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## Editorial...

David Dowling, Editor

In the previous issue, I suggested some haste may be necessary to get winter crops off and prepare for major cotton plantings as the long-anticipated La Niña had arrived. On the positive side, the grain harvest went like a dream for most areas and NSW produced what looks like a record grain crop with good quality and mostly solid prices. Grain receival sites are overflowing across the state. Isn't it great when a plan comes together like that?

But what happened to that La Niña and the expected deluge? Did we really have to raise the levee banks and stock up with sand bags? From a personal viewpoint from Toowoomba on the edge of the cotton belt, La Niña sounds like just another word for drought. Despite the forecast of a wet spring, we had the driest November on record – by a long way. Against a November median rainfall of about 100 mm, Toowoomba received 2.2 mm this year and it was hotter than average. So much for the Garden City.

So, how did the BOM get it so wrong? Well, maybe they did and maybe they didn't. Our weather and climate systems are big and complicated and like all natural systems, there is always plenty of "noise." As the great US baseball manager Yogi Berra once said, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future." The BOM seasonal and long term predictions are based on averages and there is plenty of variation about the average. They may be helpful for seasonal planning, but don't bet the house on them.

The other thing to consider is that the weather/climate modelers may still have a lot to learn about the systems they work with – a point I'm sure they would agree with. Perhaps the Indian Ocean Dipole has more impact than was credited to it. Or maybe another weather/climate driver such as the Southern Annular Mode (SAM) or something we have never heard of. After many decades of study and using the most powerful computers in the world, we still have a lot to learn about the weather.

And we are still learning many things about growing cotton. Even basic things such as when to plant the crop and how to manage it.

At Emerald, they have a new take on crop management in limited water years – 'walk away' cotton. The plan is to establish the crop as normal then let it sit there in virtual hibernation until the hoped-for water arrives in January/February. The results look good so far – see the story on page 16.

This is our final issue for what has been a difficult year. I hope all readers have a great Christmas and get to gather with their loved ones, and that Santa delivers a nice vaccine under the tree.

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