

SECTION 5
WATER MATTERS

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January deluge at Emerald

In January, the 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 was nothing less than devastating. Worst hit were farms adjoining Theresa Creek, the Nogoia and the Comet Rivers.

The good news is there is now plenty of irrigation water this season in the highlands — and probably for the next couple of seasons as well. For the first time in a number of years, Emerald growers can plan their future cropping programs with confidence. 



Some crops were totally inundated.



The Fairbairn spillway was an impressive sight.





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