



## Flooded farmers still waiting for economic lifeline

State farm group AgForce warns flood-affected communities are facing a second disaster – an economic crisis – if the Federal Government does not deliver essential assistance to farmers and small businesses who are trying to recover in the worst-hit areas of Queensland.

AgForce president Brent Finlay is challenging Federal Minister for Agriculture Joe Ludwig to tell primary producers why they still cannot access the appropriate level of Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA), in a delay that is crippling vital income and recovery efforts.

“Many rural communities were hit by floods before Christmas – yet here we are in March, still waiting for the Federal Government to sign-off on Category D status of NDRRA for areas in central and southern inland Queensland.

“AgForce understands the Federal Government has had Queensland’s application for Category D for several weeks, so this delay is unacceptable as the viability of primary production and regional communities hangs in the balance.

“Many farmers desperately need the options available through Category D arrangements, such as concessional loans and wage assistance, to kick-start production, employ workers, rebuild their livelihoods, and safeguard Queensland’s regional economies.

“The devastation following the 2010-11 wet season is the biggest hurdle many producers will face and it is imperative the government does not put up any more roadblocks to rebuilding Queensland’s vital agricultural industry.

“AgForce demands Minister Ludwig deliver Category D immediately or admit he has ruled it out.”

Mr Finlay said following applications from regional shire councils impacted by floods and cyclones, categories A, B and C of the NDRRA have progressively been activated across most of Queensland.

“After Cyclone Yasi, Category D was approved but initially restricted mainly to sugar and banana-growing areas in far north Queensland. AgForce lobbied hard to secure this status for parts of the Charters Towers, Etheridge and Flinders shires which were also significantly impacted by Yasi.”

He said AgForce continues to seek a range of financial packages for primary producers following natural disasters, to provide relevant options for different situations.

Beyond initial fodder subsidies, grants, low interest loans and employer wage subsidy schemes; AgForce calls on the government to deliver initiatives for long-term rebuilding, including:

- Interest subsidies
- Accelerated depreciation on rebuilding capital expenses
- Alteration to the rules on Farm Management Deposits to help fund the rebuilding process
- Greater emphasis on reducing existing debt burden rather than providing access to further funds, e.g. using the additional \$650,000 of low interest loans to re-structure existing debt.

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