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Editorial...

David Dowling, Editor

The latest drought statement from the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) on October 8 makes for some pretty sombre reading. Unfortunately for the cotton industry, and the health of the rivers, the biggest rainfall deficits over the past few years have been in the Murray Darling Basin. Over the past 33 months, just about all of the basin has had at least a "severe rainfall deficiency" while in at least half of it, including the main cotton growing areas, the rainfall deficiency over that period has been the worst on record.

According to the BOM: "Rainfall deficiencies have affected most of the New South Wales, Queensland and South Australian parts of the Murray–Darling Basin since the start of 2017. The deficiencies have been most extreme in the northern Murray–Darling Basin, especially in the northern half of New South Wales and adjacent southern Queensland, where areas of lowest on record rainfall extend from the Great Dividing Range west as far as Dubbo and Walgett. Some of the largest rainfall deficiencies have occurred in the upper catchments of some of the major tributaries of the Darling, including the Macquarie, the Namoi–Peel, the Gwydir, and the Border Rivers."

For the past 27 months, "only the 1900–02 peak of the Federation Drought has been drier. The past 33 and 21 months have also been the driest on record averaged over the Border Rivers, Macquarie–Bogan, Namoi, Gwydir, and Castlereagh catchments, with the past 21 months also the driest on record for the Moonie, Condamine–Culgoa, and Lower Murray catchments.

"The dry conditions of the past three years have been particularly acute during the cool season, which is important in many regions for generating runoff."

It's pretty hard to compare one drought to another, and it varies between towns and regions. But it is safe to say that the past couple of years ranks right up there with the Millenium drought, the 1940s, the early 1980s and even the crippling Federation drought of the early 1900s. Not good company to be in.

As far as individual cotton growing regions, the only areas which have received more than a third of their average January–September rainfall this year are Emerald (61 per cent) and Griffith (68 per cent). Worst off are Moree (18 per cent) and Goondiwindi (19 per cent).

The one thing in common about those previous major droughts is that they eventually came to an end, and the same will happen with this one. Rain always breaks a dry spell, as they say. But, as in all things, timing is everything. Let's hope it is sooner rather than later.

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