



## Further Drought Assistance Welcomed

AGFORCE Queensland has today welcomed the announcement of \$20 million in drought funding for the remainder of the financial year from the Newman Government as drought declarations grow to cover 65 per cent of the state.

AgForce General President, Ian Burnett, said the package would take further steps to help Queensland primary producers through this drought, which in many areas has now persisted for more than two years.

“Assistance such as this is very much about helping our farmers through what is an extraordinarily challenging weather event and beyond a reasonable capacity to prepare for,” Mr Burnett said.

AgForce survey results have indicated more than 90pc of respondents had taken steps to prepare themselves for future droughts following the previous dry however, despite these management initiatives, conditions have now deteriorated to such an extent that further assistance is required.

“With this drought easily proving one of the worst on record, and the prospect of another failed wet season high, the outlook for our rural sector in the short term is challenging to say the least.” Mr Burnett said.

“Agriculture is one of the four pillars of the economy and a strong financial contributor to the state under normal conditions.

“This package, which comes after considerable lobbying and communication with Governments at all levels from AgForce, will contribute to helping make sure the majority of our farmers can come out of the other end of this drought and, after a recovery period, return to producing some of the best food and fibre in the world.”

Announced in Longreach earlier today by Premier Campbell Newman and Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Dr John McVeigh, the package includes \$13 million for continuing the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS) freight subsidies and emergency water infrastructure, \$5 million for leasehold land rent rebates and water licence fee relief and \$2 million in community support for helping people under stress, assistance for organising community events and training and resources for community leaders.

“Many of our members have received much-needed support through the DRAS scheme and this announcement provides much welcomed reassurance that ongoing funds will be available for this program,” Mr Burnett said.

“Additionally, the agreement of the State Government to waive the next 20pc increased in leasehold land rent will also provide some breathing space while landholders have little to no on-farm income to pay such fees.

“However, at times as financially and personally challenging as this, we also welcome the Government’s commitment to helping ensure the wellbeing of our farming community.

“AgForce survey data has shown 60pc of drought affected members have found this drought more emotionally difficult than those of the past.

“After looking after your stock, family and land all day and night it is easy to become tired, stressed and isolated and it is times like this that community groups play an integral part in sharing the load and helping our farmers through these difficult times.”

In addition to ongoing discussions with State Government on the importance of drought assistance, AgForce Queensland has held urgent talks with Federal Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce, on the need to replace in-event drought assistance after other such measures were repealed under the previous Federal Labor Government.

“We are now looking to the Abbott Government to recognise the severity of this drought event and acknowledge that conditions are now such that, under the previous system, criteria for Exceptional Circumstances assistance would have been reached.

“Agriculture is part of the lifeblood of the economy and society in Australia and is an internationally competitive, long-term viable export industry which is unfortunately now in the midst of an extraordinary event, compounded by the decision to suspend live cattle exports.

“It is important we do what we can to not allow this extraordinarily severe drought to mar the future of the sector.”

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**Who is AgForce?** AgForce represents thousands of Queensland broadacre producers who recognise the value in having a strong voice. AgForce leads the way to ensure agriculture’s social, economic and environmental contribution is recognised by all levels of government. AgForce works alongside landholders, encourages and supports the next generation, builds industry partnerships and skills and promotes agriculture - for secure, sustainable, progressive and profitable food and fibre into the future.