



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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No EC decision means NO Christmas joy!!

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has expressed his disappointment at the lack of any decision by the Federal Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran on the Exceptional Circumstance drought assistance application for parts of the Northern New England and Armidale Rural Lands Protection Board areas before Christmas.

“There are approximately 700 farmers in the area formerly known as parts E and J of the Armidale and Northern New England RLPBs whose Christmas will have little joy this year because they are still waiting for an answer to their Exceptional Circumstance Drought application made over 3 months ago.

And this is after they have had three applications knocked back for a variety of reasons over the previous three years of drought conditions,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor says that whilst the area has been given ‘prima facie’ EC approval status which enables affected people to access Centrelink support to put food on the table, their ability to re-establish their livelihoods is being hindered by the lack of any decision.

“These people need to be able to access assistance to re-establish their livelihoods – not just have access to welfare support payments.

They have been visited by the National Rural Advisory Council (NRAC) over 6 weeks ago now and I’m sure that NRAC would have by now provided the Minister with their report.

I can’t understand what the hold up is.

It’s not as though when the Minister announces an area to be EC declared that funding to individual farmers begins to immediately flow – each farmer still has to prove their individual case to access funding,” Mr Windsor said.

The lack of decision has reinforced Mr Windsor’s previous calls for an overhaul of the Exceptional Circumstance process.

“I have previously called for the EC process to be overhauled and streamlined so that those impacted on by Exceptional Circumstances are helped in a more timely manner and this poor treatment of these people in need of assistance reinforces my position.

The farmers affected, the NSW Farmers, NSW Agriculture and NRAC have all done their bit so now the spotlight is on the Federal Minister, Peter McGauran to act sooner rather than later and help these people.

Christmas is upon us and I’d like to think that the Minister can help bring some joy to these farmers and their families,” Mr Windsor said.

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