



**MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES
MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES
MINISTER FOR MINERAL RESOURCES**

MEDIA RELEASE

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IEMMA GOVERNMENT MOVES TO FURTHER HELP SOUTHERN IRRIGATORS

The lemma Government will streamline its \$20 million assistance package for southern irrigators hardest hit by the drought and necessary water cutbacks, Natural Resources Minister Ian Macdonald said today.

Minister Macdonald said the State Government, at the urging of Member for Murray-Darling Peter Black, had made its existing package both simpler and faster.

“Those seeking the new streamlined option now only need to:

- Provide their water accounts to demonstrate the amount of water suspended; and
- Provide a statutory declaration of the significant financial hardship they have endured.

“Irrigators who take up this streamlined package will receive their payouts shortly after applications close on March 9 – remember the \$50,000 total maximum still applies,” Minister Macdonald said.

“These changes were made after several people, including the Member for Murray-Darling, asked for a more streamlined process that would take away a lot of the red tape. I think we have achieved that here.

“It needs to be made very clear that this process will neither increase nor decrease the package – it will remain at a total of \$20 million.

“Up to \$15 million of the package will be spent as soon as the total quantum of claims has been assessed. Irrigators who choose to complete the full application process will be assessed in full, with the remaining five million retained for those assessments.

The Minister stressed that the Extraordinary Assistance Program was designed in recognition of the severe hardship being faced by irrigators who had done their best to plan their water requirements, but who through no fault of their own have been caught out by the worst drought on record.

“This is good news for southern irrigators and they can rest assured the lemma Government will continue to stand by all the hardworking men and women on the land until this drought ends,” he said.

“Applicants will still have to be legitimate farming enterprises, and have mitigated drought management strategies by either purchasing or carrying-over water.

“It’s also important to note that any suspended accounts will be re-credited as soon as we receive sufficient rainfall.”

Minister Macdonald said the drought was responsible for the unprecedented problems facing irrigators.

“We have to remember we are dealing with record low storage inflows and the worst drought in memory, that’s why the NSW Government is working hard to come up with new ways to enhance our \$300 million in drought assistance measures,” he said.

Member for Murray-Darling Peter Black today said he welcomed the changes.

“This is a victory for common-sense,” he said.

“I’ve pushed long and hard for this, it makes the entire process a lot simpler for irrigators and that’s who we are here to help.”

Minister Macdonald said while the Government was working hard to deliver real support to farming families, the Opposition was in fantasy-land, making more than \$30.5 billion in unfunded promises.

“The only plan the Member for Vaucluse has is a plan to cut 20,000 jobs from the public sector – a slash and burn strategy that will undermine the services that hardworking families rely on,” he said.

“It is easy to swan out into regional areas and make promise after promise when you don’t have to pay for it. There is now \$30.5 billion on the Opposition’s money tree.

“The NSW Nationals in particular need to be standing up to Canberra for the hardworking people of NSW – standing up for our apple growers the Federal Government betrayed this week, standing up for hardworking families over the IR laws but instead we have silence.

“It’s no wonder the Nationals are in palliative care and not fit to govern NSW.”

The deadline for applications remains Friday, March 9 2007.

Further information can be obtained by contacting the Rural Assistance Authority, on 1800 678 593, or through their website www.raa.nsw.gov.au