



Country Women's Association of NSW

*Incorporated in 1931 by an Act of NSW Parliament
Constituent Society of the Associated Country Women of the World*

ABN 82 318 909 926

Media Release

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Concerns that looming election stalling drought assistance commitments

The Country Women's Association of NSW is urgently seeking assurances from both sides of politics on an ongoing commitment to drought assistance following concerns the upcoming Federal Election has thrown a shadow of uncertainty over future aid schemes for drought-stricken areas of the state.

It follows an announcement last week by Prime Minister Scott Morrison on new re-stocking and re-planting loans of up to \$200,000 for farm businesses, part of a \$500 million package that includes the establishment of a specific "Regional Investment Corporation" for the loans, once conditions improve. The package also includes funding for more rural financial counsellors.

The Country Women's Association (CWA) of NSW at its State Conference in Albury yesterday, prior to a visit to the conference by Mr Morrison, expressed concerns that now the Government is in 'caretaker mode' pending the federal election, there is no further information available around the announcement and that the federal Opposition has not yet indicated its intention to support the scheme should it win the May 18 ballot.

"As it stands the Opposition has even expressed some hesitation at the issuing of concessional loans, which means if we have a change of government, we may not see the program get off the ground at all," said Annette Turner, CWA of NSW State President.

"We are calling for all major political parties to state their support for this scheme. Major issues, such as drought, should be treated with a bipartisan approach and all major parties should have a firm position for action on drought so money and support gets to where it's needed without delay.

"It's too important to play politics with and must be treated with the urgency it deserves. The fact the government is in 'caretaker mode' should make no difference. In drought-stricken areas, every single day bites. Unlike politicians, we can't ask our farmers to wait a few weeks, while there is a potential changing of the guard."

The motion of urgency, which was unanimously carried by delegates, included a call for consideration of grants for farmers, as well as loans, Mrs Turner saying that while they welcomed concessional loans, they wanted the major parties to look further into grants, where appropriate.

The motion encompassed the need for more information on the budget announcement of \$5 million for the Country Women's Association of Australia to assist with the ongoing allocation of drought assistance grants, along with a call for the streamlining and simplification of the Farm



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Household Allowance scheme, in the wake of ongoing complaints from applicants about the excessive 'red tape' around the scheme.

"We have publicly applauded the Government for the funding for the CWA of Australia. And as we have proven, drought funding is in very good hands with the CWA, with the state associations efficiently, and at no cost, getting every dollar to where it is needed. However, we need all parties to confirm ongoing support for this. If there is a change of Government we need to know that all parties support this important work," Mrs Turner said.

Several other urgency motions around water security for regional communities are also due to be discussed by delegates today, including one relating to the inadequate quality of town water in many regional areas and the need for greater transparency on decision-making under the Murray Darling Basin Plan, particularly relating to the allocation of water and the balance between social, economic and environmental factors in water management.

For more information, details on the motions or interview requests, please contact Kylie Galbraith, Seftons, on 0411 480 208.