Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries, Chris Natt, today called on the Federal Government to pave the way for additional drought relief for pastoralists in Central Australia.

Mr Natt said the Territory Government will today lodge a formal application for Exceptional Circumstances to be declared over an area to the south and east of Alice Springs.

“This is the final step in our continued lobbying of the Commonwealth to assist our pastoralists who are going through tough times.

“The application is a comprehensive and complex document which has been developed in full partnership with the Northern Territory Cattlemen’s Association.

“The application seeks to demonstrate that between 2003 and 2006 there were a number of exceptional seasonal events that resulted in producers being left in a position of rare and severe financial and social hardship.

“Central Australia has a long and proud tradition in the pastoral industry dating back over 100 years and this industry remains the main economic driver for the region.

“The Alice Springs Pastoral District accounts for over 20% of the Territory’s total beef industry performance, generating an estimated Gross Value Product in 2004-05 of $55 million. The contribution of the southern district saw a downturn in 2004-05 to $15.5 million – a clear indication of the severity of the drought.

“The sector is a strong and vibrant part of the Territory, but unfortunately many of the families are struggling and are in need of assistance,” he said.

Minister Natt said if a case for Exceptional Circumstances was granted, then pastoralists in the affected area would need to apply individually for assistance.

“This will complement assistance already provided by the Territory Government to drought declared properties under the Northern Territory Drought Assistance Arrangements, Pastoral Water Enhancement Scheme and through the FarmBis program partnership with the Australian Government.

“I am hoping for a speedy reply from the Commonwealth on this issue and I urge those in Canberra to give careful consideration to the application.

"The application will also enable the NT Cattlemen's Association to strongly lobby the Australian Government when representatives travel to Canberra on Tuesday," he said.

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