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Editorial...

David Dowling, Editor

Of course, there is plenty of doom and gloom around at the moment. Without being too morbid, the outlook for the size of next year's crop is not great. Mother Nature has not only refused to cooperate over recent months – she has been very teasing and nasty about it. Several times we had cyclones bear down on our major cropping areas with well-informed forecasters predicting buckets of rain for everyone. Cyclone Oma had two or three goes to get across the coast and the weather maps were coloured purple. Alas, Oma had a major aversion to land and decided to dump all its rain out to sea – which doesn't really need it.

At least Cyclone Trevor managed to get across the coast and provided some fantastic falls for the graziers of inland Australia but not so much for the croppers, and almost nothing for NSW. There must be some invisible barriers on the border that we have been unaware of.

So the doom and gloom merchants are coming into their own with most irrigation storages at very low levels and a rabid green mob baying at farmers to provide more non-existent water to preserve the goannas at Menindee and the lifestyle of the yachting crowd in South Australia.

The fact of the matter is that if there were no dams and there had been no irrigation extraction in the northern Darling basin for the past five years, the Darling River at Willcania would still be bone dry and the fish at Menindee would still be dead. Any water which went into the system in the last big flow three years ago would have evaporated or gone out to sea well before this. Extracting water for irrigation may speed up that process to an extent, but it also provides a livelihood to thousands of people on farms and in rural towns and gives a tremendous boost to both local and national economies.

Simple solutions to complex problems are almost invariably wrong. And simple solutions are all we hear from the Greens and their fellow travellers on this issue. Irrigators have had to compromise every step of the way over the past 15 years as they have traded their water allocations in return for more security and certainty. It has been a long and difficult process but there are plenty of critics who want to start again and some of them won't be satisfied with any level of irrigation extraction.

But there's no point dwelling on the cons – anyone can do that. Let's try to find some pros.

The cotton price has been consistently over \$600 a bale. Fantastic news for anyone with cotton or the water to think they can grow some cotton in the future – but torture for those growers without the water to take advantage. Let's face it, the dams can't get much emptier and twice in the past decade we have bounced back from a similar situation at this time of year to grow very large crops the following season.

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