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Project 4401 launch

Highlighting the often hidden affects of drought on rural communities was the aim of the panel discussion held at the Oakey Library on Thursday to launch the new Project 4401 which will bring the Oakey community together to share and record stories, foster hope and reduce the sense of isolation created by the ongoing drought.

The 'in conversation' panel discussion featured leaders in the rural sector including Toowoomba Region Mayor and farmer Paul Antonio, Linthorpe dairy farmer Peter Garratt and Queensland Farmers' Federation president Stuart Armitage.

The session was moderated by 'Are You Bugged Mate?' founder and rural advocate, Mary O'Brien who led the discussion based on the idea, 'The drought will break, but we won't'.

Mr Armitage, who

also operates a farm at Cecil Plains, said he sees the affects of the drought every day when meeting farmers and discussing rural issues.

"I have seen a lot of hurt and a lot of anger in people out there because they are frustrated with the fact there is nothing they can do," he said.

"The drought is worse than a normal drought, it has become a natural disaster."

His fear was echoed by Mayor Antonio who said the uncertainty as well as



Project 4401 coordinator Emma Mactaggart (centre) with panel moderator Mary O'Brien and guest speakers Toowoomba Region Mayor Paul Antonio, farmer Peter Garratt and Queensland Farmers' Federation president Stuart Armitage following the 'in conversation' session at the Oakey Library.

external problems, such as animal activists and veganism, was causing anxiety in rural towns.

"You don't know where to go next, whether to see your cows and buy them back at double the

price," he said.

"I'm feeling the pain in the community.

"This is the worst drought I've seen."

Mr Garratt provided the most optimistic and pragmatic take on the

drought situation.

He runs about 250 dairy cows at a property that has been in his family for about four generations.

"It has changed the way we approach business

every day," Mr Garratt said.

"There are challenges with it but we are pretty committed to the long term and to be there when the drought breaks."

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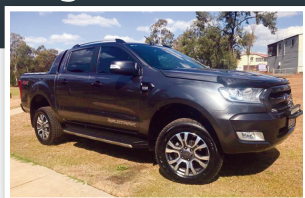
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