



Department of
**Primary Industries and
Regional Development**

2024 Dry Season Taskforce – meeting #3

Friday 17 May 2024

Meeting Communiqué

The Dry Season Taskforce met for the third time at Dumas House on Friday 17 May 2024.

The Taskforce is chaired by Rob Cossart, Chief Executive Officer of the Wheatbelt Development Commission. The Chair provided an overview of the Taskforce outcomes to date, industry engagement and feedback, implementation of actions and support packages, and reiterated the importance of ongoing government and industry collaboration to support on-ground outcomes. Taskforce members reiterated the critical period over the next 2-4 weeks, noting feed on offer and pasture growth are the main areas of focus.

Weather forecast

The Bureau of Meteorology provided an update on the current weather conditions noting no rainfall is predicted over the next week (week starting May 20), with the remainder of May likely to be drier and warmer than normal. The persistent band of high pressure to the south of WA is expected to shift in early June. Modelling shows 'normal to just above normal' chance of exceeding the median rainfall from June to August, with less confidence for southern areas.

Dry season producer survey update

Sheep Producers Australia presented an overview of the dry season producer survey data with 646 responses received. Chief Executive Officer Bonnie Skinner noted feed and financial support as priorities. The survey will be publicly released in the coming days.

DPIRD update on Dry Season initiatives

The Deputy Director General Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development provided an update on the implementation of DPIRD's ongoing dry season initiatives, including the roll-out of the \$8.6 million dry season support package. As of 15 May 2024, all but one Financial Assistance Agreement has been executed, with delivery of programs and assistance measures commenced.

There has been a positive uptake of the \$5000 hardship grants, with funds reaching the first recipients within 8 days from the program opening. The majority of recipients have been sheep or cattle farmers located in the South West and Great Southern regions.

DPIRD provided an overview of feed availability including feed on offer and pasture growth rates following recent rainfall across the South West; and focus areas for the next 2 weeks including the increasing interest and risks in the use of alternate feed options (including horticulture waste products).

DPIRD also outlined the estimated energy requirements, and feed and water requirements for the end of June in the event it does not rain until then, highlighting the critical period is over coming weeks.

Water update

Water Corporation updated the Taskforce on the status of non-potable water supplies. One local government area has engaged with Water Corporation to access emergency non-potable water supplies so far. Whilst recent rainfall has alleviated some drinking water concerns, run-off to dams is still minimal and livestock water shortages continue.

WALGA hosted a briefing with DWER and Water Corporation for LGAs on the Community Water Supplies Partnership Funding and Water Deficiency Declaration process on 23 May 2024.

Next steps

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

- Explore options to increase east coast movement of livestock.
- Explore options to increase stockfeed production or import pellets from the east coast to meet ongoing demand.
- Taskforce to provide feedback regarding the opportunities and risks of a range of support mechanisms such as freight subsidies.
- Engage with the meat processing sector to minimise the supply chain impacts of scheduled maintenance and shutdown periods and identify options to reduce impacts to processing capacity.
- Utilise the 'hotspot' data from the producer survey to ensure support programs are focused on priority areas (including water and feed assistance, grower group activities and mental health support).
- Disseminate information about financial assistance initiatives including the Regional Investment Corporation drought loans program particularly to 'hot spot' areas.
- Ensure communication material is fit-for-purpose and information is reaching target audiences including pasture and livestock management, animal welfare, work health and safety, and financial support.

Next meeting

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

Members

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 (CEO Rural Health West), Cec McConnell (Deputy Director General - DPIRD), Emily Briggs (Deputy Director General - DWER), and Barry Ford (General Manager Operations - Water Corporation)

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