



KEY DROUGHT ASSISTANCE MEASURES EXTENDED

Sunday, 13 December 2009

Premier Kristina Keneally has announced an extension of a number of assistance measures for drought-affected farmers as she undertakes a two day tour of rural NSW.

Ms Keneally made the announcement while visiting Bundarra near Armidale.

The \$8 million extension of several key initiatives reflected the Government's commitment to the State's farmers – and was recognition of the severity of the ongoing big dry.

The NSW Government has already spent more than \$500 million in drought assistance measures over the seven years in response to the drought, including \$150 million in transport subsidies.

In addition, NSW has processed more than 40,000 claims for Exceptional Circumstances assistance worth \$1.2 billion.

The latest drought figures show more than 80 per cent of NSW is now in drought, with only 4.4 per cent considered satisfactory.

Ms Keneally said the measures that would be extended include:

- The popular drought support worker program, along with the Farm Family Gatherings and Drought Workshops;
- The 75 per cent waiver for landholders in the Western Division as part of the Wild Dog Destruction program; and
- The transport subsidy scheme will be extended until March 31, 2010.

"This extension means farmers in drought affected areas can continue receiving a 50 per cent subsidy for the transport of fodder, stock and domestic water and stock to sale or slaughter," Ms Keneally said.

"Drought Support Workers have provided invaluable assistance to affected communities around the state over the past few years, staging more than 3,000 events attended by more than 140,000 farming families.

"The Department of Primary Industries is constantly assessing conditions to see if assistance can be extended even further."

In addition, Minister for Primary Industries & Rural Affairs Steve Whan said the NSW Government would write to the Federal Government to request that Bundarra be considered for Exceptional Circumstances.

"Our submission, which argues farmers in the area have access to federal drought assistance payments, follows strong advocacy from local member Richard Torbay" Mr Whan said.

"Around the state, we can expect warmer temperatures and hot winds as summer approaches.

“This combined with the forecast of below average rainfall will see pasture growth and water supplies decline.

“Hot, dry weather prompted an early harvest this year and in most parts yields have been disappointing due to a combination of moisture stress and frost damage,” Mr Whan said.

In terms of water supplies, the total storage level is 31 per cent of total storage capacity, up 3.2 per cent on last month and 0.6 per cent lower than the same time last year.