

# Drought fund rules deny dry pastoral regions



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A long anticipated grant programme meant to provide relief to drought-affected regions has instead left WA farming communities disappointed and confused.

The Prime Minister and Federal Minister for Drought announced the Drought Communities Programme funding for 35 WA Local Governments last month.

In a bizarre outcome, not a single Council in the drought-ravaged pastoral regions of WA qualified.

While it is pleasing that some Councils will receive the drought funding, the omission of over a dozen Local Governments in the WA rangelands and northern agricultural region draws forth a number of questions.

It is no secret that the pastoralists and farmers in these regions have been crippled by the drought over many years.

Struggling pastoralists, despite generations of endeavour, are on a long-term decline from the drought and are doing anything they can to keep their stock alive, their lands productive and their markets intact.

While they are not anticipating a free-for-all, it would be expected that the Federal Government be transparent with a fair formula of metrics to decide on the grant recipients.

For example, the criteria of employment data could possibly be affected by the mining sector, since it is one of the main employers in the pastoral regions.

The Federal Drought Minister would be familiar with the above – he

toured the WA southern rangelands last November and announced he would look at the criteria for Local Governments where mining and pastoralism co-exist.

Despite the announcement, it did not eventuate into a competent set of metrics that encompass existing and long term drought situations which are clearly valid and legitimate.

When the Prime Minister took office in last August, he declared drought the most urgent and pressing need which required long-term resilience into the future.

Unfortunately, the outcome of this funding round of the Drought Communities Programme has translated into a band-aid solution, created in a hurry, and with little consultation.

Without collaboration and consultation between all spheres of Government, much-needed money, which will make a real difference to hurting communities amid the persistent drought, will be hindered.

This is also against a backdrop of Western Australia having received only two per cent of available Commonwealth water related funding in the last decade.

The confusion surrounding the eligibility criteria of the Drought Communities Programme may well have blinded the Federal Government's outlook of drought affected communities across Western Australia, forsaking many struggling WA farmers, pastoralists and their communities in the process.

Given the circumstances, a full review of the eligibility criteria for the Drought Communities Programme is required to ensure that this investment of taxpayers' dollars is targeted to those most in need, and that clearly includes our communities in the rangelands and northern agricultural region.

