



Gladys Berejiklian

Premier of NSW

John Barilaro

Deputy Premier

Niall Blair

Minister for Primary Industries

MEDIA RELEASE

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MORE THAN \$584 MILLION TO HELP DROUGHT-AFFECTED FARMERS

Support for farmers and their families facing drought has been boosted by \$284 million in the NSW Budget 2018, bringing the NSW Government's drought relief package to well over half a billion dollars.

Almost all of NSW is now suffering from an extended dry period, which is expected to continue throughout the winter and potentially spring.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian, Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW John Barilaro and the Minister for Primary Industries Niall Blair visited Dubbo today to announce increased financial support, funding for mental health, key infrastructure including Doppler weather stations and streamlining kangaroo management.

"We know the drought is hitting our farmers hard but we want to reassure communities that we are doing everything we can to make sure the right help is available at the right time," Ms Berejiklian said.

"To date, the Farm Innovation Fund has delivered \$220 million to more than 1300 farmers to help build on-farm infrastructure, and prepare for and battle drought.

"Our farmers are continuing to tell us that these loans are one of the best measures available, which is why we have decided to double the funding available, taking the Fund's total value to \$500 million."

The NSW Government will also expand the criteria of the Fund to deliver \$50,000 seven-year interest free loans to allow producers to bring in fodder and grain to sustain stock on hand, as well as install key water infrastructure.

As the pressure to destock continues, the Fund will be extended to enable producers to collect and store genetics of their herd or flock, which will allow for a much quicker recovery when good times return.

The Budget will also include more than \$4 million to support communities facing natural disaster and drought including:

- Support for the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, including continued funding for 13 statewide co-ordinators to link rural people to the help they need.
- Additional counselling support through funding for the National Association for Loss and Grief, a Dubbo-based NGO.

“We are determined to stand side by side with our famers which is why we are providing both funding for drought resilience through our Farm Innovation Fund and strong mental healthcare support to get people through this tough time,” Ms Berejiklian said.

In addition, Mr Barilaro said that more than \$25 million has been allocated to construct and operate three new Doppler radar weather stations in the Central West and Far West – giving famers more accurate weather forecasting.

“These new radars will deliver fast, accurate and live weather updates to help our farmers make timely business decisions about when to sow, harvest crops or move stock, boosting productivity and saving money,” Mr Barilaro said.

“We know that Western NSW has been crying out for accurate radar information for many years and in particular, I would like to acknowledge and thank Orana Regional Organisation of Councils, NSW Farmers and the Country Women’s Association for their ongoing advocacy for this critical infrastructure.

“The radars will provide real-time weather coverage for 30 per cent of the State.”

Mr Blair said the drought package would also include a new kangaroo management strategy, which will seek to reduce kangaroo numbers in drought-hit areas.

“Under the strategy, we are removing the need for physical tags and the ‘shoot and let lie’ conditions, expanding the commercial harvest zone in South East NSW, enabling more shooters to operate under each licence, and helping to connect landholders to commercial harvesters,” Mr Blair said.

The new strategy will make it easier for landholders to meet the harvest quotas set by the Commonwealth. In 2017, NSW met less than 20 per cent of the quota, which was set to maintain the long-term kangaroo population.

“Despite some recent useful rainfall, we know the forecast is poor so we will continue to re-assess measures and talk to our communities every step of the way,” he said.

Member for Barwon Kevin Humphries welcomed the additional support.

“Conditions throughout the region have been very poor; dams are dry and pastures are greatly diminished,” Mr Humphries said.

“The boosted NSW Drought Management Strategy will assist our farmers and rural communities to get through the current dry spell and be better prepared for the next inevitable drought.”

Doppler radar vision: <https://vimeo.com/271019033> & <https://vimeo.com/270328387>

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NSW DROUGHT PACKAGE

The NSW Government's drought package includes:

- An additional \$250 million in the Farm Innovation Fund, which:
 - provides farmers with low-interest loans of up to \$250,000 to improve farm infrastructure and help farmers prepare for and deal with drought;
 - introduces new loans of up to \$50,000 that will be interest-free for seven years, to allow producers to bring in fodder and grain, to move livestock, or install key water infrastructure including troughs, underground pipes or water-saving technology;
- New criteria in the Farm Innovation Fund which allows farmers to use the loans to “bio-bank” the genetics of their herd that would otherwise be lost during de-stocking;
- Additional staff within the Department of Primary Industries to process and streamline Farm Innovation Fund applications;
- More than \$4 million in mental health support for communities facing natural disaster and drought including:
 - Support for the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health, including continued funding for 13 statewide co-ordinators to link rural people to the help they need; and
 - Additional counselling support through funding for the National Association for Loss and Grief, a Dubbo-based NGO.
- New funding of \$25 million to build and operate three new Doppler radar weather stations in the Central West and Far West to improve weather forecasting and help farmers make better business decisions;
- A new kangaroo management plan to reduce kangaroo numbers in drought-hit areas, including:
 - Removing the need for landholders to physically tag culled kangaroos;
 - Removing the ‘shoot and let lie’ conditions to reduce bio-security risk;
 - Expanding the commercial harvest zone for kangaroos in the South East of NSW; and
 - Connecting landholders experiencing high kangaroo numbers with commercial harvesters through Local Land Services and other agencies.
- Up to \$5 million towards helping local councils repair dirt roads damaged by the temporary access for heavy vehicles carrying feed, water and livestock.