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Budget winners: Infrastructure, water and drought assistance

The NSW Farmers' Association has acknowledged the Federal Government's budget announcement, welcoming spending on infrastructure and the decision to delay major changes to drought relief.

NSW Farmers' Association President Jock Laurie says that the infrastructure focus of the budget will have some positive outcomes for rural and regional areas.

"Infrastructure spending is critical to further develop and enhance our agricultural productivity and access to world markets," Mr Laurie said.

"The stated investment into roads is positive – particularly the Hunter Expressway, Kempsey Pacific Highway bypass, and the Melbourne-Cairns road investment, all of which will directly benefit NSW.

"The obvious exclusions are the proposed inland rail link and indeed, all rail west of the city and coastal regions. These are certainly areas we are focused on, and will continue to lobby for.

"The Government's commitment to continue providing Exceptional Circumstances relief for drought affected farmers is to be commended. There is no doubt that times are tough and many areas have experienced budget cuts, but for the Government to deliver on its promise to support these farmers is a good outcome.

"At the same time, we will continue to work with the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) to ensure that the drought reform process continues.

"Water is the other major announcement from last night's Budget that is of benefit to our Members. Following extensive lobbying by the NFF, the Government has agreed to take control of managing the Southern Murray-Darling Basin, and is providing \$300 million over four years for grouped on-farm projects in this area. This is a major win for NFF and its Member groups, including the Association.

"We also welcome many of the other announcements, including funding for rural doctor retention, allocations to ensure rural and regional areas are included in the National Broadband Network, tax breaks for small businesses, the maintenance of current quarantine levels, assistance for Isolated Children and funding for rural and remote mental health services.

"But at the same time, it's not all positive for the agricultural sector, with cuts to research and development a concern. We will be watching with great interest as to how the Federal Government plans to deal with the announced cut to Land and Water Australia, and the reduced funding to the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

"We have concerns regarding how current services will be maintained in light of these cuts, and this is a situation we will continue to monitor," Mr Laurie concluded.

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