



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Hypocrisy in small business drought assistance – 100 when it suits 20 when it doesn't

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor is livid at the Government's hypocrisy in its definition of a small business in its announcement of Exceptional Circumstances drought assistance being extended to small businesses with at least 70% of their income derived from primary industry.

Mr Windsor points to the Government's definition of a small business for EC assistance being up to 20 employees yet for the Workplace Relations legislation relating to unfair dismissal the Government increased that figure to 100.

"It is the height of Government hypocrisy to use the old definition of a small business of up to 20 employees for drought assistance to small business yet when it came to their definition of small business under the Workplace Relations amendments made for unfair dismissal requirements the Government changed their definition to 100 employees.

It's an absolute disgrace and a con job for the metropolitan media to be able to report that the government is helping the poor bastards in the bush suffering from the worst drought in a thousand years!! (according to the crisis meeting today).

Don't forget that the official Budget paper figures 2001 – 2005 for farm business interest rate relief was \$242m – an average of \$60m per year.

The Government is trying to perpetuate an illusion among city people that they are doing everything they can to help drought affected Australia where in actual fact there are many businesses that employ more than 20 employees but under 100 who desperately need the assistance too and according to their Workplace Relations legislation, up to 100 is a small business.

These businesses employ many skilled staff who if they are put off will leave the area, take their families and relocate to the cities making the skills shortage in regional Australia even worse than it is.

So it's 100 when it suits but 20 when it doesn't.

The announcement today by the Prime Minister, whilst overdue, is recognition of the fact that many country based small businesses are impacted by drought just as much as the farm sector.

I will be making the strongest of representations to the Government to increase the size of small business eligible for assistance to 100 employees and thereby maintain consistency in definitions across Government policies – you can't have different definitions for the same business size in different government policy areas," Mr Windsor said.

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