



Drought Information for GPs

Western Australia is experiencing one of its driest years on record.

Much of the Wheatbelt, South West and Rangelands have experienced a dry and patchy season. Estimates are for average to below-average returns to farmers.

The main locations impacted include the Pilbara, Upper Gascoyne, Perenjori, Goodlands, Bencubbin, Southern Cross, Hyden, Karlgarin, Kulin, Corrigin, Broomehill, Tambellup, Cranbrook, Salmon Gums. As the season has evolved, with increased temperatures and decreased rainfall, the impact has spread.

The Department of Agriculture and Food is working closely with growers to provide timely and accurate advice to address issues related to the season.

Current Situation

Rainfall for 2010 – WA has experienced approximately 50% of its annual average rainfall

Yield results across the Wheatbelt have been extremely variable. They range from 1.6 tonne per ha to 0.2 tonne per ha and in some circumstances farmers have made the business decision not to harvest.

Debt levels – During the past few years, debt levels have increased. It has been estimated debt levels this year will increase to at least an average of \$500,000 per landowner.

Lender of last resort – in the past funds were loaned on the basis of future crop, wool or livestock sales. Traditionally these lenders were Elders or Landmark. These now don't exist and have been taken over by the larger banks.

Equity levels have also been decreasing. In 2009 they were estimated to be 70-74% across the Wheatbelt, with some less than 70%. These levels are expected to decrease by at least 10%.

Other events in past years – The drought of 2006/07, frosts in 2008 and low commodity prices in 2009 have also had serious impact and not provided recovery time.

Farm business issues – There are numerous farm business management issues. One of the key issues relates to succession. More and more siblings are not returning to the farm, leaving an aging farming population and smaller communities.

Small business in towns – The impact of a dry season on farmers has serious flow-on effects on small business and communities, with less money spent and fewer employment opportunities.

There are a range of support measures available to farmers. A support directory with names of the services and contact numbers is attached. A summary of the key services are listed

Support	Contact Details
Farm Family Support: Income support to help families meet basic household needs	13 23 16 www.daff.gov.au/droughtpilot Centrelink
Farm Social Support: A better co-ordinated social support network to meet mental health, counselling and social needs of farming families and rural communities	13 23 16 www.daff.gov.au/droughtpilot Centrelink
Financial/Business support services	1800 612 004 Rural Financial Counsellors
Support for Rural Families & Communities	9690 2277 Regional Men's Health
	1800 616 076 WACOSS
	13 23 16 www.daff.gov.au/droughtpilot Centrelink
Young People On-line Counselling and Information Service	www.eheadspace.org.au Centrelink

State Government Assistance Package

On 17 November the State Government announced the 2010 Dry Season Assistance Package, which provides \$5 million of assistance with community-based services for farmers and small business in up to 100 shires.

The funding has been provided to assist up to 100 Shires across the State, with the following:

- \$2 million for community service grants
- \$1 million social support grants
- \$1 million to install high-volume water tanks
- \$500,000 to assist small businesses
- \$200,000 rural financial counselling support

The Department of Agriculture and Food

The Department of Agriculture and Food has set up a comprehensive dry season website – www.agric.wa.gov.au – click on 'Dealing with the Dry Season 2010'.

Key contact numbers:

- **Dry season enquiries 1300 725 572**
- **Agistment and Fodder Register, WA Farmers – 9486 2100**
- **Seedbank, CBH – 1800 199 083**

Further information, please contact Pam I'Anson, Regional Director, Central Agriculture Region, 0409112579; email Pamela.ianson@agric.wa.gov.au.