

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE, EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES PROVISIONS

420. Hon LOUISE PRATT to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

What changes will occur to drought assistance measures as a result of the decisions made last Friday at the meeting of the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand in Darwin?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

What a good question! The decisions made in Darwin are fundamental to the long-sought reform of the exceptional circumstances provisions and will make an enormous difference to farmers who are unfortunate enough to be caught up in a drought in the future. The major breakthrough that Western Australia had was that ARMCANZ agreed that those farmers whose properties were close to but outside the demarcation line defining the exceptional circumstances area, will be able to be assessed against the guidelines as if they were inside the area. The assessment will be on the same terms and conditions as those for farmers inside the area. This gets over the horrendous problems that farmers have had in the past when lines were drawn right on their boundaries and they were excluded. The Western Australian Government was also successful in achieving the ability to use predictive modelling of crop-yield data when making an application for exceptional circumstances. Prior to this change it had been the practice for States to wait until after crop yields were known before making an application. The outcome of this change is that assistance will be provided in a much more timely manner than it was in the past. Conservatively, it will shorten the time lag by some two months. This saving is significant, because it means that farmers will know the result of the application prior to their farm budget review, thus ensuring that their bankers are aware of their circumstances in a much more accurate and timely manner. I need to acknowledge that these significant achievements were not mine alone and they could not have been achieved without many months of hard work by staff of the Department of Agriculture and the dry season advisory committee headed by our former colleague, Hon Dexter Davies.