



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator the Hon Chris Ellison

Minister for Human Services

CB01/07

Tuesday 8 May 2007

2007-08 Budget

\$11 million to improve services for Australians affected by drought

The Minister for Human Services, Senator Chris Ellison, today announced additional funding to increase support for Australians living in areas affected by drought.

“The Australian Government will provide \$11 million over three years (including \$2.2 million for 2006-07) to improve access to Australian Government support and assistance for people in rural and remote communities affected by drought,” Senator Ellison said.

“The initiative will provide funding for additional mobile Centrelink services from 2006-07.”

“It will also provide additional funding for seven additional specialist Centrelink Rural Service Officers from 1 July to better connect farmers and their families and small business to the financial and counselling support that is available.

“These specialist staff will make up to an additional 150 farm visits and attend 300 community events a year.”

“Those in drought affected areas are dealing with very difficult circumstances. The additional mobile services will improve existing services by responding to the increased demand in drought affected areas for information about Government services and assistance. They will enable faster referrals to services and deliver targeted services to customers in rural areas,” Senator Ellison said.

The mobile services, previously announced as a short term initiative, have proved to be very effective since November 2006, with more than four thousand farmers accessing services across 105 locations in Exceptional Circumstances-declared regions.

About 75 percent of these farmers had not previously accessed Centrelink services. The implementation of the mobile services has contributed to a significant increase in the number of claims being made by farmers for Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment.

Claims for Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment have increased from an average of 100 per week in October 2006 to more than one thousand per week and are continuing at that level.

“The measure also aims to reduce the sense of isolation that many in rural and remote areas worst affected by the drought are experiencing,” Senator Ellison said.

Media contact: Matt Francis — 0406 052 038