



2024 Dry Season Taskforce – meeting #1

Friday 19 April 2024

Meeting Communiqué

The Dry Season Taskforce met for the first time at Dumas House on Friday 19 April 2024.

Agriculture and Food Minister Jackie Jarvis addressed members about the dry seasonal conditions being experienced by farmers across the State. The urgency and complexity of the situation was well articulated by members.

The Taskforce was chaired Wheatbelt Development Commission Chief Executive Officer Rob Cossart, who recently led the emergency response to the Kimberley floods, in his role as State Recovery Coordinator. The Taskforce is focused on immediate tangible actions to support farmers.

Seasonal weather conditions and forecast

The 2023-2024 summer period has resulted in record high temperatures and low rainfall across large parts of the southern half of Western Australia (WA). Members of the Taskforce were briefed by the Bureau of Meteorology on the current weather conditions and forecasts. Over the next two weeks, scattered showers are predicted, however no substantial rainfalls are forecast across much of the State until mid to late May. Modelling also predicts the South Coast between Walpole and Esperance may remain drier than normal across winter.

Water resources

Representatives from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) provided an overview to Taskforce members of water resources and water deficient areas, as well as the immediate help available to farmers and regional communities. Salmon Gums (Dec 2023) and Grass Patch (2024) have been officially declared water deficient areas. The Local Government Authorities (LGAs) formally request to make a Water Deficiency Declaration (WDD) and there are several conditions that must be met to trigger a WDD. In 2020/21, 12 WDDs were declared. DWER will engage with the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) to ensure LGA's are aware of the process for WDDs.

Agricultural sectors

Representatives from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) provided an overview of the amount of on ground feed available in comparison to previous years and financial assistance measures available through the Commonwealth Government. This overview included the current status of agricultural industries, including stock feed availability and livestock movements. The members of the Taskforce were advised on the year-to-date numbers of domestic and international livestock exports and meat processing including:

- Between January and March 2024, 24,600 head of cattle have been transported over east (more than double the amount in 2023).
- 357,600 sheep and lambs have been transported over east in between January and March 2024, which is more than the total number in 2023.
- In the first two months of 2024, 17.3 million kilograms of sheep meat have been exported from WA, the highest on record for this time period (and 29% higher than the same time period for last year).

Whilst there is considerable stock movement east, lower market prices are exacerbating current seasonal conditions. Taskforce members also discussed concerns for small scale producers and rural landholders in the South West who may not have experienced these conditions before.

Technical information and dry season assistance measures are available via DPIRD's Season 2024 webpage ([Season 2024: information for WA farmers | Agriculture and Food](#))

Next steps

Taskforce members made the following observations on dry conditions, emerging risks and critical points:

- Audit of current figures for livestock, and feed and water requirements
- Consideration of additional assistance measures to support farmers experiencing immediate hardship
- Opportunities to support increased processing and export (airfreight) capacity
- Provision of a detailed fortnightly rainfall forecast briefing for farmers (primary focus on the South West)
- Minister Jarvis to consider reaching out to federal Minister Watt to delay the start of the live sheep export moratorium for 2024
- Support for grower groups to help farmers access information and support services.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be scheduled for a fortnight's time.

Members

Rob Cossart (CEO Wheatbelt Development Commission), Andrew Jenkins (Chair Western Dairy), Bindi Murray (Director Sheep Producers Australia), James Bowey (Director Cattle Australia), I-lyn Loo (CEO WA Meat Industry Authority), Peter Nash (CEO Grain Industry Association of WA), Erin Gorter (Vice Chair Grower Group Alliance), Madeline Anderson (Chair Noongar Land Enterprise Group), Michael Nixon (Director Hort Innovation), Andrew Clark (Chair Rural Business Development Corporation), Nick Sloan (CEO WA Local Government Association), Tim Shackleton (Rural Health West), Cec McConnell (Deputy Director General – DPIRD) and Emily Briggs (Deputy Director General – DWER).

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