

Summer has cracked  
with all the venom  
of an incubus  
sucking a nightmare dry.

Eyes narrow  
in the seeling light  
as a bird  
tilts its wings on  
the sun then disappears.

And still no rain.

Metallic dust  
rakes the paddocks  
and the once nascent crops  
splinter and die.

Clouds ferment  
into a dense brew,  
spill a few drops  
then scuttle the hills  
with lightning,  
a line of fire  
running the ridge of night  
until morning lights up  
the stumps of sheep  
feet up in  
a river of sand.

Men who can no longer  
provide risk phone calls  
when no one's around,  
their blunt fingers  
stubbing the numbers  
out like cigarettes,  
listen to offers  
they know can't  
fill up the dams  
then swipe a cheek  
with a sleeve.

Or shove off  
into the scrub  
with a heavy gun,  
their footprints  
a few more notches  
in the stillness of dawn.

Rob Wallis

# River of sand

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Rob Wallis has had one volume of poetry published (*The match of the hunter*), has been published in various magazines and his awards include the FAW JS Neilson Poetry Prize. Having moved to Castlemaine recently, he has taken up table tennis with a vengeance.

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Image Jarryd Barton