



# \$115 Million Drought Relief Package

The Premier John Brumby this week announced a further \$115 million in drought relief to help rural communities battling the worst drought on record, bringing the Victorian Government's support for farmers and rural communities to more than \$400 million since 2006.

Mr Brumby said Cabinet had brought forward a package that would deliver immediate relief for farmers – delivering \$82 million in direct support to farmers; \$22 million for drought employment initiatives; and \$11 million to support drought-affected communities.

Key features of the Government's drought package include:

- \$58 million for water rate rebates for irrigators;
- \$15 million for 50 per cent subsidies on municipal rates and charges for 2008/09;
- \$10 million for the CMA Drought Employment Program to employ people directly impacted by drought to undertake work to protect environmental assets;
- \$10 million from the Small Towns Development Fund to invest in much needed infrastructure and boost local jobs in drought affected rural communities; and
- \$2.9 million to boost drought mental health services and support.

## Water Rate Rebate

Mr Brumby said that under the \$58 million water rate rebate scheme, the Government would pay up to the first \$1000 of water bills for all irrigators and stock and domestic farmers who are receiving less than 30 per cent of their water entitlements as of December 1.

"Irrigators whose water bill is more than \$1000 will receive an additional 50 per cent rebate on the balance of

cost rebate on the balance of bills above \$1000," he said.

"This will provide relief for irrigators in drought-stricken regions across Victoria, and means that most will have their fixed water charges paid in full."

The rebate will be deducted from farmer's water bills by local water authorities. The rebate will not be available for publicly listed companies.

## Employment

Agriculture Minister Joe Helper said \$22 million in assistance would be provided to expand rural employment opportunities in drought-affected areas.

"This includes \$10 million towards Catchment Management Authorities across Victoria to extend the successful drought employment program which employs people to undertake work on public and private land and a \$2 million boost to support apprentices employed in businesses that derive a majority of their income through primary producers," Mr Helper said.

"It also outlines \$10 million for the Brumby Government's successful Small Towns Development Fund to invest in much-needed infrastructure works in towns which in turn boosts jobs growth in drought-affected communities."

Mr Helper said the \$115 million drought relief package also recognised that the drought's impact was felt

beyond the farm gate, with \$11 million to extend mental health services for farming communities and ensure rural sporting clubs could keep active during the drought.

In addition to drought funding, another \$16 million of programs will continue

under the Brumby Government's \$205 million Future Farming Strategy announced in April and initiatives in the 2007-08 drought relief package.

Details of the 2008/09 Victorian Government Drought Relief Package

## Direct Farmer Support

- \$58 million for water rate rebates for irrigators;
- \$15 million for 50 per cent subsidies on municipal rates and charges for 2008/09;
- \$6 million for On-Farm Productivity Improvement grants to assist farmers undertake drought-proofing works;
- \$3.2 million for Drought Extension Support; providing one-on-one technical advice and information to inform decisions by farmers affected by drought, including support to ensure farmers from non-English speaking backgrounds access drought support services.

## Employment Support

- \$10 million for the CMA Drought Employment Program to employ people directly impacted by drought to undertake work to protect environmental assets on public and private land;

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# \$15 Million Drought Package

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- \$10 million from the Small Towns Development Fund to invest in much needed infrastructure and boost local jobs in drought affected rural communities;

- \$2 million for the Drought Apprentice Retention Bonus. The initiative provides one-off \$1500 cash grants per apprentice to businesses in EC declared areas which directly provide services to the farming industry.

**Community Support**

- \$4.4 million for Drought Relief for Community Sport and Recreation to long term, sustainable reductions in potable water use by community sporting facilities;

- \$3.8 million for the Synthetic Surfaces Program to support “drought proof” playing and training surfaces to allow sporting competition continue;

- \$2.9 million for drought

mental health services and community support; to develop more sustainable responses for drought affected communities by providing clinical leadership, support and better integrated counselling through mainstream health services; as well as emergency relief assistance, in the form of food relief, Christmas hampers, toys, and assistance for back to school costs, distributed by Vicrelief + Foodbank, for those families in most need.

**Continuing Programs**

In addition to the \$115 million, the \$16 million in continuing drought programs are:

- 1.5 million for additional drought co-ordinators to assist local councils to support their communities;

- \$1.4 million for the Planning for Change initiative to help councils to plan strategically for the longer-term consequences of sustained drought;

- \$1 million to provide support to volunteers and bolster the capacity of emergency relief organisations through Emergency Volunteer Support grants;

- \$3.5 million for Rural Financial Counselling; Case management services to help agriculture dependent small business in their decision making;

- \$3.7 million in the Rural Futures Initiative; forums tailored to specific regions and communities to enable farmers, industries and communities make decisions about their future;

- \$2.2 million for Sustainable Farm Families to support the physical, mental health and well-being of drought affected families;

- \$2.6 million for the Synthetic Surfaces Program to support “drought proof” playing and training surfaces to allow sporting competition continue.