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Wednesday March 14, 2012

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## Drought and flooding rains

By LOUISE THROWER

HEAVY rainfall over the past two weeks has dropped heartaches and blessings on the region's rural industry.

While Crookwell potato growers are grappling with a \$3.6 million hit to their enterprise, graziers and the local abattoir are gearing up for a bumper spring.

Department of Primary Industry (DPI) representatives hosted a meeting of some 13 growers in the town last Friday.

Regional director, South Eastern, Anne Muir described the mood as sombre.

The livelihoods of all of the area's potato growers have been temporarily wiped out by over 250mm of rain.

"People were really concerned," Ms Muir said.

"One person said he didn't want to look at the damage because it was too depressing. Others thought they could salvage something."

Farmers are facing a tough road to recovery, as many don't have a second income.



**COUNTING BLESSINGS:** District farmer Angus Gibson says cropping on his 2000 hectare property will be delayed due to the difficulty of getting machinery into water logged paddocks. But he says the moisture will ultimately be fantastic for the soil profile.

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# A bad business decision

## State's shock move to close support office

By LEIGH BOTTRELL

**A** NSW government move to shut down its Goulburn Trade and Investment office would leave a "huge hole in the centre of the State," Goulburn Mulwaree mayor Geoff Kettle said yesterday.

Cr Kettle yesterday sent a strongly worded official protest to the Government, via Goulburn local Liberal MP and minister, Pru Goward.

Ms Goward, as minister for Family, Community Services and Women, is a colleague of Primary Industry and Small Business minister, Katrina Hodgkinson, who is Nationals MP for Yass.

Last Thursday, in a move of which many people were unaware until media follow-ups over the weekend, Ms Hodgkinson's department announced the axing of several business-aide programs.

This was a bid to "redevelop" small business support services, including its women-in-business mentoring program. (Last Thursday happened to be International Women's Day).

The shock move would see the June 30 closure of small business

and regional development offices in Goulburn, Broken Hill, Tweed Heads, Coffs Harbour, and Parramatta.

In Goulburn, the four long-serving staffers at the department's Goldsmith Street offices will lose their jobs on June 30.

All these employees are aged over 55, and have worked in their fields for many years – one for more than 38 years.

Their duties, and the Goulburn office's work with the wider Southern Inland NSW region, will then be absorbed into the existing Wollongong office.

However, the department's Nowra office escaped the axe.

A wrong-footed Mayor Kettle learned of the Goulburn office shutdown on Sunday, only after he was asked for media comment – not knowing then that four people would lose their jobs.

He thought remote online services could continue to serve the Southern Inland region, provided relationships with the NSW Trade and Investment department were not adversely affected.

Yesterday, however, Cr Kettle was certainly on the front foot.

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