

From: Media Statements QLD statements@qld.gov.au
Subject: Budget boost to fight against drought and Panama disease
Date: 14 July 2015 8:08 pm
To: aemscott@icloud.com



Media release

Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries and Minister
for Sport and Racing
The Honourable Bill Byrne

Budget boost to fight against drought and Panama disease

Helping farmers through Queensland's continuing drought, measures to prevent the spread of the potentially devastating Panama disease tropical race 4, and funding associated with the implementation of three net-free fishing zones are the key agriculture and fisheries spending priorities in the 2015-16 State Budget.

Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries Bill Byrne said the Budget included \$52.1 million in much needed drought relief for primary producers and rural communities.

"This prolonged and widespread drought is our greatest challenge but one we are determined to meet.

"Our spending priorities in this Budget reflect that determination. In the coming year the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is committing \$32.9 million to the multi-agency drought assistance package."

Mr Byrne said the multi-faceted response to the drought which now engulfed more than 80 per cent of the State and covered 32 local government areas was wide-ranging and the result of consultation with stakeholders.

"It includes increased funding for producers entering their third successive year of drought, additional funding for wild dog and feral cat control, social and community support and \$1.5 million for primary mental health services to be provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service," he said.

Almost \$10 million is to be invested in the response to Panama, recognising the threat it poses to Queensland's \$600 million banana industry.

"This budget investment will not only help to protect banana plantations, but will also assist in managing the long-term social and economic impacts of the outbreak across northern Queensland.

"There is also \$10 million in the Budget to buy-back commercial fishing licences and provide assistance to operators directly impacted by the implementation of net-free zones to be introduced off Cairns, Mackay and the Capricorn Coast-Fitzroy River."

Mr Byrne said the zones, part of the Palaszczuk Government's Sustainable Fishing Plan and an election commitment, would provide opportunities for new jobs to be created to support recreational fishing tourism.

The total Department of Agriculture and Fisheries budget for 2015-16 is \$438 million.

Media contact: Michelle Connolly 0478 325 738

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