs raffles. School is also running raffles (ES, farmer and Dhurringile Community Centre).
Organising a Drought Recovery Festival in May for Saturday mornings, providing a free sausage sizzle, face painting and also a wood raffle. Giving five families the opportunity to have a gathering in their home. Sponsored two kids to attend a camp. On the 27th May there will be a concert in Tatura in conjunction with Masonic Hall. Church of England is having a night on Mondays, to which the Lions Club will be providing food (GM, Tatura and Lions Club).

(Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, 21 January 2009)

Clearly rural people wanted to do something to respond to the crisis of drought. Despite being pointed out that people were tired of always being the ones to volunteer, there also was a sense of urgency that something had to be done and so social events were a means for the volunteers to feel as though they were helping their community. In the previous chapter Jennie spoke about her involvement with the CWA in just this way. Organising and attending such events became a legitimate reason to get away from the farm, to take some time out and to connect with people other than those associated with the farm. Therefore having opportunities for people to prepare for and implement community activities became a crucial way to support rural people.

At the Information Exchange meeting held in May 2008, also in Shepparton and outlined in Table 5 below, the primary concern remained mental health and well-being followed by the need to circulate appropriate information out to people in rural communities. This time however, social events were no longer a primary concern but rather available economic options became more urgent.

Numerous programs had been developed between the years of 2007 and 2009 and one such program included a pilot program called Rural Skills Connect, funded by Regional Development Victoria, a state government department. This program was designed to match the skills of people who farmed with skills that employers in the region might be seeking and who they might be willing to employ during times that suited the person who farmed. For example, people in the dairy industry would only be able to work between milking times (10.00am until 3.00pm) instead of a regular eight hour shift such as 8.00am to 5.00pm. The aim of this program was to assist people who farmed to stay on their farms through the subsidisation of their cash flow with off-farm employment. Other economic options included in the Information Exchange Meeting were the Drought Force Program, the dairy industry’s Taking Stock Taking Action, the fruit industry’s
Manage Today, Plan for Tomorrow and the extension of Centrelink’s Farm Help program that provided people with farm planning. These programs were all geared around helping people who farmed to remain farming, to provide them with opportunities to work off-farm and subsidise their income, to offer a means of paying farm employees through the Drought Force Program and to supply them with professional business planning for the future. The value of these programs was that they were focused on the longer term, rather than responding to the sense of urgency that went with the planning and attending of social events.

Table 5. Concerns identified at Information Exchange Meeting 13 May 2008 (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Information Exchange Meeting Concerns 21 January 2009</th>
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<th>Community people (W)</th>
<th>Community people (M)</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7 (5)</td>
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<td>Social Events</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</table>

Top 3 Concerns
- Mental Health and Well-being 11 (7)
- Information Access 7 (5)
- Economic Options 5 (3)

The many mental health and well-being programs discussed at this meeting included programs such as ‘Helping your Neighbour’, ‘No Bull Support’, ‘Sustainable Farm Families’ and ‘Mental Health First Aid Training’; all of which were designed to provide well-being strategies that assisted people for the longer term. In this way it can be seen that by 2008 drought workers were beginning to put into place long term strategies that could be developed over time, rather than the short term emergency activities called for in 2007. This was in direct response to more Victorian government funding as announced in October 2007 that
provided for a longer response period than the initial funding granted in 2006 (Victorian Office of the Premier 2007). It can be seen how the longevity of the drought was beginning to be better appreciated, and the fact that 'no end was in sight' was affecting the distribution of funding. In many cases, aside from bringing new people into the drought service provision sector, it also extended the contracts of those already working in the field and in many cases they moved to a more full-time role giving them greater capacity for future planning, rather than crisis driven, short term options.

By 2009 it was a common feeling that the drought would never end and that this period of dryness was permanent. Below in Table 6, the meeting, again held in Shepparton in January 2009 illustrates that there was nevertheless another shift in drought worker concerns. The mental health and well-being of people who farmed remained the primary concern but now the focus was also turning to how farms and the agricultural sector would cope with the economic opportunities that were diminishing even further than anticipated. In addition, there was talk about upcoming social events and people’s availability to attend for support.

At this time, it became clear that people who farmed and rural communities more broadly were facing a number of economic downturns. These included a downturn in opportunities for people who farm to access off-farm employment; even through employment programs such as Rural Skills Connect. This can be directly connected to the impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis\(^\text{13}\). People involved in cropping were struggling because they were unable to meet their contracted quotas and faced fines (imposed by their contractors) for still another year; orchards were abandoned and there was also a crippling downturn in milk prices within the dairy industry (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009b, p. 5). An interest was also developing on the young people and children of farming families and their ability to deal with the longevity of this drought.

\(^{13}\) The Rural Skills Connect Program was a pilot program when first introduced into the Goulburn Valley. As Regional Development Victoria began to roll it out across the state of Victoria, the Global Financial Crisis hit and as the economy slowed down it affected employment opportunities (Reserve Bank of Australia 2010).
The sense of urgency that had influenced this meeting was challenged dramatically just two and a half weeks later when on the 7 February 2009 the devastating Black Saturday bushfires raced through the hills of the southern parts of the Goulburn Valley; one of many major fires across the state of Victoria that day. Overall, 173 people lost their lives and many more lost their homes, there was serious damages to local services and amenities as well as the painful loss of livestock, feed and agricultural infrastructure. The farmers in the northern part of the Goulburn Valley collected hay to send down to those feeding their stock that were still alive. They were also volunteering to help out with fencing and donating money, blankets, clothing and time to support those people left to struggle with the destruction of that day. Suddenly it was as if the drought was less than important and instead government funding shifted to supporting these bushfire affected people and their communities. As drought worker contracts expired, many shifted immediately from being drought workers to working as emergency support people for the communities savaged by fire. The immediate crisis on top of a long term, chronic event really taxed the social and community resources of the Goulburn Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Exchange Meeting Concerns 21 January 2009</th>
<th>Service Providers (W)</th>
<th>Service Providers (M)</th>
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</table>

Top 3 Concerns
Mental Health and Well-being 11 (7)
Agricultural Farms 7 (6) & Economic Options 7 (4)
Social Events 6 (5)
As discussed in detail in Chapter three, drought is a common feature of Australia’s climatic conditions but it still wreaks havoc on people and as the Millennium Drought proved, even the best equipped people who farmed were ill-prepared for the intensity and the longevity of this drought. A close examination of these three meetings provides a sense of what was being discussed at the Information Exchange meetings and how the issues changed in priority the longer the drought continued. It also highlights indirectly some of the difficulties associated with the drought work due to the short term nature of the funding and employment contracts. Working under a National Drought Policy that requires people who farm to manage the risk of drought as they would any other risk to their business and that has removed drought from the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements, means that bringing in drought workers for a six month period does nothing to address the long term needs of rural communities to better prepare for and manage for drought. Rather, such six monthly contracts actually confirm the notion that drought is a crisis and the response is as it would be for other natural disasters such as it was for the Black Saturday bushfires.

Chapter three also outlined how the Millennium Drought became ‘caught up’ with a broader concern about climate change, and the predictions that droughts will occur more frequently and more intensely in the future. However, as significant an issue as climate change was at this time in a political sense, this was not a subject that was recorded in the Information Exchange Meeting minutes until September 2008 (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, 17 September 2008). This can be seen as a sign that drought workers themselves had started to shift from promoting an emergency response, to programs which skilled-up rural communities to better support themselves. Recognising this shift here is important because the longer the drought continued, the more people started to question the common assumption that drought only lasted for one to two years and began to better appreciate that it could last for more than a decade, and that this could be more common in future. This transition meant that managing drought shifted from dealing with it as an emergency crisis to working alongside rural communities to ensure they were better resourced to be self-reliant and productive into the future (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, 17 September 2008).
A close reading of the Information Exchange Meeting minutes suggests that drought was the only factor affecting farmers in the Goulburn Valley despite the new prominence of climate change discourse and of political decisions such as the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and the Food Bowl Modernisation Project impacting rural communities in the region. Potential reasons for this included the awareness that many farmers were not ready to face the implications of climate change while in the middle of dealing with drought, did not believe in or were unwilling to engage in climate change discussions (Carter 2007; Evans et al. 2011, p. 233). Also it could be that drought workers were so busy dealing with drought that they focussed only on the one issue. Another contributing factor could be that climate change and these projects were seen as being more of a scientific nature, whereas many of those involved with the Information Exchange Meeting were naturally focused on the social and economic impact of drought and helping people who farmed to access the assistance they needed. Over time, the drought workers had become acutely aware that their tenure was finite and their legacy to people who farmed and rural communities needed to be through the promotion of long term outcomes that benefitted the collective wellbeing of the community.

This section has described how information dissemination became a high priority for drought workers because they were concerned about enabling people to access the appropriate drought services when needed. The next section examines the development of a drought information brochure and how it came to be produced in 2009 as a Rural Community brochure.

6.1.2 Rural Community Brochure

Disseminating information using a brochure was specifically designed to target community resilience by “facilitating opportunities for agencies, communities and individuals to network and access appropriate information and resources” (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b, p. 3). In the early period of local government involvement, it was assumed that people who farmed were dealing with a crisis and needed information about the different drought support agencies
available in the region. A drought brochure was seen as a useful way to promote available drought services as well as generating some interaction between the council and farming community (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b, p. 3).

It was understood that having access to up to date and accurate information was vital in resourcing the community during the crisis. Contacting the correct service with the first phone call can mean the difference between someone accessing support and someone deciding to manage on their own because it is too hard to get to the necessary starting point. The drought brochure was designed using a step-by-step process of the order needed to contact the different agencies (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b, p. 5). It also provided a comprehensive list of locally available drought services in the areas of health, finance, technical support and emergency relief (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b, p. 5). This step-by-step structure became a useful tool for drought workers (as well as community members) because it also provided them with up to date information about each of the services available in the region and, in the case of new drought workers, helped them to quickly understand the process so that they would be able to immediately support those in need.

The Greater Shepparton City Council drought brochure was considered a ‘live’ document despite being distributed in printed form. It became essential that as services were introduced, changed or terminated, the brochure was updated so that at any stage people who farmed could rely on the information they received. As such, it was also made available online through the Greater Shepparton City Council’s website. Reliability of information was a major test of the trust established between the community and local government.

Critical to the dissemination of the brochure were two postal mail outs. The first in March 2007 was a mail out to all land owners who paid rates to Council (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b, p. 5). This mail out included a letter of support from the Mayor, Councillor Jenny Houlihan, with the brochure itself and a fridge magnet with Council’s contact details for the Drought Recovery Officer (Greater Shepparton City Council 2007b, p. 5). The rationale in the use of a fridge magnet was that when paper information comes into a household, people may not have the time to read the information in detail, but they are more likely to stick
a magnet on their fridge; adding it to their collection. The fridge magnet is often easier to find when they are ready to seek out information. The strategy of including the fridge magnet proved useful because two years later there were still telephone calls from those asking for help and the only phone number they could find was the fridge magnet still on their fridge.

The second mail out occurred late November 2007 after businesses in towns with populations under 10,000 people became eligible to apply for drought support (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008a, p. 7). This time there was an acute awareness that in sending out the earlier brochure, people who farmed and who were not land owners (rate payers) but share farmers, lease holders or employed workers had been inadvertently overlooked (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008a, p. 7). Therefore the second postal mail out included all rural householders outside urban settings and all businesses in towns with populations under 10,000 people. At this time, the city of Shepparton was the only urban setting with a population over 10,000 people. This change in the demographics of those included in the mail out was a direct result of a recognition that the longer the drought continued the more aware drought workers became of the different groups associated with the agricultural sector who did not fit the model of the ‘agrarian landowner’. In the first mail out the focus was on ‘farmers’ and it was taken for granted that using the rate payers’ data base would be the most effective means of contacting all ‘farmers’. This is another example of the way agrarian ideology impacted not only on people who farmed but also on people within rural communities as well as on the drought workers themselves. Chapter two describe how agrarian ideology is not just about the ‘farmer’ but is directly connected to Australia’s national identity. As such people who were not part of the agricultural sector implicitly made assumptions about who worked the land. By the time employment contracts had been extended and drought workers’ engagement with the rural community had become more extensive, there was a better appreciation about who needed what support for the management of drought.

The drought brochure was also placed in the Greater Shepparton City Council’s reception area with more extensive information contained within an information pack. The information was made available in this way so that people could be
discreet in gathering the information for themselves or for their families and friends. This confidential approach meant that there is no data gathered about who actually collected that information.

The design of the drought brochure and its structure using a step-by-step process meant that it became a valuable tool when meeting with people who, by the time they had contacted Council, were generally in crisis mode. It gave drought workers a way to check off what services the people had already accessed and then help them to determine what other services they could access to support their particular circumstances. The brochures were also useful to distribute at social events and also acted as a ‘business card’ as well as an information brochure. Throughout the drought, some volunteer organisations such as St Vincent de Paul Society began ‘cold calling’ farm families in the region. When this became known to the Victorian DPI they, together with Council quickly organised an information session, and the Council’s drought brochure was used to show these volunteer organisations how they could use information contained in the handout to better contribute to the conversations they had with the people they visited (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008a, p. 7). At the time there was much controversy about whether or not cold calling should be done, especially when it came to non-professional ‘counsellors’ untrained in crisis management calling in on strangers potentially in a crisis situation. The Victorian DPI concluded that it was better to provide some form of training with appropriate information than ignoring what was happening. While the Council's drought brochure proved useful in a number of different ways, nevertheless as this study has found, drought service provision throughout 2007 and 2008 dealt with drought as a natural disaster and therefore a crisis, rather than a risk to be better managed.

By February 2009, the year ahead was appearing to be a disastrous one, especially for the dairy and fruit industries. The anticipated outcomes predicted for that year for people who farmed remained depressed, however the Black Saturday bushfires changed attitudes and their impact shifted treating drought from an ongoing crisis to it being regarded more as a continued climatic event to which people had to become accustomed. In mid-2008, the Rudd Labor Federal government had implemented a Drought Policy Review that determined that EC declarations should be terminated at the end of their designated period
(Productivity Commission 2009, p. 267). For the Goulburn Valley, the EC declaration was due to expire on 31 March 2010. No further extensions of funding for drought support were given and some drought workers gradually moved from drought service provision to newly funded positions working in fire affected communities. However, the EC declaration for the Goulburn Valley was revised by NRAC and subsequently extended until 31 March 2011 (National Rural Advisory Council 2010, p. 10 & 14) but no extra funding was granted to reintroduce any drought support services. The people who farmed in the Goulburn Valley were expected to manage for drought using regular community services as had been anticipated during the last six months of 2009.

During the Federal government’s Drought Review consultation process, the subject of the growth of a ‘drought industry’ was discussed (Kenny et al. 2008, p. 37). By mid-2009, this drought industry was beginning to be shut down and drought workers, acutely aware of the still dire situation of the people who farmed, expressed concerned that rural communities would be left with no support and no obvious organisation to turn to because ‘drought services’ were no longer available (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, 29 July 2009). This highlighted some of the ideological complexities associated with dealing with people who farmed and especially dealing with the men who farmed and the associated agrarian characteristics of stoicism, pride, strength and power. An EC declaration appeared to give people who farmed ‘permission’ to seek help because they believed that they were accessing drought support rather than ‘welfare’ support (Kenny et al. 2008, p. 10). Many women sought drought support information by contacting Council because they wanted to know exactly what to do when they finally were given permission from their husbands to access available assistance (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009e, p. 7). These women believed that their husbands were reaching a critical physical and emotional breakdown point and they wanted to be able to put processes in place before their husbands had time to change their minds. Having ‘drought services’ as a result of EC declarations meant that many barriers were overcome for people who farmed to be able to say they needed help. The concern of drought workers now that these drought services would no longer be available, was that those who really needed help would stop asking for it (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, 21 January 2009; 2009c, pp. 2-3).
Public and media discussion throughout 2009 continually reiterated that with climate change, drought in Australia was to be considered the new climatic norm and Federal and State government financial support would not continue as it had done throughout the years of the drought (Productivity Commission 2009, p. 267). At the final Information Exchange Meeting held in Mooroopna on 29 July 2009, it was decided to produce a further brochure based on one the Cobram and District Health Services had researched and designed to support drought service providers (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, 29 July 2009). Key concerns of the drought workers relating to the loss of specifically drought related programs such as the mental health and well-being programs that had been available during the past two years, were that rural people would stop accessing the help they needed because the programs they had accessed during the drought were no longer available (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, 29 July 2009). This second pamphlet was therefore created to enable farmers to understand that there were rural services available during times of hardship even when there was no drought. The ‘Rural Community’ brochure (See Appendix G), was initially sent out with a letter from the mayor to all rural households, as per the second mail out, encouraging farmers to transition from searching for drought services to recognising the availability of mainstream support services (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009c, pp. 1-2) which could be accessed by all. When the original drought brochure was initially designed, drought workers managed for drought as though it was a crisis. The pamphlet designed in the latter half of 2009 provided farmers with information about ongoing access to a range of services available in the region. As a Rural Community brochure it provided information to support people in need, to determine for themselves what services they required and listed the contact details so they could make the call directly to the service (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009c, pp. 1-2). Rather than encouraging short term funded projects, it strongly promoted the use of mainstream, regular services to support rural communities to become more self-reliant when accessing current information about financial, health and industry based services (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009c, p. 1).

It can be seen in hindsight that the Rural Community brochure was more in keeping with the neoliberal aspirations of the National Drought Policy that required farmers to manage for drought independent of government support. Its
production also highlighted a change in drought workers’ assumptions where they no longer assumed drought to be a crisis but recognised it as a new ‘norm’ in climatic conditions for the region. While in crisis mode, the practical application of providing a step-by-step process proved useful in informing stressed farmers about how to access support efficiently and for enabling others to disseminate information about local drought services. The Rural Community brochure, however, provided information geared towards re-thinking the delivery of services to rural people and it was designed with the intent of getting people who farmed to better understand the services already available in the region that could help them in times of crisis, rather than continuing to be dependent on an ad hoc delivery of services that had been set up in 2007 and 2008. The Rural Community brochure continues to prove useful as most of the information remains current to this day. This suggests that dealing with drought events in the future could be better managed if local government developed a longer term approach to planning for and implementing strategies that supported people who farmed to move towards the neoliberal principles of Australia’s National Drought Policy.

This analysis shows that the Greater Shepparton City Council played an important role in the development of the original drought brochure and then facilitating its transformation into the Rural Community brochure as a positive way of encouraging people to be more self-reliant while ensuring they had access to quality information. The next part of this chapter describes and analyses the final aspect to be presented of local government involvement: the SWSF program.

### 6.1.3 Strong Women Strong Families

The Strong Women Strong Families program began around May 2007 in the Moira Shire (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, p. 2) and made a powerful impact on future planning within the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought program. Initially designed by a group of health and drought service providers working in the Moira Shire, ‘Strong Women Strong Families’ was given its title in recognition of the crucial role women played in caring for their families and keeping them together during times of crisis while at the same providing an
opportunity for time-out for themselves (Congues 2009). Culturally, the name of the program ‘Strong Women Strong Families’ resonated well with women’s experiences and was seen as a positive reinforcement and recognition of the difficult role they had watching the impact of drought erode the mental and emotional well-being of their husbands, children, extended family and communities.

In October 2007, the Great Shepparton City Council provided funding to undertake the SWSF program locally (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, p. 2). A vital component to the running of the SWSF Program in Greater Shepparton was to make sure there was a reasonable lead-in time so that women from within the different parts of the region could be part of the preliminary consultation and planning process (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, p. 2). Prior to implementing the program, two months were spent meeting with five different groups of rural women from around the region, asking them to design an event for women who farmed in their district. While one segment of the proposed event was to provide information relating to mental health and well-being, every group wanted the second element of their event to include some kind of personal comfort program, such as a foot or hand massage, facials or nail manicures14. The women also designed their food choices as to what they thought would be special for the women of their community and nominated where they would prefer to hold the event. This gave the women a sense of ownership because they designed an event they believed would benefit the women of their community. The success of the SWSF program was measured by the number of women in attendance and what they learned about available drought support programs and mental health and well-being services (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, pp. 7-8). Many of the comments made on the subsequent evaluation sheets were that more of these programs were needed as well as something similar be delivered for farming men (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, p. 8). Other feedback and suggestions from the women included:

“More days of laughter and pampering please, we need to know people care,” (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, Appendix).

14 These personal events became known more commonly as ‘pampering’ or ‘pamper’ events.
“Empowering women to look after themselves so they can care for family and community – women are very strong creatures with a lot to give,” (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, Appendix).

“Great event to catch up, and listen to people talk on their profession and also to enjoy pampering,” (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, Appendix).

“If farming conditions remain as they are at present – there will be even more need for people to get together and share hardships,” (Greater Shepparton City Council 2008b, Appendix).

These comments affirm the need for people enduring hardship to connect socially. There was also a sub-text that suggested connecting with other women was uncommon and that some women were going without and experiencing isolation. With nearly two-thirds of attendees indicating they had learned more about available mental health and well-being services by attending these events, it also suggested that funding social events just to boost community morale was not enough for people managing for drought.

When further funding was granted by the Victorian State government to fund the project ‘Coping in a changing environment’, it was agreed that a second SWSF program was possible. A decision was made to change the focus of the program to one where information would be provided through a workshop process and the topic would be understanding grief (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 1). The primary reason for this was that governments were not funding projects that simply wanted to repeat events or projects, instead it was clear that they preferred this new tranche of funding to jump-start potentially economically viable projects (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 9). It was therefore important that a new and innovative approach to the project be established. To this end a decision was made to engage a professional grief and loss facilitator who presented workshops for people who were experiencing the loss and grief of someone who had died. Grief and loss were emotions that were perceived to be associated with people not only dealing with death (such as of their animals) but with people dealing with change as a result of the drought crisis (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 1). The facilitator agreed to also take a lead role meeting with local community women to plan such a program drawing on their perceptions as to what was needed for their communities (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 1). Unfortunately, it turned out that this
facilitator proved to be extremely limited in her availability and as a result the planning process with women from the community was not successful. This meant that the capacity for the women in the rural community to engage and own the process was minimal (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 2). The final program was designed as a four-pronged approach with a small portion of the funding also going to Tatura Community House to present the full program the grief and loss facilitator wanted to facilitate as a formal program. The other four events were divided into two different formats. Two of these events were designed to be small workshop programs in a World Café\textsuperscript{15} format and facilitated by the grief and loss facilitator (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 3). The other two events were designed in a similar format to the 2008 SWSF events where women would be introduced to a ‘How to care, what to say’ approach presented by the grief and loss facilitator and then enjoy some personal comfort activity (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 2). The final event was planned to be a grand finale culmination of the overall drought program where the women would participate in a high tea while being entertained informatively by a professional comedienne, Robyn Moore (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 4; Moore 2015). An analysis of the completed evaluation forms for this second SWSF program indicated that the three most valued aspects of the program were: the opportunity to socialise, laughing/having fun/being pampered and sharing food (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 7). Most women who completed the evaluation forms also indicated that they had learned more information about personal health strategies, followed by the availability of community services and health, mental health and well-being services (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 7).

However a detailed analysis of this second SWSF program, shows that any ground swell of enthusiasm and excitement did not occur and instead it could be argued that the program as designed failed to achieve its goals. Two of the events scheduled for Toolamba, ‘How to Care What to Say’ social night, and Undera, ‘World Café’ style small group luncheon ended up cancelled due to lack of interest

\textsuperscript{15} ‘World Café’ was an increasingly popular format which gave larger groups of people an opportunity to gather in groups of four per tables and engage in series of three or more 20 minute conversations relating to a particular topic or question (The World Cafe 2015). At the end of each round everyone moves to another table but not with the same people. There were facilitators at each table who act as a host and then afterwards, the group comes together to discuss the process and people’s overall responses to the different questions.
with only two women wanting to attend each program (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 3). These women were then taken out for lunch both as a way of giving them a ‘treat’ as well as providing them with an opportunity to access information about available health and well-being services (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, pp. 3-4). An interesting aside that in organising these lunches was that upon hearing that the original event was cancelled and they were being asked to lunch instead, all four women said that it this ‘not necessary’ and that they did not want to ‘put us out’. Nevertheless the opportunity to lunch in this smaller setting actually proved beneficial for each of the women and the two drought workers.

The events that were held were valued by the participants. Sixty-five (65) per cent of the women who attended identified as being part of a farming family or an agricultural business or agency. However, as there was not a similar level of achievement as previously experienced in 2008, a Centrelink social worker and the Council’s Drought Recovery Officer completed a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) Analysis (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, pp. 5-6 & 8) to ascertain what lessons could be learned from the experience. Irrespective of the success or failure of the program, significant weaknesses and threats were identified that offer some findings for the purposes of this study. It was concluded that the topic of grief and loss reflected too closely to the women’s lived experiences and, as a result, this information was too confronting and focused too much on the participants’ emotions (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 5). It was agreed that trying to deal with grief and loss as the season continued to deteriorate was simply too threatening because the women remained in survival mode (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 5). This suggests that the women of the Goulburn Valley remained emotionally vulnerable and the seemingly unending and ever-continuing state of the drought, the way people were adapting to it as the new norm and the inability for people to continue to be hopeful that the drought would end, all impacted on their capacity to focus too deeply on these issues. As the drought programs wound up and because of the National Drought Policy reviews that had been released in 2009, people became even more fearful that the EC declarations would be discontinued and that this meant that they would be left to manage the oncoming dry climate on their own.
The strengths and opportunities identified in the program included the vital opportunity for women to gather, to socialise with other women, meet old friends, to get to know new people and to have a laugh (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 5). Women often attended the event with a friend, their mum or a sister and in the process gained the opportunity to hear other women’s stories and experiences that enabled them to feel connected and not so alone (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 5). Gathering women together in each of the formats provided great opportunities for the women to access information that they could take with them back to their families and communities and to hear other women’s ideas about what was needed for themselves and their own communities (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 5).

The assumption underpinning the SWSF program was that men who farmed were more prone to attempt or commit suicide than women, but that women were easier to access than men because of their involvement in the wider community. Enabling this information to the women would ensure that the men who farmed would also receive it because women would naturally share that knowledge. It was also understood that such knowledge could be withheld until a time as the man was ready to ‘hear’ it. Another powerful assumption underpinning the program was that while women were overseeing the well-being of everyone else in their home they may not be having their own needs met. The reports on the SWSF programs and especially the second program present a potent argument that demonstrates the vulnerability women who farmed faced and the isolation, loneliness and heartache from farming during the drought. It also recognised that during the crisis, women had forgotten how, or had been unable to, continue socialising with their family and friends. The joy of laughing and having fun had simply been lost along the way. When the women arrived at the event held in Tatura during the first SWSF program which involved Denise Drysdale, a well-known comedienne and entertainer, the CEO of Women’s Health Goulburn North East who was presenting the informative part of the event, had everyone in stitches, laughing and learning ideas about how to connect and reconnect with friends through establishing ‘bongo banging groups’ (Women’s Health Goulburn North East 2008). Denise Drysdale’s comedy routine then followed and left everyone feeling reinvigorated and renewed with energy (Celebrity Speakers 2015). Therefore when running SWSF a second time, it
became essential that an event that allowed for as many women as possible to attend was presented. This event had as its main presenter Robyn Moore who was the voice of Australian children’s cartoon character Blinky Bill, the mischievous koala. When Blinky Bill began talking to the women on that day the laughter started and continued throughout the afternoon (Moore 2015). As a result, women left the event feeling revitalized and inspired. In a hand-written letter sent to Council following the afternoon tea with Robyn Moore, one woman claimed that attending the event had “changed her life” and that “the drought’s price would have been a lot higher without people like you” (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009a, p. 10).

Communities in the Goulburn Valley required programs that not only provided a fun time, but also included opportunities to learn more about maintaining life balance and personal wellbeing in order to be better positioned to manage drought proactively. Engaging with rural women may have promoted the benefits of mental health and well-being, but it also provided them with a wonderful opportunity to connect socially and boost community morale.

An important feature of the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought program was that women were both the principal participants and the organisers. Women were also the drought support workers, social workers and counsellors. Women predominantly rang Council for drought information, attended the Council’s drought information meetings, wrote grants for their local community groups and brought their children to drought social functions. Women were also significant players in the professional roles such as counsellors, the rural financial counsellors and the social workers. In contrast, men dominated technical sectors such as the water companies, the Victorian DPI and the financial institutions such as Rural Finance and the banking sector.

These findings have provided a unique opportunity to consider what the Council actually achieved and how this could inform strategies for a future predicted to include more frequent and more intense drought events. The following section proposes the vital role local governments could play in rural Australia, and how, when the opportunity presented itself, local government engaged with Federal

6.2 Local governments play a vital role in rural Australia

On reflection, it can be seen that the nature of drought service delivery as a result of the funding for the services offered by local government were delivered in an unprepared, unplanned for manner. Regions had to be declared as experiencing Exceptional Circumstances, before any of the Federal government programs could be accessed by the people who farmed. Then, as the conditions deteriorated, the state government would contribute with a drought budget that delivered programs primarily within a six month contract because the expectations were that rain would come very soon. The 2008-2009 Federal drought policy reviews firmly established in national policy discourse that drought was to be considered a continual feature of Australia’s climatic conditions and that Australians who farmed the world’s driest continent should plan for more drought events in the future. This movement into a way of understanding drought was brought on by the timely intervention of the National Drought Policy Reviews that analysed drought from the scientific, social and economic ways of thinking. It challenged the interventions of EC drought support programs that were already in place and it attempted to re-establish the neoliberal push to have farmers manage for drought independently of government support.

This chapter, together with the women’s stories discussed in the previous chapter, suggests that there is clearly a vital role to be played by local government in supporting farming families during drought. Consideration of the Greater Shepparton City Council programs discussed here is that the value of these programs as developed and delivered over a three year period during the Millennium Drought has not generated new measures for preparing for and addressing the impact of future droughts. The significance of the Greater Shepparton City Council reports demonstrate that the focus in the first six months while productive meant very little future planning took place. When the contract for the drought worker was extended out to a further 18 months, more time was
taken in planning which was undertaken with members of the community to implement those programs they believed were of value to them. This action began a process of building social capital within the community. The principle underlining drought policy required people who farmed to be independent of government support and this meant that the extra time to plan enabled a more educative role for local government beyond being simply a service provider.


The opportunity to engage directly with Federal representatives developing drought policy came in July 2008 when drought workers became aware that the Panel would be in Shepparton on Monday 4 August 2008 (Greater Shepparton City Council 2009d, July 2008). Through the dissemination of the Social Expert Panel Issues Paper via the Council’s email database and by encouraging all those attending the July 2008 Information Exchange Meeting, drought workers and community people met with the Panel and presented their ideas and asked their questions directly. This was a singular moment where people within the Goulburn Valley and their local governments had an opportunity to make their concerns known directly and to enable the development of future drought policy. The Report shows that 99 people were recorded as attending the event and 16 organisations and individuals also sent in written submissions from the Goulburn Valley (Kenny et al. 2008, pp. 99 & 104-106). Such opportunities are few and far between except in times of crisis and lend themselves to developing stronger links between Federal and local governments. It needs to be restated that no councillors or executive were present at this meeting.

This points to an opportunity that there could be a role for local government to adopt a stronger affiliation with the aspirations of Australia’s National Drought Policy so that it better identifies its crucial role in building the capacity of its rural communities. Timely intervention during times of crisis with appropriate information enables people to make decisions. Regardless of what programs are being implemented, if there is no planning within the community or time allowed
for promotion of the program, then people can actually miss out on maximising the benefits. It can be seen that those employed as drought workers supporting people who farmed and businesses in farming communities were employed more as a reactive response to a perceived immediate crisis, rather than as a part of a long term plan. As Chapter three describes, droughts are a creeping phenomenon with little to no agreement as to their beginning or their conclusion. Therefore, employing someone to work for a six month contract meant that the services being delivered continually underlined an emergency response, and when the emergency continued as it so often happened during the Millennium Drought, these workers’ contracts were extended but little to no long term productive planning was undertaken.

There are three points that can be drawn from this analysis, as people moving from crisis mode to becoming adjusted to the regularity of drought required three particular actions of Council, and these can be placed against the findings from the women’s interviews as discussed in the previous chapter.

First: that the Council’s programs can action social engagement strategies and through the development of projects such as SWSF determine how rural communities needed support in better understanding how important it is to look after their health and well-being. Council offers an ideal site for the development of this kind of service because it remains well positioned to facilitate and connect rural community members and service providers. Second: that Council becomes a vital conduit of information where drought workers and rural community members can access information about available drought services and gather and monitor appropriate and up to date information. Council is well placed within the three tiers of government to understand policy and political shifts and is close enough to its community to value what is needed. Third: Council produces services that can promote long term sustainable strategies such as the Rural Community brochure that enabled people to adapt to managing drought as a normal part of the Goulburn Valley’s climatic conditions. One can only imagine what drought service provision might have been had there been a long term and co-ordinated strategy in place from the very beginning.
In conclusion, and on reflection of the overall drought program there was an urgency and intensity in which drought service provision was to be delivered to rural people within a very short six month timeframe at the beginning. With the drought worsening further action became essential and subsequently the Victorian State government provided more money to local government to employ drought workers for a further 18 months and in some cases they became full-time roles within their councils. About midway through 2008 when the drought began to feel as if it would never end and by the end of 2009, drought workers and rural communities seemed almost resigned to this drought state being the new ‘norm’. Nevertheless as this chapter has shown, despite drought becoming normalised like this, it did actually provide opportunities for local government to ensure that people remained self-reliant and socially connected through programs designed to encourage this.

This chapter has identified possible roles for local government to prioritise in supporting and building the social capital of its local rural communities to enhance their capacity to manage for future droughts and ultimately the impact of climate change and variability. In the concluding chapter next, the findings of this chapter and the previous one will be discussed to foreground how the knowledge and expertise of women could enhance local government’s service delivery during future droughts.
Chapter Seven. Women and local government: some reflections from the Goulburn Valley

The understanding people had about drought at the beginning of 2007 was based on their memories and their reflection of how drought had played out in history. However, by 2008, a sense of panic pervaded the community as its experiences of the drought years of 2006 and 2007 were unprecedented. Drought could no longer be considered within an historical imagination but rather needed to be perceived now as a form of ‘dryness’ that was to become the new norm for understanding Australian climatic conditions (Kenny et al. 2008, p. 10).

This shift became clearer during the interviews as women recalled those ‘intense moments’ (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 3) that remained with them long after the crisis had lifted. The women reflected how they had dealt with drought and some spoke of the different drought programs they had accessed while others spoke of how they had missed out on support. This raised the issue that timely intervention is crucial to any future planning. This thesis concludes that the Federal government can best support people who farm by empowering local governments to take a more direct approach to the long term management of drought as part of their ‘regular’ and ongoing service delivery.

This study has focused on how women who farmed managed for drought during a specific timeframe; a timeframe chosen because on 16 October 2006 the Federal government announced Exceptional Circumstances (EC) declarations for most farming land in Australia and on 31 March 2010 all EC declarations were lifted, and drought service provision ended. This chapter draws together the evidence gathered and makes some suggestions as to their value in considering future drought events.

There were four crucial elements to this study that contribute to its significance. As discussed in Chapters three and four, these elements framed the scope of this study to a specific time and location and to a particular group of women.
First, its location in the Goulburn Valley, which Chapter three describes as a rich farming region made up of many different farming industries including dairy, stone fruit, apple and pear orchards, cropping, beef and sheep. This enabled a focus on considering the impact of drought across a breadth of the agricultural sector unlike many previous Australian studies that have tended to concern themselves with a particular industry.

Second, this was a region that, despite its long held agrarian values, had complied with the neo-liberal risk management approach of Australia’s National Drought Policy. It therefore believed that it was drought proofed only to discover that between the drought years of 2006-2010, there were no guarantees that irrigators would have access to water and ultimately some irrigators found they had no access at all. In addition, such water as was available was being made a priority for cities. Consequently, people were not only running out of water but the risk management strategies that had been put in place to protect them from drought had failed.

Third, those interviewed for this study were women who came from these various industries, who worked on the land and in some cases were also involved with and participated in the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought program. As the thesis has argued, these women’s knowledge was not valued within either the agrarian or the neo-liberal ideologies. Their voices contribute to the findings in both Chapters five and six.

The fourth and final element was that this study was given access to reports developed at the time of the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought program. This has enabled an analysis of not only how the women managed for drought but also of what was recorded officially by local government at the same time. Rarely has such access to official records been used in correlation with what people who had experienced events could then remember. Chapter four described just how the methods adopted enabled this evidence to be gathered and analysed. This combination of elements proposes insight into strategies to strengthening the social capital of people who farm to better manage for future drought events in keeping with the risk management approach of Australia’s National Drought Policy.
These elements were purposefully chosen because of their capacity to illuminate women’s contribution to farming and managing for drought and local government’s potential to play a vital role in supporting rural communities to better manage in times of crisis. These findings cannot be universalised given that the sample size consisted of 11 women in a specific location and the document analysis was based on the reports from one local government. Nevertheless, these limitations open up opportunities for further research to build on the theoretically informed foundations of this study.

The next section summarises the overall findings from the study acknowledging the invisibility of women despite their detailed knowledge and experience and understanding the contribution that local government can make in preparing for managing future drought events.

As highlighted in Chapter five, it became apparent there was a congruence between what the women recollected and the findings of Chapter six’s document analysis. Three themes have emerged from the analysis developed in Chapters five and six. First, that women who farm have knowledge, experience and expertise to contribute to the agricultural sector even though their ideas and suggestions are rarely sought after or even considered of value to that sector. Second, that local government offers a useful, but under-utilised (and under-represented) capacity to know and represent the needs of rural communities in times of crisis. Third, that through its already established structures in building social capital, local government needs to be included in any future planning and managing of drought.

7.1 Women: their knowledge, experience and expertise

This thesis has put a case that while women continue to be rendered invisible within the agricultural sector, their knowledge, ability and experience actually contributes to the capacity for their farm businesses (and their communities) to survive and manage for drought.
Chapter one argued that the taken-for-granted, unspoken and unquestioned dominance of patriarchy and agrarianism has resulted in the role of women who farmed being overlooked, ignored or at best tolerated as 'other' and therefore still considered of insignificance to the agricultural sector. Through the theoretical lens of Smith's feminist standpoint theory, Chapter two developed how a deeper understanding of women's everyday standpoint within Australia's farming sector could be placed alongside Bourdieu's notion of the field, and therefore be described as both contained within the field of farming but also examined as external to the field. This chapter also introduced Heller's 'double bind of modernity' to enable an appreciation of the ideological positioning of agrarianism and neoliberalism. These ideologies, it was argued, reinforced the position of women in the agricultural sector as 'other', marginalised their role and denied their contribution to the development and use of knowledge.

Chapter two described just how the historical imagination of the agrarian 'farmer' shifted with a more neoliberalist approach to drought, and yet as described in Chapter five, the women interviewed revealed how they needed to live their lives between the two ideologies, without being accepted within either. Chapter two also argued that by maintaining and promoting such agrarian ideology it actually failed to support the neoliberal approach (the individual as stoic entrepreneur) because the concept of 'farmer' itself remains a male construct deeply embedded within an agrarian ideal. This construct needs to conform to an ideological notion of identity that becomes tenuous during times of long crisis, such as drought events. Such a challenge to male identity impacts significantly on women's roles. However while the everyday standpoint of women who farmed is also rooted within an agrarian ideology it was shown in Chapter five that women try to find a balance between this and the neo-liberal, for which they struggle to achieve. The thesis has shown that despite such a struggle, women have found ways in which to be active agents, making decisions and contributing to their families and communities. The evidence outlined in Chapter five established that in farming and dealing with drought, women have strengths and talents in resourcefulness, decision making and networking. This evidence directly related to what they did to support the survival and continuation of their farm businesses throughout the Millennium Drought.
Just as drought exacerbates problems and issues that are already present, it also intensifies women’s involvement in their rural communities. This was apparent in the way they involved themselves with volunteer organisations such as Country Women’s Association (CWA) and Landcare, their continued attendance at Council drought meetings and agricultural industry groups such as the Farmers’ Federation Victoria and United Dairyfarmers Victoria; in keeping their children participating in sporting activities, and in their outreach to others through the development of ‘bongo’ friendship groups and community social events. This went beyond the act of volunteering or building the social capital of their community, and as such networking can also be seen to be building their individual social capital so that they could better manage the hardship they lived with back on the farm. Volunteering in this way also became a legitimate means to take time out from the farm and in the process they also strengthened their own well-being. Significantly, this strategy of dealing with the impact of drought became a powerful means of securing their own, their families and their rural communities’ sense of connectedness and wellbeing.

Chapter five outlined how each of the women contributed their ideas to better manage for future droughts. Most agreed that when considering future drought events and drought policy, governments, and in particular, local governments needed to place more value on social capital and the long term maintenance of resilience within rural communities. While investment in science, technology, new practices and economics is valued within the neoliberal paradigm of the free market and what it means to be entrepreneurial a drought as long and enduring as the Millennium Drought, meant that such investments contracted and the capacity to modernise and implement new practices on farm was reduced. The evidence gathered for this study suggests that any investment in social capital building for rural communities is fundamental in educating people to become more resilient and self-reliant. While it could be argued that social capital can be considered as a component of agrarianism, as discussed in Chapter three and presented by the women in Chapter five, this thesis concludes that it should be seen as a vital component of any preparation and adaptation program so that people who farm remain connected to each other, to service providers and have access to up to date important information as a matter of course. For the women interviewed, their capacity to be resourceful, decisive and socially connected
demonstrated the value of their social capital to enable them not only to survive the Millennium Drought but also to still maintain productive farm businesses. By exploring their everyday standpoint this study has demonstrated just how powerful the building of social capital can be as a strategy to better implementing a risk management approach to future droughts.

7.2 Local government and future drought events

Chapter six’s document analysis of the Greater Shepparton City Council drought program reports provided evidence of a governing body with the capacity to invest in social engagement, to network a flow of information throughout local rural communities and with the scope to produce sustainable strategies that have long term benefits to its local community.

This study concludes that had local government been given an opportunity to take a long term approach to the development and implementation of its drought program from the very early stages of drought in the Goulburn Valley, this may have produced a more viable process that gave structure to a strategy that outlived the actual crisis itself. All the services listed in the Rural Community brochure were actually available prior to 2006 and most are still available today. The difference was that service providers were able to connect individuals and groups to these services, and that local government was given a ‘legitimacy’ to become involved in drought service delivery. This study has concluded that what was needed during the drought were programs to support the service providers to better appreciate the impact drought was having on local people who farmed so that appropriate support could be provided. Instead, the rather ‘ad hoc’ nature of the programs meant that providers often did not fully appreciate the dire circumstances in which people found themselves.

Chapter one described the three-tiers of Australian government which complicated the ‘drought approach’ in times of crisis. The Federal government could only deal with state governments, which meant that it was that State government that dealt with local government. The development of the Federal
The government’s National Drought Policy in 1992 was done so at the Federal level, and this policy established the EC approach, meaning that local government could not become fully involved until such time as EC was declared. The development of any drought policy did not involve local government directly and any implementation of that policy continued to reinforce a top-down approach to implementing support to people who farmed. This approach directly promoted strategies to deal with short term emergencies – an irony given that the whole policy was based on a long term risk management approach which had superseded the previous emergency management policy.

This study has highlighted just how local governments managed for drought, as was evidenced from within the Greater Shepparton City Council’s program, which suggests that there remain many unrealised opportunities. There may even be opportunities for the development of strategies that could free up direct Federal government support during the crisis, which instead could become part of local government’s remit. There is certainly an under realised potential within local government to assist in the development of future national drought policies.

The evidence analysed in the previous chapter offers some argument for a future role for local government in working with its rural community to better prepare and manage for drought events.

Three aspects were highlighted in this chapter. First, local government being in an ideal position to manage the pragmatics of coordinating meetings between drought workers and community people to discuss what was happening in the community during the drought and to get to know who the different drought workers were and the services they offered. Second, to collate and disseminate quality and up to date information to communicate what was happening across the region and the support services available and how they could be accessed. Third, by accessing grant monies to implement and provide for community support programs to the rural community such as the SWSF program, local government was able to bring programs that maintained and strengthened social capital. Together, these can be seen as crucial to ensuring that the Goulburn Valley region remained resilient and survived the crisis.
This thesis concludes that there is a role for all local governments to become strategic players within Australia’s National Drought Policy as they can inform and educate rural communities to prepare for drought events in the future. Local government must be part of the planning for future events, rather than being thought of only when Federal and state governments make some funding available. As the Exceptional Circumstances component of national drought policy now no longer exists (Federal Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry 2013, pp. 1-2) this becomes an even more important point to consider, as local governments are well positioned within their communities to play a coordination role, to manage resources and to provide up to date information to all.

Local government should also be seen as a repository of previous drought ‘knowledge’ and can hold an archive for its region of a history of preparing for and managing drought, such as those accessed for this study. In addition, through the creation of an ongoing community development position within the local government organisation, rural communities could be better prepared for drought events. Such a position could already exist, however, it is possible, that given the Greater Shepparton City Council experience, ‘drought’ would not normally be part of the job description, except in a time of crisis. Such a revised and expanded position could be responsible for the keeping of records and through that process establish an historical perspective which would enable an early intervention, risk management role rather than dealing with drought as an emergency crisis. Enabling access to information and support and having a better understanding of the services that are available and can support the community as well as knowing who to contact within Council to find that information would also be part of the position’s remit.

Finally and importantly, as this thesis has argued throughout, local government needs to better understand and appreciate the vital role that women play in the building of, and maintenance of, social capital during times of crisis. Such knowledge would then be integrated in any future early intervention approach.
7.3 Some concluding thoughts

This study began with an early question: what knowledge do women have that enables them to adapt and manage for drought during 2006-2010? It then asked the women interviewed just how such knowledge and experience could be utilised to prepare and manage for drought events in the future.

The evidence has highlighted how women’s resourcefulness, decision making and social networking were aspects of their management strategy and the study considered just how these maintained and supported the social capital essential to survival and sustainability. Any future drought policy needs to ensure that social capital is both maintained and strengthened and the thesis found that there is a critical role for local government to play supporting rural communities better prepare for and manage for drought. Rather than being a passive player waiting for a Federal declaration and then for a State government hand-out of funding, this study concludes that local government must be part of any future, and it needs to invest now for long term success and community resilience. Such investment could include an ongoing community development position that has a long term responsibility. This way, when the crisis of drought comes again, there will be no need to run ‘sausage sizzles and jumping castle’ events to boost community morale. Instead there will be a more valuable focus on liaising between the rural community and service providers, disseminating quality, up to date information and strengthening strategies that will enable not just a survival, but rather a thriving which enables the community to recover more rapidly.

This thesis also concludes that there is much to be gained if the agricultural sector included the knowledge of women who farm more broadly. This means a better appreciation of the value of women’s knowledge, of their networking capacities and of their keeping their families and communities connected socially and up to date with the information they gather through those networks. This study has shown that until that happens women will simply continue to be seen as the ‘glue’ that holds farming families together while the agricultural sector renders them invisible to the field in decision making and knowledge building. While valuing the building of social capital is not seen as ‘agricultural’ as it is not considered as a component of production, nevertheless it is a strong and powerful aspect which
has enabled the Goulburn Valley to survive through a once-in-a-generation crisis and which should be recognised by governments as crucial in supporting any future risk management approach to drought.

Women and local government in the Goulburn Valley each played significant roles in supporting rural communities to better manage for drought; however, as this thesis has argued, neither are considered as major players within the field of farming. This study has highlighted how, by committing funding to local government to better enable social capital building with a long term outlook in preparing for drought can actually be an important first step to supporting people who farm to better manage for drought as they would any other risk to their business. This remains a vital task as, since Australia’s National Drought Policy was introduced in 1992, drought events have consistently occurred in some parts of Australia and such events tend to thwart any attempts for time to prepare for the next drought event. The stories of how these women who were interviewed managed for drought focuses on the untouched, unacknowledged capacity that women have to navigate their way through a world that refuses to value their knowledge, experience and expertise. They provide insightful ideas about how drought can be managed better in the future and these ideas need to be adopted, acknowledged and given value for their contribution.
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Appendix A: Permission to use Council reports

From: Bev Bell
To: Janet Coogee
Cc: Amanda Tingay, Adrian Peru
Subject: Drought Records for Use in Studies
Date: Wednesday, 13 March 2013 11:53:27 AM
Attachments: Image001.png
Case study 1 - A Healthy Look at Arley 2009 DOC
Drought Recovery Report 1 July 2009 DOC
Riding the Waves of Drought to Climate Change
Notes DOC Note on farming conditions September 2007 DOC
Minor Community Grants Evaluation Summary
2009 XLS Case Study 2 - Strong Women Strong Families 2009 DOC Drought Program Brief August 2009 DOC
Progress Report - Healthy Transition in a Changing Climate
Summary for assessment Minor Community Grants November 2009 XLS Community Grant (Drought) Assessment Form December 2009 DOC Drought Recovery Report 1 July 2007 DOC

Final Report Healthy Transition in a Changing Climate 2009 DOC

Good morning Janet!

Please find attached items identified as relevant to your request for documentation regarding farming women, drought and climate change, created whilst employed by Greater Shepparton City Council as a Drought Recovery Officer.

The material supplied by Greater Shepparton City Council is not to be duplicated. Any information used from the documents provided in course assignments/assessments, must be acknowledged/referenced as being provided by (or the property of) Greater Shepparton City Council.

I wish you well with your studies, & hope the above is of assistance.

Thank you!

Bev Bell

Project Officer - Information Management
Greater Shepparton City Council
Phone: (03) 5832 5892
Fax: (03) 5831 1987
Website: www.greatershepparton.com.au
Appendix B: Ethics application

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Created by: u5131608
Record number: 5489
Protocol type: Expedited Ethical Review (E1)
Protocol number: 2012/616
Date entered: 16/10/2012
Ethics program type: Postgraduate
Requested start date: 01/09/2013
Requested end date: 31/01/2014

Protocol title: Farm women and drought in the Goulburn Valley, Australia: lived experience and policy

Investigators

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<th>Name</th>
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<td>Congues, Janet</td>
<td>Primary investiga-</td>
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<td>Keane, Helen</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
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<td>Social Sciences, ANU</td>
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Investigators Detailed

Name: Congues, Janet  Role: Primary investigator

Expertise:

I have the lived, professional and academic experience and training in rural community development and drought policy to undertake a document analysis and in-depth interviews for this project.

Education: Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Sociology - 2010


An analysis of the National Drought Policy and the minutes of the Greater Shepparton City

Personal: Lived on husband’s 3rd generation dairy farm during drought in the Goulburn Valley - 2004-2008 before exiting due to impact of drought.

Professional: Worked as the Drought Recovery Officer, Greater Shepparton City Council - Jan 2007 - Dec 2009.

Role included: writing evaluation reports of drought program, planning and writing grant applications for drought programs, dissemination of drought information, interviews with farmers, farm women and rural people, facilitation of workshops with rural communities, coordinating inter-organisation drought meetings and other community development programs.

Name: Keane, Helen  
Role: Supervisor

Expertise:  
Culture, Gender, Sexuality
History and Philosophy of Medicine
Sociology
Other Studies in Human Society
Cultural Studies

External Investigators

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<td>CASS Research School of Social Sciences</td>
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Project Questions Detailed

Description of Project

Describe the research project in terms easily understood by a lay reader, using simple and non-technical language.

This is a sociological study of farm women and drought policy. In particular, I want to explore the stories, the ideas and the experience of farm women in the Goulburn Valley to better understand how governments could respond to drought in the future. To date, there have been very few studies undertaken in and about the Goulburn Valley in regards to farming and drought, plus traditionally farm women’s expertise, as farmers and managing for drought, has often been overlooked.

Using the mixed methods of document analysis and in-depth interviews to gather the data, this qualitative study will explore a local government’s response to drought and farm women’s experience of the 2006-2010 drought in the Goulburn Valley, Victoria in relation to Australia’s National Drought Policy.

This study will analyse farm women’s contribution to the viability and sustainability of farming businesses in Australia and the findings could assist policy makers develop drought policy into the future.

Location of Data Collection

Australia Yes

Overseas No

Provide country / area where data collection will be conducted Goulburn Valley, Victoria, Australia

Aims of the Project

List the hypothesis and objectives of your research project.

Hypothesis:

Farm women have knowledge and expertise about how to deal with drought that is yet to be systematically documented and evaluated in relation to the dominant hegemony of the agricultural industry and drought and climate change policies.

Objectives:

There are four aims:

1. To analyse the impact of drought policy and to document farm women’s contribution to managing drought

2. To analyse the extent to which farm women’s roles, experience and knowledge and are reflected in the development of drought policy.
3. To explore women’s experience with farming enterprises and the agricultural industry to analyse to what extent women contribute to the viability and sustainability of the farming business and family unit in Australia.

4. To achieve a documented account of farm women’s contribution to managing drought that will assist with future drought and climate change policy development in Australia.

Methodology

In language appropriate for a lay reader, explain why the methodological approach minimises the risk to participants. (For surveys, include justification of the sample size). This research will use two primary approaches to data collection, that will aid the development of this case study:

1. In-depth interviews

   Developing an exploratory sample, there will be approximately 15-20 unstructured, in-depth interviews with farm women to gather qualitative data on their experiences of the 2006-2010 drought and how the drought and drought policy impacted on them, their farming business, families and communities.

   A convenience sampling method will be used to initiate the in-depth interviews from women who are representative of farm women who farmed in the Goulburn Valley during 2006-2010. Snowball sampling will then be used inviting the interviewees to suggest others of a similar representation who might be interested in participating. The sample size of 15-20 allows for a one to two hour interview.

   To obtain a rich description of lived experience, open-ended in-depth interviews are used in which participants are able to talk about their lives in their own words, focusing on issues important to them. It is possible that some topics may come up that may be distressing to participants. The following strategies will be used to minimise risk to participants:

   a) All interviews will be carried out by a researcher who has experience working with this community and is sensitive to community norms.

   b) Interviews will be limited to a specific length (60-90 minutes), however if appropriate the interviewer will sit with the participant for a longer period for general conversation

   c) Consent will be regarded as a process of ongoing mutual negotiation in which any difficulties will be discussed as part of the research process.

   d) A protocol for responding to distress in participants will be followed: an offer to stop the interview, empathetic support and referral to an appropriate support agency.

   e) Particular care will be taken to ensure that individuals are not identifiable by the information they provide.
2. Document analysis

A document analysis of a range of public and semi-public documents from the Greater Shepparton City Council’s drought program (4 Jan 2007 - 24 Dec 2009) will be used to establish what happened in the region during the drought from a local government perspective and monitor any changes that took place regarding how the community managed drought. The primary documents used will be evaluation reports of the Council's drought program and the program's community projects, minutes from the Council's drought meetings and the drought brochures. Secondary documents may also be accessed such as a Hume region scoping study and minutes from neighbouring council drought meetings.

Provide the survey method, a list of the questions to be asked or an indicative sample of questions. These should give a good sense of the most intrusive/sensitive areas of questioning.

An indicative list of questions for the interviews has been attached:
2012/616_Cougues_Interview Questions

What mechanisms do the researchers intend to implement to monitor the conduct and progress of the research project? For example:

- How often will the researcher be in touch with the supervisor?
- Is data collection going as expected? If not, what will the researcher do?
- Is the recruitment process effective?
- How will the researcher monitor participant’s willingness to continue participation in the research project, particularly when the research is ongoing?

The researcher will be in touch with the supervisor on a regular basis at least once a month by phone and as needed via email. Should any difficulties arise they will be assessed during that process.

In terms of monitoring a participant's willingness to continue participating in the focus groups or interviews, the participant will be informed in writing and verbally before the interview starts of their right to withdraw at any point in the interview. If a participant decides that they wish to withdraw, their decision will be respected and their data removed from the study, unless they state otherwise in writing.

Participants

Provide details in relation to the potential participant pool, including:

- target participant group;
- identification of potential participants;
- initial contact method, and
- recruitment method.
The target participant group for the study is approximately 15-20 farm women located in the Goulburn Valley between the ages of 30 and 75 years old, who have been farming between 2006 and 2010 and who are still farming today.

In terms of the in-depth interviews there will predominantly be three categories of farm women identified, based on how they define their roles within the farming enterprise:

1. Traditional Farm Women – who predominantly manage the home, work the farm and bring up or have brought up their children.

2. Off-farm Work Farm Women – farm women who work off-farm and combine managing the household, rearing the children and working on the farm.

3. Business Farm Women – who work as co-partners in making farm business decisions, work on the farm themselves as a partner or paid worker or who have been entrepreneurs in diversifying their business.

A convenience sampling method will be used to initiate the in-depth interviews from women who are representative of farm women who farmed in the Goulburn Valley during 2006-2010. Snowball sampling will then be used inviting the interviewees to suggest others of a similar representation who might be interested in participating.

Initially women representative farm women will be contacted by phone to ascertain their interest and to gain permission to send them the Information Sheet which will be sent to the contact via email or post.

A second phone call will be made within a week where, if the contact is willing, a verbal agreement will be made to meet and the Research Consent Form can be signed prior to the interview.

From there snowball sampling will be used to gain access to other farm women. Recruitment measures, if needed will also be made by approaching farm women’s groups like Goulburn Valley Women in Horticulture (GV WinHort) and the Country Women’s Association (CWA).

The sample size will be cumulative to ensure that sufficient data is gathered prior to developing the findings.

**Proposed number of participants 15-20**

**Provide details as to why these participants have been chosen?**

This particular group of participants have been targeted because primarily they have been overlooked in sociological studies about drought, farming and questions about sustainable farming into the future. The research is also based upon farm women, so therefore the participants must be female and participating in a farm business.
Cultural and Social Considerations/Sensitivities

What cultural and/or social considerations/sensitivities are relevant to the participants in this research project?

Rural women may have differing perspectives on gendered issues and given my background working with farm people, I have the experience necessary to be sensitive to allowing the participant to express her story from her perspective.

During the drought period of this study, many farm people experienced drought as a crisis and as such they require a certain level of sensitivity to the retelling of their stories. Having worked directly with farming people directly in my role as the Drought Recovery Officer I have the appropriate level of expertise and training to ensure these people are interviewed in a safe environment and the conversation stays focused on the research questions.

Incentives

Will participants be paid or any incentives offered? If so, provide justification and details.

While participants will not be paid due to unavailable funding, the researcher will provide either morning or afternoon tea for the interviewees. This is important because culturally in the Goulburn Valley this is an appropriate way to make sure people feel at ease in order to talk. It also lets the women know that their time and input is appreciated and valued.

Benefits

What are the anticipated benefits of the research?

Anticipated benefits of this research include:

1. Providing farm women, who often remain in the background of farming enterprises, with an opportunity to voice their ideas and experiences about farming, managing for drought and drought policy.

2. Gaining insight into the effectiveness of Australia’s National Drought Policy.

3. Gathering knowledge that will enhance future decisions relating to drought and climate change policies and rural support service provision especially in relation to rural communities and health services.

4. Understanding farm women’s roles within the farming industries, families and rural communities.

To whom will the benefits flow?

1. The farm women will be empowered by the process of speaking their stories and contributing to knowledge.

2. The farming sector because this research incorporates a number of agricultural industries such as dairy, horticulture, sheep, beef and crops, plus includes irrigated and dryland farming and therefore is not specific to one industry.
3. Federal, state and local government policy makers in terms of better understanding what worked and what did not work in terms of the National Drought Policy and the drought support and service provision it generated.

4. The mental health and public health sectors in terms of better understanding the social impact of drought on farmers, farm women, their families and their communities.

Informed Consent

Indicate how informed consent will be obtained from participants. At least one of the following boxes MUST be ticked 'Yes'.

In writing Yes

Return of survey or questionnaire No

Orally No

Other No

If Oral Consent or Other, provide details.

Confidentiality

Describe the procedures that will be adopted to ensure confidentiality during the collection phase and in the publication of results.

All interviews will be recorded digitally and stored in a secure environment so that the names and voices of the participants cannot readily be accessed e.g. downloaded onto a password secure hard-drive that is stored in a locked filing cabinet and erased immediately from the recorder.

The extent to which someone can be identified will be addressed by taking the following precautions:

1. When typing up transcripts and notes, codes will be used such as P1 for Participant number 1, rather than names.

2. No personalised features or characteristics of participants will be used without their express written consent.

3. Townships may be mentioned in terms of nearby urban centres with a population of 1,000 people or more, but not rural districts smaller than this.

Data Storage Procedures

Provide an overview of the data storage procedures for the research. Include security measures and duration of storage.
All digital recordings and paperwork will be stored according to The ANU policy (https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_001235). In particular, all digital recordings of the focus-groups and interviews will be saved electronically both on a locked storage hard-drive and within NVIVO - for which access will be possible only via a secure password.

As the researcher studies externally the digital recording and paperwork will be stored in a lockable filing cabinet in the researcher’s home for the duration of the project.

Following the submission of the thesis, the data will be kept according to The ANU record keeping policies at The ANU (as above).

Feedback

Provide details of how the results of the research will be reported / disseminated, including the appropriate provision of results to participants. If appropriate, provide details of any planned debriefing of participants.

The results of the research will be published as a thesis as part of the research requirements for a PhD Research Candidate of The ANU. As such the primary people reading the thesis are the members of the supervisory panel and the examiners.

The data, analysis, findings and recommendations however, may be used prior to and after submission for academic journal publications, online publications, as a chapter in a book, or as part of a book, albeit an e-book and/or in print. This information may also be used as part of presentations at conferences, forums, media opportunities, policy contributions, teaching and further research.

Participants will be made aware of this during the consent process.

Participants wishing to discuss the findings will be able to contact me directly, plus I can send them a copy of any publications that arise from the research.

There is no necessary debriefing required, however, should a participant request a further conversation based on the process or to provide feedback having read the brochure, the researcher will meet with them to discuss any issues or concerns.

Supporting Documentation

Please ensure electronic copies of any supporting documentation have been uploaded the documents tab of the relevant protocol.

Has this work been approved by another Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)?
No

If yes, please give the name of the approving HREC.

Funding

Is this research supported by external funding? No

Provide the name/s of the external sources of funding. Please include grant number/s if available.
Is the research conducted under the terms of a contract of consultancy agreement between the ANU and the funding source? No

Describe all the contractual rights of the funding source that relate to the ethical consideration of the research.

**Expedited Questions Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third Party Identification</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children or Young People</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent or Unequal Relationship</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of a Group, or Related Issues</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Harm</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Harm (includes Devaluation of Personal Worth)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Harm</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Harm</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Harm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covert Observation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deception</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive Personal Information</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas Research</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection, use or disclosure of personal information WITHOUT the consent of the participant</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questions Detailed**

**Psychological Harm (includes Devaluation of Personal Worth)** Yes

Is prior warning given? Yes

Are the risks easily negated, minimised or managed?: Yes

In 200 words or less, outline the measures which will be taken to address the risks*:

The focus of the interview is not related to mental health and well-being but farm women's experience of drought and drought policy. Yet in talking about the drought, the interviewee may become upset. Strategies taken to address the potential risk of upsetting the
interviewee are:

1. There will be no probing into specific details about what has made the person upset.

2. The interview will be stopped and the interviewee given time to assess if they want to continue or not. They will also be asked if they wish to continue or end the interview and have their information deleted.

3. Holding the meeting in a public place like a coffee shop is in part designed to generate a great conversation, but at the same time ensure that the conversation does not become too personal.

4. The interviewee will be reminded that information sheet has attached a list of service organisations that could provide assistance if they need more support.

*Will potential participants be screened on the basis of complicating mental health factors?* No

*Can the research team guarantee that a reasonable person would not find the stress significant?* Yes

*Will participants be provided with an appropriate contact if they become distressed?* Yes

*Sensitive Personal Information* Yes

*Is prior warning given and is the participant reminded occasionally that they can withdraw?* Yes

**Supporting Documentation**

Please ensure electronic copies of the supporting documentation have been uploaded into the documents tab of your protocol.

These may include (please circle the relevant answer):

- List of indicative questions Yes
- Copy of questionnaire / survey N/A
- Invitation or introductory letter/s N/A
- Publicity material (posters etc.) N/A
- Information sheet Yes
- Consent form Yes
- External approval documentation N/A
- Research visa (if applicable) N/A
- Other (specify below) N/A
- For other, please specify: N/A
SIGNATURES AND UNDERTAKINGS

PROPOSER OF THE RESEARCH

I certify that all the persons listed in this protocol have been fully briefed on appropriate procedures and in particular that they have read and are familiar with the national guidelines issued by the National Health and Medical Research Council (the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007).

I certify that the above is as accurate a description of my research proposal as possible and that the research will be conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007. I also agree to adhere to the conditions of approval stipulated by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and will cooperate with HREC monitoring requirements. I agree to notify the Committee in writing immediately of any significant departures from this protocol and will not continue the research if ethical approval is withdrawn and will comply with any special conditions required by the HREC.

Signed:.............................................. Date:...................

ANU SUPERVISOR

I certify that I shall provide appropriate supervision to the student to ensure that the project is undertaken in accordance with the undertakings above:

Signed:.............................................. Date:...................

HEAD OF ANU DEPARTMENT/GROUP/CENTRE:

The Head of ANU Department/School/Centre is asked to certify that this proposal has his/her support:

I certify that:

:-I am familiar with this project and endorse its undertakings;
:-the resources required to undertake this project are available; and
:-the investigators have the skill and expertise to undertake this project appropriately.

Please print name and title................................................................................................................

Signed:.............................................. Date:...................
Dear Ms Janet Congues,

Protocol: 2012/616
Farming women and drought in the Goulburn Valley, Australia: the lived experience and policy

The Humanities & Social Sciences DERC met on 08/08/2013. Below is an extract from the unconfirmed minutes:

1. If the interview becomes upsetting what skills does the researcher have from her role as ‘drought recovery officer’ to properly assist with emotional / mental health reactions that may arise. To properly understand the issues, doesn’t the researcher need to understand the source of the ‘upset’ for the participant?

2. Information Sheet:
   a) The use that will be made of the data needs to be described on the Information Sheet - i.e. it needs to be made clear that the outputs of the research will include the PhD thesis, academic papers, etc (reports to government?)
   b) Anonymity cannot be promised (as the identities of the participants are known to you), only confidentiality.
   c) The data storage period (at least 5 years from publication) should be specified.
   d) The participation section should be moved towards the beginning of the document, and there should be a statement that declining to participate or withdrawing will not have any negative impact on the potential participant.
   e) You should include a statement that the ethical aspects of the research have been approved by the ANU HREC.
   f) Feedback from the study would be better in the form of a summary of the research rather than whole papers or a thesis.
   g) The Information Sheet should also advise further details about the interviews (location, duration, etc.) to help participants decide whether the requirements are suitable for them.

3. Consent Form:
   • Is it intended that interviews are recorded? If so, this needs to be described on the Information Sheet and a separate consent item is required on the consent form.
   • Will pseudonyms be used to maintain confidentiality? You could offer three options to participants: real name; pseudonym; or complete confidentiality.

   • Data storage needs to be for at least 5 years.

   • The question on feedback refers to the researcher feeding back results to participants - suggest that a summary be offered (see above).
PLEASE NOTE: It is not necessary to fill out a new application form. An email response with any necessary attachments sent to the email address on the signature below will be referred to the Chair.

DEADLINE FOR RESPONSES RE PROTOCOLS: Please note that the committee has a three-month limit for responding re the committee's requirements. The three months applies from the date of this email. If no reply is received in that time, the application will be deemed to have lapsed and researchers will need to re-submit their application in order to seek ethics clearance. A researcher can apply for an extension to this time period, but will have to provide justification for the request.

You should refer to the following URL for information regarding terrorism if your research may generate information that is relevant to a terrorist act or an investigation into an actual or possible terrorist offense.


Kind regards,

Kim

Ms Kim Tiffen
Human Ethics Manager Office of Research Integrity, Research Services,
Ground Floor, Chancery 10B Ellery Crescent,
The Australian National University ACTON ACT 0200
T: +61 6125 3427
F: +61 2 6125 4807
Kim.Tiffen@anu.edu.au or human.ethics.officer@anu.edu.au
Response to Questions from the Humanities & Social Sciences DERC
Ms Janet Congues
Protocol: 2012/616
Farming women and drought in the Goulburn Valley, Australia: the lived experience and policy

The Humanities & Social Sciences DERC met on 08/08/2013.

Below is an extract from the unconfirmed minutes:

1. Question

If the interview becomes upsetting what skills does the researcher have from her role as ‘drought recovery officer’ to properly assist with emotional / mental health reactions that may arise. To properly understand the issues, doesn’t the researcher need to understand the source of the ‘upset’ for the participant?

Response
The skills I have at hand to deal with a participant who becomes upset during the interviews include:

1. Workplace training such as Vic Health’s Promoting Mental Health and Well-being Short Course (2008), Beyond Blue’s education program regarding depression in the workplace (2007) and skill development covered in the Greater Shepparton City Council’s Information Exchange Meetings that included ‘warm hand overs’, cold-calling, how to talk with people who were highly stressed and understanding available support services in the region (2007-2009).

2. Through my experience of dealing with highly stressed farmers and drought workers during 2007-2009, I always used a tool to support what I was saying, such as the drought information brochure. Hence, even though the participant will be given support service information with their information sheet, I will also have the support service information on hand during the interview, in case the participant becomes upset and we need to develop a strategy to make sure she knows there are options to access professional support.

3. Conversational skills: such as early recognition of a conversation becoming too personal and redirecting the conversation back to some more basic details such as the number of children, favourite pets, the number of animals on the farm or how many community groups are they involved with. This moves the participant from a more emotional response into a numerical, logic response, which can sometime help the person gather themselves and get back to the point.

4. The skill to understand how to work up-stream and design the field work in a way that ensures the participant is in a comfortable space to participate in a conversation, but is also in a public space that is not conducive to baring all.

   a. Hence there will be no direct questions about mental-health and well-being issues, nor will the participant be asked to expand on any comments they may make about mental health and well-being issues.

   b. Using the coffee shop is also part of the strategy to ensure that the participant is comfortable and able to have a conversation about the drought rather than holding an interview in a private space that could be conducive to the participant expressing more personal details.
5. The ability to know when to stop the interview – such as if the person cannot stop crying or is clearly becoming distressed. No interview is that important.

I can also provide professional referees who can verify that I have these skills and that the participants will be provided with a safe space to participate in the interviews.

2. **Information Sheet:**

   (a) The use that will be made of the data needs to be described on the Information Sheet - i.e. it needs to be made clear that the outputs of the research will include the PhD thesis, academic papers, etc. (reports to government?)

   (b) Anonymity cannot be promised (as the identities of the participants are known to you), only confidentiality.

   (c) The data storage period (at least 5 years from publication) should be specified.

   (d) The participation section should be moved towards the beginning of the document, and there should be a statement that declining to participate or withdrawing will not have any negative impact on the potential participant.

   (e) You should include a statement that the ethical aspects of the research have been approved by the ANU HREC.

   (f) Feedback from the study would be better in the form of a summary of the research rather than whole papers or a thesis.

   (g) The Information Sheet should also advise further details about the interviews (location, duration, etc.) to help participants decide whether the requirements are suitable for them.

**Response**

Please see attached document: 2012_616_Congues Information Sheet and Consent

3. **Consent Form:**

   (a) Is it intended that interviews are recorded? If so, this needs to be described on the Information Sheet and a separate consent item is required on the consent form.

   (b) Will pseudonyms be used to maintain confidentiality? You could offer three options to participants: real name; pseudonym; or complete confidentiality.

4. Data storage needs to be for at least 5 years.

5. The question on feedback refers to the researcher feeding back results to participants - suggest that a summary be offered (see above).

**Response**

Please see attached document: 2012_616_Congues Information Sheet and Consent

PLEASE NOTE: It is not necessary to fill out a new application form. An email response with any necessary attachments sent to the email address on the signature below will be referred to the Chair.
Dear Ms Janet Congues,

Protocol: 2012/616
Farming women and drought in the Goulburn Valley, Australia: the lived experience and policy

I am pleased to advise you that your Human Ethics application received approval by the Chair of the Humanities & Social Sciences DERC on 15 August 2013.

For your information:

1. Under the NHMRC/AVCC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research we are required to follow up research that we have approved.

Once a year (or sooner for short projects) we shall request a brief report on any ethical issues which may have arisen during your research or whether it proceeded according to the plan outlined in the above protocol.

2. Please notify the committee of any changes to your protocol in the course of your research, and when you complete or cease working on the project.

3. Please notify the Committee immediately if any unforeseen events occur that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the research work.

4. Please advise the HREC if you receive any complaints about the research work.

5. The validity of the current approval is five years' maximum from the date shown approved. For longer projects you are required to seek renewed approval from the Committee.

All the best with your research,

Kim
Ms Kim Tiffen
Human Ethics Manager
Office of Research Integrity, Research Services,
Ground Floor, Chancery 10B
Ellery Crescent,
The Australian National University ACTON ACT 0200
T: +61 6125 3427
F: +61 2 6125 4807
Kim.Tiffen@anu.edu.au or human.ethics.officer@anu.edu.au

Appendix C: Interview questions

In-depth interviews – unstructured

Setting the scene
1. I wonder if we could begin by telling me a little bit about you and your farm business. (e.g. type of farming, your role, memories, typical day, family, community)

The drought
1. Can you talk about your understanding of drought and its impact on your life? What was drought like for you? (farm, family, community, decisions) How did the drought affect you?

2. What kind of changes did you make on the farm and in your family because of drought? Could you talk about some of the major farming decisions made during the drought? What was your role in making those decisions?

3. Could you describe any services you accessed during the drought? Were they useful or not?

4. Could you describe what it was like on the farm after the drought broke? Today?

Future viability
1. What do you think are the plus sides of farming as a way of life? What are the negatives?

2. Tell me about your aspirations for the future? Do you always see yourself connected to farming in some way? Do you think your children will want to continue farming?

3. What is your opinion of climate change predictions that say future droughts will be more severe and more extreme? What kind of future do you see for you and your family on the farm?

4. Given your experience of managing the risk of drought, imagine that you are the sole decision maker about the farm? What are your ideas about farming in the future knowing the risk of drought is inevitable?

5. Do you agree with the drought policy which states that farmers must manage for drought as they do for any other risk? What are the pros and cons of this kind of policy?

6. If you were to design a policy for managing drought into the future, what would you include in it? What would your policy look like?

7. Is there anything you would like to add about your experience of farming and the drought? Have I missed any important aspects that you would like to comment on?
Appendix D: Information sheet

FARMING WOMEN AND DROUGHT IN THE GOULBURN VALLEY, AUSTRALIA:
LIVED EXPERIENCE AND POLICY

INFORMATION SHEET

INTRODUCTION

My name is Janet Congues and I am a research student at the Australian National University, Canberra studying for my doctorate (PhD) in Sociology. Currently I live in Nathalia and for three years, starting in 2007, I worked as a drought worker for the Greater Shepparton City Council. I also lived on a dairy farm in the Moira Shire between 2004 and 2008.

This research has been approved by The Australian National University's Human Research Ethics Committee.

PARTICIPATION

Any involvement with this research project is voluntary. A requirement of your participation is that you have read and understood the information sheet and that you sign the consent form. You retain the right to decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me by phone, email or in person with no negative impact. Furthermore, if you revoke consent to be included with the study I promise to destroy all relevant recordings and/or records collected.

DETAILS ABOUT THE INTERVIEW

You are invited as my guest to participate in a recorded interview at a local coffee shop of your choice, where we can enjoy a nice cuppa and something to eat for morning or afternoon tea while we talk. The interview is expected to take between 60 and 90 minutes, depending on how much you wish to say.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

This is a study of farm women and drought policy.

In particular, I want to hear the stories, the ideas and the experience of farm women in the Goulburn Valley to better understand how governments could respond to drought in the future. To date, there have been very few studies undertaken in and about the Goulburn Valley in regards to farming and drought, plus traditionally farm women's expertise, as farmers and managing for drought, has often been overlooked.

The documentation of this information will be used primarily to produce a PhD thesis plus academic papers, maybe a book or chapters in a book, conference presentations, and/or government reports. Please indicate on the consent form if you would like to receive a summary of the findings upon the completion of the PhD Thesis.

WHAT I AM ASKING FOR

The themes covered in the interviews will be:

1. Experiences of farming during the drought period of 2006-2010
2. Experiences of drought and farming
3. How drought policy impacted on the farm surviving the drought
4. Experiences of accessing drought support services
5. Decisions made for the business to survive that drought period
6. Ideas about farming and managing for drought in the future

I undertake to maintain the confidentiality of the interviews as far as the law allows. In any presentations, reports or publications I will refer to interviewees by a pseudonym and I will change any details which could lead to identification. The names and details of interviewees will only be known by me. I will secure all materials in locked cabinets in my home office and on the university campus, when there, and work with the transcripts on a password protected computer. For at least five years from publication in accordance with The Australian National University's policy, the data will be stored securely in either a locked cabinet and/or password protected hard drive.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES
Farm women have a knowledge and expertise about how to deal with drought that is yet to be systematically documented and evaluated in relation to the agricultural industry and drought and climate change policies. This study will analyse farm women's contribution to the viability and sustainability of farming businesses in Australia and the findings could assist policy makers develop drought policy into the future.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION
The interview will involve talking about your experience living on a farm, the decisions you made dealing with drought and about your ideas about managing farming into the future, given that drought is predicted to occur more often and with more intensity. It is possible that some of the topics will be difficult for you to discuss. It is important to stress that you can refuse to answer any question at any time; you can ask for me to move on to another topic; you can ask for some time out to gather your thoughts; to resume the interview on another day; or to withdraw from the project completely. I will comply with your wishes. You will find attached a referral list for advice or support if required.

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor at any time if you have any concerns or questions about the project or your involvement.

Janet Congues
School of Sociology
Australian National University
ACTON ACT 0200
M: 0419 158 353 E: janet.congues@anu.edu.au

Dr Helen Keane
School of Sociology
Australian National University
ACTON ACT 0200
P: 02 6125 2734 E: helen.keane@anu.edu.au
If you have any serious concerns about the way the research is being conducted please contact the Australian National University Human Research Ethics Committee at the address below:

Human Ethics Manager
Human Research Ethics Committee
Australian National University
ACTON ACT 0200 T: 02 6125 3427 E: Human.EthicsOfficer@anu.edu.au
Appendix E: Consent form

Farming women and drought in the Goulburn Valley, Australia: lived experience and policy
Research consent form

☐ I have read and understood the Information Sheet describing the project and I agree to participate in the project as an interviewee, knowing that I have the right to withdraw at any stage.

☐ I understand that at any stage prior to publication I may withdraw from the project, as well as withdraw any information I have provided.

☐ I consent to the interview being recorded digitally and the recording being stored for at least five years, in accordance with The Australian National University’s policy about the storage of research.

☐ I consent to the publication of the results of the project on the understanding that I am not individually identified in any report of the project, and that confidentiality is preserved.

☐ I note that this project has been the subject of an Ethics Application in accordance with the protocols of The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia and the Human Research Ethics Committee.

☐ For this research I choose to be identified by: (Please circle and write in name of choice)

1. My real name

___________________________________

2. A Pseudonym

___________________________________, or remain

3. Completely confidential

☐ Following the publication of this research as a PhD Thesis, I would like to receive feedback in the form of a summary. (Please circle)

1. Yes 2. No

Name:

___________________________________

Signature:

___________________________________

Date:

___________________________________

Email:

___________________________________
Appendix F: Referral list

REFERRAL LIST

Beyond Blue National Depression Info Line
http://www.beyondblue.org.au/
Ph. 1300 22 4636

Lifeline
Ph. 131 114
24 hr counselling service

Parentline
Ph. 1300 30 1300

Relationships Australia
Ph. 1300 36 4277
Appendix G: Rural Community Brochure

![Rural Community Brochure](image)

- **Health Services**
  - Cancer Council: 03 5831 4099
  - Family Care: 03 5833 7000
  - Goulburn Valley Community Health Service: 03 5833 2200
  - Goulburn Health: 03 5832 2200
  - Men's Referral Service: 1800 065 673
  - Nangalving Elders: 05 5831 5750
  - Relationships Australia: 1800 817 569 or 5830 7844

- **Financial Support**
  - Centrelink: 132 316
  - GEMI Agora: 1300 834 775
  - Department of Human Services: 1800 658 021

- **On Farm Assistance**
  - Department of Primary Industry: 136 186
  - Goulburn-Murray Water: 1800 013 357
  - Greater Shepparton City Council: 03 5832 9700
  - Rural Skills Connect: 0418 225 271

- **Tough Times**
  - Salvation Army - Pathways: 03 5833 1099
  - St Vincent de Paul Society: 1300 303 320 or 5821 5570
  - Food Share: 03 5821 5770

**Organisation** | **Phone Number**
---|---
Cancer Care | 03 5831 4099
Family Care | 03 5833 7000
Goulburn Valley Community Health Service | 03 5833 2200
Goulburn Health | 03 5832 2200
Men's Referral Service | 1800 065 673
Nangalving Elders | 05 5831 5750
Relationships Australia | 1800 817 569 or 5830 7844
Centrelink | 132 316
GEMI Agora | 1300 834 775
Department of Human Services | 1800 658 021
Department of Primary Industry | 136 186
Goulburn-Murray Water | 1800 013 357
Greater Shepparton City Council | 03 5832 9700
Rural Skills Connect | 0418 225 271
Salvation Army - Pathways | 03 5833 1099
St Vincent de Paul Society | 1300 303 320 or 5821 5570
Food Share | 03 5821 5770

**Emergency Services**
- Victoria Police
- Emergency Services: 000

**Goulburn Valley Area Mental Health Service**
- 1300 367 005

**Mental Health Services**
- 03 5831 5999