



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media Release

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PM clarifies farmers' eligibility for stimulus payment

Following a number of calls from farmers raising their concerns about their eligibility to receive the \$900 economic stimulus payment if they are not in receipt of exceptional circumstance payments, but still in negative taxable income, the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor sought clarification from the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd in Parliament today.

Mr Windsor welcomed the Prime Minister's clarification and is asking farmers to go through the process suggested by the Prime Minister should they not receive the payment in the near future.

The following is the Hansard of Mr Windsor's question to the Prime Minister and his answer.

"My Question is to the Prime Minister and relates to the eligibility of farmers to the \$900 cash payment as part of the economic stimulus package.

Prime Minister, are you aware that some farming families that don't have a taxable income and aren't currently receiving exceptional circumstance payments will not be eligible for the \$900 cash payment in the recent stimulus package.

Prime Minister, given your government's obvious glee at criticising my cockies' corner comrades on their lack of support for farm families in question time yesterday, will you resolve this anomaly where these farmers earn less than the \$80,000 threshold outlined in the package but are ruled out due to negative incomes?"

The Prime Minister's answer

I thank the honourable member for New England for his question, and I appreciate the way in which he represents the interests of his constituents and, more broadly, the interests of farmers in rural Australia who are doing it tough through a combination of drought and the impact of the global economic recession, the great recession. The honourable member rightly raises the question of possible anomalies around the schemes which have been announced. It is for that precise reason that the government, in putting forward its program, also indicated that there would be an administrative scheme to deal with anomalous cases.

Administrative payment schemes are common features for acts providing for lump sum and one-off welfare related payments. The purpose is to enable payments that are similar in purpose to those provided for in the act to be made to people who have missed out on the act payments due to unforeseen circumstances or unintentional limits in the operation of the act.

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This not something new. It has been done, I am advised, on previous occasions as well. Therefore, in the case of farmers to which the honourable member refers, I would strongly recommend that he advise those farmers to correspond, either through the member or directly to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, to seek to have these individual cases resolved on an individual administrative basis.

Furthermore, I would say to the honourable member that on top of the farmers hardship bonus—which, as he rightly indicates, has been voted against by every member of the National Party in this place, and they know in their hearts that it was the wrong thing to do, but they still went ahead and did it—eligible farmers are also eligible for \$900 if they have children who receive FTB part B and for a \$950 back-to-school bonus for each school-aged child if they are eligible for FTB part A. I would also draw that the honourable member's attention.

Finally, what I would say to the honourable member is that, more broadly, the government is seeking to support families in rural areas who are dealing with the extraordinary circumstances which still prevail in many parts of the country through drought. Over \$1.1 billion has been committed to exceptional circumstances assistance this financial year. As at 31 January 2009, there were approximately 19,630 farmers and 1,000 small businesses in receipt of EC income support. There are currently 71 EC-declared areas covering 49.1 per cent of Australia's agricultural land.

Dr Stone interjecting—

Mr RUDD—*I thank the honourable member for New England for his question, and I contrast it with the interjections just received from the member for Murray. I would have thought that the member for Murray, representing a rural area, would have stood up for her constituents, would have stood up for farmers in her area and would have voted for these payments we are making to farmers in these distressed circumstances. Within her electorate, I am sure, the member for Murray would pretend every day of the week that she is out there, concerned about the interests of farmers. But when the rubber hits the road in this parliament, when she was asked to vote on the simple question of: 'Are you going to provide support for more than 20,000 farmers to receive this farmers hardship bonus', what did the member for Murray do? She voted against it. That is where the rubber hits the road. The member for New England voted for these measures. I have referred to the ways around the circumstances which he described. Each member of the National Party and each member of the Liberal Party representing a rural area has voted against it—and they should hang their heads in collective shame.*