

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES - 20 OCTOBER 2011 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Rural Services Officers

Question reference number: HSW 1

Senator: Williams

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 9 December 2011

Number of pages: 1

Question:

- a) The Centrelink Rural Support team did a great job during the Bundarra drought in the past couple of years, getting out on the ground and helping with paperwork and encouraging farmers to apply for support. But I am being told these officers, or officer, has been withdrawn. Is that correct?
- b) Is it a budgetary decision, a staffing decision or a demand decision?
- c) Does Centrelink have a Rural Field officer available to travel around New England at short notice?
- d) When a farmer rings and wants some help, will a field office be sent out?
- e) Isn't this shoddy service when you consider seasons are variable?
- f) Has this happened in other areas? Will it be addressed?

Answer:

- a) Yes.
- b) It is both a budgetary and demand decision.
- c) Yes.
- d) Depending on the customer's circumstances, some outreach to Bundarra is still being maintained, including outreach services to the local hospital.

The department also provides support via Self-Service, Mobile Offices, Call Centres and there is an Access Point at Bundarra. If a rural customer rings the Call Centre number on 13 23 16 they will be put through to a rural service expert who can assist them with their enquiry.
- e) No.
- f) Yes. It is addressed through the services outlined in (d).