

# **Towong Shire Community Support Committee Report for Productivity Commission Inquiry into Drought**

**Highlighted issues are as follows**

## **EC Assistance**

- There are a number of inequities in the Asset test for EC support payments which need to be addressed.
- Current Centrelink Exit Grants are not large enough to encourage farmers to take it up. Asset test limits also need to be raised considerably.
- EC criteria needs to consider the age of farmers and their family situation as well as the level of off farm income.
- EC Payments, whilst beneficial, are only enough to assist in putting food on the table and not in assisting with the overall farm operations.

## **Other Grant Issues**

- The eligibility for Murray Darling Basin Commission grants has changed over time (the taking into account of off farm income) without any prior notice to grant holders.
- There is a need for the municipal rate subsidy to be reinstated at least until the end the EC declaration (which has been extended till 31 March 2009 in the North East.
- The rebate which was applied to farmers where they did not use their full water entitlement should be reinstated.
- The assistance provided to support non farming businesses needs to be continued.

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## **Farming Assistance**

- Funds need to be available for drought proofing the farm to make them self sufficient. What farms want is proactive support rather than reactive support.

## **Funding for Professional Programs / Positions**

- Additional funding needs to be put into rural financial counselling and business advisors with any resultant education and training provided at a local level.
- There needs to be continued funding for drought specific positions such as Rural Services Officers , Social Workers, Mental Health Specialists etc who can provide outreach services.

## **Other Issues**

- There has been an increase in the diagnosis of clinical depression however early diagnosis services funding has been cut.
  - Increased farm production costs (e.g. fuel, fertilizer, fodder) is justifying the increase in access to financial and other support services due to the low returns for the increased efforts needed to be put in place.
  - There needs to be a differentiation between income support and the current measurement against farming income & asset testing.
  - Lease rental payments from Goulburn Murray Water on properties with water frontage have in some cases increased by as much as 500% where the amount of land has increased (due to the decreased level of water) due to the drought.
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