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Drought reform needs careful consideration

The NSW Farmers' Association says today's announcement from the Federal Government of a 12 month trial for new drought assistance measures doesn't give enough time for measuring the reforms effectiveness.

NSW Farmers' Association President Charles Armstrong says the funding stream for the farm business grants will be over a 4 year period, so 12 months trial isn't long enough.

"Under the arrangements the installments could be paid up to June 2014. How can the true effects be measured before the funding allocation has been completed or tested under the next drought situation," Mr Armstrong asked.

"Planning, preparedness and social support are welcome measures. The Association has long advocated the need to support farmers in the preparation and management of drought, and despite it being part of the current drought policy, the funding towards it has been insufficient," he said.

"The pilot does provide the opportunity to consider the proposed drought policy. However, there is still much detail to be clarified, such as the income and assets test for the farm family support. The Association will work through this," he said.

The NSW Farmers' Association is also calling on the Government to allow for the continued consideration of alternative mechanisms to assist farmers as the results of this trial come forward.

"There are concerns that the pilot does not allow for emergency or exceptional relief in times of severe drought and it removes the current interest rate subsidy, or any alternative, from the package.

"Farmers need to know that they will be supported in providing food to the nation, even in a case of extreme drought such as we have seen over the last decade.

"The pilot doesn't alter EC arrangements for those currently receiving assistance. We are seeking confirmation that the pilot also won't prevent any other area submitting applications under the current guidelines for EC assistance.

"We are open to working on new drought policies with the Federal Government, but we do believe a trial period of 4 years, the full length of the funding stream would be more valuable," Mr Armstrong concluded.

Contact:

Amanda Barwick (Media Manager) 0428 400 736
Ellen McNamara (Media Officer) 0429 990 218

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