

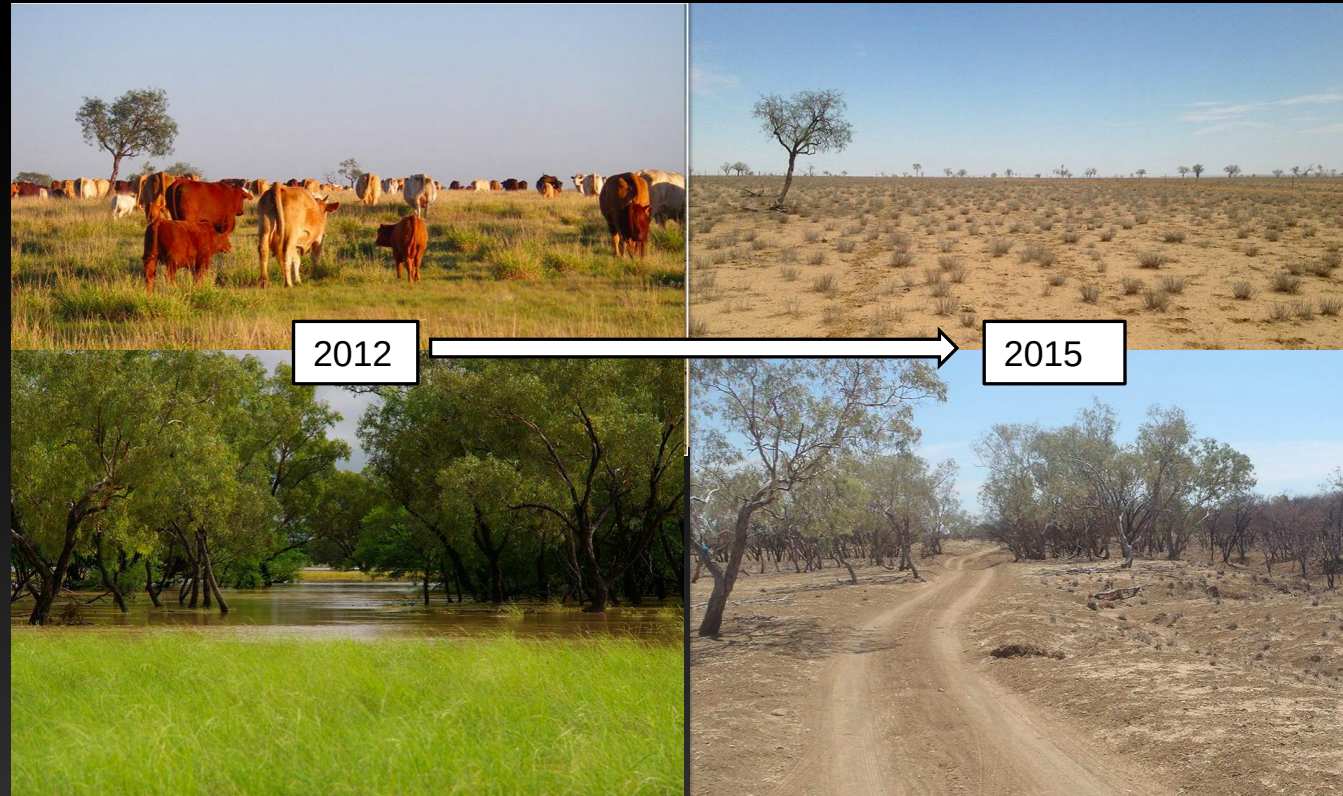
Farming women and the relationality of drought and distress

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Media Depictions of Drought



Context: Drought: What is it?

Drought is a 'creeping phenomenon' (Agakouchak et al., 2021:3) and a slow recurrent violence with its impacts continuing after it has ended.

Re-occurring it disrupts the 'ordinary'

inert', stable and potent presence in media images

Governments often defined by measuring the intensity and duration of reduced rainfall (e.g. Edwards, Gray & Hunter 2014; Hanigan 2012; Hanigan, Schirmer & Niyonsengal 2018).

As drought is defined by governments – drought becomes a political act. The timing of declaring a region in drought is based on what is considered "normal" for a region. With climate change over time this "normality changes". Australia now no drought declaration. Policy requires farmers to 'self manage' drought as part of the conditions of farming.



WHAT THIS UNDERSTANDING OF DROUGHT MEANS FOR FARMERS

BY NO LONGER DECLARING DROUGHT AS AN **EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCE** AND A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY BUT AS A RECURRENT AND PART OF THE FABRIC OF FARMING DROUGHT IS NOW AN INDIVIDUAL PROBLEM FOR FARMERS TO SOLVE ON THEIR FARMS.

My Focus: Farming, Women, Drought and Distress

How farming women's bodies are experienced as distressed in moments of time through and with multiple parts of nature.

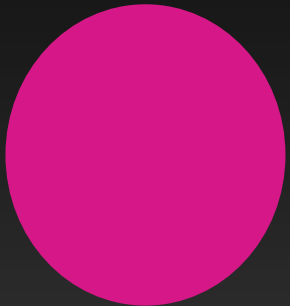
Drought brings nature into focus and is felt on the body and in the mind.

These experiences are captured in a participatory film made with farming women.

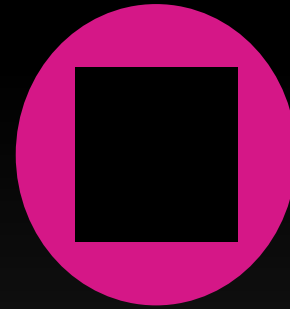
Jess, Julie and Joy



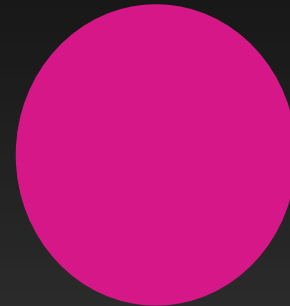
Recruited via flyers circulated in Cowell broadly and to women's group and word of mouth through the local district council offices. Eyre Peninsula on western coast of South Australia. 270,500 sq kms and is 600 km from the capital city. 3% of the state's population live there.



Agricultural region: sheep/beef and crop farming.
Drought 2001-2010 and again 2017-18. Film made 2019.



Four women self-identified and 3 participated; cis white heterosexual women; young children; married into farming or had come from family farming background; aged in their 30s; co-farmed; one had off-farm work.



The participants were asked to construct a story with a focused message on any aspect related to drought, distress and farming.



Creating the Film

Pre-Workshop

Prior to a one-day workshop zoom meetings to discuss how the day would be set up and what could be brought along artefacts (photos, farming or household items, crafts, etc.)

Workshop:

brainstormed ideas, decided on a message, developed a storyboard and art, a constructed an overarching narrative; interviews on film.

Post-Workshop

Designer produced the form; women reworking of order of film; writing narration together and narrated by one of the women

Boots n' All

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/i92gww9mzik7fgx/Boots%27n%27all%20FinaI%20Cut.mp4?dl=0>

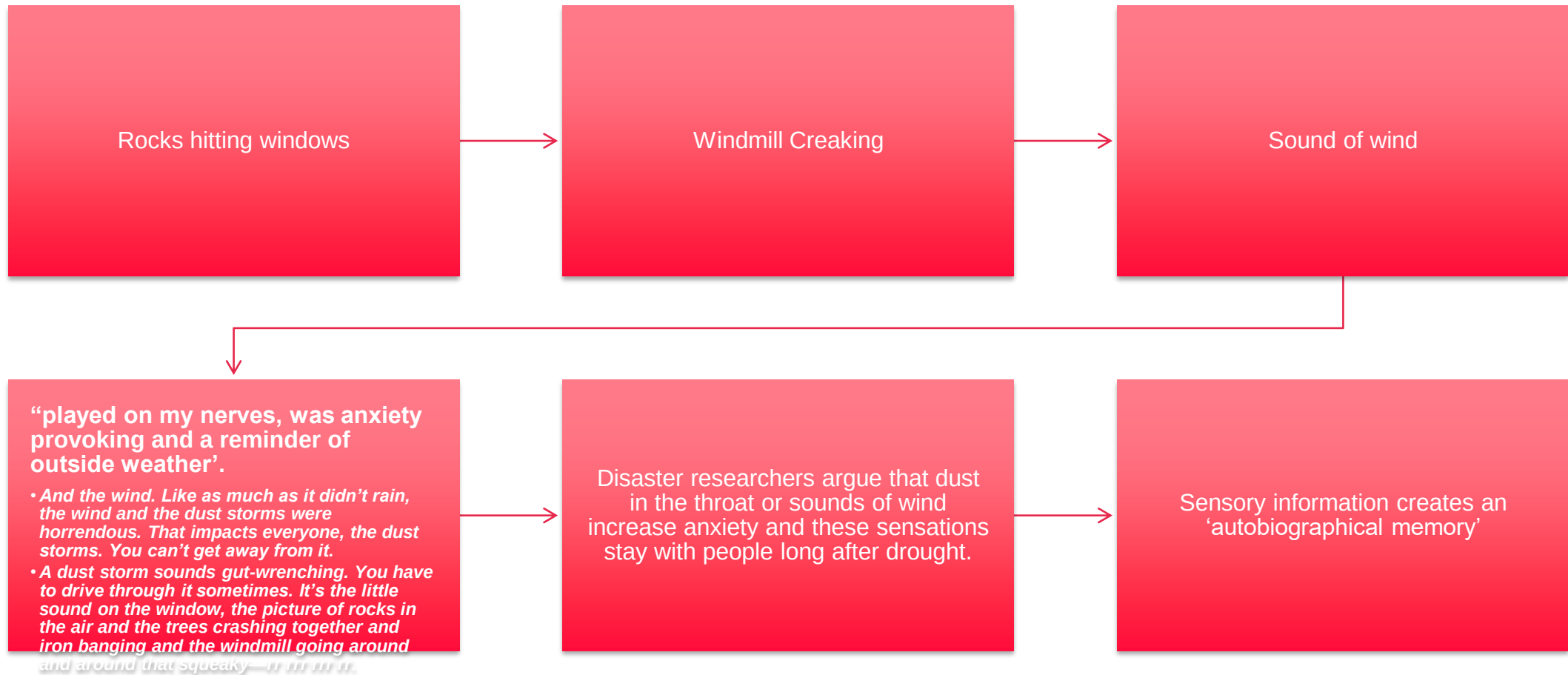




Women, Boots and Work: Unsparing Work

Collins English Dictionary (2014) defines 'boots 'n' all' as an Australian and New Zealand phrase that means **'to make every effort; with no holds barred; unsparing'**.

Distress as the sounds and sites of drought



Drought challenges how women care for livestock

Keeping sheep alive hay difficult to source; charities delivering hay and water for animals. But to feed sheep farmers have to deliver hay across between 2,000-12,000 acres.

I found feeding sheep huge last year. Feeding hay out every day, constantly moving sheep to paddocks with feed in it; every two weeks transporting and selling stock; filling up feeders ... constantly cleaning troughs because of the dirt. [It] took up lots of time. Some days it was a whole day just checking and feeding sheep.

Drought and Distress

Felt as exhaustion
Have to carry on to keep
animals and crops alive

This carrying on is
'endurance' and having to
endure is what causes
exhaustion and also leads
to distress





Loss and Identities

During drought women explained that their identities and their self-worth were being challenged.

Women explained that her identity shifted from “entrepreneur” to “just trying to manage”. Women asked the question during drought “if I am not a farmer anymore who am I”?

Loss of landscape and fear of loss of animals and farm impact on identity and create distress.



Hues of Brown and Green: It's not over when it rains

The women's artwork in the film shows raindrops and regeneration with the sprouting of plants. However, the women caution that 'it's not over when it rains'. They explain:

What I am really worried about is when it rains and everything is green and you should be really happy and obviously bank accounts are not going to be ... [there will be] no money at the end of the year [and] it is going to take 4 years [to recover] and [while] sheep prices are up at the moment ... they might drop off by the time we are ready to sell.

The idea that 'everything is green' and one should be happy refers to the idea of green landscapes as life-giving and health-promoting for plants, humans, animals and insects.

It's not over
when it rains

Prevalent discourses in Australia suggest that farmer wellbeing is contingent on drought breaking (Bryant and Garnham, 2013).

This is problematic because services and support are required after drought breaks as it takes several years to stabilise financially and for regrowth.

Many thanks to the Women
who co-designed the film.

Thank you for your time and
participation today.

