

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 112
Asked on 5 March 2014

MR KATTER asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (MR McVEIGH)–

QUESTION: Will the Minister advise if the existing number of rural financial counsellors servicing the North West region is adequate to process in a timely manner, the number of applicants for the federal assistance package and if not, will he commit to immediate appointment of an additional person in the North West region?

ANSWER:

It is Queensland Government policy to provide targeted financial counselling assistance on a temporary basis following natural disasters and during drought.

The Rural Financial Counselling Service is a Federal Government program that is available nationally. The program is primarily funded by the Federal Government with contributions from State Governments.

In Queensland, rural financial counselling is delivered by two private sector service providers based in Longreach and Roma.

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry officers regularly liaise with these service providers including in times of drought and natural disaster.

As a result of consultations, in October last year, I provided the service based in Roma with funding of around \$180,000 to employ two financial counsellors to provide targeted assistance in the South West and Maranoa regions. These positions are temporary up to 30 June 2014.

At that time, the Longreach group which provides financial counselling in the North West indicated that current resources were sufficient for the demand from primary producers in the region, and they did not request additional funding to provide targeted support.

Based on current advice, the Longreach service still believes it employs sufficient counsellors to meet the current demand for financial counselling from the North West region, including advice on the Federal Government's Farm Finance Package and its drought assistance package.

However, if the situation in the North West changes and the Longreach service cannot meet demand with its existing resources I will consider any request from them for additional funding.