

Central Highlands

As I am writing this report the storm clouds are building up again and there could be some more rain in them. Over the past two days there has been another 50 mm around the district. This has been excellent follow up rain to the 50–60 mm that we received just after Christmas.

As a result of all this rain, the Fairbairn Dam has had some significant inflow from the catchment with the level going from 12 per cent to 14 per cent at the beginning of January. It is estimated that another 40,000 megs of inflow is required before medium priority water licences will start getting allocation again. This is quite exciting for irrigators and has been a real turn around in the situation that existed during early December.

Crop development has been quite good this season with earliest crops cracking their first boll recently. First defoliations will begin by the third week of February. Generally the crop has grown a much smaller bush this year with quite mild growing conditions, but its retention has been excellent and boll loads are quite large.

Fingers are crossed that this could be another high yielding season similar to 2005–06. Weather records show we have had very few days over 38°C and average daily degrees of about 17.

Comparing Day Degree accumulations — this year is running about two weeks behind last year and at least eight days behind the year before. This is quite a dramatic change in seasonal conditions. It will be interesting to see if this season's yields will surpass those of the 2004–05 in line with the variations in temperature.

Insect pressures have been quite mild this season but nobody has been able to get away with not putting on a spray for whitefly. In some cases the levels have been low enough to use products such as Pegasus for suppression, but in most cases Admiral has had to be used. Mirids and Jassids have also been of some concern this season.

The limited allocations this year has prompted some irrigators to grow a spring crop of sorghum with small amounts of carry over water. These crops are being harvested now and initial yields have been between eight to 10 tonNE per hectare. Depending on marketing arrangements this has proved to be an excellent gross margin at this yield level. It is also a useful indicator of what the impact of milder summer temperatures can do for crop production in Central Queensland.

By the time the next issue comes around Central Highland growers will be in the middle of picking which should be short and sweet with only 4000 hectares in the ground. Hopefully there will be some surprising yields.

Doug Sands
January 24, 2007

Dawson Callide

We have come to accept that no two seasons are alike but the disparity between this and last year could not be more apparent. At this time last year extensive rainfall throughout the Dawson catchment during November and December had seen the Dawson River flood on several occasions and ensured sufficient water to secure the crop. This year the complete opposite is true.

Some rain in October provided a mere trickle through the system and gave most growers an extra irrigation but there has been little respite since. As a consequence many crops have been abandoned and mulched with those growers dependent on the channel irrigation scheme being worst affected with about 40 per cent of the 2800 hectare area being ploughed out. Growers on the river with independent storages have fared better although most crops will not be irrigated to their full potential.

The other cruel irony is that temperatures this season have been near perfect for cotton production in the Dawson compared to last year's persistent heat. Many growers will only be able to imagine what might have been in terms of yield and quality had the water situation been kinder.

This season has been strange in other ways in terms of pest insect activity. Heliothis have been virtually non-existent in the region all season. This is well evidenced by many of the pigeon pea refuges around the district that are carrying significant quantities of pods compared to their more typical ravaged appearance by mid-January in any other year.

Mirids have also been less active with many crops needing minimal insecticide applications for control. The only exception appears to be silverleaf whiteflies which have again become abundant in many fields throughout the Dawson and will no doubt require control in places.

At the time of writing some rainfall models suggest significant falls may be on the horizon which if true will trigger many growers to divert recently mulched cotton fields to a late crop of sorghum, maize or mungbeans to capitalise on soil moisture and any available irrigation water in an attempt to partially redeem what has been a trying season.

For the cotton crops that remain there is still some distance to go and many have had their last irrigation and will finish earlier than normal should no rain occur. Hopefully, by the next edition we will have had soaking rains throughout the regions to replenish storages and provide a more positive outlook for 2007–08.

Paul Grundy
January 22, 2007

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St George Dirranbandi

Given the low water situation at the beginning of the season the total area planted to cotton was well below full acreage in both the St George irrigation area and around Dirranbandi this season. It is estimated that around 5000 hectare was planted at St George and less than 1000 hectare at Dirranbandi.

Some storm rain was received in the area in the second week of January. The amount received varied from 30 to 60 mm. Some isolated totals of greater than 60 mm were also reported. This will have saved a watering for some crops. As a result of rainfall in the catchment area, there has been an inflow into Beardmore Dam.

In terms of temperature the season has been about average with 1254 day degrees recorded for St George between November 1 and January 21 and 1260 day degrees recorded for the same period at Dirranbandi. St George has had 31 hot days compared to 42 at Dirranbandi during this time.

Hot days are classed as days in which the maximum air temperature is equal to or above 36°C. Both locations have had cold shocks with two recorded for St George and three for Dirranbandi. Cold shocks occur when daily minimum temperatures fall below 11°C, which may cause growth and development the following day to be reduced regardless of the maximum temperature reached.

Research work is continuing in the Lower Balonne area. Des McGarry and Anne Riezs (Department of Natural Resources and Water) are conducting a bore monitoring project in the St George irrigation area. More details about the project and its aims will be available in coming months. Mary Whitehouse (CSIRO Entomology) is working with local growers and consultants as part of a national mirid survey designed to determine the decision-making processes associated with mirid control. Emma Carrigan (Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries/Cotton CRC) and Sarah Hood (Sustainable Irrigations Systems) have continued water use efficiency measurements this season in selected fields.

**Veronica Chapman
January 23, 2007**

Darling Downs

Seasonal conditions have continued to deteriorate generally across the Darling Downs. Nevertheless, there are some reasonably good crops — even some very good — but just as many struggling to survive. Approximately 2000 hectares of Bollgard crops were ploughed down prior to the January 20 licence cut-off date.

Rainfall in the next month or so will be critical for all crops given the major concern is the adequacy of irrigation water and/or soil moisture to finish both irrigated and raingrown crops.

Insect pressure from heliothis and secondary pests is relatively low although there has been one mirid spray on average across the region.

Kate Charleston has been appointed to the position of Regional Cotton Extension Officer at Dalby by DPI&F and Cotton CRC. Kate comes from Innisfail with experience in northern farming systems associated with cane and its alternative rotation crops, weed management and substantial extension experience in DPI&F and DNRW.

Her knowledge of crop agronomy, soil health and nutrition issues will be beneficial given these are priority issues for the region. She will commence work in early February and is looking forward to further developing her knowledge of the cotton industry and meeting with growers, consultants and agribusiness over the next couple of months.

**Geoff McIntyre
January 24, 2007**

Macintyre Valley

The season is similar to last season in terms of accumulated Day Degrees (1631 versus 1696 in 2006). This is well above average the average of 1480. There have been seven cold shocks and 34 hot days from September 20, 2006.

Rainfall varies significantly from front gate to back. We are yet to see any general rain, with some lucky people picking up a couple of inches around the place.

The crop generally is shorter with good boll loads. The crops are really getting into the water with growers looking to Pix for cut-out where they are running an irrigation short (that is, two in-crop irrigations remaining) or a light rate of Pix if there are three in-crop irrigations remaining.

The insect pressure remains low contributing to the high boll loads the plants are carrying. The majority of BGII crops have received one or two sprays for mirid control, and the conventional has had four or five sprays to control heliothis. The low insect year and decreased reliance on insecticides has seen the beneficial numbers flourish and high thrip numbers are controlling most mites.

The CRDC has provided funding for egg collectors in the Macintyre Valley this season. With minimal pressure, the egg collectors have been tripping all over the countryside with the most recent egg lay of any significance occurring at St George. The collection of eggs and larvae is critical for monitoring resistance — any help in pin pointing hot spots (more than two eggs per metre) is greatly appreciated. The egg collectors will happily cover this region, Mungindi and St George.

Disease incidence has generally been a non-event with dry conditions prevailing, although there have been over 40 days with minimum temps below 20°C which provides ideal conditions for the development of Fusarium wilt. There are reported cases of Fusarium showing up in fields where the disease has not been evident before and it is unusually severe. The incident highlights the importance of remaining vigilant in your Come Clean, Go Clean strategy and communicating the occurrence of disease on-farm with relevant experts for further investigation. NSW DPI will be carrying out their annual disease survey at the end of February.

Emma Carrigan
January 24, 2007

Gwydir Valley

Crop development in the Gwydir Valley is highly variable with planting dates spread from mid September to the close of the Bollgard II planting window. Early planted crops are looking good with up to three irrigations left. Later planted crops still have a lot of work to do and water is tight to finish the crops.

Some Bollgard II crops have been hovering around cut out since early in the new year with growers and consultants trying to manage this and maintain nodes above white flower with irrigation, stretching already tight water budgets. The alternative row configuration of one planted row, one skip row has been trialled by several growers this season. The number of growers trialling Pima cotton and the area grown to Pima cotton has also increased this season.

Day degrees to date for the current season are a little in front of average but slightly behind the same period last season. Similarly, the number of hot days are above average but slightly behind the same time last season. The prolonged periods of extremely high temperatures experienced last season have not been repeated so far this season. There have been isolated and patchy storm

events around the region this summer which have provided some temporary relief from the dry conditions for those lucky enough to be under them.

Insect activity has been very uneventful so far this season. Helicoverpa pressure has been very low. Pheromone trap numbers have been variable with some traps indicating high numbers of *H. armigera* but which are not necessarily being reflected in egg lays in the field. Mirids have required control in some Bollgard II crops and the odd GVB is starting to be seen about the area.

Broadacre dryland summer crops have generally been suffering from moisture stress. But patchy storms have provided some useful moisture for some crops. Sorghum harvest has commenced and initial yield reports are between 1.8–2.4 tonnes per hectare. Grain moisture levels have caused some difficulties for harvest even in desiccated crops due to the humidity over the past couple of weeks. Sunflowers are being harvested with variable yields of 0.5–1.5 tonnes. This variation can be attributed to isolated storm events boosting soil moisture.

Julie O'Halloran
January 25, 2007

Lower Namoi Valley

It's been a great season so far, if you have plenty of water! That rules out most growers in the Lower Namoi except for a few with enough bore water and the capacity to pump it fast enough. Temperatures and growing conditions have been near perfect for the past two months and the yield potential is very good. But most growers will be one to two irrigations short and without significant rain won't be able to capitalise on the season.

Crops have very good fruit numbers, with some crops peaking at over 340 squares and bolls per metre. Obviously crops cannot hold this much fruit and shedding is now occurring. Crops are also on track to be relatively early. Some crops planted in mid September have com-

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pletely "cut out" and will be ready for picking in mid to late March.

Insect activity remains generally very light. A few mirids and green vegie bugs have required treatment during January but heliothis activity is the lowest I can remember. Some rough bollworm activity has also been recorded on isolated crops. Although most of the crops in the valley are Bollgard its value so far this season is questionable. But a flush of late season armigera from the 35,000 hectares of sorghum and corn planted in the valley may change this situation next month.

Dryland crops are now doing it very hard. Although late planting and relatively mild temperatures have helped the crop so far, lack of general rain in January will see most crops limited to about one bale per acre.

There has been quite a bit of verticillium evident in crops this season. Low temperatures around December helped the disease get going in fields with high levels of inoculum. With the recent higher temperatures the vert has now gone into remission.

Prices for this year's crop have improved from the lows at planting time but still remain unattractive. The dams are now both empty as we wait for the heavens to open and deliver us 12 inches of steady rain. We hope this happens before or after picking!

Robert Eveleigh
January 27, 2007

ANSWER TO IAN'S MYSTERY TRACTOR

The rusty old tractor is an Advance Rumely Oil Pull Model L, of around 1925 vintage. The engine was a twin cylinder ohv placed horizontally with parallel cylinders. Instead of water, these tractors used oil in their cooling system, which enabled them to operate at around 120°C without boiling. At this high temperature the engine was able to convert the kerosene fuel into energy, more efficiently than a conventional water cooled engine.



Macquarie Valley

Rainfall over the Christmas and New Year period has been of major benefit to many crops in the region. Falls of up to 80 mm in scattered storm activity have enabled growers to stretch irrigation intervals and collect runoff from fields for future use. It has been the equivalent of 1.5 waterings in some cases. The rainfall coincided with milder weather that was also of benefit.

Many crops have now been 'cut out' with an application of a plant growth regulator. This is based on fruit numbers and number of nodes and it is hoped that finishing the crops slightly earlier may also reduce the number of irrigations. Heliothis pressure has been light to moderate with some of the more western and northern crops experiencing heavier pressure. Mirid activity has also been varied with most crops having at least one mirid spray.

Day degrees are tracking above the long-term average A trial site north of Warren is running at around 14 per cent above the average. The number of hot shock days is above average and conversely, the number of cold shock days is down.

Burrendong Dam near Wellington is currently at six per cent and falling as water is released for downstream commitments. The dam is predicted to go down to between one and three per cent by the end of summer. This and many other dams urgently require significant inflows.

Growers are now looking towards the end of the growing season. Defoliation will generally start in late February with the bulk occurring in March.

Craig McDonald
January 27, 2007

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