

Research into farm stress

SOME of the strategies used by farmers to help them cope with the stresses of tough times on the land are being documented in a new research project led by a Warrnambool academic.

Deakin University's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Rural and Regional) Professor Sue Kilpatrick is the lead researcher in the project that covers fishing, mixed farming, cotton, grains and sugar and involves case studies from around Australia.

Preliminary findings from her study, 'I feel like I'm dancing on the Titanic' – managing the stress of farming in difficult times, which takes its title from a quote from a farmer interviewed as part of the research, will be presented at the **National Centre for Farmer Health's** conference in Hamilton on October 12.

Professor Kilpatrick hopes that documenting the strategies will help to give guidance to other farmers. "No one has researched this before. Research has looked at people who are ill but there is very little literature on preventative behaviours that farmers use to help themselves through difficult times," she said.

"In recent years there has been an accumulation of factors which are having a particularly severe impact upon rural Australia resulting in a decline in mental health of farmers, including isolation, drought, the global financial crisis, increased government regulations and a widening of the schism between urban and rural Australia.

"Psychological well being is often adversely impacted through the stress of difficult times."

Professor Kilpatrick said the research

project investigated processes used by farmers and fishers to achieve and maintain good physical and mental health in 'difficult times'.

She said there was an increasing awareness within farming communities of the importance of mental health issues. Strategies discussed by farmers include trying to stay positive and not worry, compartmentalising difficult decisions, having good social support and networks, having regular medical check-ups, recognising the importance of off-farm pursuits and interests, and good nutrition and physical activity.