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New study uncovers how often rural land is changing hands

A new study released by the Rural Industries R&D Corporation has found that just over 4 per cent of Australia’s rural land is changing ownership each year.

The study - titled ‘Rural land in Australia’ - is the first of its kind to reveal land ownership patterns across rural Australia and covered the years between 2004-2008, which was a period of severe drought.

The study also showed that the incidence of land ownership change tended to be higher in the more densely populated states of NSW, Victoria and Tasmania when compared to SA, WA and Queensland, which have comparatively lower population densities. The likely reason for this was due to greater demand for land in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania for non-agricultural purposes.

The study includes five detailed regional case studies of land ownership change in north-west NSW, the Murrumbidgee region of the NSW Riverina, peri-urban SA, coastal north Queensland and north-west Victoria. Data from 2004-08 was chosen as it provides a baseline which can be used for future comparative research.

The Rural Industries R&D Corporation’s Managing Director Craig Burns said the study will provide a strong platform for further research into land ownership patterns in Australia and could help to inform some of the public debate about land use change and corporate ownership.

“This report provides the first comprehensive national assessment of landholding patterns and we now have authoritative estimates of the annual rates of rural land ownership turnover in rural Australia,” Mr Burns said.

The report’s lead researcher, Assoc. Prof. Bill Pritchard from the University of Sydney said the land title databases used in the report could potentially play a role in informing debate on foreign and corporate ownership of rural land in Australia.

“The report is based on 2008 data so it pre-dates the more recent high profile sales involving foreign buyers but there is potential for this data to better inform that debate in the future. For instance, when we used the data to examine the impact of corporate land ownership in NSW we discovered that the Riverina and the upper Hunter had relatively high levels of corporate land ownership.” Assoc. Prof Pritchard said.

“However, it won’t provide a single source of knowledge and should be considered alongside other data.”

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