



## Floods, cyclones – and now the government fails farmers

State farm group AgForce has labelled the government's natural disaster assistance package to north Queensland as insufficient and a failure to recognise the extent of destruction caused to hundreds of inland graziers by Cyclone Yasi.

AgForce president Brent Finlay said today's announcement was a long-awaited step forward for coastal communities, but the federal and state governments need to expand their approval of Category C and D levels of Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) to include inland shires.

"The special concessional loans and wage assistance offered by Category D are only available to communities along the Cassowary Coast, Hinchinbrook and parts of the Tablelands in a decision which blatantly ignores the plight of primary producers in other devastated shires," Mr Finlay said.

"Graziers in the Etheridge, Croydon and Charters Towers shires are also facing extensively damaged buildings, roads and power lines; destroyed fences; fallen timber; and displaced – in some cases deceased – livestock.

"The size of enterprises in north Queensland means it will take graziers on average nine months just to repair on-property infrastructure before they can return to their core business of producing food. Some graziers may have to replace up to 500km of internal fencing on individual properties.

"AgForce is calling on the government to justify why these shires also missed out on the NDRRA Category C status which provides clean-up and recovery grants of up to \$25,000.

"These grants are limited to eligible small businesses and primary producers in the local government areas of Burdekin, Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Hinchinbrook, Palm Island, Tablelands, Townsville and Yarrabah – once again ignoring hundreds of graziers who face months of rebuilding.

"Access to these recovery funds would literally put 'fuel in the tank' by delivering a cash injection to businesses so they can retain skilled workers and contribute to the long-term sustainability and morale of regional communities in the wake of Cyclone Yasi."

AgForce is also calling on the Federal Government to explain why it failed to deliver Category D status to the parts of regional Queensland still reeling from floods, and is calling on this approval to be made urgently.

"Six weeks on, we are still waiting for a sign that the government has the best interests of rural and regional Queensland at heart – the failure to underpin recovery efforts with a real commitment to the long-term sustainability of the vital agricultural industry is nothing short of disappointing."

AgForce is urging all primary producers to continue reporting their individual assessments of infrastructure damage and lost productivity to AgForce on [agforce@agforceqld.org.au](mailto:agforce@agforceqld.org.au) or 3236 3100.

AgForce continues to represent primary producers on industry and government natural disaster recovery taskforces to ensure economic, infrastructure and productivity rebuilding across the state.

“AgForce has contacted the State Government about expanding Category C into the necessary areas and will seek assurance from the Federal Government as to when Category D will be approved,” Mr Finlay said.

Mr Finlay said AgForce welcomes the farm cleanup grants as part of today’s package for north Queensland but is concerned the allocated \$20 million will be insufficient given the extent of damage to fences and other on-farm infrastructure across a large region of Queensland. The extension of Category D grants up to \$50,000 is also welcomed, but AgForce continues to lead the call for interest subsidies and extended special loans.

“The resilience of our industry and individuals is critical to regenerating the sector to emerge stronger and more productive – but it must be underpinned by a commitment from Government to make the road to recovery as smooth as possible for primary producers by delivering much-needed financial packages, minimising red tape and prioritising the repairs of critical infrastructure to keep supply lines open,” Mr Finlay said.

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