



## **2024 Dry Season Taskforce – meeting #2**

**Friday 3 May 2024**

### **Meeting Communiqué**

The Dry Season Taskforce met for the second time at Dumas House on Friday 3 May 2024.

Agriculture and Food Minister Jackie Jarvis provided an overview of the Cook Government's newly announced \$8.6 million funding support package for farmers currently being impacted by dry seasonal conditions and the guidelines for the hardship grants. Minister Jarvis also provided an update on her request to Minister Watt for a 10-day extension to the live export moratorium and thanked the Taskforce members for acting quickly in the identification of immediate assistance measures.

The Taskforce was chaired by Wheatbelt Development Commission Chief Executive Officer Rob Cossart, who recently led the emergency response to the Kimberley floods, in his role as State Recovery Coordinator. The Taskforce is focused on immediate tangible actions to support farmers.

### **Recent rainfall**

After months of record dry conditions, parts of the South West Land Division (SWLD) received varied rainfall last week. Whilst welcomed, the rainfall does not change the immediate pressures facing farmers across the South West and in some cases presents additional challenges with on farm decision-making. The overall weather pattern continues to be dominated by high pressure systems to the south and east of the state. A breakdown of this feature is expected during the second half of May which will increase the likelihood of rain in the SWLD from cold fronts.

### **Dry Season survey**

As an action arising from the first Taskforce meeting, Sheep Producers Australia, Cattle Australia and Western Dairy have undertaken a survey of farmers, to quantify livestock numbers, access to feed and water, market suitability of livestock and assistance required. As of 9am 3 May 2024, over 600 responses have been received. Sheep Producers Australia Chief Executive Officer Bonnie Skinner provided an overview of the preliminary data, noting feed, water and financial support as priorities. The survey has been extended and will remain open until Wednesday 8 May.

## DPIRD update on Dry Season initiatives

Deputy Director General of Primary Industries Development Cec McConnell provided an update on DPIRD's ongoing dry season initiatives, including the establishment of a weekly weather briefing by DPIRD and BoM with a focus on the South West. DPIRD will continue to provide up-to-date advice and resources on its website such as feed and water budgeting tools and industry analysis ([Season 2024: information for WA farmers | Agriculture and Food](#)).

A key concern is for smaller growers who do not have established networks for accessing hay. The Western Beef/South West NRM Feed Register and other online platforms will assist in connecting producers requiring fodder. DPIRD is considering feed requirements based on future circumstances and identifying key decision points.

DPIRD is working closely with DWER and the Water Corporation on water supplies and is encouraging primary producers to assess their water capability, test water quality, forward plan and contact their Local Government Authority (LGA) if their water supplies are getting low.

DPIRD is working with recipients of the support package funding (Farmers Across Borders, Rural Aid, Rural West, Regional Men's Health, Blue Tree Project, and Grower Group Alliance) to finalise financial assistance agreements.

## DWER update on Dry Season initiatives

DWER advised that the Community Water Supply Partnership Program will be expanded to regional communities with average annual rainfall >600mm (part of the \$8.6 million dry season support package). Local Governments and community groups will be able to apply for up to \$100,000 for water supply projects based on community needs for infrastructure, including additional water storage capacity and water carting.

Water Corporation is continuing to assess options for additional access and improved supply of potable and non-potable water supplies.

## Taskforce member initiatives update

- Western Beef and South West NRM have established an online feed register including a farmer forum and dry season resources: [The Livestock Feed | Nature Voice \(southwestnrm.org.au\)](#).
- Whilst prices remain low, the throughflow of livestock at the Muchea and Katanning saleyards is consistent with historic trends.
- V&V Walsh have increased processing shifts to increase capacity and to ease market pressures.
- 2024 WA Producer Survey being run by Sheep Producers Australia has been extended until the 8 May 2024.

## Next steps

Taskforce members observations on dry conditions, emerging risks and critical points:

- Provision of clear and consistent information and advice for farmers on availability and access to stock feed (including hay), water and support services.
- Additional information on locations and flow rates of potable and non-potable water supplies and standpipes in affected areas.
- Assessment of the 2024 WA Producer Survey, including producers requesting immediate assistance and identification of emerging and ongoing risks and mitigation options (including freight assistance) should challenging seasonal conditions continue.
- Engagement with LGAs regarding Community Water Supply Partnership Program.
- Taskforce briefing to regionally based mental health service providers and LGAs in the South West on dry season conditions and support services.
- DPIRD to continue to assess emerging seasonal issues (including animal welfare), key messages to industry and potential support needs.
- Seek advice about potential freight subsidies.

## Next meeting

The next meeting will be scheduled for a fortnight's time.

## Members

Rob Cossart (CEO Wheatbelt Development Commission), Andrew Jenkins (Chair Western Dairy), Bindi Murray (Director Sheep Producers Australia), James Bowie (Director Cattle Australia), I-lyn Loo (CEO WA Meat Industry Authority), Peter Nash (CEO Grain Industry Association of WA), Erin Gorter (Vice Chair Grower Group Alliance), Madeline Anderson (Chair Noongar Land Enterprise Group), Michael Nixon (Director Hort Innovation), Andrew Clark (Chair Rural Business Development Corporation), Nick Sloan (CEO WA Local Government Association), Tim Shackleton (Rural Health West), Cec McConnell (Deputy Director General – DPIRD) and Emily Briggs (Deputy Director General – DWER).

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