

SECTION 4
AREA ROUNDUP

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Central Highlands

By Susan Maas

The 2007–08 season will certainly be remembered as a challenging year for growing cotton, shaped by extreme weather. Coming into the 2007 winter with no allocation and 60 per cent carryover, many irrigators opted to plant chickpeas and wheat.

Growers took advantage of the exceptionally wet June (143.4mm compared with a long term average of 33.4mm) and planted chickpeas as late as July.

This, coupled with increasing commodity prices for grain crops and limited water availability, led to only 3182 hectares of cotton planted — by far the lowest area cropped to cotton for many years. Sorghum, corn and mungbeans were alternative summer cropping options.

In late October, Emerald felt the force of a storm with wind gusts reaching speeds of up to 140 kilometres per hour. While the worst of the damage seemed confined to the northern part of the Emerald, many fields had varying degrees of damage.

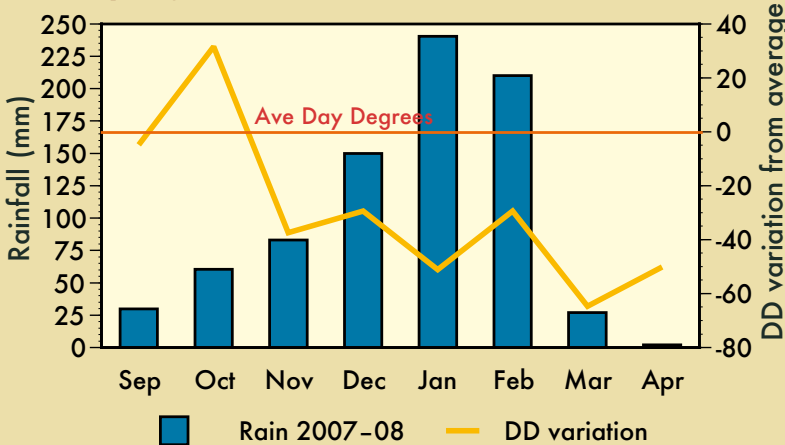
Crops progressed well after receiving useful rain in late December. January started with small inflows into the Fairbairn Dam resulting in an increase in water allocations from zero to 33 per cent providing for other summer crop plantings — in particular sorghum and corn. Cotton crops suffered in the humidity and extended wet weather.

Mid January brought more rain and valuable inflow into the dam. Reports of falls in the catchment areas of up to 330 mm overnight had irrigators excited about the prospect of 100 per cent allocations. The Fairbairn Dam at 38 per cent capacity was set for a long awaited rise.

Within three days, it had reached 100 per cent, and the rise continued to 169 per cent of capacity. At its peak it was 4.4 metres over the spillway, and there was 225,000 megalitres per day flowing through the now flooded township of Emerald and many farms. The community spirit in Emerald was certainly evident, with many working tirelessly to help others, while their own assets were in danger.

Emerald 2007–08 seasonal climate

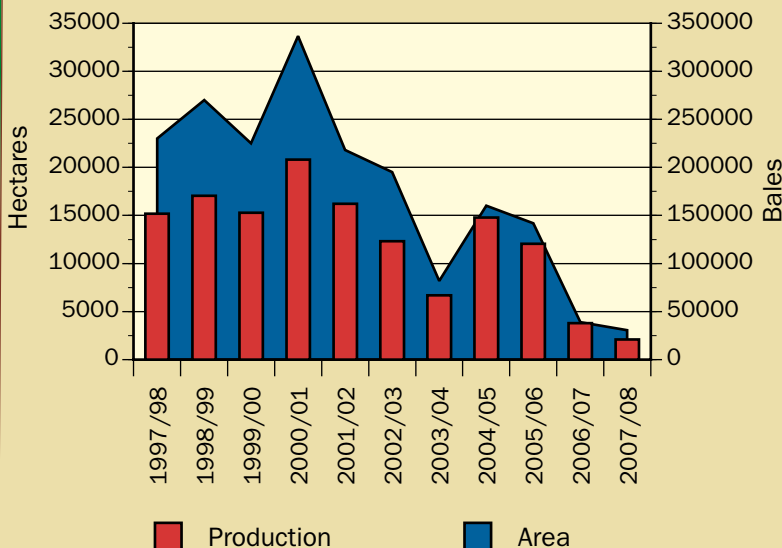
Total Day Degrees: 3012 (-235); Total rain: 803 mm (+332)



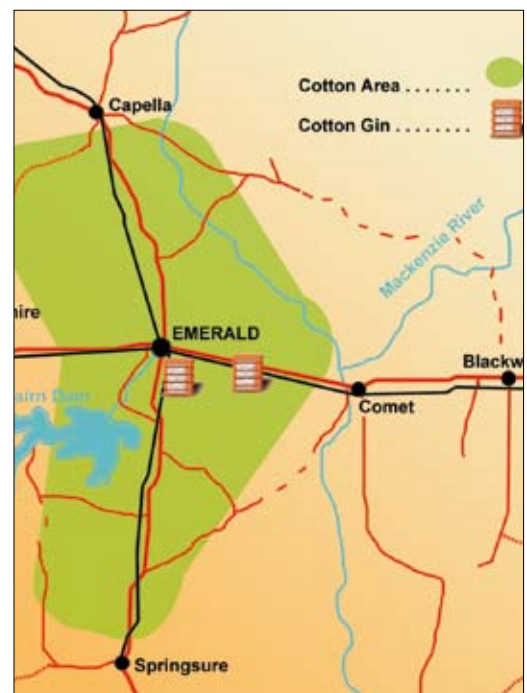
	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
Cold shock	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4 (-6)
Hot shock	0	4	0	4	0	1	0	0	9 (-32)

*Average day degrees from 1957 to 2008.
Source: CSIRO Plant Industry.

Emerald: Area and production



Central Highlands cotton area



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The remainder of the season seemed to fly by. In the end there were 2,852 hectares of cotton picked in the Central Highlands, with 330 hectares removed due to flooding.

Establishment

There were some issues with Rhizoctonia and Pythium, and this was more pronounced in crops following legumes. A few crops, planted into sorghum stubble, displayed symptoms of 'allelopathy' including poor root development and slowed growth.

Insects

Insect pressure in general was quite good for most areas with the rain and the humidity keeping populations low late in the season. Mirids were once again common and most growers had to spray at least once and possibly twice for mirids. Green vegie bug numbers were higher than previous years.

Before the rain, heliothis pressures were quite high, with large egg lays on the Bollgard crops. Whitefly numbers were moderate although patchy throughout the season with over half the fields requiring at least one whitefly spray. Cotton stainers became a particular problem at the end of the season.

Disease

Seedling diseases were a minor concern with some issues with Rhizoctonia and Pythium. Tobacco Streak Virus (TSV) was confirmed in several cotton crops within the irrigation area of Emerald. TSV had previously been identified in sunflowers, mungbeans

and chickpeas. The potential impact of TSV on cotton in Australia has not been established, but it is currently thought that TSV is unlikely to cause significant losses. Disease risk increases with proximity to significant Parthenium weed populations.

Prolonged wet weather during mid January and early February, coinciding with boll opening, resulted in significant yield losses from boll rot and tight lock across almost all crops with some losses estimated as high as three bales per hectare.

Irrigation

Attempts to improve water use efficiency through timely irrigation scheduling was challenging given the frequency of significant rainfall events. With large periods of mild, overcast weather compounding wet conditions, it is not surprising that many crops suffered more from waterlogging than from lack of water.

Yield and quality

The final district average yield of 6.74 bales per hectare (2.73 bales per acre) was significantly lower than past averages, and reflects not only the impact of the flood, but the cool wet conditions that knocked all the crops around. Downgrades for colour were the main quality issue.

Annual awards

The following awards were presented at the annual Central Highlands Cotton Growers Association annual cotton awards dinner on May 31 in Emerald:
 ...68 ▷



Asset Managers Auctioneers & Valuers Property & Business Sales

Specialists in...

- (Asset Management
- (Plant and Machinery
- (Agricultural Equipment
- (Earthmoving Equipment
- (Transport Equipment
- (OH & S
- (On-Site Auctions
- (Clearing Sales
- (Valuations
- (Property & Business Sales



Facilities in...

- (Adelaide
- (Brisbane
- (Cairns
- (Devonport
- (Dubbo
- (Mildura
- (Moree
- (Perth
- (Shepparton
- (Sydney
- (Toowoomba
- (Townsville
- (Wagga Wagga

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<67...CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Cotton Grower of the Year (highest average yield across total green hectares):

- 1st Steve Morawitz, 'St Aubins'.
- 2nd Neek & Robyn Morawitz, 'Argoon'.
- 3rd George & Kim Sypher, 'Karramara'.

Ian Mackay Service to Industry Award — Amanda Noone.

Grower Service to Industry Award — Mike McCosker.

The Farming Excellence Award was cancelled due to the flood.

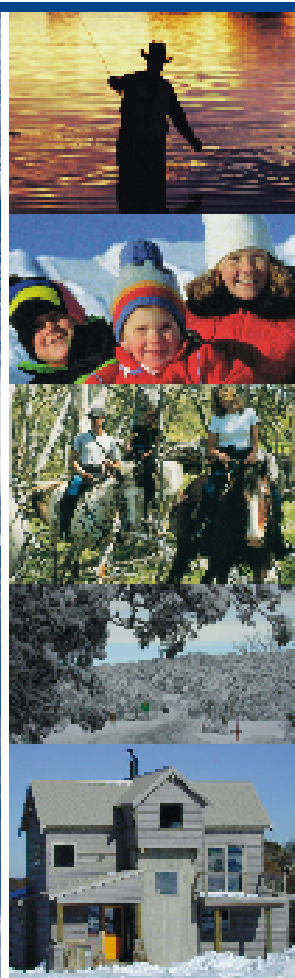
Next season

The outlook for next season is fantastic. With 100 per cent allocation, there are a multitude of options for growers with most looking to cotton. Due to an unusually cold winter with frosts, it is expected the chickpea crop finish will be later than anticipated, and some growers will not be able to turn around the country before the end of the Bollgard window. For these growers the choice will be between conventional cotton or other summer crops. Let us just hope for a kinder season weather wise.



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