



PRIME MINISTER

153/93

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP

FURTHER HELP FOR VICTORIAN FLOOD VICTIMS

The Commonwealth Government has decided on a new package of assistance for people affected by flooding in regional Victoria, in addition to the substantial assistance provided immediately after the flooding.

This decision follows the receipt of a report prepared by my Rural and Regional Task Force, and further considerations by my colleagues in the Ministry. The task force, chaired by the Member for Page, Harry Woods, visited the severely affected centre of Benalla on 12 November to examine first-hand the damage caused by the floods.

The Government will make available \$209,000 from Landcare funds, on a dollar-for-dollar basis with the Victorian Government, to develop further flood prevention measures.

An extra 50 JOBSKILLS places will be allocated to the flood-affected region. This is in addition to the 20 LEAP places allocated to the Wangaratta-Benalla area for 1993-94 at a cost of \$164,000.

The Government plans to amend the Social Security Act to permit some retrospective payments. In the Victorian floods, there is clear evidence of some families having difficulty in accessing entitlements. Where people were eligible for benefits, but did not get their applications in on time because of the floods, payments will be available as an act of grace.

In light of the Victorian experience, I will discuss with the Minister for Finance whether we need to review the thresholds which operate under the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements, and the relative treatment of households and businesses under the Arrangements. This will be additional to the substantial assistance provided to Victoria under the existing arrangements.

This response shows that this Government is committed to ensuring that appropriate and timely assistance is provided to those affected by natural disasters of this type.

CANBERRA

22 DECEMBER, 1993

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