

Horticultural body Growcom has welcomed Australian federal government and Queensland government relief assistance to help farmers recover after recent floods, but has asked for the inclusion of more regions. 

Financial assistance arrangements including recovery grants of up to AUD\$25,000 (US\$25,847) for growers affected in the Bundaberg, North Burnett, Fraser Coast, Gympie and Lockyer Valley regions.

However, Growcom pointed out that other regions including the Scenic Rim, Fassifern Valley, the Sunshine Coast, Logan and Albert were also hit by flooding and severe weather.

"Kalbar had the worst flooding that has been seen in 60 years while the Sunshine Coast lost tree crops to severe wind. It is only logical that these areas should be included in access to assistance measures," said Growcom CEO Alex Livingstone.

"In total it is likely to cost growers more than AUD\$100 million (US\$103 million) in lost production and infrastructure. In many districts the damage was worse than in 2010/11.

"We calculate at least 65 per cent of growers in the Lockyer Valley, 55 per cent in the Fassifern Valley, 50 per cent in the Bundaberg region and 30 per cent in the Gayndah/Mundubbera region have been severely impacted. Ongoing challenges include the loss of farm labour and fertile soil washed away by floodwaters."

He also called for wage subsidies to help growers keep existing staff, as well highlighting the need for Industry Recovery Officers (IROs).

"In the 2010/11 natural disasters, growers who were unable to fill out their paperwork correctly were faced with long and frustrating delays in assistance. Growcom would like to see the process streamlined this time around and having IROs in place would definitely help."

### **Package details**

Livingstone said farmers were already seeking to apply for the grants, and were looking forward to forms and guidelines from the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority (QRAA).

"We also welcome news this week of the Disaster Income Recovery Subsidy (DIRS) which will provide help to farmers who can demonstrate they have experienced a loss of income as a direct result of the natural disaster," he said.

"Once again, the subsidy is so far only being made available to individuals in Bundaberg, Gympie, Fraser Coast, North Burnett and Lockyer Valley and will provide fortnightly payments equivalent to the maximum rate of the Newstart Allowance depending on the person's circumstances.

"This is on top of payments for one-off emergency financial assistance - to individuals in Bundaberg, Gympie, Fraser Coast, North Burnett and Lockyer Valley."

Livingstone labeled the availability of recovery grants and other assistance as "an important injection of confidence" that will allow growers to continue urgent rebuilding and replanting.

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