



## **MEDIA RELEASE – James Harker-Mortlock – Independent for Hume – Monday May 6 2013**

### **DROUGHT RELIEF – NO CERTAINTY**

*“After many months of inaction, the federal and state governments finally announced their “INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT ON NATIONAL DROUGHT PROGRAM REFORM” last Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> May. This inadequate agreement is designed to replace the Exceptional Circumstances arrangements terminated some time ago.”* said James Harker-Mortlock, independent candidate for Hume. *“There are a number of problems with this agreement :*

1. *Much of the detail is yet to be worked out ;*
2. *It is not due to take effect until 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014 with implementation plans not due to be finalised until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013 – yet drought is with us now ;*
3. *Whilst the Transitional Family Payment remains in place until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2014, this is essentially a variation of the Newstart Allowance with similar means tests and asset tests which exclude many farming families from receiving any benefit. The benefit is taxable and can be received only for one twelve month period. In addition, the plan requires recipients to develop or update an action plan and undertake quarterly discussions with a Rural Financial Counsellor to review their progress against their action plan;*
4. *Measures planned to be implemented under the new arrangements are generally motherhood statements :*
  - a. *‘a farm household support payment’ – this is nothing like an exceptional circumstance grant*
  - b. *‘continued access to Farm Management Deposits (FMDs) and taxation measures’ – nothing new here*
  - c. *‘a national approach to farm business training’ – what does this really mean?*
  - d. *‘a coordinated, collaborative approach to the provision of social support services’ – isn’t this the job of governments anyway?*
  - e. *‘tools and technologies to inform farmer decision making’ – what are these?*
5. *The agreement talks about ‘reciprocal obligations aimed at driving behavioural change’ – this sounds a lot like social engineering*
6. *There is much talk about ‘reporting’ and ‘monitoring’ and ‘evaluating’ – which would appear to be a lot of highly paid work for public servants when what we need is direct assistance for farmers now.*
7. *The agreement states - ‘for access to the income support system, farming families should have a temporary period of exemption from the normal assets tests for farm assets, but otherwise receive the same access rights as the wider community’. What this really means is that, after a short period, the same restrictions will apply to farming families as those applied to those families receiving income support generally, i.e. assets and income tests.*

*This is an arrangement put together by people living in comfortable and remote isolation from the realities of life facing many farming families today. It is a desperate attempt by a lame-duck federal government to appear to be doing something whilst doing nothing”.*

ENDS

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