



Department of
**Primary Industries and
Regional Development**

2024 Dry Season Taskforce – meeting #4

Friday 31 May 2024

Meeting Communiqué

The Dry Season Taskforce met for the fourth time at Dumas House on Friday 31 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 and updates on assistance measures.

Taskforce members reiterated that whilst recent rainfall is alleviating conditions in the South West and central Wheatbelt regions, on-farm conditions across parts of the northern and eastern grainbelt, and parts of the Great Southern and Esperance regions remain challenging for livestock outside of processing specifications. Access to feed, animal welfare and mental health remain issues of concern, however the Taskforce did note the substantial rain and the likely fodder coming onto the market.

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 and that all the funding agreements for the Dry Season assistance program have been implemented.

The Taskforce was presented with the latest rainfall to date maps, break of season scenarios and soil moisture data. This highlighted the need for follow-up rain in the northern and eastern grainbelt areas to improve soil water moisture. The focus for producers remains around condition scoring, supplementary feed, nutrition and stock management, preserving pastures and adjusting management based on weather conditions.

Hardship Support Grant applications have been received from across 70 Local Government Authorities (LGAs). Currently around 200 applications have been approved. The majority of applications are seeking financial support for stockfeed and transport. The message for producers was to not self-assess and contact the Rural Business Development Unit for primary producer information and advice.

Grower Group Alliance update

GGA Chief Executive Officer Rikki Foss presented to the Taskforce on the implementation of the WA Government's Dry Season assistance funding. Grants of \$5000 – \$35,000 have been made available for agriculture groups/organisations in impacted areas to support on-ground activities.

GGA's 'On-ground intelligence' and 'Knowledge directory' portals are providing a mechanism for farmers, grower groups and consultants to provide situation updates to the Taskforce to support informed decision-making, and to access resources, event listings and financial initiatives in relation to dry season response activities.

GGA will continue to work with the Taskforce and DPIRD to extend relevant messages to grower groups to support them during this challenging time.

Freight subsidy

Minister Jarvis requested the Dry Season Taskforce assess effectiveness, potential issues and costs of a transport subsidy to the east coast to assist sheep producers to manage through the current dry season conditions. Chair Rob Cossart updated the Taskforce on recent advice from the Livestock and Rural Transport Association of Western Australia (LRTAWA), industry organisations and government agencies noting that the transport network is operating at full capacity and the importance of avoiding unintended impacts of market intervention (including price impacts, animal welfare and road safety concerns). Year to date (to the end of April) figures highlight there has been more than 507,000 sheep and lambs transported to east coast and numbers are expected to remain high over the coming months. Whilst the Taskforce appreciated the low prices and challenging conditions, this indicates that interstate markets are working.

Acknowledging the advice provided, the Taskforce has recommended not to proceed with a subsidy at this time but will remain in close dialogue with the LRTAWA and industry organisations to monitor the situation, including livestock movements, domestic processing, transport capacity and animal welfare risks.

Industry engagement

The Taskforce has continued to engage with industry organisations regarding the dry season conditions with the following noted by the Taskforce since the last meeting:

- WALGA hosted a Local Government Dry Season briefing with 25 LGAs. The Taskforce Chair, DWER and Water Corporation provided a briefing on the Dry Season support initiatives including the Community Water Supplies Partnership Funding and Water Deficiency Declaration process.
- Rural Health West and the Taskforce Chair briefed mental health service providers through the Wheatbelt Human Services Managers Forum on the season and received valuable feedback regarding on-ground conditions.
- DPIRD and the Taskforce Chair briefed the Agri Finance Alliance of Western Australia. Rural West providing valuable insights on current financial pressures and risks.
- DPIRD and the Taskforce Chair engaged with WA Pellet manufacturers regarding current manufacturing capacity.

- CBH Group has reported a 200% increase of grain out-turned to domestic grain buyers between March and May 2024 in response to the dry season and a 300% increase in the out-turn of growers' own grain, back to WA growers to support them during this same period.

Water update

DWER advised there has been no change in the current Water Deficiency Declarations (WDD).

Next steps

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

- Continue to engage with LRTAWA and industry to monitor the freight situation.
- Continue to monitor on farm and supply chain animal welfare risks.
- Continue targeted communication and messaging of financial assistance initiatives available to primary producers.
- Continue to provide timely seasonal messages to industry and producers on livestock management including nutrition, stock management, preserving pastures.

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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