



MEDIA RELEASE

Mayor Zaffina Welcomes Drought Support — Calls for Formal Drought Declarations and Subsidies

Balranald Shire Council Mayor, Cr Louie Zaffina, has welcomed the NSW Government's expanded drought assistance package following his attendance at the Southern NSW drought forum held at Wentworth Shire Council on 4 February 2026.

The community meeting, attended by Southern NSW Drought Coordinator Ray Willis, mayors and farmers from across the region, provided a direct platform for drought-affected producers to outline the significant challenges facing their businesses and families.

Mayor Zaffina said farmers spoke candidly about escalating feed and freight costs, declining water availability, livestock management pressures, cash-flow stress, and the ongoing mental toll of prolonged dry conditions.

On 16 February 2026, NSW Minister for Agriculture, Tara Moriarty, announced an expansion of the Minns Government's drought plan, including:

- Doubling the Drought Ready and Resilient Fund loan cap to \$500,000.
- A new Small Drought Relief Loan of up to \$100,000 with reduced documentation requirements.
- Additional funding for the NSW Rural Financial Counselling Service.
- Extension of the Drought Adoption Officer Program and the Southern NSW Drought Coordinator role.
- Free statewide feed and water testing; and
- Increased pest and kangaroo management funding in drought-affected western NSW.

Mayor Zaffina acknowledged that the additional financial tools and support services are positive and reflect that the concerns raised at the Wentworth forum were heard.

"We appreciate the announcement of further support and the willingness of the Minister and Drought Coordinator to engage directly with our communities," Mayor Zaffina said.

“However, much of what has been announced is an expansion of existing measures. While helpful, many farmers feel it is more of the same.”

Mayor Zaffina said two strong themes emerged at the Wentworth meeting: the call for the formal declaration of droughts and the reinstatement of direct subsidies.

“There remains a strong view in rural communities that governments should return to formally declaring droughts. A declaration creates clarity, increases public awareness, and generates the media exposure that highlights the seriousness of the situation,” he said.

“Subsidies, particularly for freight and fodder, were also a hot topic. Farmers are under immense financial pressure, and many believe targeted subsidies provide immediate, tangible relief during critical periods.”

Mayor Zaffina emphasised that Balranald Shire Council will continue to advocate for both practical financial assistance and broader policy settings that recognise the scale and impact of prolonged drought conditions.

“Our farming sector underpins the economic and social fabric of both Balranald and neighbouring Shires. Council will continue to work constructively with the NSW Government, while strongly representing the views expressed by our producers.”

Farmers seeking further information about available drought assistance can contact the NSW Rural Assistance Authority, Local Land Services, or the NSW Rural Financial Counselling Service.

Terry Dodds PSM

CEO

Balranald Shire Council

