

SECTION 4  
AREA ROUNDUP



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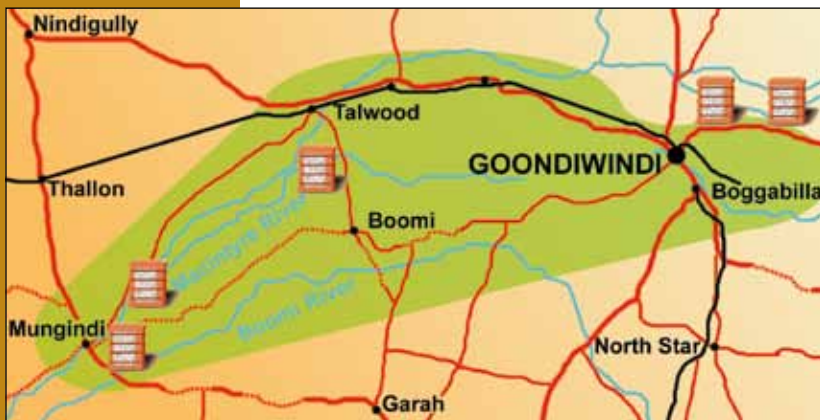


QUEENSLAND



MAP LEGEND

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# Border Rivers

By David Kelly

The 2008–09 season began with more optimism in the air than the past two. Prices at around \$500 per bale and some good soil moisture regenerated some enthusiasm in both irrigators and dryland producers although both Pindari and Glenlyon dams were hovering around to 25–30 per cent capacity.

A significant amount of the irrigated area had been planted to wheat in the winter of 2008 and a 50–75 mm rainfall event that occurred in early September was ideally timed for these crops and had the added benefit of freeing some irrigation water for cotton and providing a moisture planting opportunity for some.

Those chasing this moisture began planting around September 20, by which time soil temperatures were in the high teens and so the establishment of these crops was generally excellent. Many others got tired of waiting for the next change and began pre-irrigating in the first week of October and planted in mid October.

Conditions remained fairly dry until mid November when a general rainfall event of 50–110 mm occurred, wreaking havoc to the irrigated wheat crops. Being after the close of the Bollgard II window, it only meant a small extra area of late conventional cotton was planted but it went a long way to ensuring full water to the current crop due to a small high-flow pumping opportunity.

Final planted areas were about 8800 hectares around Goondiwindi and 10,000 hectares at Mungindi – with all making it through to harvest.

Following a relatively wet start to the season, December and January were generally clear and sunny – perfect cotton-growing weather for those with enough water.

Some rainfall events in the upper reaches of the Macintyre system over the Christmas period allowed another small pumping event for irrigators on both sides of the border – meaning most crops had adequate water to get them through.

## The Border Rivers cotton area

High early fruit retentions and dryer conditions through January meant growers had to work hard to keep crops flowering – particularly in the western parts where temperatures are generally 2–3°C warmer. Most crops commenced flowering at only six to seven NAWF (Nodes Above White Flower) and these levels were maintained only when tight irrigation schedules were maintained. In cases when moisture was lacking, such as late irrigations, steep tail drains, red sections of fields etc, crops cut-out very quickly.

In the middle of February, a rainfall event delivered the whole area at least 100 mm over three days, and up to 160 mm in isolated patches around Toobeah and Boomi. For early maturing crops this didn't add much value, but for later crops it timed quite well to mature some later bolls. The biggest benefit was a flow in the Weir River, allowing growers on that system to harvest some water, assuring some cotton area for a 2009 planting.

Much of the crop was defoliated in the third week of March, and while conditions started to cool only slightly, many crops took a long time to drop their leaves and some even required a third application.

Some of the earlier crops around Mungindi started being picked around the first week of April although it was another fortnight before the bulk of pickers were moving. On average, crops around Goondiwindi were about two weeks later than this.

A small rainfall event around Easter caused about a week's delay in picking and caused a significant impact on the colour of the lint picked afterwards.

### Insect pressure

While the adoption of Bollgard II and Roundup Ready Flex technology was high, there was still a sizeable area of conventional cotton planted – particularly around Talwood and Mungindi.

Thrips pressure, and the resulting damage, was more intense than recent seasons due to the large areas of cereals and vegetation that had flourished from the September rainfall. While it meant all crops looked very 'tatty', damage was mostly cosmetic and very few crops were treated.

Mirid numbers were unprecedentedly low, meaning most Bollgard II crops were not treated with any insecticide until the middle of January and fruit retentions of over 90 per cent were commonplace. Most Bollgard II crops received two sucking pest sprays only for the season.

In conventional crops, heliothis pressure was generally moderate but persistent until early January when there was a spike in moth and egg numbers, but the season finished quietly meaning most crops were treated only seven to nine times.

There were some populations of silverleaf whitefly but they were well monitored and managed accordingly.

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**Hail and storms**

In the areas between Goondiwindi and Boomi, the November rainfall event also included some areas of intense hail. While this did not write any crops off, it did significantly reduce the plant stand of some – exacerbated by a week of hot, windy conditions in the week following which killed some of the wounded seedlings.

On December 30, an intense ‘mini-cyclone’ hit Boggabilla and Goondiwindi. It did not contain much hail but the physical damage to many crops was very evident and may have impacted on yield. It also caused some damage on some farms to sheds, tanks and vehicles (including planes).

**Yields and quality**

Around Goondiwindi yields in the irrigated crops averaged around nine to 10 bales per hectare. A few fields around the district reached 12.5 bales per hectare, but not many.

Further west, yields around Talwood and Mungindi were excellent with many farm averages getting close to and above 12.5 bales per hectare.

Quality was all good with the exception of colour, mainly impacted by the Easter rain and some showers after that. Pre and post rain picked cotton often saw a drop from 21s to 41s. Most micronaire was around 4.2, strength about 30.5 grams/tex and length at 38 32nds.

**Grower awards**

Winners of the Macintyre Valley Cotton Awards for 2008–09 were

- Landmark Irrigated Crop of the Year, based on yield and agronomic management was Bruce and Dell Bailey, ‘Hazeldene’, Boomi, with a crop of Sicot 71BRF that yielded 12.95 bales per hectare.
- Total Ag Gundy Dryland Crop of the Year, also based on yield and agronomic management was Boardman Agriculture, ‘Backspear’, Tulloona with a crop of Sicot 70BRF yielding 6.3 bales per hectare.
- Local agronomist Jim O’Connor was presented with the service to the industry award following more than 20 years of involvement in cotton in the Macintyre.
- The Patricia Coulton Memorial Award that recognise the unsung heroes of the industry – those who play very important roles in ‘keeping the wheels’ turning but are rarely recognised – was presented to local trucking identity Steve Ellis.

**Prospects for 2009–10**

Good rainfall in late May replenished soil moisture profiles, provided some flood harvesting along the Macintyre, and put about 14 per cent into Pindari Dam – its best inflow in the past two years. Pindari is currently at 44 per cent capacity, but neither Coolmunda Dam (39 per cent) or Glenlyon Dam (24 per cent) benefited from the May rainfall. There is still a reasonable amount of water stored on-farm as a result of the flood harvesting events during the summer.

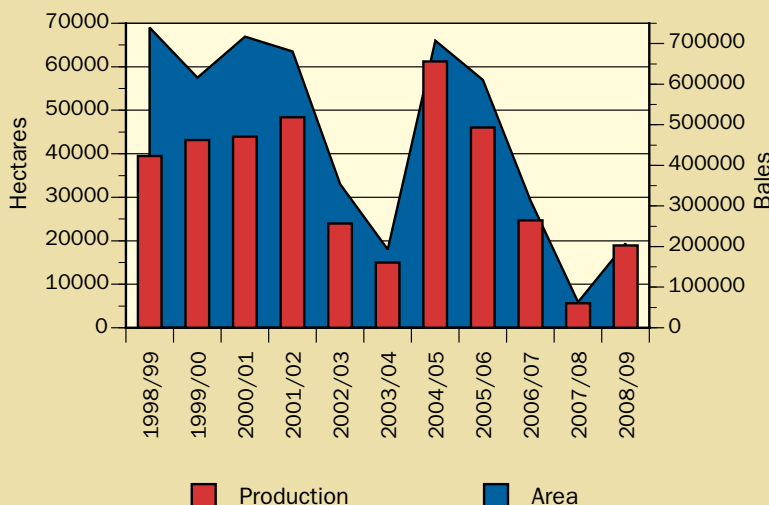
Optimism for cotton in the area is at it’s highest for several seasons. Many irrigators will be growing cotton for the first time for two or three seasons,

and there is a good amount of interest in dryland. Unfortunately, a very dry June–August period and some discussion of El Niño has tempered some of this optimism – but here’s hoping.



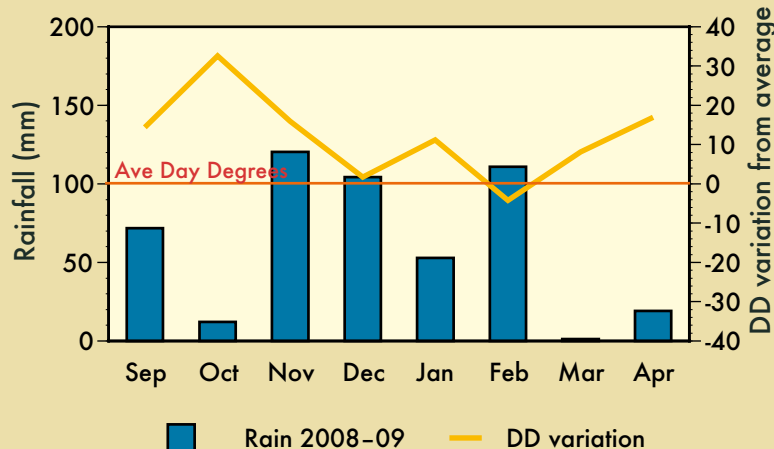
Shane Boardman, ‘Backspear’ Tulloona yielded more than six bales per hectare with a dryland crop of Sicot 70BRF planted single skip in mid November.

**Macintyre Valley: Area and production**



**Goondiwindi 2008–09 seasonal climate**

Total Day Degrees: 2851 (+97); Total rain: 493 mm (+38)



	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	Total
<b>Cold shock</b>	14	8	1	0	0	0	0	7	30 (-7)
<b>Hot shock</b>	0	0	1	5	7	7	4	0	24 (-1)

\*Average day degrees from 1957 to 2009.  
Source: CSIRO Plant Industry.