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MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 13 November 2008

Premier needs to deliver on drought assistance

The State Government has failed to deliver promised funding for rural Victorian communities.

David Koch, Member for Western Victoria, said in Parliament this week that by failing to spend 97 per cent of \$10 million promised in special drought support to help rural communities during the worst drought in living memory, Labor has once again demonstrated its lack of compassion for country Victorians

“Figures in the 2008/09 Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Report reveal that in 18 months only \$245,765 of the promised \$5 million special drought funding to be funded through the Small Towns Development Fund had been delivered up to 31 March this year.

“The Small Towns Development Fund is part of the notoriously mismanaged Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF).

“The Brumby Government has again been caught out breaking promises to regional and rural communities as the ongoing drought flattens country towns and their communities.

“As Coalition Leader Ted Baillieu visited drought-ravaged rural communities over two days during last week, the Premier seems to have no comprehension of the current crisis and the immediate need of support for struggling families.

“This city-centric Government and its city-centric bureaucracy have no idea of what it is like for rural families who are facing yet another year of well below average rainfall.

“Farmers in the grain belts of the Wimmera/Mallee and much of northern Victoria are reporting a 35 per cent reduction in rainfall over the past seven years and crop yields that are at least 20 per cent below long term averages this year. Farmers are walking off the land and depression is claiming too many, while there are warnings the price of food could double as the drought continues to bite.

“This is another example of Labor’s mismanagement that is hurting regional Victorians at a time when drought-affected communities most need a helping hand and much-needed assistance.

“Drought-ravaged communities desperately need support to help them deal with worsening conditions, but instead this arrogant Government continues to mislead them on drought support.

“After eight years into the ten-year RIDF program, the Government has only spent \$272 million of its promised \$585 million budget.

“The ongoing mismanagement of the Small Towns Development Fund is another example of underspending in the RIDF. With only two years to run of its ten-year program, blatantly the Government has only spent 45 per cent of its promised funding, denying Victorian’s assistance.

“Premier Brumby and his Government must stop misleading country Victorians and guarantee that the total allocation of the Small Towns Development Fund will be delivered to struggling drought-affected regional and rural communities within the program period up to 2010”, David Koch said.

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