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**State Government confirms support of rural financial counselling services**

Following the recent State Government budget announcement, the Minister for Primary Industries and Small Business has indicated her commitment to continue funding rural financial counselling services across New South Wales, allocating \$840,000 per annum to be spread across the NSW services (the same amount as last year).

Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW Central West Inc. (RFCS-CW) chief executive officer, Jeff Caldbeck said the announcement was gratefully received, particularly the news that Minister Hodgkinson was instructing the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to finalise a new bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth Government as soon as possible.

As yet, the agreement has not been signed off and as such RFCS-CW has not been formally notified about how much of the \$840,000 it would receive of the State Government funding. Over the past three financial years, the State Government has contributed \$318,000 per annum to the Central West-based service.

Mr Caldbeck said, "The RFCS-CW Board and Management look forward to receiving official notification in regards to the matter and being able to finalise its 2011-12 operational budgets in line with this injection of State funding.

Mr Caldbeck also stated, "It should be noted that our service's operational income is still down by 18.97% overall as against the 2010-11 year. This decrease in overall funding income has meant that operationally the service has had to re-structure."

The Board met this week to determine a way forward and to strategise the impact of the 2011-2012 funding and examine several measures.

Mr Caldbeck also advised, "The funding situation is driving operational decision-making by the Board and management and we've had to make some tough decisions on how to proceed.

"Due to the identified funding reductions we cannot extend two of the three month contracts due to finish next week on 30 September, and we are reviewing other short term staff contracts."

"The good news is the Gilgandra office will remain open with a Dubbo-based counsellor providing outreach, as required," he explained.

"We are now looking forward to receiving notice of our State funding allocation so that we can provide certainty for those we service, as well as our staff, as we look to the remaining nine months of this budget year. The Commonwealth Government is expecting us to finalise our 2011/12 budget very soon."

**ENDS.**

**MEDIA CONTACT: Rural Financial Counselling Service NSW Central West Inc. (RFCS-CW)**  
**(02) 6884 7841; ceo@rfcs-cw.com.au**