



National Farmers'
F E D E R A T I O N

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Government makes native title savings, at farmers' expense

Government cost cutting in native title will save the Government \$19 million over the next four years – at the expense of native title respondents who have had their funding cut, the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) has today said.

NFF President Jock Laurie said the Government's boast today that reforms to native title will save millions is a slap in the face to respondents who have had the \$2.2 million needed to continue their legal representation cut.

“Up until this year, both claimants and respondents in native title cases have had fair and equal access to assistance and legal representation,” Mr Laurie said.

“But the Government decided in November to cease funding to respondents – while continuing funding for claimants – creating inequality in their access to justice. Respondents have been left to foot the hefty bills for legal representation or be left to represent themselves.

“This has severely jeopardised the goodwill of the current system for the sake of Government cost cutting. By cutting this funding for respondents, the Government will save only \$2.2 million over two years.

“This is hardly a vast sum of money for the Government at a time when it is boasting about its millions of dollars in savings, yet is vital for the more than 1,600 respondents still to have their native title cases heard.

“And while the Government is today saying that the reforms will improve the efficiency of the native title process, cutting respondent funding has actually had the opposite effect.

“Under the old system, one lawyer and one Native Title Officer represented all of the pastoral respondents in one claim. Now, with the funding cut, self-represented farmers or legal representatives for a host of individuals are fronting the courts, slowing down the process.

“Ironically for the Government, this will end up costing more than the \$2.2 million they had hoped to save.

“The time impost on the court has been noted by a Federal Court judge, Justice Rares, who just last month said the Commonwealth's cutting of respondent funding was ‘ridiculous’ and an ‘outrageous interference’ in the orderly process of the court.

“With only two years left to run in existing native title cases, we call on the Government to put people ahead of profit and reinstate respondent funding,” Mr Laurie said.

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