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CHANGES TO DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

The Australian government has recently announced changes to the drought package to assist farmers and small businesses in rural areas severely affected by drought. The assistance is now available until 31 March 2008 for all existing Exceptional Circumstance declared areas and will be reintroduced for identified areas for which Exceptional circumstances declarations had previously expired.

The government also announced changes to the eligibility criteria for income support and business support which means that it is important that **no one self assess** their eligibility.

WHAT ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE&..FOR FARMERS

Income Support payments

The Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment (ECRP) or income support is still available to families who are in Exceptional Circumstance declared areas. This is a fortnightly payment paid at the same rate as Newstart Allowance. For more information contact Centrelink Drought Assistance Line on 13 23 16 or www.centrelink.gov.au.

Business support payments (Interest Rate Subsidy)

The funding available is 50% of interest payable for the first year and 80% of interest payable in the second and subsequent years to a maximum of \$500,000 over five years. For more information contact the NSW Rural Assistance Authority on 1800 678 593 or www.raa.nsw.gov.au.

Country Women's Association emergency family and Community Grants

To help meet family's immediate household needs. For more

information contact your local CWA Branch, NSW Office on 02 9358 2923 or www.cwaa.org.au .

NSW Department of Community Services Drought Household Assistance

This is a grant of a maximum of \$2,000 in three categories, including Farm household, Non Farm household and Low income rural household. The grant is available purely for household support. For more information contact Department of Community Services on 1800 018 444 or www.community.nsw.gov.au

Farm Management Deposits Scheme

The cap on Farm Management Deposits Scheme has been increased to a maximum deposit of \$400,000. The Non Primary Production income test has also been increased to a maximum of \$65,000

Support for Children of Drought Affected Families

Centrelink may be able to provide assistance for your dependent children through Youth Allowance, Abstudy or Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme. Normally these would be subjected to a Parental Income Test, a family Assets test and often a family actual means test. If however you get the Exceptional Circumstance Relief Payment (ECRP) the test will be waived. If you receive the AIC Boarding Allowance you may be eligible for an Additional Boarding Allowance. For more information call Centrelink Drought Assistance hotline on 13 23 16 or www.centrelink.gov.au .

New Grants for Professional Business and Financial Advice

Grants are available of up to \$5,500 (GST Inclusive) for farm businesses located in areas that have been Exceptionally Circumstance declared areas for more than 3 years, including Bourke – Brewarrina, Central North – North West, Central Tablelands, Dubbo, Forbes, Majority Western Division, Molong, North – East Northern New England, Nyngan, South West Slopes and Plains, Walgett – Coonamble. For more information contact Centrelink Drought Assistance Line on 13 23 16 or www.centrelink.gov.au .

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE&..FOR SMALL BUSINESS

For small business operators (including contract harvesters, fencing contractors, seed, feed and fertilizer suppliers, livestock transporters, shearing contractors and suppliers of farm machinery/equipment) to be eligible to receive assistance under the new drought package they must be able to demonstrate that 70% or more of their total income comes from farm business in Exceptional Circumstances declared areas. They are then able to apply for Income Support and Business Support (Interest Rate Subsidy) at the same rates as noted above for Farmers.

For more information contact Centrelink Drought Assistance Line on 13 23 16 or www.centrelink.gov.au .

**Please contact your local Forsyths team if you would
like more information.**

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