



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

23 June 2005

EC ASSISTANCE NEEDED FOR CONTRACT HARVESTERS

Member for New England, Tony Windsor has called on the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon Warren Truss to extend Exceptional Circumstance assistance to contract harvesters who are currently not eligible for any drought assistance.

Mr Windsor said “contract harvesters are in a unique position in comparison to most other small business operators in that their income will be extremely limited until winter crops are harvested and they are struggling to meet their huge equipment finance commitments.”

Unlike most rural small businesses who the Government have argued will start to see some flow-on benefits if EC support is provided to the region’s farmers, contract harvesters won’t start receiving any income until the end of the year, if there are crops to harvest. In addition, any casual employment they may be able to obtain would only be enough to support their families and could never service their equipment finance debts.

“Rural Financial Counsellors have also expressed concern for the contract harvesters who are clearly struggling to meet their financial commitments and there is a real danger of their equipment being repossessed which will mean their services will not be there when the farmers eventually get to harvest time” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor has written to Minister Truss requesting that urgent consideration be given to ensuring contract harvesters in EC areas have access to the interest rates subsidies and income support payments offered to drought stricken farmers.

“The Government recognised the predicament of these contractors in 2002 under the Small Business Interest Rate Relief Program and they desperately need it now more than ever” Mr Windsor concluded.