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Positive approach best way to tackle adversity

By **COLIN BETTLES**

AGRICULTURAL region MLC Brian Ellis wants to retain a positive outlook for the season ahead in the wake of recent reports about a looming "rural crisis".

Mr Ellis knows what he's talking about.

He is a third generation farmer from Bindi Bindi and ran his family operation before entering State Parliament in 2007 following the resignation of fellow Liberal Margaret Rowe.

Mr Ellis said he sympathised greatly with the farmers who attended the Kulin meeting on March 19, in the face of high input costs and low commodity prices and the fact many farmers were having difficulty obtaining finance.

But Mr Ellis said it also was important to remember the highs and lows of farming were an acceptable part of the rural landscape and need to be well managed.

He also said the testing situation could not be blamed on the loss of single desk marketing for bulk wheat exports.

"Budgets are extremely tough this year for a lot of farmers, there's no doubt about that," he said.

"I sympathise with the farmers who are under pressure this year and are facing some difficult decisions over the next few weeks.

"A lot of them were at the Kulin meeting and while I couldn't attend the event I've certainly received feedback about how serious the situation is.

"I'm very sympathetic but we must also remember to stay positive and accept this is all part of the farming cycle and has nothing to do with single desk.

"We've heard these kinds of stories before and I'm hoping we are going to start getting some positive reports very soon."

Mr Ellis said the season was starting to take a positive shape, with reports of about 100mm of rain falling on some farms around Moora in recent weeks.

"We hope to improve on a good start," he said.

"No summer rain has been good for a lot of farmers because they haven't had to spend thousands of dollars on chemicals to spray their summer weeds."

Mr Ellis said he didn't blame media for reporting on the crisis meeting.

But he said public meetings were often not the best method of expressing the situation.

He acknowledged they did provide other benefits including bringing people together to vent their spleens on common issues.

"I'm not blaming the media but sometimes it does a disservice to farming when these types of meetings are held," he said. "We don't want to deter young farmers.

"We need to stay positive about farming and encourage the younger farmers because it is a great career.

"I accept people are in tough times and some have had their equity whittled away over a few tough years, but it will turn around.

"In the good years you put some dollars away for the bad times and hopefully it all averages out.

"I remember my father having a few drought years too and we survived.

"We just don't want to denigrate the industry too much when things are tough; remember it's important to stay positive."

Mr Ellis said he had taken feedback that the budget period was strenuous for many farmers, even in traditionally good areas.

"Even in the safer areas budgets have been knocked back, some up to three times," he said.

"They haven't been totally rejected and will probably eventually get passed but that's unusual for the safer areas.

"If that's the case, it's going to be an even tougher year in the marginal areas.

"Everybody will be looking very closely at cutting costs in other ways, making savings and maybe even turning to stock.

"But, we have seen it before; farmers are very resilient and we will adapt and survive."