

# January deluge at Emerald

**T**he cotton farmers and irrigators of Emerald were desperate for a big inflow into Fairbairn Dam to ensure a decent crop next year. They needed plenty of rain ... but this was ridiculous.

The dam went from about 30 per cent to 100 per cent in a couple of days – and kept filling. The excess joined up with water from some of the other local rivers to inundate low-lying areas of the town and caused major damage to cotton, sorghum and tree crops. But the biggest losses were in infrastructure – pumps, channels and machinery.

After being evacuated from her home, Regional Extension Officer Susan Mass went up in a chopper and reported that damage to parts of the irrigation area is nothing less than devastating. Worst hit are farms adjoining Theresa Creek, the Nogoia and the Comet Rivers.

As the rivers came down, entire fields of cotton and other crops were completely inundated, with 100 per cent losses in those fields. It is likely that half of the planted area (originally 3300 hectares) has been completely lost, with perhaps another 30–40 per cent having serious water damage. Anything not inundated will still suffer 20–30 per cent yield reductions due to boll rot from the rain.

The biggest concern is infrastructure damage and of course it is too early to call, but the bill will be well in the millions.

The good news is there will be water for next year in the highlands. Let's just hope the growers get the opportunity to get their farms ready. The bad news is there may be plenty more rain this wet season.

Note the water only made it to the floor joists of Susan's home and didn't make it inside. Sadly many in town were not so lucky.



Some crops were totally inundated.



The Fairbairn spillway was an impressive sight.



Levy banks were breached in many cases.



The main bridge and railway line into Emerald.



A harvester caught in the deluge.