

# District Reports...

## Central Queensland

After little rainfall for several months, we received a wet October in Central Queensland with some areas receiving up to 213 mm of rainfall for the month. With a large cotton planting window, this meant there were some growers quickly trying to get chickpeas off before the rain and other growers saving at least one irrigation on their cotton crops.

For several growers, this wet weather held up planting, but also enabled some dryland cotton crops to be planted in the region. Further rainfall around the Central Queensland region in the past few days has been welcomed with open arms,

particularly for these crops. To date, a large majority of the 2018 irrigated cotton crops have been planted with only a small number of fields remaining. And the current price of cotton and the rainfall around the Central Queensland region has left many dryland growers hoping for a bit more rainfall to consider planting.

Early planted crops are cut out and fast approaching first open bolls. In a big change from last year it has been a light insect pressure season so far, but mirids, mites, jassids and silverleaf whitefly have been seen around the region although not at concerning levels. Very low levels of mealybugs have also been found, reiterating the importance of practicing good farm hygiene. As a result of the wet October, the focus has turned to weed and volunteer cotton control which has presented a bigger challenge than past seasons.

Many growers are cautiously optimistic with high retention counts and for a number of growers only a month or so until the pickers start coming out of the sheds.

**Sharna Holman**  
December 4, 2017



**Dryland cotton meetings held in Kilcummin and Wolfgang to provide updates on cotton varieties and the Bollgard 3 Resistance Management Plan which provides greater opportunities for dryland cotton in the northern area of Central Queensland.**

## St George and Dirranbandi

Although the Lower Balonne has seen a huge turn around in rainfall with October recording anywhere from 100–160 mm within the district, the sub soil has been so dry that we have had very little run off. With fields that were pre-irrigated requiring 1.8–2.1 megs per hectare, it has meant that the surrounding profile was still 50 mm or so short of being full and so there has been very little water flow into the river system.

Beardmore Dam did have a small trickle of 10,000 megs at the end of October which combined with the rain in October and November has given the growers a slight buffer to their water budgets. Although the rain has been great it still hasn't been enough to persuade growers to risk planting more cotton. At this stage it would appear that the area will remain around 15,000 hectares which is well down from full production of 55,000 hectares. Although the planting window is now open until the end of December and the cotton price is hovering around \$530 per bale, it is difficult to see anyone planting past the first week of December.

The rain in October and November has seen a delay to planting with a wide range in crop growth. There were a number



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of fields planted in the last week of September which are now flowering, while the majority of fields were planted at the end of October after the rain. There has also been probably another 20 per cent of fields planted in November with crops ranging from flowering to three true leaves. Although October and November have been wet and cool, seedling disease has not been too bad and replants have generally been limited. Due to the poor condition of the back to back fields, plant stands are noticeably thinner this year with most fields averaging eight to nine plants per metre compared to fallow fields at an average of 11 plants per metre.

Insect pressure has so far been completely opposite to last year and similar to the previous years with very little activity within the crop. We are now just beginning to see a few mirids in crops though still at very low numbers.

Hopefully the BOM's forecast of a wet summer eventuates so as to at least fill profiles for next year's winter crop and dams for next year's cotton crops. Most importantly here's to a safe and joyful Christmas.

**Dallas King**  
December 6, 2017

## Darling Downs

The Darling Downs had a good start to the season with some reasonable planting moisture from beneficial rainfall throughout October. While we could have used a bit more to really fill the profile, most growers were pretty happy with the way it fell – soft and steady.

Then along came some extremely windy and cold weather which dried things out badly. Watering up was required by many irrigators due to significant drying out of the hills. In many cases emergence has been very slow as the crop struggled for heat. Some replant has been required.

The windy dry conditions have meant irrigations are already up on normal so without more rain some may be left short of water at the end.

The temperatures have been way down for November and resulted in some seedling disease, mainly black root rot. But on the upside, insect pressure has been almost non-existent.

The past few days has seen some storm activity about with very patchy but valuable falls. This has made a big difference to the dryland crop which was struggling.

This year the Darling Downs region has expanded into areas where cotton has never been grown before, with trial sites in several places, most notably the Mundubbera and Biggenden areas. So far the crops are doing really well with Mundubbera at mid squaring and Biggenden at about four to five nodes. These crops are being watched with great interest and may open up new opportunities for growers in these locations.

**Mary O'Brien**  
December 1, 2017

## Border Rivers

The contrast from the last report just goes to show how quickly things can change. Winter in general was dry and the lead up to planting remained that way with September warming up and no rain in sight.

That changed significantly in the first week of October with good falls of rain occurring in many areas. Falls generally ranged from 50–70 mm, and this kicked off several weeks of rain/storms

that came and went. Planting started sporadically in between these storm events, with rainfall for the month of October being well above average. Over 100 mm was recorded in places. This provided both opportunity and angst as the rain helped to get some early crops away, and built moisture in back to back fields that were looking down the barrel of taking up to two megs to get watered up.

The flipside was that these events also coincided with winter crop harvest which did cause some issues.

Through the latter stages of October there was a break in the weather, which saw a reasonable run of hot days, followed by a cooler change.

Many planters got going in this period which pushed into early November, with many able to plant into rain moisture.

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# District Reports...

Although in many cases planting conditions into rain moisture looked fair to good, a run of hotter and windy days did see moisture fall away which impacted on uniformity of emergence and establishment.

Many fields required a flush to help improve moisture levels and the plant stand. A fair bit of country was planted from the last week of October through to mid November. Scattered storms in early November caused some hail damage, but I have not heard of any significant areas of replant.

Dryland areas remain a moving target but are back on the previous season as a lot of country was under winter crop. But those with long fallows pencilled in for cotton did benefit from the rain events, helping to improve sub soil moisture for a confident planting decision to be made. Areas to the west around Toobeah and Talwood received more rain from storms around November 17, with 50–80 mm recorded, and some crop will go in on the back of these falls.

Crop establishment has generally been good, but at an individual farm and field level, results have varied, depending upon whether the fields were long fallowed or back to back; the level of preparation that may have occurred; whether the crop received any post planting rain or was pre irrigated etc. Early crops got away well with these currently squaring, but crops planted around mid October to early November went through the fluctuating conditions and have been slower as a consequence. There are pockets of disease about with rhizoctonia and black root rot being observed, and perhaps some fusarium in known areas, all most likely exacerbated by slow growth.

At the time of writing, upstream storages of Pindari and Glenlyon are at a combined capacity of 87.9 per cent which is up 1.6 per cent on this time last year. Production area is fluid with rough estimates at present around 45,000–50,000 hectares irrigated and dryland still hard to call as some planting continues.

To date there have been no significant observations of mirids, but there are reports of consistent *Helicoverpa* pressure, particularly to the west. At the time of writing another rain event is on the cards with models indicating that some handy falls are possible?

**Chris Teague**  
November 27, 2017

## Gwydir Valley

The much-anticipated October rainfall predicted for the Gwydir actually came to fruition this time, and has greatly improved the outlook for the 2017–18 cotton season. With the rain starting around the long weekend, some planting got underway just before this, but the bulk of irrigated crops went in the ground between October 10 and 30. Regular rain events continued throughout the month, relieving some of the pressure off water budgets, but also posing a few challenges of planting into moisture and much stop-starting of planters. The exceptionally dry winter meant that cereal harvest has been

relatively small, but late season rain on chickpeas has delayed their harvest.

Irrigated crops have generally established well, with most being watered up. There have been some issues with the 'Kinze crack', where previously very dry hills have cracked open along the plant line after watering.

There has been some incidence of seedling disease, and thrips have been present but have not posed any real issues in terms of numbers. Small patches of hail and some sand blasting from days of high wind have knocked seedlings about, but most are now growing through this.

Two months ago the outlook for dryland cotton in the Gwydir was looking quite dismal, but this has turned around to see a reasonable area now planted. Even this week the planters continue on dryland country, with the forecast of more significant rainfall at the end of the week.

Dryland cotton has also established well, with the only issues really being areas of too much rain causing crusting. To the east of Moree soil profiles were joined during October, whereas the western country has taken more to fill. But the forecast for the rest of the summer is encouraging, so some growers are taking the punt on in-crop falls.

The weather is warming up now, crops are powering along and we're beginning to see squares in the earlier cotton. So the start to this season has certainly been an improvement on the last. Let's hope the trend continues and the forecasts are right for a mild, wet summer.

**Alice Devlin**  
November 28, 2017

## Namoi Valley

Planting in the Namoi began in late September and the majority of the crop was planted by mid October. About 44,000 hectares of irrigated cotton has been established in the lower Namoi (including Walgett). The upper Namoi irrigated crop is around 18,000 hectares.

Dryland plantings have been reduced because of dry soil profiles and insufficient planting rain. About 28,000 hectares of dryland cotton was planted in the upper Namoi and 12,000 hectares in the lower Namoi. If enough rain falls in the lower Namoi a significant area of late dryland cotton could still be planted west of the Newell.

Regular showers of rain assisted establishment but cool night temperatures in early October did cause some problems for growers. Watered up fields with very dry profiles followed by rain and cool nights were particularly troublesome. About five per cent of the area was replanted. But much of the crop was established on rain moisture this season.

Early insect pressure has been much lower than the previous season. Thrips are causing some damage as average temperatures are slow to rise and crop growth has been slowed – particularly in the upper Namoi. *Heliothis* have been insignificant so far.

Black root rot is easy to find this season. Other seedling disease has not been too bad. The first signs of hormone drift are evident in the lower Namoi.

Water supply is still not great – but improving. Keepit is just over 50 per cent capacity and Split Rock is 30 per cent full. With the catchment primed it is only a matter of time before the dams receive some inflow.

At the time of writing growers are completing their first over

the top Roundup applications. Side dressing operations will commence shortly and the first irrigation is not far away.

Winter crop harvest is complete in the lower Namoi and well advanced in the upper Namoi. In contrast to the previous season yields are generally well below average. Many growers west of Wee Waa did not have a winter crop to harvest!

Crops are generally looking good as we head towards Christmas. All we want for Christmas is some rain in the catchment. Some New Years rain for dryland crops would also be welcome.

**Robert Eveleigh**  
November 29, 2017

## Macquarie Valley

**TABLE 1:**

Location	Day Degrees	Average DD	Cold Shock	Rainfall
Mumblebone East	301.8	310.6	8	73 mm
Trangie Research Station	281.7	286.5	8	57.2 mm
Narromine Airport	272.3	277	12	
Westwood Narromine				8 mm
Farrendale Narromine				11.2 mm

Day Degree is for the planting date of October 20 and Rainfall is from October 20. Note DD is not calculated from October 1 due to a later planting on average this season.

Recent rain in the region has been very patchy over the past month, with farms receiving anywhere from 75 mm to 8 mm out of a few different storms. Burrendong dam is now at 67.5 per cent and good rain is predicted for the last week of November. So we will be watching and waiting as most crops are looking to receive the first in-crop irrigation around this time. Winter crop harvesting is going on at the moment. Yields and quality are down this season due to such a dry winter, but some crops that were pretty much written off have surprised a few.

In terms of cotton planting, for the majority it was a good start, but we did see a bit of replant due to poor conditions in some areas. We also copped a few hail storms that caused damage in small pockets.

With planting on average being two weeks later, most areas are below average or right on average for Day Degree accumulation. But we are in front of last season in all areas. The insect pressure has been highly variable as has the rainfall. There were been some pretty good egg lays from *Helicoverpa* before the last lot of rain north of Warren but it was not right across the valley. Apple dimpling bugs have been spotted about in some areas especially near the river and thrips have been consistent across the valley. Some of the more advanced cotton (6–8 nodes) is starting squaring, but there is a big range of plant stages (even farms next door to each other). We have some raingrown cotton – about 2000 hectares at this point. The valley has around 38000 hectares this season, so we are shaping up for a pretty big year in terms of area.

We have just held the annual cotton awards for last season and it was a great night with a resurgence of the 'old hands' taking out the gongs in what was very challenging season for all.



**Billy Brownings' 'Caterpillar Truck'.**

Friday, November 10, 2017 saw the annual CSD Macquarie Cotton Grower Association awards evening at Soulfood Narromine, where 160 growers and industry representatives met to socialise and celebrate the efforts of their peers over the past 12 months. With a slightly changed format, the guests were treated to a cocktail style evening with plenty of mingling on the menu!

After a tough season in 2016–17 the awards were eagerly anticipated. The top field above 30 hectares was awarded to Boree Park Pastoral with a yield of 14.22 bales per hectare. The large farm average was awarded to Glen and Narelle Whittaker 'Killowen' with 12.01 bales per hectare over 424 hectares. The small farm average was awarded to Boree Park pastoral with 13.62 bales per hectare over 114 hectares. Congratulations to these growers who achieved great results under such trying conditions.

Young Achiever was awarded to Thomas Quigley for his local efforts with the MCGA and for undertaking a Nuffield scholarship to look at farming systems under overhead irrigation. Our final award was very well received and much deserved Dr Pat Hulme was awarded The Jim Beale Services to Industry Award for over 30 years working within and alongside the cotton industry. Billy Browning won the hotly contested 'Bugger It' photo competition award with an oldie but a goodie, and everyone is busy working on next years winning pic.

For entertainment on the night, guests were treated to comedian Tommy Dean's views on the real reasons Aussie men watch cricket for five days; that cotton is actually vegetarian wool; and, some differences between Australian and American gun laws. Rounding up a wonderful catch up was the spinning efforts of DJ Calamari.

**Amanda Thomas**  
November 23, 2017

# District Reports...

## Southern NSW

The start to 2017–18 has been good, with a dry winter allowing growers to get ground prep done ahead of planting without any delays. The only draw back was that some beds were not consolidated enough ahead of watering up, which caused some seed to sink.

Seedling establishment has been all over the place. Some early crops got off to a fantastic start, with good strong plant numbers, while some crops that were planted just ahead of rain germinated in cold weather, and struggled to push through crusting soils.

There has been about five per cent of the area in the south replanted this year. The late plant last season has given some growers the confidence to re-plant knowing the potential for a two bales per hectare loss – better than the alternatives.

Throughout October the weather has been cold in the south. Even in early November we are still experiencing cold shock. By October 1 there have been around 25 cold shock days, only allowing 14 days of warm weather to grow the crop.

The cold shock resulted in a higher level of seedling losses this year. Black root rot has been worse on Sicot 746 than previous years, while Sicot 714 has been performing well on the disease front. Around Coleambally, Darlington Point and Whitton some growers have been having problem with high *Alternaria* leaf spot on early cotyledon cotton. This has even occurred on fresh country with no history of cotton.

Planting started mid September this year and was still continuing in mid November. The area of Southern NSW is expected to be around 90,500 hectares:

- Lachlan 19,000 hectares;
- Murrumbidgee 67,000 hectares; and,
- Murray/Victoria 4500 hectares.

We have also seen a big increase in the number of first time growers in the south. Last year the number of growers totalled 219, while this year we have 64 first time growers.

There has been an increase in dryland cotton this year from the small trial site down towards Horsham and we also have cotton trialled down towards Durham Ox in Victoria which makes it the most southern cotton crop this year – about one hour north of Bendigo.

Insect pressure has been up this year with some growers already spraying twice for thrips. The damage has been high due to the cooler weather and some of the crops around Deniliquin have been sprayed due to damage from red legged earth mites.

As stated before, crop growth started off well, but hit the wall in late October/early November with the cold overnight temperatures. Leaf production has been reduced due to the cold weather and so the insect damage has been more noticeable. The outlook for late November looks promising with a warm spell to come through, hopefully pulling the crop along.

**Jorian Millyard**  
November 23, 2017



At a cotton trial at Durham Ox, local growers and agronomists inspected trial and demo site.

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