

Friday, 30 May 2025

EXPANDING DROUGHT SUPPORT TO FARMERS ACROSS OUR STATE

As farmers grapple with rapidly deteriorating conditions across our state, the Allan Labor Government has announced it will extend its Drought Package to farmers statewide.

While farmers were anxiously awaiting May rainfall, the latest weather data shows the anticipated “autumn break” has failed to eventuate, with the window for last minute rain to avoid a failed season closing completely.

Advice from Agriculture Victoria indicates that rainfall in May realised the worst-case scenario, projected at the start of the month.

Over the past two weeks, a majority of the state received just 20 per cent or less of the average typical rainfall expected in May.

The latest reporting from the Bureau of Meteorology also indicates these conditions are likely to continue into June. Together, these conditions have left paddocks and dams dry, with fodder prices doubled.

Due to these worsening conditions, the Labor Government will deliver a new and expanded Drought Package – supported by an additional \$37.7 million in funding.

This will ensure farmers across our state are able to access grants of up to \$5000 to support on-farm drought management improvements, in addition to financial counselling and mental health support.

Recognising the ongoing impact of drought on farmers in our south-west, these payments will be increased to \$10,000 across 11 council areas and parts of West Wimmera. The program will also be expanded to cover water carting activities and pasture re-establishment across Victoria.

Agriculture Victoria’s farm technical and decision-making support has also been made available statewide, supporting farmers to manage the impacts of these increasingly drier conditions.

As part of its Drought Package announced earlier in May, the Government announced that farmers in 24 drought-impacted local government areas would pay a reduced Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) contribution – capped to the same amount they paid in 2024-25.

This will now be extended to all primary production properties – ensuring all farmers can focus fully on their drought response and recovery.

This will mean the ESVF variable rate on primary production properties will remain at 28.7 – the same as it was in 2024-25 – for the duration of the 2025-26 financial year. This reduced rate will be applied to rates notices for primary production properties automatically.

As conditions worsen, we know more support is needed. It’s why the Labor Government will deliver a further package of support in the coming weeks – informed by a dedicated new Drought Response Taskforce. The Taskforce will include:

- Minister for Regional Development Jaclyn Symes
- Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence
- Minister for Water Gayle Tierney
- Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria Michaela Settle

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- Nationals MP for Murray Plains Peter Walsh
- President of the Victorian Farmers Federation Brett Hosking
- Regional Cities Victoria Chair, Cr Shane Sali
- Rural Councils Victoria Deputy Chair, Cr Kate Makin
- Dr Susan Brumby, National Centre for Farmers Health
- CWA Victoria President, Jenny Nola
- Stock Agent Representative, Heath Templeton – President of the Hamilton and District Stock Agents Association
- NAB Executive for Regional and Agribusiness, Khan Horne
- Robert Musgrove, General Manager, Corporate and Public Affairs, Bendigo Bank

The Taskforce will be chaired by the Premier – ensuring recommendations are heard at the heart of government – and provide advice on further help for farmers, as well as broader support for impacted businesses and communities.

The Taskforce's first meeting will be held next week, with a further package of support to be delivered as soon as possible.

These announcements build on the Government's existing \$29.4 million investment to support communities experiencing drought conditions.

Quotes attributable to Premier Jacinta Allan

"The increasingly devastating effects of drought aren't confined by postcode or region – its impacting farmers across Victoria. It's why we're expanding support statewide."

"The new Taskforce will bring together Victorians from different communities, different backgrounds and different political parties. Most importantly, it'll be focused on delivering real relief for farming communities."

Quote attributable to Treasurer and Minister for Regional Development Jaclyn Symes

"By capping the rate of the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund for primary production properties, we're ensuring farmers can remain fully focused on their drought response and recovery."

Quote attributable to Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence

"This funding is about ensuring that no drought-impacted community is left behind, providing immediate relief to farming families across our state."