

MEDIA RELEASE

From Waikato Regional Drought Committee

22 December 2010

Recent rain welcome but drought far from over

Recent rain in the Waikato has been an “early Christmas present” for farmers but the region-wide drought was far from over, a meeting of the multi-agency regional drought committee heard today.

Committee chairman Peter Buckley of Environment Waikato said the recent rain had been patchy and not enough to break the back of the drought, with conditions remaining difficult for many.

“We’re certainly not out of the woods yet despite the recent rain. Committee members will be closely monitoring what happens with rainfall as we can’t afford to relax just yet.”

The Government recently declared the Waikato regional council area, south of Auckland city and the Ruapehu district to be in drought, meaning various forms of assistance would continue to be available to farmers from 1 January.

A Fonterra representative told the committee the local areas whose milk production had been worst affected by the drought were South Auckland, Cambridge, Taupo, Morrinsville and Hamilton.

“We know that many farmers are under stress due to the current drought, which has compounded problems caused by dry conditions in the region in recent years,” said Mr Buckley, a north Waikato dairy farmer.

“So we encourage any farmers to call the Rural Support Trust on 0800 787 254 if they need assistance and to talk to their banks about their cash flow situation as required. Farmers are proud people and can be shy about reaching out for help but they should definitely not be afraid to put their hand up if they need to. The current conditions are tough and agencies are happy to discuss providing assistance.”

Today’s committee meeting heard it was possible that the drought in Waikato could be declared over if January was wet enough. Forecasts at this stage were that rainfall would be normal or above from now till February.

“But the whole question of when the drought might be declared over is something we will obviously have to keep under close review depending on what happens with the weather,” Mr Buckley said.

“For now, members of the committee will continue to share information so that we can help the region best cope with the affects of the drought as summer progresses.”

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