



Ellis welcomes new scientific trial drought plan

AGRICULTURAL Region MLC Brian Ellis has welcomed a trial program to help farmers cope with drought.

A third generation grain grower, Mr Ellis said that the key components of the plan appeared to be a fairly comprehensive approach to keeping farmers on the land and helping others to exit their properties with dignity.

“The trial offers an improvement on the Exceptional Circumstances grants made in the past as it is a more holistic approach and goes further than crisis management,” Mr Ellis said.

“Having personal experience of the seasonal ups and downs of farming, I believe this new system could take farm assistance and farm management in a positive new direction if it is effectively implemented.

“The proof is in the pudding, and I will be watching with interest to see the uptake of the pro-

gram, how it is implemented, and farmer feedback.

“I am keen to see that it is a practical trial with real outcomes for farmers rather than just a targeted study.”

The pilot program was announced by WA Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman and Federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke following a request by Mr Redman in June last year for a drought reform trial to be conducted in WA.

The main objectives of the trial are to strengthen farm businesses, sustain farming families and build resilient rural communities.

The seven major components include:

Farm Planning: assistance for farmers to undertake a program of training to enhance their skills in business planning;

Building Farm Businesses: grants of up to \$60,000 to help farmers better manage and prepare for future chal-

lenges;

Farm Family Support: income support to help families meet basic household needs;

Stronger Rural Communities: grants of up to \$300,000 for eligible local groups experiencing significant hardship due to an agricultural downturn to build the resilience of their rural community and assist them to manage future hardship;

Farm Social Support: a better coordinated social support network to meet mental health, counselling and social needs of farming families and rural communities;

Farm Exit Support: grants of up to \$170,000 to support farmers who decide to sell their farm, including retraining and relocation expenses; and

Beyond Farming: a program for farmers who want to know more about opportunities that arise when they sell up or retire.

The WA Government will fund and administer

the Farm Planning component of the trial and will administer the Building Farm Businesses component.

The pilot region extends from Karratha to Esperance, and was selected on the basis of previous recipients of Exceptional Circumstances.

It will start on July 1 and end on June 30, 2011, although Building Farm Business grants will be spread over four years.

Under the agreement the Western Australian Government will not be able to apply for an Exceptional Circumstances during the period of July 1-June 30, 2011.

Farmers wanting further information can visit the website at www.daff.gov.au/wapilot or call 13 23 16.

Mr Ellis will also hang the relevant fact sheets on his website at brianellis.com.au

