

SECTION 1  
OVERVIEW

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# Water on the brain

By David Dowling

Once again, the cotton industry has had a year almost totally dominated by water — or, rather, the lack of water. Australia will produce more than twice the amount of cotton than in the previous season, but this is still less than half the potential crop size. While part of this shortfall has been due to competitive pressure from other crops, it has mostly been about the lack of water.

A feature of the year was the emergence of the Federal government in the water market in the form of the buyback scheme. Unfortunately, the buyback scheme seems to be more closely related to politics than to the environment or economics.

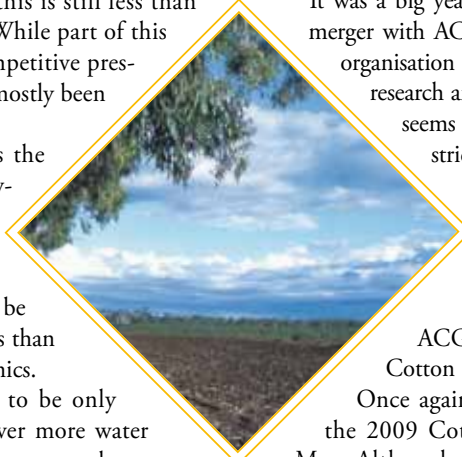
The buyback was meant to be only one leg of a strategy to deliver more water down the Murray. The strategy was also supposed to include massive investments in infrastructure and water use efficiency projects, with the gains

shared equally by the environment and irrigators, but water buybacks grab the headlines and so seem to be more popular with politicians and some green groups.

It was a big year for Cotton Australia with the merger with ACGRA to form a single industry organisation with responsibility for advocacy, research and grower services. The industry seems to have taken the merger in its stride and the end result is a streamlined organisation ready to accept the immense challenges which are being thrown up at the moment.

The final act of the old ACGRA was to organise the 2008 Cotton Conference at the Gold Coast.

Once again it was a great success as was the 2009 Cotton Trade Show at Moree in May. Although neither event set records for attendance, their success is testimony to the resilience of the industry in difficult times.



David Dowling.

## Australian cotton production estimates 2008-09

	Irrigated			Dryland			Total	
	Hectares	Yield bales/ha	Bales	Hectares	Yield bales/ha	Bales	Hectares	Bales
<b>Queensland</b>								
Emerald	11460	9.2	105000	200	4.0	800	11660	105800
Biloela/Theodore	5140	8.5	43900	400	4.0	1600	5540	45500
Burdekin	790	6.8	5400				790	5400
Darling Downs	21000	8.4	176000	6000	3.7	22000	27000	198000
St George	8810	11.1	98000				8810	98000
Dirranbandi	12210	10.8	132000				12210	132000
<b>Total</b>	<b>59410</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>560300</b>	<b>6600</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>24400</b>	<b>66010</b>	<b>584700</b>
<b>NSW</b>								
Macintyre#	18000	10.9	197000	1400	3.9	5500	19400	202500
Gwydir	25600	10.9	278000	7000	3.9	27000	32600	305000
Upper Namoi	7450	9.9	74000	1800	3.7	6600	9250	80600
Lower Namoi	21200	10.7	226000	4000	3.5	14000	25200	240000
Macquarie	4150	9.0	37500				4150	37500
Bourke	1580	9.6	15200				1580	15200
Southern NSW**	3200	9.0	28800				3200	28800
<b>Total</b>	<b>81180</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>856500</b>	<b>14200</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>53100</b>	<b>95380</b>	<b>909600</b>
<b>Aust. total</b>	<b>140590</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>1416800</b>	<b>20800</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>77500</b>	<b>161390</b>	<b>1494300</b>

Overall average yield: 9.26 bales/ha (2102 kg/ha).

# About 40% of Macintyre cotton is grown in Queensland. \*\*Lachlan, Murrumbidgee Valleys and Tandou