

MEDIA RELEASE

7 July 2020

FREE LEGAL HELP FOR BUSHFIRE AFFECTED LOCALS

Farmers, small businesses and regional communities recovering from the worst bushfire season in living memory are set to benefit from close to \$5 million in Commonwealth funding for NSW's legal assistance services.

Member for Goulburn Wendy Tuckerman said the investment will play an important role in helping the electorate recover from the devastating bushfire season.

"The fires not only caused the loss of life, homes, livestock and property, but in their wake, the flames also left many people across our community with difficult legal problems," Mrs Tuckerman said.

"For anyone who faces insurance claims, tenancy issues, financial hardship, social security entitlements and other legal problems caused by the bushfires, this investment will mean they have access to more free legal support than ever before."

Deputy Premier and Minister responsible for Disaster Recovery John Barilaro said the funding will boost a range of legal assistance services and programs.

"Almost \$3 million in funding will help individuals navigating legal issues caused by the bushfire and made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic," Mr Barilaro said.

"A further \$2 million will be invested to provide legal support for small businesses and primary producers. This will allow Legal Aid NSW to launch a new grants program, enabling private lawyer to access grants of aid to deliver free legal services to local businesses impacted by bushfires."

Attorney General Mark Speakman said the funding will boost the capacity of Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres and the Aboriginal Legal Service to support individuals in bushfire affected area across the State.

“This investment is great news for anyone whose home or livelihood has been affected by the bushfires. From the South Coast, to the Snowy Valley, to the Southern Highlands and to the North and Mid-North Coasts, more pro bono solicitors and legal assistance will be available to those in need,” Mr Speakman said.

Today’s \$4.9 million Bushfire Funding Agreement is part of the Australian Government’s \$2 billion response to the 2019-20 Bushfire Disaster over two years.

The Agreement will deliver the following legal assistance supports:

Individuals

- Boost Legal Aid’s [Disaster Response Legal Service](#) to provide advice and referrals on issues including insurance claims, financial hardship, accommodation and CentreLink entitlements.
- Additional staff at five generalist Community Legal Centres (CLCs) in bushfire affected communities and three specialist CLCs delivering services to bushfire affected individuals.
- Increase the capacity of the Aboriginal Legal Service to provide its services to individuals in bushfire affected communities.

Businesses and primary producers

- Establish and promote a new grants policy for private practitioners to deliver legal services to small business and primary producers for bushfire related issues.
- Extend Justice Connect’s pro bono platform to link small business and primary producers with pro bono services.
- Support the Financial Rights Legal Centre to continue offering its services specialising in areas including consumer credit, banking, debt recovery and insurance to small business and primary producers.

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