



## PRIME MINISTER

135/93

### STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, HON P.J. KEATING, MP TASKFORCE REPORT ON BENALLA FLOODS

I have received the report on the Benalla floods prepared by the Government's Rural and Regional Taskforce, headed by the Member for Page, Harry Woods.

This report was compiled after the taskforce visited the Benalla region and met representatives of the Victorian Farmers' Federation, the Chamber of Commerce and all local municipalities, to establish how much damage was done in the floods and how the Commonwealth could help.

Mr Woods has noted that the local representatives he met were generally happy with the Commonwealth's initial response to the immediate personal hardships. There was recognition of the value of programs such as JobSkills and the Landcare and Environment Action Program. The taskforce has recommended that these programs be extended specially in the flood-affected area.

It recommends that assistance be considered through the National Landcare Program in restoring and repairing severely damaged land, waterways and vegetation. And it recommends that the Minister for Social Security consider special disaster provisions, so that benefits could be paid retrospectively to those who have helped in the clean-up.

Mr Woods has reported to me that many local people told the taskforce they believed they were being denied the level of financial help that ought to be provided by the Victorian State Government. Similar concerns have been voiced by the Victorian Farmers' Federation, in a statement of November 11 and at the taskforce's hearings.

This is a matter of concern to the Commonwealth Government. Under the terms of the National Disaster Relief Arrangements, the cost of disaster relief is met by the State Government up to an agreed threshold, and matched by the Commonwealth beyond that. Victoria's spending has not reached that threshold, Mr Woods told me.

I am now examining the report of the taskforce, and I will ensure that recommendations for action are put before the relevant Commonwealth Ministers without delay.

CANBERRA,  
November 26, 1993

Further inquiries:

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