

**Subject:** FW: WAIKATO SEEKS FRESH DROUGHT DECLARATION

**Media release**

**From WAIKATO REGIONAL DROUGHT COMMITTEE**

**8 December 2010**

## **WAIKATO SEEKS FRESH DROUGHT DECLARATION**

The Government is being asked to make a fresh drought declaration covering the Waikato and nearby areas following the very dry conditions affecting farmers in the region.

A sub-group of the Waikato Regional Drought Committee met in Hamilton today and heard that no significant rain is expected in the next few weeks. Waikato and the central plateau were considered the driest areas behind Northland, where a new drought declaration was made today by the Government.

The meeting passed on a request for a new Waikato declaration to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry official at the meeting, who said MAF would now formally evaluate the request.

The declaration sought would cover from south of Auckland city through to Ruapehu district, which is just outside the Waikato Regional Council area.

Assistance offered to farmers under an earlier drought declaration is due to expire on 31 December, said committee chairman Peter Buckley of Environment Waikato.

Mr Buckley said farmers were already doing much to help themselves manage their way through the current dry conditions, and a drought declaration would provide them with an assurance that emergency support was available longer term if required.

“If we get a fresh declaration, this will enable farmers to continue to access emergency assistance beyond 31 December, and also it will continue funding for the Rural Support Trust in our area which has done so much work to support farmers during the problems this year.

“Conditions out there are tough and we want to make sure that if the dry conditions persist that the support infrastructure is in place going on into the new year,” said Mr Buckley.

“The drought declaration can always be rescinded if we get the rain we need but we believe it’s important to ensure the support infrastructure remains in place given the continuing dry conditions.

“We will also be formally reconvening the drought committee on 22 December to help ensure that everyone is working together to help farmers manage through the drought.”

The meeting – attended by EW councillors and staff, Federated Farmers representatives, the Rural Support Trust and MAF – heard details of a very dry few months in the region with soil moisture and non-spring fed rivers at very low levels. Supplementary feed production was down by 50 per cent on average nationally and feed prices had risen. Some farmers were drying off cows early, while others were sending stock to the freezing works.

The La Nina weather pattern currently affecting the country had been present during the 2008 drought conditions which cost the national economy \$2.8 billion and the regional economy \$1.2 billion, said MAF’s North Island regional policy manager Phil Journeaux.

Mr Buckley said the meeting heard that the whole country was very dry and deteriorating rapidly.

“Collectively we in the Waikato and neighbouring areas will need to co-operate closely to help farmers and others weather this dry spell. It’s not only important for the farmers but for the rural towns and the wider regional economy that they support.”

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