



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## Media Release

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### **EC granted – Finally!! - FOI to get answers on delay**

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has cautiously welcomed the announcement by Minister for Agriculture, Peter McGauran that farmers affected by the drought in the Northern Tablelands Rural Lands Protection Board regions of Division B of Armidale and Division D of Northern New England can now access Exceptional Circumstances (EC) assistance.

“Finally, Minister McGauran has announced his decision that the 450 farmers of the Northern New England and Armidale RLPBs will be able to make individual applications for Exceptional Circumstance drought assistance.

These farmers have been living in hope whilst other farmers in areas surrounding them have been able to access support to maintain and re-establish their enterprises.

They needed help when their first application went in 4 years ago and each farmer still has to make their own individual applications to access assistance, so they still have a way to go yet but at least they are through the gate.

I cautiously welcome the announcement and thank the NSW Farmers, Member for Northern Tablelands - Richard Torbay MP, NRAC and the Rural Financial Counselling Service for their active support of those affected and I also thank all those affected for their patience as frustrating and disheartening as it has been,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor agrees with NSW Farmers President Jock Laurie that there are also a lot of unanswered questions that need to be addressed and he will be lodging a Freedom of Information application for answers from the Minister about the circumstances surrounding this EC application.

“I will be lodging a Freedom of Information application with the Department to find out what happened in the processing of this EC application that took so long, so that it can be used to help steam-line future EC processes.

We can't allow people in genuine need of Exceptional Circumstance assistance be victims of a process set up to help them.

I hope that the Department is appropriately staffed to process all the applications faster than it took to announce the area eligible for EC assistance,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor is urging farmers of this area to call Centrelink's National Drought Helpline on **13 23 16** to discuss their circumstances in relation to ECRP. They should contact the NSW Rural Assistance Authority on **1800 678 593** about ECIRS and if they experience any difficulties to contact him on Toll free **1300 301 839**.

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**Further information contact Tony Windsor, Ph (02) 6761 3080 or 0427 66 8868**