

Bad run for weather forecaster: And for farmers

For those who have not been following the story so far, well respected New Zealand long range weather forecaster Ken Ring was willing to make a 12 month rainfall forecast for Moree back in January.

The forecast is very specific with daily rainfall totals given for every day over the following year.

In the first two months, Ken's forecasts were off the mark in terms of daily totals, but his estimate for the total rainfall each month was a much better prediction than the district monthly average or median rainfall. So it was quite a promising start.

Unfortunately, the result for April-May was well wide of the mark. Not only were the daily figures seemingly unrelated to the actual falls over the two months (Figure 1), but the totals were way out as well (Figure 2).

Ken anticipated a relatively wet April, but this proved to be a massive over-estimation. He was a lot closer to the mark in May, and after predicting a couple of light falls early in the month, was right on the money with a very dry finish to the month. The reality was that total May rainfall in Moree was only one mm.

In both cases, the long term average rainfall was a better predictor of the actual rainfall than was Ken's forecast. But at least you can say that he doesn't play it safe and forecast falls close to the average.

In fact, if you ignore the big discrepancies in April, his call on the extremely dry period during May was a good one.

Farmers in northern NSW and southern Queensland will be hoping that Ken is way off the mark again with his forecast for June and July (Figure 3). His prediction is for a very dry two months. Let's keep our fingers crossed he is wrong.

FIGURE 1: April-May daily predicted vs actual

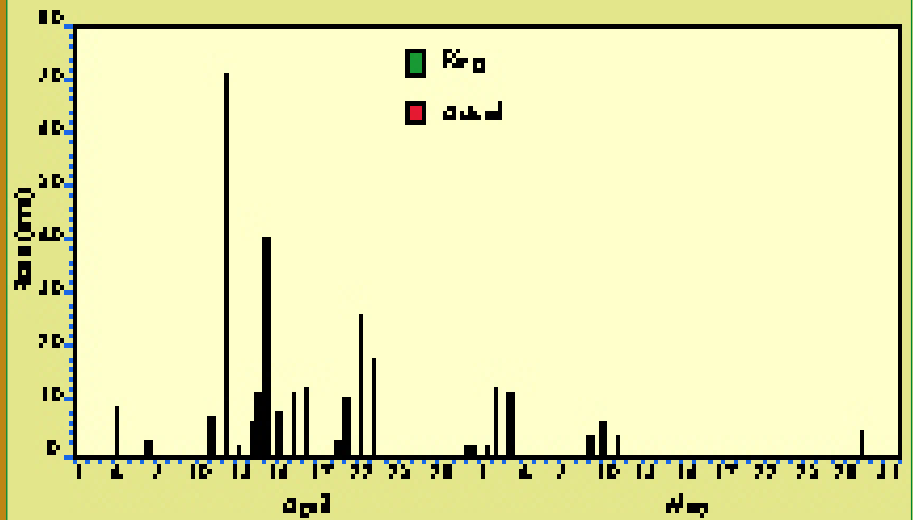


FIGURE 2: April-May totals and rain days

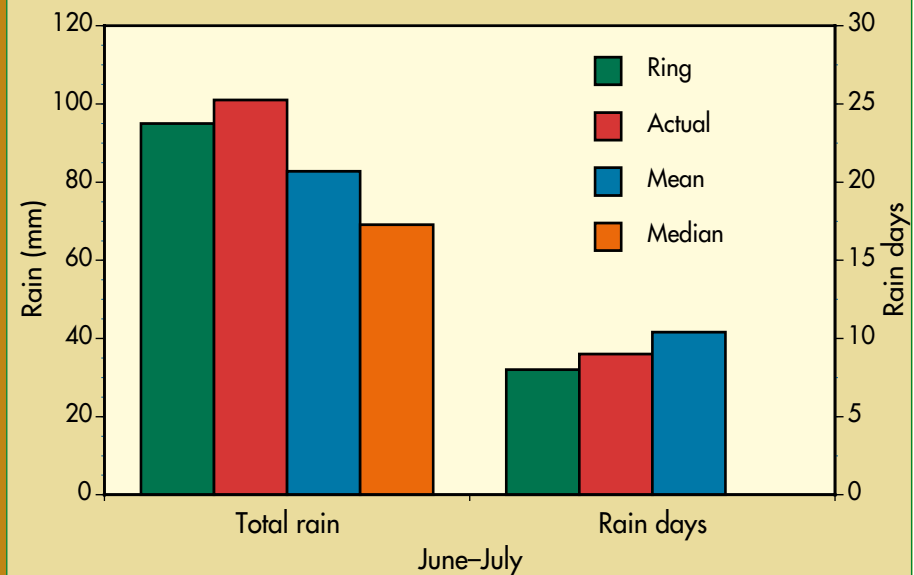


FIGURE 3: Daily rainfall forecast for Moree for June-July 2006 (mm)

