

Media release

Worsening drought prompts call for planning

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Recent rain has done little to ease the worsening drought conditions affecting the region and all Northlanders are being advised to plan now to manage its effects.

Following its second meeting today, the multi-agency Northland Drought Committee says all Northlanders should be aware of both the actual and potential impacts of the ongoing dry weather and plan accordingly - if they haven't already.

Drought Committee spokesperson Helen Moodie – who's also the Rural Support Trust Northland Co-ordinator – says the drought's reach is affecting all areas of Northland, albeit to varying degrees.

“While we've had some rain recently, it's nowhere near enough to make a difference and at this stage forecasters are still predicting these dry conditions are here to stay for at least the next month or two,” she says.

“Rainfall for the next 3 months is predicted to be normal at best. That's not enough to turn pasture growth around. Soil moisture and river flows are predicted to remain below normal, similar to conditions faced during the last regionally significant drought in the early 1980s. In fact, some parts of Northland have experienced the lowest November to January rainfall totals in a century.”

Farmers in particular need to ensure they are planning for the drought and putting those plans into action. Those plans also need to be reviewed regularly to ensure they are still relevant.

“Unless we get some fairly serious rain in the next few weeks, there are some farmers who will be facing major stock water shortages. Bluntly, simply hoping for rain is just not a viable option; we're saying plans need to be put in place now based on the worst case scenario,” she says.

Stock feed and water are already major concerns for many farmers who have contacted the drought helpline – **0800 778 667** – and Tafi Manjala, DairyNZ Regional Manager (Upper North Island), is advising farmers to lock in supplementary feed contracts, including grazing, now.

“We are advising farmers to do a feed budget so they know what they need and have a plan in place to purchase supplementary feed or grazing rather than risk leaving it until just before they need it.”

“People need to remember the effects of a drought like this are not just short-term. Longer term there's likely to be little feed going into winter and stock condition may also be an issue.”

Mr Manjala says a series of meetings are being organised throughout the region to provide a variety of information to farmers including financial assistance and longer-term drought planning.

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By classifying the drought as “medium”, the Government has unlocked a range of support including various levels of tax assistance.

“There is no provision for direct compensation, grants or subsidies in the package. However, farmers can access a range of financial assistance and there is support available for anyone struggling to cope with the situation,” says Ms Moodie.

“Farmers typically just get on and deal with whatever the elements throw at them, however, the stress of finding feed for stock, ensuring they have adequate water, paying bills and – in the worst case scenario – feeding their families, can obviously still take its toll,” she says.

“It’s far better to seek help now, rather than leaving it until things are well out of hand.”

Ms Moodie says the information farmers need is available by phoning **0800 778 667** and through the Northland Regional Council website at www.nrc.govt.nz/drought.

For more information
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