



# Queensland Drought Declaration Process

## **Independent report**

Charles Burke

September 2023

## Independent reviewer's introduction

The recommendations of this report, which are based on extensive consultation, should underpin a national, long-term drought strategy led by the Queensland Government. I firmly believe that the recommendations contained within this report, when implemented, will allow the Queensland Government to continue to drive the move to a national approach to drought management.

This summary clearly articulates the context by which this report has been prepared and the methodology of developing the recommendations. It also links Queensland's future drought declaration or recognition process and the role of the Local Drought Committees (LDCs) to Queensland's drought preparedness assistance.

In 2018, the Queensland Government engaged an independent panel to complete the Queensland Drought Program Review. The independent panel provided 20 recommendations, with 18 accepted by the Queensland Government for implementation. Following the review, the Queensland Government has implemented significant reforms to its drought assistance programs, with an underlying premise of resilience.

Recommendation 2 of the review stated that 'by 30 June 2021, the current LDC system and declaration process be reviewed and restructured into a new system for declarations that will be based on the transition to a more objective, science-based, multi-layered framework, utilising publicly accessible indicators, and maintaining appropriate local input'. While the response to the COVID-19 pandemic delayed implementation, a review of LDC and drought declarations has now been conducted in line with this recommendation.

The Queensland drought declaration process and LDC framework were designed with Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS) in mind. DRAS was intended primarily to assist producers to manage their core breeding livestock resource during drought, and to assist in the return of stock to the property in the post-drought period. The major component of Government drought relief to primary producers was the freight subsidies available under DRAS (fodder and water freight subsidies during drought, livestock returning from agistment, livestock purchased for restocking after revocation).

The new drought preparedness and in-drought assistance programs introduced following the Drought Program Review to replace DRAS do not require a drought declaration. However, there are other in-drought assistance provided by other agencies, both state and federal, that still require a drought declaration, or trigger for activation. When Government considered drought reform in 2021, it made no decision as to the future of these other programs, rather it was agreed the availability of these programs would be decided should the need arise in any future drought. A review of LDCs and drought declarations, consistent with the drought program review recommendation, will ensure drought declarations, or alternative mechanisms are suitable for any future in-drought assistance programs.

Drought is a normal feature of the Queensland environment. Producers must factor the regular occurrence of major droughts into their future business management plans. On occasion, however, conditions may become severe enough to threaten the viability of the farm business and place additional pressure on producers that may not have reached the point of resilience required to sustain the business throughout the course of the drought.

In conducting this review and compiling the subsequent report, I have utilised my experience gained over many years in various engagement roles and policy development. Recommendations have been made that, when implemented, will provide Queensland with a contemporary system and process for identifying when a region or a defined area is experiencing drought conditions and the subsequent impacts, in essence a recognition that the prevailing climatic conditions are not 'business as usual'.

I have **not** prepared this report in the context of cost savings or significant investment increases; however, I viewed the review and report through the prism of making recommendations to government that will be realistic, deliverable, and defensible. I have adopted the approach of what will be best for primary industries in Queensland as a whole, and the communities that rely on them, and that the Queensland Government will prioritise these recommendations with the necessary investment. This body of work has also focused on the need for Queensland to continue to be a key participant in the National Drought Agreement.

It is also important to note that the vast majority of current and former members of LDCs have attended to their duties with the very best of intent. They have made a significant contribution to the process and should be congratulated for their diligent service to the agricultural community. This also underpins the importance of retaining this input from dedicated and knowledgeable individuals to ensure that community expectations are met and satisfied for any future process.

As part of this review, a range of meetings were held with stakeholders to instigate engagement and discussion regarding the current process, and observations of what a future process may look like. To support the discussion, introductory questions were posed at the beginning of the meetings to create the opportunity for further information and debate. The information gathered during this process identified issues and observations and was then summarised into key themes.

The recommendations within this report have been developed utilising the key themes identified during this review and, if implemented, will ensure a contemporary drought recognition process.

The following key themes were identified:

- A form of drought recognition be retained;
- A clearly defined and communicated drought recognition system or process be developed;
- Regardless of the system/process implemented/developed it must include regional/local input from industry stakeholders;
- Recognition that the science, data and mapping systems used are vital and need to be continually improved;
- A need to focus on the timeliness of the declaration process and announcement;
- A need to maintain a Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) resource to support the process and the industry participants;
- The necessity of Individually Droughted Property (IDP) declarations, considering the current assistance measures do not provide 'in-event' support and may no longer be relevant.

The recommendations provided in this report are practical and appropriate for a modern, future-focused drought acknowledgment process. It will incorporate a balance between a more science based and multi-layered framework, and the provision of regional industry knowledge to recognise drought in Queensland in the future.



**Charles Burke**

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# 1 Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

Queensland maintains, for the short term, a process for acknowledging that a drought or drought conditions exist in a defined area.

## Recommendation 2

Remove the terms “Drought Declaration” and “Drought Revocation” and replace with “Drought Condition Statement (DCS)”.

- To support the DCS, a system be funded and implemented that identifies a defined area is in drought rather than utilise Local Government Area (LGA) boundaries or any other prescriptive lines.

## Recommendation 3

A review be conducted in five years after implementing the new Regional Agricultural Climate Committee (RACC) procedures and personnel. This review would also consider the effectiveness of the Drought Condition Statement (DCS) and whether it continues to be fit for purpose or whether it is needed at all.

## Recommendation 4

Maintain a human element in the process for acknowledging drought and rename this group as Regional Agricultural Climate Committee (RACC).

- Develop a new set of guidelines, based on previous Local Drought Committee (LDC) guidelines, and terms of reference for the operation of the RACC including a flow chart that clearly articulates the process for acknowledging drought conditions. This process will also develop a set of guidelines based on data that clearly articulates at what point a defined area is no longer experiencing drought conditions.

## Recommendation 5

Refine the current process for drought declarations and move towards a more streamlined approach that follows a set criteria and process, to make the DCS an automatic affirmation.

- Continue to utilise the relevant climatic data to assess whether or not a defined area is experiencing drought conditions and take every opportunity to ensure that contemporary data and tools are utilised effectively in the process.

## Recommendation 6

To complete a move to a DCS, this new process will also articulate when an area is no longer experiencing drought conditions and this process will include a measurement of above 50 percentile rainfall deficiency.

## Recommendation 7

Based on the adoption of a defined area mapping process, the Individually Droughted Property (IDP) process should be removed no later than 30 June 2025.

## Recommendation 8

Once the new process is implemented, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) should provide appropriate and adequate resources to ensure efficient management, coordination and governance of the DCS, RACC and necessary internal and external communication.

## **2 Introduction**

### **2.1 The review**

Recommendation 2 of the Queensland Drought Program Review requested that the current Local Drought Committee (LDC) system and declaration process be reviewed and restructured into a new system for declarations that will be based on the transition to a more objective, science-based, multi-layered framework, utilising publicly accessible indicators, and maintaining appropriate local input.

DAF had partially implemented this recommendation; however, the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities requested a further independent review to ensure the recommendation is appropriately implemented. The independent review commenced on 29 June 2023. The Terms of Reference for the review are focused on the LDC process only, with a final report to be provided to the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities.

### **2.2 Scope of the review**

The scope of the review is set by the terms of reference (see Appendix A).

### **2.3 Process of the review**

The scope of the Review and the relatively short time frame for completion necessitated a streamlined process. During the lead-up to the 2019 Report, significant information was received via a formal submission process as well as extensive consultation across the state. A range of engagement meetings were conducted with relevant stakeholders to obtain an understanding of the issues and seek input and feedback on potential opportunities for reform.

To begin the process, a comprehensive list of stakeholders was identified as essential for the engagement piece of the review, and relevant correspondence was created as a way of introduction to the review. The review commenced on 29 June 2023. Letters were sent to industry, local government, other stakeholders and LDC members in July 2023 inviting them to participate in the review (see Appendix B)

A formal submission process was not undertaken in favour of a targeted consultation process achieving the desired input and necessary feedback. However, during the consultation phase, stakeholders were encouraged to provide written feedback and information following meetings with the reviewer.

Targeted consultation (through face-to-face, telephone and online meetings and interviews) was conducted by the Reviewer with landholders, LDC members, community groups, peak bodies, local government mayors and staff, Queensland Government departments and agencies among others. Meetings and interviews were held in July and August 2023.

The review process closed on 15 September 2023. While formal submissions were not called, five written feedback emails were received. In addition, a further eighteen online meetings were held with various industry groups including AgForce Queensland and Queensland Farmers Federation, Queensland government representatives, Local Government and community organisations. All LDC members were contacted and given the opportunity to submit an interest to speak with the reviewer over the phone or send an email, with the Reviewer directly speaking with approximately eight LDC Members personally. These LDC members were in various local government areas across Queensland. Fifteen local government mayors were also consulted either face to face, via phone calls or via on-line meetings.

### 3 Drought in Queensland

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) defines drought as a prolonged, abnormally dry period when the amount of available water is insufficient to meet normal use. Drought is not simply low rainfall; if it was, much of inland Australia would be considered as being in almost perpetual drought.

What might be considered a drought in one part of the country or for a specific industry or community may not be considered a drought for another. However, several recognised drought classifications or types can be adapted to any region's historical climate patterns or land use. These include:

- Meteorological drought – when dry weather or below average rainfall patterns persist in an area.
- Hydrological drought – when below average rainfall results in low water levels or reserves which impact on a region's water system or supply. This can include water shortages for urban use, irrigation supplies, stock water reserves or natural water systems.
- Agricultural drought – when agricultural production such as livestock, cropping and horticulture is significantly impacted by a persistent lack of rainfall, low soil moisture and shortage of useable and accessible water.
- Socioeconomic drought – when supply and demand of various commodities is affected by drought. This can also be expanded to include the economic impact of drought on primary production enterprises as well as regional and rural communities.
- Ecological drought – when a natural healthy ecosystem that would normally be able to support agricultural production and associated communities is significantly altered or degraded usually through a persistent and severe drought. Indicators would include a change or reduction in preferable perennial pasture species and landscape scale change (e.g., an open forest being replaced by a grassland).

Drought is one of many climatic risks managed by the agriculture sector, and managing drought is a feature of Queensland agriculture.

A key difference is that, while the impact of other climatic events such as floods and bushfires is immediate, droughts often develop 'slowly' over time. Accordingly, it can be difficult to determine a clear start and end date to drought. Droughts have productivity, profitability and environmental impacts which can last for years. It can also be difficult to compare one drought to another. Droughts often differ in seasonality, location, spatial extent, economic and productivity impact, environmental impact and duration.

This can make decisions relating to drought management difficult to implement unless seasonal conditions are being monitored regularly and suitable drought management strategies and plans have been developed prior to the onset of the drought.

Additionally, climate change is adding complexity to managing our already highly variable climate. For example, ongoing research indicates that the frequency of El Niño events is likely to increase. The severe Queensland droughts of the early 1980's, early 1990's, 2000's and 2014-2020 were all related to El Niño events. While often the cause of below average rainfall, El Niño's are also associated with a later than normal start to the summer rainfall season, warmer than average temperatures, increased evaporative demand, decreased cloud cover, fewer tropical cyclones, fewer streamflow and dam inflow events and a significant increase in bush fire risk.

The expected increase in frequency of El Niño events raises significant questions of the impacts of future droughts on agriculture in Queensland.

Finding a balanced solution therefore remains a challenging task and highlights the need for a continuing focus on drought preparedness and business resilience planning rather than in-drought responses.

### **3.1 National Drought Agreement**

The National Drought Agreement (NDA) sets out a joint approach between the Australian Government and the states and territories for drought preparedness, responses and recovery. The agreement recognises the need to support farming businesses and farming communities to manage and prepare for climate change and variability. It focusses measures across all jurisdictions to bolster risk management practices and enhance long-term preparedness and resilience.

The NDA states that droughts are part of Australia's landscape and managing drought is a feature of Australian agriculture. Australian farming businesses and farming communities are adopting increasingly sophisticated and effective strategies to deal with drought and respond to climate change and variability.

The agreement builds on drought policy reform including moving away from Exceptional Circumstances arrangements and associated lines on maps to qualify for drought support. A principle in the agreement is that there can be times when even the most prepared and resilient may need support. Support provided should avoid market distortions and eligibility should be based on need, not activated by drought declarations.

Queensland is a signatory to the NDA. At the time of writing this report, the NDA was currently under review with a new NDA to be agreed to by mid-2024. A draft of the new NDA was out for public consultation at the time of writing this report, it is noted the principles are largely the same as the current NDA.

### **3.2 Current drought declaration process in Queensland**

The Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and the Minister for Rural Communities makes drought declarations and revocations for local government on the recommendation of LDCs. It should be noted that while LDCs provide a recommendation, it is only the Minister who has the ability to declare or revoke a drought in an area.

LDCs meet at least once a year at the end of the summer rainfall season, or as required, to discuss the impact of seasonal conditions and make recommendations about the drought status of their area. Drought declarations are an official acknowledgement by the Queensland Government that an area or property is impacted by drought.

The threshold for drought-declared status is principally a 12-month rainfall deficiency likely to occur no more than once every 10 to 15 years. During the assessment of whether to approve applications for Individual Droughted Property (IDP) declarations or for the purpose of LDC meetings, this is considered when rainfall for a specific location or region is at or below the 10th percentile (lowest decile) for a minimum of 12 months (preferably including a full 'wet' season). In addition to rainfall deficiency, LDCs also consider a number of criteria including:

- water and pasture availability
- the condition of stock
- the extent of drought-related movement of stock to forced sales or slaughter and to agistment
- the quantity of fodder introduced and whether other abnormal factors, such as high temperatures and winds, have affected the situation



- the number of IDP declarations that have been issued (however, there is no particular percentage of properties that need to be IDP declared for an area recommendation to be made)
- the prevailing weather conditions such as winds and temperatures
- the time of year (a drought declaration is less likely to be supported at the start of a wet season).

The Queensland Government recognises that some local government areas are large and do not meet the criteria, but localised areas may do so. Therefore, primary producers who are in an area which is not drought declared but believe they are experiencing drought conditions can apply for an IDP declaration.

Historically an IDP has given primary producers the same access to Queensland Government drought assistance, including the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS) as an area declaration. The same assessment criteria are used for an IDP and an LDC meeting.

### **3.2.1 Drought recognition in other parts of Australia**

No other Australian state or territory currently undertakes a formal government-driven drought declaration process nor provides ongoing, in-drought financial assistance. Drought in other jurisdictions is generally viewed as part of the normal agricultural operating environment with the focus on assisting primary producers to manage and prepare for drought (and other climatic and production risks) through:

- farm business training including resilience planning and other workshops
- awareness raising of current and changing seasonal conditions through the provision of targeted mapping and decision support information.

This approach aligns with the NDA approach of bolstering risk management practices and enhancing agricultural enterprise long-term preparedness and resilience.

Some jurisdictions provide scientific data and mapping online to indicate an area experiencing or being impacted by drought but this information does not include any financial assistance available and no formal drought declaration has been made.

### **3.2.2 The structure of Local Drought Committees**

LDCs were established in 1982 to make recommendations to the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities on the need for regional drought declarations and revocations to allow access to fodder, water and livestock freight subsidies.

LDCs comprise local primary producers, representatives of local industry organisations and are chaired by a DAF officer. Producers with specialist expertise who are not affiliated with any industry organisation may also be members of an LDC.

LDC membership requires knowledge on the local environment, soil types, suitable stocking rates, pasture types and its availability (including the nutritional value). This local and regional knowledge is invaluable in supporting fair and equitable decisions for all parties regarding drought declarations or revocations.

It is imperative that all recommendations are conducted in line with the appropriate criteria and are based on objective decision-making and free from bias.

There are currently 29 LDCs across Queensland. LDCs are generally geographically based on regional LGAs and may include more than one LGA and/or part of an LGA. LDC primary producer membership numbers vary from two to nine.

There is no set limit to the tenure of LDC membership. However, if members are no longer primary producers, move to a different area or do not wish to continue in the role, their membership is withdrawn. Membership is voluntary and is not remunerated. LDC membership is confidential and there is anonymity surrounding members and their contact details. This ensures that LDC members do not receive undue pressure to make (or keep) a drought declaration to enable ongoing access to financial or other assistance.

Information discussed during LDC meetings regarding the drought status of an area must remain confidential until the official announcement made by the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and the Minister for Rural Communities.

### **3.3 Local Drought Committee Guidelines**

The *Queensland Drought Declarations Local Drought Committee Guidelines* are available online through the Long Paddock website at [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au).

### **3.4 Current drought revocation process in Queensland**

The same process of LDC recommendations to the Minister that is undertaken to drought declare an area or individual property is used when considering whether to recommend revoking the drought declaration of an area. The key difference is that while there is a clear benchmark figure used with drought declarations (lowest decile of historical rainfall for a minimum 12 months and preferably including a full wet season), this is not the case with drought revocations.

Revocations are much more subjective, resulting in many shires maintaining their drought status for long periods. For example, Murweh, Balonne and Bulloo LGAs have been drought declared for 40 to 50 per cent of time since 1964. Paroo has been declared for 50-60 per cent for that period. As a result, this has led to critical public comment against LDC members and DAF staff's understanding of drought and whether the 'drought period' has truly ended. Map 1 shows the percentage of time LGAs have been drought declared since 1964.

Currently, recommendations to remove the drought status of an area are not made immediately after a good fall or season of rain. Some time is allowed (often 6 to 12 months) to elapse to ensure that the benefit expected from relief rain materialised.

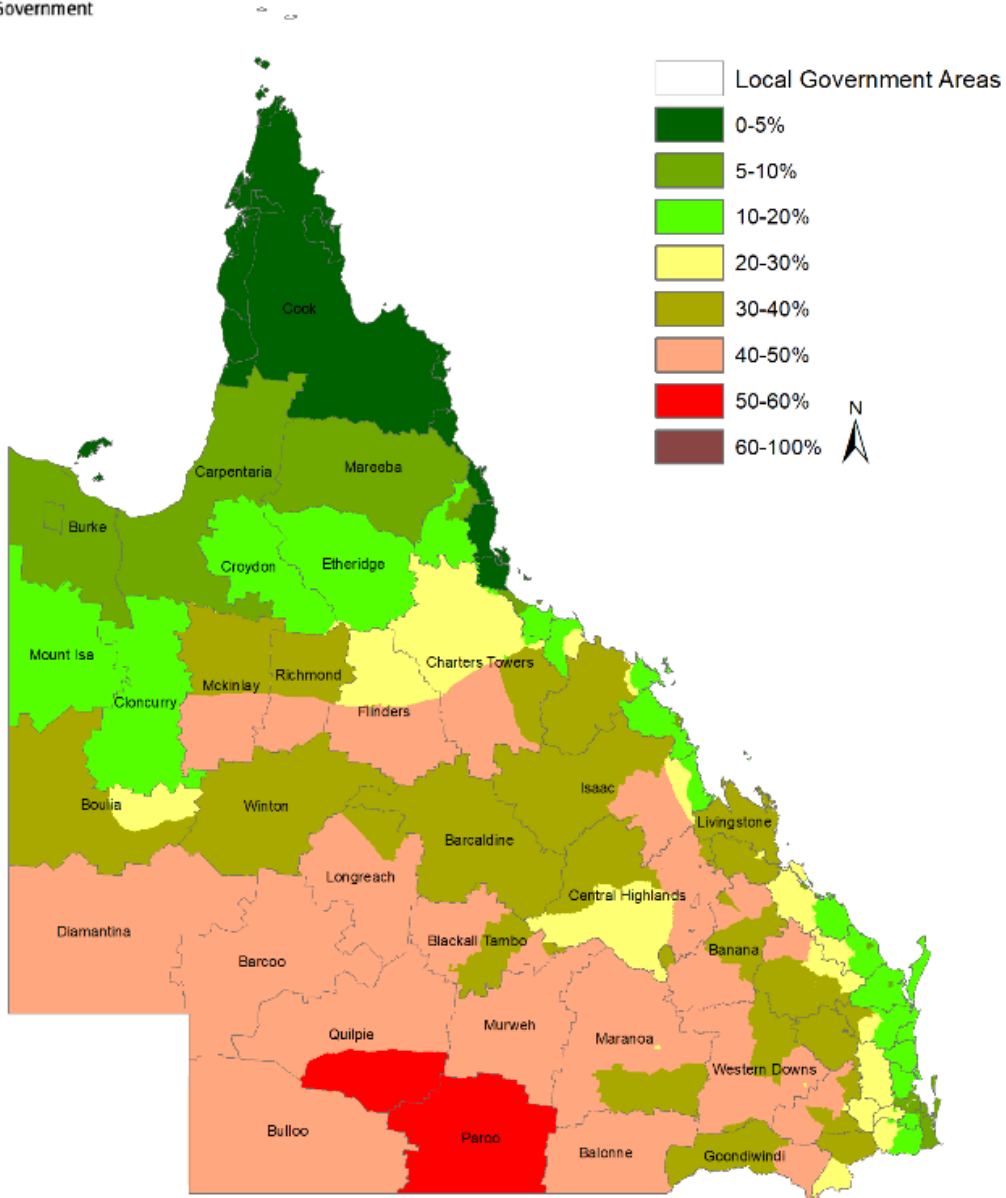
LDCs consider several points when considering revocation of an area, including:

- the amount of rain that has fallen and whether such rain was general
- the response of crops and pastures and their condition
- the availability of surface water
- the condition of livestock;
- the prevailing weather conditions such as winds and temperatures
- whether supplementary feeding has ceased throughout the district
- other factors that could affect the area
- the time of year.

**Map 1 Percentage of time local government authorities have been drought declared from 1964 to 4 August 2023**



**Percentage Time Drought Declared Since 1964**  
as at 4 August 2023



## 4 Key themes and actions required

A range of meetings were held to engage with stakeholders and discuss the current process and what a future process may look like. To support the discussion, introductory questions were posed at the beginning of the meetings to create the opportunity for further information and debate.

The questions included:

- Is there an understanding of the current process for declaring a drought in Queensland?
- Considering the new Drought Assistance policy initiatives in Queensland have limited 'in event' support programs, is a drought declaration still relevant and necessary?
- The current process requires the input and advice from local members, is that an important element in any future process?
- Is the current usage of climatic data and science-based information relevant and adequate for the identification of when a drought is evident?
- Is there an understanding of the current process for a drought revocation?
- What does the future of identifying a drought and drought impacts look like in Queensland in the future?

This approach drew out significant discussion and provided all stakeholders the opportunity to discuss and debate all relevant issues surrounding drought declarations.

The information gathered via these meetings was captured and summarised, and in some cases the stakeholders provided follow up information to ensure that their key points and issues were articulated.

Due to the reviewer's extensive networks, there were numerous discussions held with LDC members, property owners/managers and many other interested parties. These discussions were also captured and summarised into the below key themes.

These key themes form the basis for the report and are the foundation for recommendations that, if implemented, will ensure a contemporary drought recognition process.

The key themes identified are:

- A form of drought recognition be retained;
- A clearly defined and communicated drought recognition system or process be developed;
- Regardless of the system/process implemented/developed it must include regional/local input from industry stakeholders;
- Recognition that the science, data and mapping systems used are vital and need to be continually improved;
- A need to focus on the timeliness of the declaration process and announcement;
- A need to maintain a DAF resource to support the process and the industry participants;
- The necessity of Individually Droughted Property IDP declarations, considering the current assistance measures do not provide 'in-event' support and may no longer be relevant.

## 4.1 The need to retain a form of drought declaration/recognition in Queensland

During consultation, it was evident that there was mixed understanding of the current drought declaration process. This fact is disappointing, however, it reflects an evolution of the process that has not allowed for adequate updating and communication. It also is born out of the fact that elements of the LDC functions have relied on anonymity of members and hence limited, in most cases, their ability to liaise with the community.

The vast majority of the feedback received during the consultation highlighted a need to retain some form of 'drought declaration'. Although most stakeholders acknowledged that there are now limited offerings of 'in event support', there was still a desire to retain a declaration process to recognise that there are drought impacts. One stakeholder expressed that a declaration is a recognition that it is not 'business as usual' when primary producers are experiencing drought-like conditions.

All other Australian States and Territories have moved away from a formal government driven drought declaration process and the provision of in-drought financial assistance. Formal drought declarations and in-drought assistance have now been replaced with business resilience training and awareness raising of changing seasonal climatic conditions through the ongoing provision of more data driven mapping, observations, indices and drought management information. This has included a focus on improved farm business and resilience planning such as through the Farm Business Resilience Program of the Future Drought Fund.

The majority of stakeholders consulted made it clear that a centralised model based solely on scientific data in Queensland would not be acceptable with the data currently available. This does not mean that the Queensland Government should not aspire to a similar, data-driven model, moreover it should acknowledge the benefits of such a model and invest in initiatives that will quickly address any current gaps in data, data usage, and mapping to create confidence in a contemporary system.

Based on the feedback received, and considering historical legacy issues, it would be a quantum leap for Queensland to dispense with some form of drought declaration/recognition now. It would be appropriate to retain a recognition trigger in the short term and then review this, along with other aspects of Queensland's drought assistance measures in 5 years . This would provide sufficient time to implement, and fund appropriate, and widely accepted, scientific data, analysis, and mapping that would allow for transition to a more centralised system. This would also be in concert with other jurisdictions and the NDA.

### **Recommendation 1**

Queensland maintains, for the short term, a process for acknowledging that a drought or drought conditions exist in a defined area.

To begin a move towards a more scientific data-driven model, where the future may not include a defined drought trigger, it is important that small steps be taken now to start the process. To move completely and instantly away from a drought declaration process, to one where there is no trigger or recognition, would be too large a step. A more deliberate and structured transition will ensure that industry and the community understand the new model and process and recognises and trusts the information and data that is used.

Removing the term 'declaration' from any trigger or recognition will assist in the process to acknowledge that drought does not have a 'cliff face' beginning and end. It is more gradual and has many different timing aspects and conditions that are evident throughout the transition across seasons. With this in mind, the current Queensland Government assistance packages are aimed at moving primary producers toward a drought resilience mind set.

While there are still some Queensland Government assistance programs that require a 'trigger', it makes sense to move toward a more modern mechanism that does not require the formality of a 'declaration'.

Therefore, a move to a more automatic, and clearly articulated recognition of drought conditions would replace the need for a Ministerial Declaration. This would satisfy some concerns about timeliness of declarations, confusion about the process, and any perceived political bias in the outcomes. It would also continue to satisfy the need by Queensland Government agencies for a trigger event to instigate assistance and establish a primary producer's eligibility. This would allow for a move away from using LGA boundaries and other descriptive lines on maps.

This process and how it would work is outlined in **Sections 4.2 and 4.5**

### **Recommendation 2**

Remove the term "Drought Declaration and Drought Revocation" and replace with "Drought Condition Statement (DCS)".

- To support the DCS, a system be funded and implemented that identifies a defined area is in drought rather than utilise Local Government Area (LGA) boundaries or any other prescriptive lines.

### **Recommendation 3**

A review be conducted in five years from implementation of the new Regional Agricultural Climate Committee (RACC) procedures and personnel. This review would also consider the effectiveness of the Drought Condition Statement (DCS) and whether in fact it continues to be fit for purpose or whether it is needed at all.

## **4.2 The current process is not clearly defined, articulated or communicated**

As outlined in previous sections, there was a range of views regarding understanding drought declarations and the process supporting it. There was also commentary and frustration about the timeliness of decisions and lack of communication about declarations and revocations.

For decades there has been debate about the effectiveness of 'lines on maps' when it comes to a drought declaration. Historically a declaration would usually cover an entire LGA either after a significant number of IDPs were issued, or when a large area of an LGA was eligible at once. This has led to perceived delays in declarations and hasty revocations that has caused frustration at times.

As noted above, it appears there is still a need, at least in the short term, for a recognition of an area experiencing drought impacts. This recognition must utilise all relevant data, tools, and resources to establish the specific area experiencing the impacts.

To be able to move away from declaring whole LGAs and using the LGA boundary, a more granular system must be utilised. Other jurisdictions have implemented systems that have attempted to address this with mixed results. The Queensland Government has the benefit of understanding other jurisdiction systems' shortcomings and developing its own system that will ensure success.

The strength of a new system will rely heavily on an investment by the Queensland Government in the necessary mapping capability. To be able to achieve the granularity to identify, via a climate data generated map, a specific area experiencing drought conditions is vital. This map, along with the input from local RACC expertise will automatically identify a defined area for a DCS.

The concepts and details regarding how this will work, the technology and mapping required, along with potential investment is explored further in **Sections: 4.4.1, 4.5, and 4.6**. Additional measures such as revised guidelines for the RACC and a well-defined flow chart for the process, is also provided in these sections.

Suffice to say that a move to a simpler, and more well-defined process is the ultimate goal of this review. It is also important that a new system has the trust of all stakeholders relying on it, as this will ensure its acceptance. This will be achieved by adequate investment and scenario planning in the lead up to a new process being implemented.

It was identified during consultation that often the declaration of a drought was more obvious than the process for revocation. The process for both drought declaration and revocation are clearly defined in the current guidelines, however, as stated previously, these details are often misunderstood.

The revocation of LGAs or part LGAs has often caused the most angst among communities and stakeholders. It often created disagreement within LDCs about whether or not the area had received adequate rainfall to remove it from a drought declaration status. It also generated debate at times as to the status of recovery of individual properties and had potential to focus on management processes rather than rainfall and climatic data.

Recent examples show that, when a prominent community member has challenged a recommendation to revoke an area from drought, it has been more difficult to defend the recommendation. This has led to occasional critical public comment against LDC members and departmental staff's understanding of drought and if the 'drought period' has truly ended.

As stated previously, a view held by some stakeholders is that the rainfall deficiencies associated with the onset of a widespread drought are more consistent in comparison to the rainfall associated with the 'breaking' of a drought. This issue has exacerbated the challenge of revoking a drought declaration and it must be rectified for a better future process.

This will require the resourcing and implementation of the various initiatives that are articulated in this report, in particular, **Sections 4.3.1, 4.4.1, 4.5 and 4.6**

## **Recommendation 2**

Remove the term "Drought Declaration and Drought Revocation" and replace with "Drought Condition Statement (DCS)".

- To support the DCS, a system be funded and implemented that identifies a defined area is in drought rather than utilise Local Government Area (LGA) boundaries or any other prescriptive lines.

### 4.3 The value of local knowledge and involvement

The feedback received throughout the consultation was varied across many different and related subjects, and captured a multitude of opinions on current processes and what the future should look like.

The one view that was consistently shared across all the stakeholder groups, LDC members, and other engaged individuals was the need to retain a 'human element' in whatever process is implemented in the future.

The continued engagement with primary producers that have local knowledge and expertise, a good connection to the community, and a network of contacts were considered vital for the future.

Historically there has been commentary and media scrutiny about the LDC process and the composition of committees. This fact was due to a lack of detailed understanding of the process, the anonymity of the committee members and the process for their selection and appointment. This should not detract from the importance of the role that the LDC members have played in the past and continue to do so.

Much of the feedback about the LDC process was that rainfall can be incredibly patchy and at times regions can experience significant variation in rainfall totals. There was concern that the use of rainfall data alone was not necessarily a true measure of how and when to declare a drought. The addition of local knowledge was viewed as critical by stakeholders and DAF as 'ground truthing' of the data to ensure the right outcome is achieved.

Further details regarding this issue are included in **Sections 4.3.1, 4.5 and 4.6**

#### **Recommendation 4**

Maintain a human element in the process for acknowledging drought and rename this group as Regional Agricultural Climate Committee (RACC).

- Develop a new set of guidelines, based on previous LDC guidelines and terms of reference for the operation of the RACC including a flow chart that clearly articulates the process for acknowledging drought conditions. This process will also develop a set of guidelines based on data that clearly articulates at what point a defined area is no longer experiencing drought conditions.

#### **4.3.1 The structure and effectiveness of current Local Drought Committees**

During the consultation, it was well recognised that LDC members present and past, in the majority of cases, had attended to their duties professionally and as intended. There was also a recognition that it was timely to review the existing terms of reference and operational guidelines to ensure more transparent expectations of LDC members. Further, it was identified that clearer guidelines would allow for better understanding of the roles of the regional/local industry committee members would play in the process of identifying drought impacts.

The existing guidelines have been updated periodically throughout the term of the current LDC membership and tenure. The guidelines for LDC membership clearly state the criteria and mechanisms for declaring a drought, however, there have been challenges during LDC meetings on the appropriateness and triggers to revoke an area from drought.



Consequently, it has been more difficult to defend a recommendation to revoke an area from drought when it has been challenged by a prominent local community member.. This has led to occasional critical public comment against LDC members and departmental staff's as understanding of drought and if the 'drought period' has truly ended. This may be due to the commonly held view that the rainfall deficiencies associated with the onset of a widespread drought are more consistent in comparison to the rainfall associated with the 'breaking' of a drought.

The maintenance of anonymity of LDC members by the Department has been met with a mixed response during the stakeholder consultation. However, the majority of feedback indicated that it was no longer necessary. It should be noted that while the identity of LDC members in some regions is not widely known, in other regions LDC members are clearly known within their local community.

LDC members are generally very knowledgeable about their area and industry. However, it has been difficult to find new members for LDCs once a member has retired from the committee. Some members have been on a committee for many years (over a decade in some instances) and membership has not been regularly reviewed to ensure suitability for the position.

During recent years the LDC meetings have moved away from a more formal face-to-face meeting to either telephone or online meetings. This arrangement has worked well with LDC members not requiring additional time and expense to travel to a meeting. It has also allowed for easier and quicker communication of developing issues and feedback.

An optional survey of LDC members was run in conjunction with the annual LDC meetings at the end of the 2021/22 summer rainfall season. The survey was undertaken to gauge members views on the future of LDCs and the material and information used in making drought declarations and revocations.

The survey comprised 21 questions over 2 sections including options to provide comments. There were 70 completed responses. The first section focused on membership and LDC's future while the second section focused on the material and information provided by DAF to support the LDC process.

Key findings include:

- There was overwhelming support among members for the continuation of LDCs (98%)
- There was very limited support among members for the inclusion of Local Government (88%)
- LDC members had at least a basic (or better) understanding of the maps, data and information provided during the LDC process (100%)
- Combined Drought Indicator (CDI) maps were generally considered to represent conditions in their areas well (97%)
- There was strong support for the CDI maps to be downscaled to property level or similar (87%)
- There was less confidence in using CDI maps as the primary tool in the drought declaration and revocation process (70% rated the CDI maps as useful for drought declarations and revocations yet expressed concerns about its use as the 'primary' tool without local context).

LDC members took their role seriously and viewed the LDC process as working well. LDC members identified their local knowledge, content, contacts and ability to ground truth the climate and seasonal conditions data as their key input.

LDC members valued the opportunity to engage with the Department and government to provide grassroots feedback and input on seasonal conditions and issues in their area. The strong support for the LDC process should be considered in any future drought declaration process even if primarily as an effective stakeholder communication channel between regional communities and the Department and State Government.

This support for an ongoing consultative process should be utilised by the Department in any new drought recognition process. With the shift away from a formal Ministerial drought declaration or revocation towards a drought recognition statement, it is important to ensure that RACC member input and feedback could be sought on improvements in the CDI and associated information, providing a local perspective on seasonal conditions and facilitating an opportunity for members to communicate on issues of concern for that region.

This consultation should still occur at the end of the summer rainfall season (May) as well as potentially at the start of the summer rainfall season (November).

The further development of the CDI map to display/highlight the areas of the state impacted by drought as well as a formal Drought Impacted Area Statement by DAF would allow other government departments or agencies to continue to provide drought-based assistance. Primary producers could also utilise the improved CDI to highlight that they are drought impacted when seeking assistance (such as the Drought Relief from Electricity Charges (DRECS), land lease fee waivers etc).

Based on the information outlined in this section, the associated recommendations will outline the details of future human element and involvement in the drought recognition process. Appendix C includes the draft guidelines that will outline all the relevant details of what these entities will look like in the future. It should be noted that these draft guidelines may not address all the relevant issues in the first instance. This will present an opportunity to further engage with industry and stakeholders, after the release of the report, to refine and finalise the details of operating guidelines. In particular, this will address the selection process for the most appropriate people to participate and will engender trust and support for the process in the future.

#### **Recommendation 4**

Maintain a human element in the process for acknowledging drought and rename this group the Regional Agricultural Climate Committee (RACC).

- Develop a new set of guidelines, based on previous Local Drought Committee (LDC) guidelines, and terms of reference for the operation of the RACC including a flow chart that clearly articulates the process for acknowledging drought conditions. This process will also develop a set of guidelines based on data that clearly articulates at what point a defined area is no longer experiencing drought conditions.

#### **4.4 Recognition that the science, data and mapping utilised are vital**

Science based climatic and drought information, data and evidence are the keys to developing sound policies and delivering equitable government assistance programs and support to industry and agriculture. Since the late 1980's there has been a significant increase in both the availability and quality of science-based resources available to help LDCs make consistent and defensible recommendation regarding drought declarations and revocations.

Sources of data and information currently used by LDCs and by Department staff in assessing IDPs and potential drought declarations and revocations include:

The **Long Paddock** website [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au) has provided climate and pasture information to the grazing community since 1995. Operated by the Science Delivery Division of the Department of Environment and Science (DES) with support from DAF, Long Paddock provides access to information on climate, rainfall and pasture outlook. and is the portal to a number of useful decision support tools including:

- SILO is an enhanced climate database accessed via [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/silo/](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/silo/) which contains Australian climate data from 1889 (current to yesterday), in a number of ready-to-use formats, suitable for research and climate applications.
- FORAGE [www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/forage/about/](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/forage/about/) generates and distributes information relating to climate and pasture condition at user-specified locations.

FORAGE information available for any location including property/regional level scales in Queensland including: rainfall and pasture reports, rainfall and pasture by land type reports, ground cover reports, regional comparison ground cover reports, foliage projective cover reports, rainfall and pasture growth outlook reports, regional climate projections report and importantly drought assessment report.

FORAGE reports are usually run for all new IDPs coming out of an area that is not already drought declared or for which no previous IDPs have been endorsed. Forage reports are also usually run at a LGA level in the leadup to LDC meetings.

The **Drought Monitor** at [www.nacp.org.au/drought\\_monitor](http://www.nacp.org.au/drought_monitor) hosts the Australian CDI. The CDI uses a combination of rainfall, soil moisture, evapotranspiration and Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) from satellite to produce a drought indicator tailored for Australia. The 12-month Queensland Drought Monitor drought map is usually a good place to start investigating drought conditions and shows Queensland council/shire boundaries. In recent years it has become the primary map shown in LGA meetings.

**Australian CliMate** <https://climateapp.net.au/> uses Bureau of Meteorology data and the Queensland Government's SILO database to interrogate long-term climate records to ask questions relating to rainfall, temperature, radiation, and derived variables such as heat sum, soil water, drought, seasonal forecasts and time trend analyses. It is the primary tool used when identifying specific sites' rainfall percentiles. It also offers an excellent drought analysis tool. Australian CliMate is used with all IDP applications and data presented in LDC meetings.

**Bureau of Meteorology** [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au) provides data, maps and information including rainfall decile maps, drought statements and maps, soil moisture maps and reports, streamflow and dam reports and evaporative stress reports.

#### **4.4.1 Ensure a focus on continual improvement of relevant and timely science, data and mapping**

Recommendation 2 of the Drought Program Review stated that by 30 June 2021 the current LDC system and declaration process be reviewed and restructured into a new system for declarations that will be based on the transition to a more objective, science-based, multi-layered framework, utilising publicly accessible indicators and maintaining appropriate local input.

The transition to more science-based information has been ongoing especially since the mid-to-late 2010s. The ongoing development of the FORAGE suite of tools allows producers to 'downscale' maps to at least a district scale (5km x 5km) if not to a small property scale. The development and easy access to Australian CliMate allows primary producers to access rainfall and other climate information including drought analysis and rainfall percentiles across Queensland.

An identified gap or area needing improvement in the data and maps utilised by LDCs is the Australian CDI. Feedback from existing LDC members highlights this need. While in the 2022 survey of LDC members 97% of respondents considered the CDI maps to represent conditions in their areas generally well, there is less confidence in using CDI maps as the primary tool in the drought declaration and revocation process. In total, 70% rated the CDI maps as useful input for drought declarations/revocations yet expressed concerns about its use as the 'primary' tool without local context.

This concern is due, in part, to Queensland's normally high rainfall variability (in seasonality, quantity and spatial distribution) and the view that while 'droughts' generally develop in a widespread consistent pattern, the breakdown of droughts can be very patchy and not consistent. To help improve confidence levels in using the CDI maps, 87% of LDC survey respondents would like the CDI maps to be downscaled.

When shown the south-east Queensland scale maps in comparison to the Queensland scale maps, LDC members viewed the former to be more useful. However, LDC members stated that if CDI maps and associated information were able to be scaled down to a district or property scale (similar to FORAGE reports), this will increase confidence levels in the product as well as make it more useful for ongoing property management decisions.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Enhanced Drought Information System (EDIS) <https://edis.dpi.nsw.gov.au/> as developed by the Climate Branch of the DPI in 2016 is an excellent example of what could be achieved. The EDIS is used to improve the awareness, monitoring and forecasting of seasonal conditions and drought across NSW. A key feature of the EDIS and the NSW version of the CDI is that maps are spatially scalable to a parish level. It is essential that the Queensland Government undertake and develop a similar contemporary approach to drought management and awareness raising.

While developing a similar approach taken by NSW DPI would take further time and resources, it would resolve many of the issues previously highlighted by LDC members, CDI users and the stakeholders consulted during this review. It would also arguably improve drought management and resilience through its targeted, scientific and data-based approach.

This approach, in the short term will require a very modest investment to further develop and fine tune the mapping capability. In the longer term it will ensure a system that is fit for purpose and effective, and will stand up to scrutiny by industry and the community.

It is noted that should the Australian Government develop an appropriate tool which effectively reflects Queensland conditions, it could be considered to be a replacement for a Queensland system. This does not appear to be imminent, with Australian Government systems finding it difficult to effectively reflect southern and northern climatic differences.

#### **Recommendation 5**

Refine the current process for drought declarations and move towards a more streamlined approach that follows a set criteria and process, to make the DCS an automatic affirmation.

- Continue to utilise the relevant climatic data to assess whether or not a defined area is experiencing drought conditions and take every opportunity to ensure that contemporary data and tools are utilised effectively in the process.

## 4.5 Timeliness and communication

A common frustration that was expressed throughout the consultation, was the time taken to formally announce a drought declaration and the lack of communication associated with it. This is, in part, a result of the multiple levels within the process and a lack of understating of the process.

This fact strengthens the argument for a change in the way that drought is recognised in Queensland and acknowledges that new drought assistance measures do not necessarily rely on a lengthy, formal process.

A move to a streamlined, and virtually automatic recognition process for drought recognition in Queensland would be an ideal transition. Considering other refinements and changes being recommended throughout this report, it would culminate in the adoption of a system that relied on expanded data and mapping capabilities alongside continued local input.

This process would rely on the expanded capabilities outlined above and would be underpinned by a well-defined and articulated process represented in a flow chart for activity and timelines. The flow chart would include all factors to be considered along with who is responsible for activity, what data is utilised, and how and when the RACC members are engaged. The new guidelines for the RACC will also clearly define their roles in the process.

Assuming all the criteria are met within the process, then a DCS is automatically in place.

The development of a suitable benchmark figure to determine or support the drought revocation process would also be beneficial. An indicative figure would be when rainfall for the previous 12 months has reached the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. This does not mean that all the ongoing economic and production impacts of the drought have finished, rather that rainfall for the previous 12 months has returned to 'near normal'.

A Draft flow chart has been developed to show the proposed procedures for the future RACC and DCS process (see Figure 1)

### **Recommendation 5**

Refine the current process for drought declarations and move towards a more streamlined approach that follows a set criteria and process, to make the DCS an automatic affirmation.

- Continue to utilise the relevant climatic data to assess whether or not a defined area is experiencing drought conditions and take every opportunity to ensure that contemporary data and tools are utilised effectively in the process.

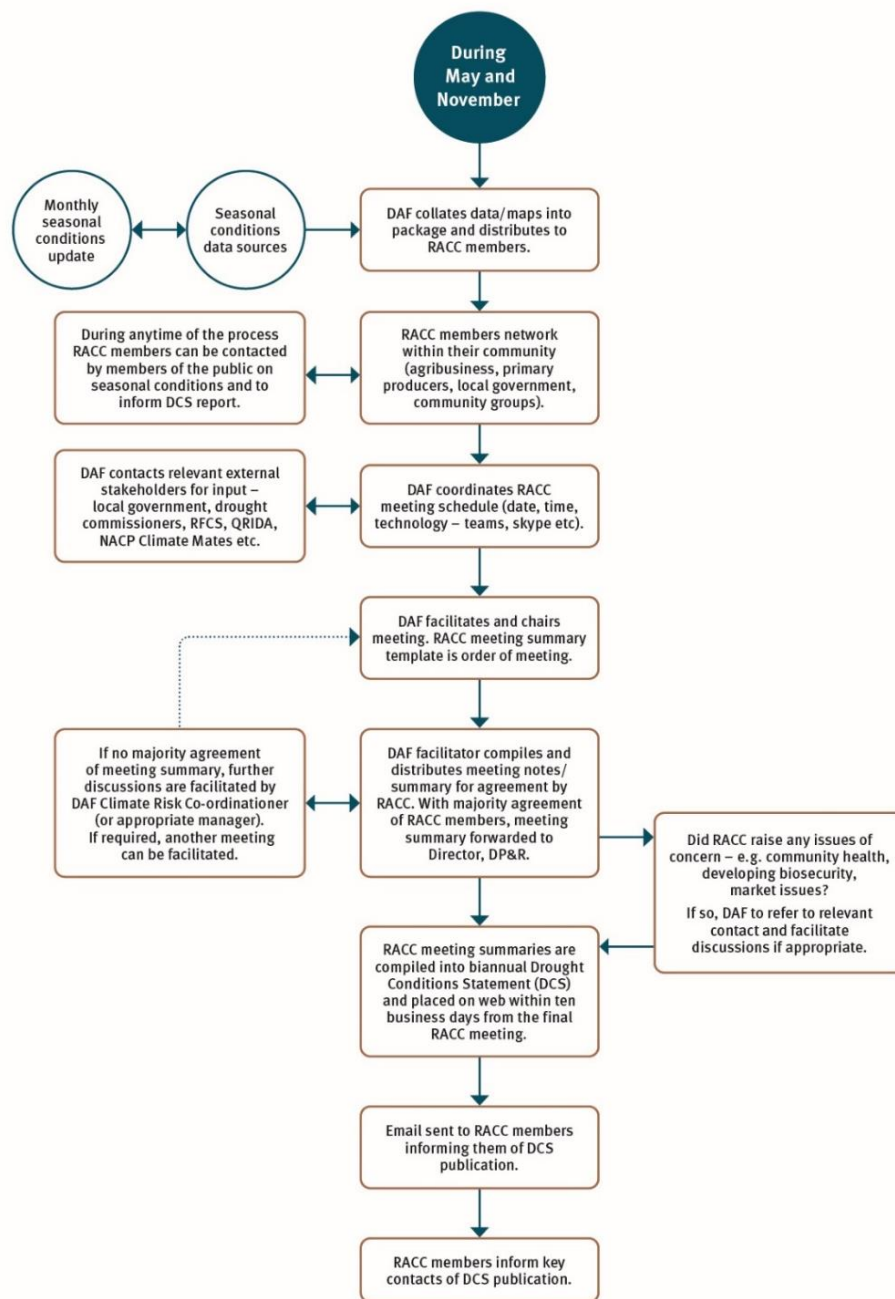
### **Recommendation 6**

To complete a move to a DCS, this new process will also articulate when an area is no longer experiencing drought conditions and this process will include a measurement of above 50 percentile rainfall deficiency.

Figure 1 - Draft Flow Chart of the Regional Agriculture Advisory Committee Process

**Draft RACC flow chart process**

As at September 2023



Abbreviations: DAF, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; DCS, drought condition statement; DP&R, Drought Policy and Response; NACP, Northern Australian Climate Program; QRIDA, Queensland Rural Industry Development Authority; RACC, Regional Agricultural Climate Committee; RFCS, Rural Financial Counselling Service

## 4.6 Relevance of Individually Droughted Properties (IDP)

In recognition that not all droughts follow local government boundaries, the drought declaration process allowed individuals to apply for an IDP for their property. The criteria for an area declaration are applied to all IDP applications, and in the past, IDPs were also shared with LDC members for endorsement. Historically, primary producers in a drought declared area or who held an IDP declaration had access to Queensland Government drought assistance, such as the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS).

With the cessation of DRAS, the relevance of IDPs has been raised. In the shorter term, IDPs should be retained to allow primary producers to access other assistance that is triggered by a formal drought declaration as well as time to allow other Departments and agencies time to update their assistance triggers.

However, with the further development of drought indicators such as the CDI into a format that will allow users to downscale to a property or regional level (e.g. 5km grid), other departments, agencies and primary producers will simply be able to refer to the property details to clarify if they are eligible or in a recognised drought impacted area. The inclusion of the CDI maps into a formal DCS twice a year would allow eligible areas to be eligible for assistance.

An argument for retaining IDPs is that it acknowledges the impacts of drought at a property level. Experience has also shown that in some cases these property impacts have been as much about management as it is about rainfall and climate variables. The application and issuing of IDPs has also been problematic and time consuming for limited effect with the new drought assistance focus. It is therefore timely that the concept of an IDP does not apply within the potential future process for DCSs.

A move to a more granular level of mapping, as recommended in other sections of this report, will address the current issue of requiring an IDP. It will allow for accurate identification of drought impacted areas, remove the requirement for, not only IDPs, but whole LGAs declarations, and result in streamlined administration.

To remove IDPs it is assumed there will be an improved property scale spatial mapping to replace IDPs. This will only be implemented when historical data sets indicate a strong confidence in a model.

### **Recommendation 7**

Based on the adoption of a defined area mapping process, that the Individually Droughted Property (IDP) process be removed no later than 30 June 2025.

## 4.7 Drought impact, recognition and adequate resourcing within the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

The consultation process identified a gap in the mapping available at a property level particularly for maps such as the CDI. While there are various tools available through the Bureau of Meteorology, there is a need for focused Queensland-level information to assist with a drought recognition process.

In addition, there was feedback about DAF staff resourcing in general and that the DAF coordinator needs to be regionally located. There is a need to ensure a local DAF presence is involved in the process and coordinated by the DAF State Climate Coordinator.

It is critical that the process to appoint RACC members, hold bi-annual RACC meetings and prepare quarterly Seasonal Updates are appropriately resourced within DAF, with clear regional coordination. In addition, the Queensland Government must ensure a drought indicator such as the CDI is developed to a property level (lot on plan or similar) analysis of drought conditions. As outlined above, while rainfall deciles provided through the Bureau of Meteorology are useful, a bigger picture of pasture growth, evapotranspiration (which accounts for temperatures), vegetation and soil moisture is needed to assist with understanding drought conditions. In addition, to support RACC decisions and any seasonal updates DAF's State Climate Risk Coordinator will need to coordinate a full analysis of water flows and impacts felt across various industries.

Acknowledging the need for well-planned and targeted investment in the necessary tools to ensure a contemporary process is vital. Simply maintaining the current system will not allow for the necessary progress to provide Queensland with a progressive nation-leading drought management and identification process.

**Recommendation 8**

Once the new process is implemented, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) should provide appropriate and adequate resources to ensure efficient management, coordination and governance of the DCS, RACC and necessary communication (internal and external).



## 5 Other relevant matters

### 5.1 Observations

The scope of this review has been well defined, and it specifically addresses the current drought declaration process, including LDC's, in Queensland. The Review has been conducted solely with that scope as the focus for consultation and input. It is also fair to say that there was significant feedback and discussion regarding the current drought support measures and the future initiatives that may be considered in the event of a prolonged drought.

Discussions that were outside the were not allowed to have prolonged debate, and it was clearly articulated that the subject of current or future initiatives were not within the remit of this review.

It would, however, be remiss not to address this issue within this report, as there is a strong relationship between drought recognition and the assistance measures available during this challenging time.

The existing weather conditions, and current forecast are pointing toward a challenging period for Queensland. At the time of writing this report, the Bureau of Meteorology Climate Driver Update indicates warmer and drier conditions are likely across Queensland from October to December. The Bureau has also issued an El Niño Alert. When the climatic conditions required for an El Niño Alert have been reached historically, an El Niño event has developed around 70 percent of the time.

Historically, when a drought begins to take hold and create pressure on agricultural businesses and communities, public calls for further government assistance become louder and more anxious. The trap that governments often fall into is to simply revert to mechanisms that were part of previous assistance regimes. The recent events in NSW are an example of political and media pressure, that culminated in the reintroduction of freight subsidies.

It is hoped that the Queensland government can resist those calls, and have, at the ready, options to address the gaps in assistance that bridges the divide between resilience and drought preparedness, and the need for additional in event support.

### 5.2 Potential in-event options

There is no doubt that managing through a severe or prolonged drought can be challenging for even the very best prepared primary producers. The recent changes to Queensland's drought assistance see the offer of innovative schemes that are available all year round and promote drought resilience.

It would therefore make sense to expand on these current programs to ensure there is additional support to assist primary producers through the course of drought impacts. This will show a willingness to respond to unforeseen conditions and business impacts, while maintaining the new system of encouraging a move towards drought resilience.

Recommendations for additional, 'in event' support for implementation after at least 2 failed wet seasons:

- increase the frequency of the Drought Preparedness Grant (DPG) from the current one single \$50,000 grant every five years, or make other changes such as an increase the limit to \$75,000, or increase the government contribution from 25 percent to 50 percent.
- offer two \$50,000 interest free Emergency Drought Assistance loans in a given period as opposed to the current one.
- adjust the terms, interest rates and interest only periods on Emergency Drought Assistance loans, and Drought Carry-on Finance Loans. This could include:

- adding an interest only component option for an additional year after the no repayment period of 2-years
- adding a no repayment period of one year to a loan
- adding a grant component to the loan products.eg. a 10-20 % grant component could be added to the Emergency Drought Assistance Loan
- after two or three failed wet seasons the Emergency Drought Assistance loan could be increased to \$75,000-\$100,000 and the repayment term could be increased to 10 years
- increase the Farm Management Grant (FMG) provided to complete the Farm Business Resilience Plan (FBRP) from the current \$2,500.
- Utilise FMG concept to target in-drought:
  - Financial literacy
  - Tailored support to undertake feed and watering budgeting.

These are an expansion of existing programs that are delivered by the Queensland Rural Industry Development Authority (QRIDA). It makes sense that existing programs be utilised as the base for further assistance and that it continues to be delivered by QRIDA as it has the existing structure and knowledge base.

There are other initiatives that should also be retained and where appropriate expanded for 'in event' support. DAF could coordinate, as it already does, additional funds for Queensland Government programs focusing on assistance for drought impacts including:

- Small Business Wellness Package through the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training.
- Tackling Regional Adversity through Integrated Care (TRAIC) through Queensland Health.
- Drought Wellbeing Service currently run by Royal Flying Doctors Service
- Re-activate Communities Assistance Program through the Department of Communities.
- land rent rebates/relief measures
- water licence waivers
- targeted relief from electricity charges
- various, transport-related drought assistance via the Department of Transport and Main Roads
- additional support for students through Education Queensland
- schemes for animal welfare and water shortage issues for small scale, and individual landholders where other assistance schemes do not apply.
- additional support and funding to the Rural Financial Counselling Service to provide services into drought impacted communities to support primary producers facing the effects of drought conditions (after at least 2 failed wet seasons)
- additional funding and support to community agencies, charities, and groups to provide targeted assistance to primary producers facing hardship to pay essential bills etc.

As outlined, it would represent good foresight and planning for the Queensland Government to consider the issues raised in this section of the report. If the prevailing weather and climatic conditions do follow the predictions, Queensland will have parts of the state move into drought-like conditions. This will then precipitate the call for additional assistance. If the Queensland Government has developed further measures in advance, it will be better placed to respond.

# Appendix A Terms of reference



## Drought Declaration Process Review Terms of Reference

### Local Drought Committee Review

#### Background

In 2018, the Queensland Government engaged an independent panel to complete the Queensland Drought Program Review. The independent panel provided 20 recommendations, with 18 accepted by the Queensland Government for implementation. Following the review, Queensland has implemented the most significant reforms to its drought assistance programs for generations.

Recommendation 2 of the review stated that 'by 30 June 2021, the current Local Drought Committee (LDC) system and declaration process be reviewed and restructured into a new system for declarations that will be based on the transition to a more objective, science-based, multi-layered framework, utilising publicly accessible indicators, and maintaining appropriate local input'. While the response to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic delayed implementation, in line with this recommendation, a review of Local Drought Committees (LDCs) and drought declarations will be conducted.

The drought declaration process and LDC framework were designed with the freight subsidies under the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme in mind. The new drought preparedness and in-drought assistance programs introduced following the Drought Program Review do not require a drought declaration (Appendix A). However, there may be other in-drought assistance provided by other agencies that still require a drought declaration for activation (Appendix B). When government considered drought reform in 2021, it made no decision as to the future of these other programs, rather it was agreed the availability of these programs would be decided should the need arise in any future drought. A review of LDCs and drought declarations, consistent with the drought program review recommendation, would ensure drought declarations are suitable for any future in-drought assistance programs.

#### Local Drought Committees

LDCs were established in 1982 to make recommendations to the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities on the need for regional drought declarations and revocations, to allow access to fodder, water and livestock freight subsidies.

LDCs are made up of local primary producers, representatives of industry organisations of the various industries in that area and chaired by a Department of Agriculture and Fisheries officer. LDCs meet at least once a year at the end of the summer rainfall season, or as required, to discuss the impact of seasonal conditions and make recommendations about the drought status of their area.

The threshold for drought declared status is principally a 12-month rainfall deficiency likely to occur no more than once every 10 to 15 years. In addition to this, LDCs consider the response of crops and pastures and their condition, availability of surface water, condition of livestock, prevailing weather conditions such as winds and temperatures, whether supplementary feeding is occurring throughout the district and any other factors that could affect the area. Recommendations to remove the drought status of an area are not made immediately after what can be considered a good fall of rain. Some time is allowed to elapse to ensure that the benefit that was expected from relief rain is materialised.



## Drought Declaration Process Review Terms of Reference

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### **Scope of the Review**

With consideration of the Queensland Government's current and future drought programs, the review will:

- Assess and provide analysis on the current arrangements for LDCs and if they are appropriate. This can include the future role of LDCs, membership, confidentiality, remuneration and assessment process, including utilisation of science-based data sources.
- Provide alternative policy options for future Drought Declarations and or alternative triggers.
- Consider and advise the purposes of future drought declarations and their nature.

### **Process**

The review will take approximately six months.

The reviewer may elect to engage directly with stakeholders, including industry organisations, LDC members, universities, regional community representatives and other Queensland agencies.

It would not be envisaged that a submission process be undertaken, rather, a process for targeted consultation would achieve the desired input and necessary feedback.

The final report is to be provided to the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities.



## Drought Declaration Process Review Terms of Reference

### Appendix A: New Queensland Government drought programs

The following programs do not require a drought declaration to access.

#### Farm Business Resilience Plans

The Farm Business Resilience Program helps farmers and graziers build a sustainable business by planning today for tomorrow's drought and climate risks.

Through the program producers can:

- access free learning and development through training and workshops
- improve farm management and business performance
- develop strategies and actions on how to manage risks and progress opportunities.

For the new drought preparedness grants and loans, producers must first have a suitable Farm Business Resilience Plan or similar. For in-drought assistance loans, if they do not already have a plan, producers must undertake to complete one in a reasonable time.

The Farm Business Resilience Program is co-funded by the Federal Government's Future Drought Fund and the Queensland Government's Drought and Climate Adaption Program.

#### Drought Preparedness Grants

Primary producers can apply for a grant of 25 per cent of the cost of purchasing new permanent capital infrastructure to a maximum cumulative amount of \$50 000 over five years.

The grant aims to assist producers with the cost of implementing on-farm capital improvements and carrying out drought preparedness activities identified in their Farm Business Resilience Plan including the below and as outlined in the guidelines. Please note this is not an exhaustive list.

- water infrastructure including pipes, water tanks, water troughs, new dam construction, drilling a new working bore, water conservation infrastructure and water pumps
- storage, mixing and feeding out equipment for grain, fodder, molasses, and other supplements
- grain storage and equipment that improves the ability of the business to manage drought
- reasonable freight components to purchase and install equipment or infrastructure
- consumables including fuel for own machinery used in relation to the drought preparedness project and
- contractor costs or non-salaried employees' costs directly associated with implementing the drought preparedness project.

#### Drought Ready and Recovery Finance loans

Queensland based primary producers who may be ready to undertake on-farm capital improvement activities or restocking and replanting activities to improve the drought resilience of their primary production enterprise may be eligible for a Drought Ready and Recovery Finance Loan of up to \$250 000.

The loan aims to assist producers with the cost of implementing new on-farm permanent capital infrastructure or restocking or replanting activities as identified in the Farm Business Resilience Plan to improve drought resilience and can complement the Drought Preparedness Grant.



## Drought Declaration Process Review Terms of Reference

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### **Emergency Drought Assistance Loans**

Queensland based primary producers who have been significantly financially affected by drought may be eligible to access an Emergency Drought Assistance Loan of up to \$50 000 to assist in meeting working capital expenses.

Producers may only receive one Emergency Drought Assistance Loan in any five-year period up to a maximum of \$50 000. The loan may be used for working capital expenses, such as paying employee wages, paying creditors, paying rent and rates, and buying goods for carrying on the business

The maximum combined outstanding loan balance under both the Emergency Drought Assistance Loan and the Drought Carry-on Finance Loan is \$250 000.

### **Drought Carry-on Finance Loan**

Queensland based primary producers who have been significantly affected by drought may be eligible for a Drought Carry-on Finance Loan to assist with carry-on finance.

Producers may only receive one Drought Carry-on Finance Loan in any five-year period up to a maximum of \$250 000.

The loan may be used for working capital expenses, such as paying employee wages, paying creditors, paying rent and rates, and buying goods for carrying on the business.

The maximum combined outstanding loan balance under both the Emergency Drought Assistance Loan and the Drought Carry-on Finance Loan is \$250 000.





## Drought Declaration Process Review Terms of Reference

### Appendix B: Recent Queensland Government in-drought assistance programs

#### Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries)

The Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS) helps primary producers manage the welfare of their core breeding herd during drought and restore their herds after drought. DRAS is now only available for producers that were drought declared prior to 1 April 2022, and will no longer be available in the next drought.

If drought declared, a producer may be eligible for fodder transport freight subsidies, water transport subsidies, and emergency water infrastructure rebates. After revocation of a drought declaration, producers may be eligible for livestock transport subsidies for returning from agistment, and for restocking.

DRAS subsidies are up to 50 percent to a maximum of \$20 000 per year. This can be increased to \$30 000 per year if the producer has a Drought Management Plan, or up to \$50 000 per year if the producer has been drought declared for six or more years and has a Drought Management Plan.

#### Land Rent Subsidies (Department Resources)

Landholders of rural leases (being Category 11 leases used for grazing and primary production) issued under the *Land Act 1994* are eligible for a rebate of 18 per cent of the annual rent where that annual payment is more than the minimum rent of \$284.

The rebate is available to leases in drought declared areas and individually droughted properties (IDP). Landholders who are eligible for the rebate have it automatically applied to their annual or quarterly invoices, along with information about the rebate.

#### Water Licence Waivers (Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water)

Annual water licence fees are being waived for Queensland producers whose properties are in drought-declared areas or have an IDP. Affected producers will be advised of the waiver by letter. Fees for all new water licence applications for stock and domestic water in all drought-declared areas in Queensland are also waived. This includes properties with an IDP.

#### Drought Relief from Electricity Charges (Department of Energy and Public Works)

The Drought Relief from Electricity Charges Scheme provides relief from supply charges on electricity accounts that are used to pump water for farm or irrigation purposes. Financial assistance is available in drought-declared areas or if their property has been drought-declared. Producers can apply for a waiver or reimbursement of supply charges on all relevant electricity accounts.

#### Transport-related drought assistance (the Department of Transport and Main Roads)

Transport-related drought assistance measures include:

- permits for increasing the maximum hay loading height
- concessions on shifting droughted livestock
- waivers and flexibility on certain vehicle registration conditions, fees, and charges
- increased school transport allowances for some families that drive their children to school or connect with a school bus run.

## Appendix B Consultation

### Letter template to existing LDC members

«Title» «Name» «Surname»

Member

«Local\_Drought\_Committee» Local Drought Committee

«Email\_address\_»

Dear «Title» «Surname»

I acknowledge your significant contribution in the past as a Local Drought Committee (LDC) member and write to you seeking your participation in the upcoming review of the drought declaration process and committees.

In 2018, the Queensland Government commissioned an external review of existing drought programs and assistance. This included developing recommendations for a future long-term approach to managing drought response in Queensland focussed on drought preparedness.

Two of the recommendations of the report related to LDC frameworks, drought declaration processes and inclusion of more science-based indicators. The relevant recommendations were:

#### **Recommendation 1**

The existing LDC Framework and the drought declaration process, including Individually Droughted Properties (IDPs), be maintained in the immediate future. The areas of responsibility and processes and procedures of the LDCs should be immediately clarified and made publicly available to avoid confusion and misinformation.

#### **Recommendation 2**

The current LDC system and declaration process be reviewed and restructured into a new system for declarations that will be based on the transition to a more objective, science-based, multi-layered framework, utilising publicly accessible indicators, and maintaining appropriate local input.

The Honourable Mark Furner MP, Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, requested an independent review of LDCs and the drought declaration process to finalise the recommendations from the 2018 review. Mr Charles Burke has been engaged to undertake this review. Mr Burke played an essential role in establishing drought program reform in a previous role as Co-Chair of the Queensland Government Drought Program Review. His experience through this process makes him well suited to complete the review.



Mr Burke will be consulting with a range of key stakeholders to determine their position and expectations of the existing system and what any future arrangement may look like. Mr Burke is willing to engage directly with you either by email, phone, video conference or in person. While Mr Burke is not calling for formal written submissions, if as an LDC member, you wish to provide your written comments or be contacted by Mr Burke directly, please contact us to [drought@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:drought@daf.qld.gov.au) by 11 August 2023.

An optional survey of LDC members was run in conjunction with the annual LDC meetings at the end of the 2021–22 summer rainfall season. The survey was undertaken to gauge members' views on the future of LDCs and the material and information used in making drought declarations and revocations. The outcomes of the survey assisted in informing the review process.

The final review report is scheduled to be provided to the Queensland Government for consideration before the end of 2023.

If you require any further information, please contact Dave McRae, State Climate Risk Coordinator, Drought Policy and Response on 4529 4111 or by email at [david.mcrae@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:david.mcrae@daf.qld.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

**Peter Donaghy**  
**General Manager, Agribusiness Operations**  
**20 July 2023**

## Letter Template to Stakeholders

«Title» «FirstName» «Surname»  
«Postion»  
«Organisation»

«email\_»

Dear «Title» «Surname»

I am writing to you as a key industry representative seeking your participation in the review of the drought declaration process and committees which has just commenced.

In 2018, the Queensland Government commissioned an external review of existing drought programs and assistance. This included developing recommendations for a future long-term approach to managing drought response in Queensland, focussed on drought preparedness.

Two of the recommendations of the report related to Local Disaster Committee (LDC) frameworks, drought declaration processes and inclusion of more science-based indicators. The relevant recommendations were:

### Recommendation 1

The existing LDC Framework and the drought declaration process, including Individually Droughted Properties (IDPs), be maintained in the immediate future. The areas of responsibility and processes and procedures of the LDCs should be immediately clarified and made publicly available to avoid confusion and misinformation.

### Recommendation 2

The current LDC system and declaration process be reviewed and restructured into a new system for declarations that will be based on the transition to a more objective, science-based, multi-layered framework, utilising publicly accessible indicators, and maintaining appropriate local input.

The Honourable Mark Furner MP, Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, agreed to the independent review of LDCs and the drought declaration process to finalise the recommendations from the 2018 review. The media release can be found here [Review of Queensland's drought declaration process - Ministerial Media Statements](#)

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has engaged Mr Charles Burke to undertake the review. Mr Burke has extensive experience and understanding of Queensland drought programs. Mr Burke played an essential role in establishing drought program reform in a previous role as Co-Chair of the Queensland Government Drought Program Review. His experience through this process makes him well suited to complete the review.

Mr Burke will be consulting with a range of key stakeholders to discuss their position and expectations of the existing system and what any future arrangements may look like. While there is not a formal

call for written submissions, we welcome any key points, information or comments to be emailed to [drought@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:drought@daf.qld.gov.au) by 31 July 2023. Alternatively, if you would like to request a meeting with Mr Burke to discuss please email DAF at [drought@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:drought@daf.qld.gov.au).

The final report and recommendations is scheduled to be provided to the Queensland Government for consideration before the end of 2023.

If you require any further information, please contact Dave McRae, State Climate Risk Coordinator, Drought Policy and Response on 4529 4111 or by email at [david.mcrae@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:david.mcrae@daf.qld.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

**Peter Donaghy**  
**A/Executive Director Agri-Business and Policy**  
**12 July 2023**

## Letter to Agriculture Industry Organisations

«Title» «Name» «Surname»

«Position»

«Organisation»

«Email\_Address»

Dear «Title» «Surname»

I am writing to you as a key industry representative seeking your participation in the review of the drought declaration process and committees which has just commenced.

In 2018, the Queensland Government commissioned an external review of existing drought programs and assistance. This included developing recommendations for a future long-term approach to managing drought response in Queensland focussed on drought preparedness.

Two of the recommendations of the report related to LDC frameworks, drought declaration processes and inclusion of more science-based indicators. The relevant recommendations were:

### Recommendation 1

The existing LDC Framework and the drought declaration process, including Individually Droughted Properties (IDPs), be maintained in the immediate future. The areas of responsibility and processes and procedures of the LDCs should be immediately clarified and made publicly available to avoid confusion and misinformation.

### Recommendation 2

The current LDC system and declaration process be reviewed and restructured into a new system for declarations that will be based on the transition to a more objective, science-based, multi-layered framework, utilising publicly accessible indicators, and maintaining appropriate local input.

The Honourable Mark Furner MP, Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities, agreed to the independent review of LDCs and the drought declaration process to finalise the recommendations from the 2018 review. The media release can be found here [Review of Queensland's drought declaration process - Ministerial Media Statements](#)

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has engaged Mr Charles Burke to undertake the review. Mr Burke has extensive experience and understanding of Queensland drought programs. Mr Burke played an essential role in establishing drought program reform in a previous role as Co-Chair of the Queensland Government Drought Program Review. His experience through this process makes him well suited to complete the review.

Mr Burke will be consulting with a range of key stakeholders to discuss their position and expectations of the existing system and what any future arrangements may look like. Mr Burke wishes to engage directly with your organisation, we will be in contact with you shortly to explore options for an initial meeting at your earliest convenience.

While there is not a formal call for written submissions, we welcome any key points, information or comments on your organisations position via email to Mr Burke at [cburke@stanleyhouse.com.au](mailto:cburke@stanleyhouse.com.au) and DAF at [drought@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:drought@daf.qld.gov.au) by 31 July 2023.

The final report is scheduled to be provided to the Queensland Government for consideration before the end of 2023.

If you require any further information, please contact Dave McRae, State Climate Risk Coordinator, Drought Policy and Response on 4529 4111 or by email at [david.mcrae@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:david.mcrae@daf.qld.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

**Peter Donaghy**  
**A/Executive Director Agri-Business and Policy**  
**12 July 2023**

# Appendix C Draft Regional Agricultural Climate Committee guidelines

## Introduction

Drought is one of many climatic risks managed by the agriculture sector, and managing drought is a feature of Queensland agriculture. A key difference is that while the impact of other climatic events, such as floods and bushfires, is immediate, droughts often develop 'slowly' over time, and it can be difficult to determine a clear start and end date. Droughts have productivity, profitability and environmental impacts that can last for years. It can also be difficult to compare one drought to another. Droughts often differ in seasonality, location, spatial extent, economic and productivity impact, environmental impact and duration.

This can make decisions relating to drought management difficult to implement unless seasonal conditions are being monitored regularly and suitable drought management strategies and plans have been developed prior to the onset of the drought. This highlights the need for a continuing focus on drought preparedness and business resilience planning rather than in-drought responses.

With the end of formal ministerial announcements of drought declarations and drought revocations, Regional Agricultural Climate Committee (RACC) meetings will be used to gain a local perspective on seasonal and agricultural production conditions as well as facilitate an opportunity for members to communicate on issues of concern for that region. This information will be incorporated in a biannual Drought Condition Statement (DCS) that, when combined with the updated and improved Australian Combined Drought Indicator (CDI) maps, will identify which parts of Queensland are currently drought impacted.

These changes also support new drought assistance in Queensland that is open to eligible primary producers across all agricultural sectors to better manage future droughts without needing a drought declaration. These measures are available every year, regardless of drought status, and are managed through the Queensland Rural Industry Development Authority (QRIDA). The drought program reforms also deliver Queensland's obligations under the National Drought Agreement.

The purpose of this document is to outline the standard operating processes of the RACCs and the Queensland Government's ongoing recognition of changing seasonal conditions and drought.

## RACC distribution

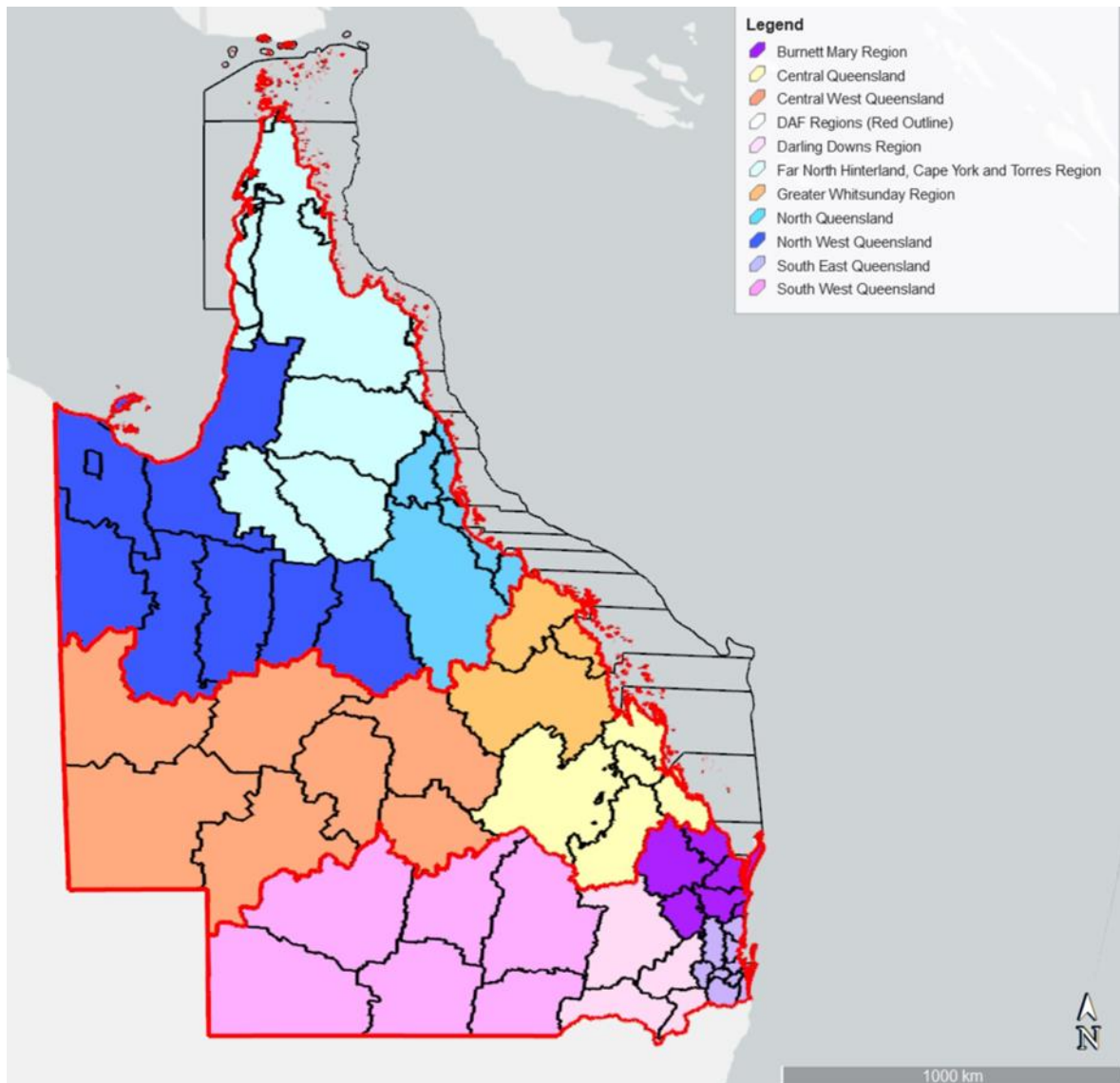
RACCs are geographically based on an amalgamation of Local Government Areas (LGAs) loosely based on current Queensland Regional Affiliations. These are used as they represent/reflect existing divisions.

There are 10 RACCs:

- South East Queensland
- Darling Downs Region
- South West Queensland
- Central West Queensland
- North West Queensland
- Far North Hinterland, Cape York and Torres Region
- North Queensland
- Greater Whitsunday Region

- Central Queensland
- Burnett Mary Region.

**Map 1 RACC distribution with highlighted DAF north, central and south regions**



A list of each RACC with the affiliated LGAs is included at Appendix 1. The DAF administration of the RACCs will be based on existing DAF regions (South, Central and North).

### **RACC committee membership**

RACC membership will comprise representatives from DAF and primary producers from the various primary production activities that predominate in that region. The extent of representation from DAF and industry relates to the geographic nature of the various industries in each area.

Requests for nominations for RACC membership will be made to grower and industry representative organisations, such as, but not necessarily limited to, AgForce and Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) and the regional agriculture industry organisations they represent (e.g., Cotton Australia, Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers, CANEGROWERS, Growcom, eastAUSmilk).

Producers or those from related industries with specialist expertise who are not affiliated with any industry organisation may also be members of a RACC. During the transition period from LDCs to the establishment of RACCs, DAF will consult with current LDC members, industry, DAF staff and local government regarding new RACC members. In recognition of their previous contribution as an LDC member, existing LDC members will be surveyed to gauge their interest in continuing to represent their communities and industries through participation in a RACC.

It is expected that RACC members are primary producers who reside in and are well connected in their community; are knowledgeable about seasonal conditions and other factors affecting their communities; and are prepared to contribute to RACC discussions and information gathering. RACC members will also be expected to have suitable internet connectivity (or access to) and the capability to join discussions and meetings remotely (using Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc.).

RACC membership will initially be for a period of 5 years and following a review, any changes to membership of a RACC will be made on a rolling basis. While it is accepted that representative organisations and individuals will wish to make RACC nominations, it is at the department's discretion whether to accept those nominations or find alternative nominations. The department will undertake a standardised review process to ensure all RACC nominations meet community expectations. RACC membership is voluntary, with no remuneration made.

RACC membership numbers can vary based on geographic size, but it would be reasonable to expect member numbers to be between a minimum of 6 to maximum of 15. A quorum for a RACC meeting is set at a simple majority of the members.

The DAF officer responsible for the RACC must make a reasonable attempt to contact all members prior to the meeting to allow them an opportunity for input. All members should be contacted after the meeting with a copy of the meeting summary and actions.

The chair or facilitator of each RACC will be the DAF Climate Risk Coordinator responsible for the area the RACC represents or a DAF officer with delegated responsibilities. DAF officers will have relevant expertise in areas such as climate science, beef cattle, sheep, horticulture, dairy and agronomy.

## **RACC process**

RACCs will meet at least once per year during May to consider seasonal and agricultural conditions across their region. Being at the end of the summer rainfall and pasture growing season, May is a suitable time to hold a RACC meeting as members will have a good grasp of seasonal and agricultural conditions (pasture response, soil moisture levels, water levels, crop growing conditions, etc.) and if there are enough reserves to last until the start of the next wet season.

There is also an option for RACC members to formally meet again in November. RACC members may seek to do so if seasonal conditions are poor or deteriorating, or they may choose not to meet in November if seasonal conditions are positive. Regardless of the outlook, the DAF officer responsible for each region will contact RACC members for feedback on seasonal and agricultural conditions in their regions in May and November.

The DAF State Climate Coordinator will provide information on climatic data and seasonal conditions to members during May and November each year, organise and facilitate the meetings, compile meeting summaries and contribute to the development of the Drought Condition Statement. RACC members would be expected to contribute their local and regional knowledge of:

- pasture response
- water supplies (stock, underground, surface, irrigation)
- extent of drought feeding, drought-related stock movements



- general stock condition
- cropping (condition of crops, soil moisture, yields) and horticultural conditions
- other factors or issues affecting their communities.

Input or contributions can also be sought from non-RACC members, such as the Northern Australian Climate Program (NACP) 'Climate Mates'. Climate Mates are regionally based and selected based on their knowledge of northern grazing and their ability to network and communicate with producers in the grazing industry.

It is also expected that DAF would continue to meet regularly with the Queensland Drought Commissioners who have been appointed to provide update to the government on the impacts of drought on rural and remote communities. Drought Commissioners, through DAF, can receive and provide information from and to RACCs as required.

Contact may also be made by DAF and RACC members with relevant local government officers to seek input or contributions regarding drought-related issues for their communities.

The output from RACC meetings will be used to develop the Drought Condition Statement. This will be an amendment to the monthly conditions reports based on the Australian Combined Drought Indicator (CDI). The Drought Condition Statement will identify which parts of Queensland are currently drought impacted. This will allow producers to be recognised as experiencing drought conditions and for eligible producers to access assistance from other government departments, which may still require some type of drought recognition. The CDI will be updated monthly and publicly available to give a more responsive reflection of conditions being experienced at any given time.

A survey of RACC members should be undertaken every 2 years to ensure RACC members wish to continue in their role; are confident in the process; have at least a basic (or better) understanding of the maps, data and information provided; and that the downscaled CDI maps generally represent conditions in their areas well. A flow chart highlighting the RACC process is included at Appendix 2.

## **Data and mapping resources for RACC meetings**

Sources of data and information to be provided to RACC members prior to any meetings will include: The Drought Monitor ([www.nacp.org.au/drought\\_monitor](http://www.nacp.org.au/drought_monitor)) hosts the Australian Combined Drought Indicator (CDI). The CDI uses a combination of rainfall, soil moisture, evapotranspiration and the Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) from satellites to produce a drought indicator tailored for Australia.

The 12-month Queensland Drought Monitor drought map is usually a good place to start investigating drought conditions and shows Queensland council/shire boundaries. It should be the primary map shown in RACC meetings.

The Long Paddock website ([www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au)) provides information like climate outlooks, rainfall and pasture outlooks and historical rainfall. It is the portal to several useful decision support tools, including the following:

- SILO ([www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/silo/](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/silo/)) is an enhanced climate database that contains Australian climate data from 1889 (current to yesterday) in ready-to-use formats suitable for research and climate applications.
- FORAGE ([www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/forage/about/](http://www.longpaddock.qld.gov.au/forage/about/)) generates and distributes information relating to climate and pasture conditions at user-specified locations.

FORAGE reports are available for any location, including property and regional level scales in Queensland and include: rainfall and pasture; rainfall and pasture by land type; ground cover; regional comparison ground cover; foliage projective cover; rainfall and pasture growth outlook; regional

climate projections; and, importantly, drought assessment. FORAGE reports, including a drought assessment report, should be run at an LGA level in the leadup to RACC meetings.

Australian CliMate (<https://climateapp.net.au/>) uses Bureau of Meteorology data and the Queensland Government's SILO database to interrogate long-term climate records to ask questions relating to rainfall, temperature, radiation and derived variables, such as heat sum, soil water, drought, seasonal forecasts and time trend analyses. It is the primary tool used when identifying specific sites' rainfall percentiles. It also offers an excellent drought analysis tool.

Australian CliMate rainfall and drought assessments for key locations within an RACC region should be presented in all RACC meetings.

Bureau of Meteorology ([www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)) data, maps and information including rainfall decile maps, drought statements and maps, soil moisture maps and reports, streamflow and dam reports and evaporative stress reports.

Dam level information as relevant to individual RACCs can be sought from Sunwater ([www.sunwater.com.au](http://www.sunwater.com.au)) and seqwater ([www.seqwater.com.au](http://www.seqwater.com.au)). Further information regarding regional communities' water supply levels is best sought from their local government. The [Queensland Local Government Directory](#) provides contact details and locality maps for Queensland's local governments.

## **Regional Agricultural Climate Committee (RACC) meeting outcomes and communication**

RACC meeting outcomes and actions should be prepared **and** circulated to members for verification. After a majority of RACC members respond, the agreed actions will be forwarded to the State Climate Risk Coordinator and the Director, Drought Policy and Response, DAF.

The information can then be used in any departmental briefing notes or for policy development or response as required. A RACC meeting summary template is provided in Appendix 3.

These documented actions are then used as the basis for the Drought Conditions Statement (DCS) which will be published twice a year after the May and November meetings or contact with each RACC. A DCS template is provided in Appendix 4.

## **Drought condition statement (DCS)**

The DCS will be based on the relevant climatic data and mapping resources as used in the RACC, feedback from RACC members, the minutes of the RACC meeting and other appropriate sources (Drought Commissioners, NACP 'Climate Mates', etc.).

The DCS will identify which parts of Queensland are recognised as currently drought affected. This will allow eligible producers to access assistance from other government departments, which may still require some type of drought recognition. It will be updated twice a year (published in June and December) within 10 working days of the last RACC meeting in addition to the monthly seasonal conditions update.

The monthly seasonal conditions update will be the CDI map showing areas across Queensland experiencing drought conditions. This map will be available online for property owners and assistance scheme administrators to search for individual properties and drill down to a local level to identify drought impacts at that level. The Drought Condition Statement will provide further information on the drought conditions experienced by different agricultural industries.

## **Drought- impacted recognition**

An area or location must meet certain criteria to be recognised as drought impacted. A clear benchmark figure that has widely been used for drought recognition is when rainfall is in the lowest decile (or 10th percentile) of historical rainfall for a minimum of 12 months and preferably including a full wet season. When rainfall for the previous 12 months is at or below the 30th percentile, an area should be identified as being in a drought alert stage and producers should be encouraged to manage conditions as appropriate.

A benchmark figure for identifying when a drought has ended in an area previously recognised as drought impacted should be when rainfall is above the 50th percentile for the previous 12 months. This does not mean that all agricultural activities or seasonal conditions have returned to pre-drought status but rather that recent rainfall figures have returned to near average. The definition of drought used in this process should remain limited to rainfall rather than production, profitability or other determinates.

With the further development of the CDI into a more interactive drought alert tool, the same approach can be utilised with the CDI maps. Areas identified as being in 'extreme drought' for a minimum 12 month period at the end of May are identified in the drought recognition statement as being drought impacted. For that recognition to be lifted, seasonal conditions, as identified by the CDI, must have returned to 'near normal' for a minimum of 12 months.

When a region has been identified as drought impacted in the Drought Condition Statement issued as of June or November, this recognition remains until the next RACC meeting, when it is reviewed.

## **Regional Agricultural Climate Committee conduct**

RACCs are an integral part of the state government's response to drought. Therefore, it is important that a good working relationship exists between members, departmental representatives, LGAs and industry bodies and that all discussions are conducted in a professional manner, in line with the appropriate criteria, based on objective decision-making and free from bias.

RACC members should raise any issues in the first instance with the relevant DAF members or the State Climate Risk Coordinator. If this does not provide a resolution, it should be escalated within the department by either the RACC member or their representative industry body.

## Appendix 1 Regional Agricultural Climate Committee distribution and local government area affiliation

<p>South East Queensland RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brisbane City Council</li> <li>• Gold Coast City Council</li> <li>• Ipswich City Council</li> <li>• Lockyer Valley Regional Council</li> <li>• Logan City Council</li> <li>• Moreton Bay Regional Council</li> <li>• Redland City Council</li> <li>• Scenic Rim Regional Council</li> <li>• Somerset Regional Council</li> <li>• Sunshine Coast Regional Council</li> </ul>	<p>Central West Queensland RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barcaldine Regional Council</li> <li>• Barcoo Shire Council</li> <li>• Blackall-Tambo Regional Council</li> <li>• Boulia Shire Council</li> <li>• Diamantina Shire Council</li> <li>• Longreach Regional Council</li> <li>• Winton Shire Council</li> </ul>
<p>Burnett Mary Region RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bundaberg Regional Council</li> <li>• Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Fraser Coast Regional Council</li> <li>• Gympie Regional Council</li> <li>• North Burnett Regional Council</li> <li>• Noosa Shire Council</li> <li>• South Burnett Regional Council</li> </ul>	<p>North West Queensland RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burke Shire Council</li> <li>• Carpentaria Shire Council</li> <li>• Cloncurry Shire Council</li> <li>• Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Flinders Shire Council</li> <li>• McKinlay Shire Council</li> <li>• Mornington Shire Council</li> <li>• Mount Isa City Council</li> <li>• Richmond Shire Council</li> </ul>
<p>Darling Downs Region RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goondiwindi Regional Council</li> <li>• Southern Downs Regional Council</li> <li>• Toowoomba Regional Council</li> <li>• Western Downs Regional Council</li> </ul>	<p>Far North Hinterland, Cape York and Torres Region RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aurukun Shire Council</li> <li>• Cook Shire Council</li> <li>• Croydon Shire Council</li> <li>• Douglas Shire Council</li> <li>• Etheridge Shire Council</li> <li>• Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Mapoon Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Mareeba Shire Council</li> <li>• Napranum Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council</li> <li>• Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Torres Shire Council</li> <li>• Torres Strait Island Regional Council</li> <li>• Weipa Town Authority</li> <li>• Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council</li> </ul>

<p>South West Queensland RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balonne Shire Council</li> <li>• Bulloo Shire Council</li> <li>• Maranoa Regional Council</li> <li>• Murweh Shire Council</li> <li>• Paroo Shire Council</li> <li>• Quilpie Shire Council</li> </ul>	<p>North Queensland RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burdekin Shire Council</li> <li>• Cairns Regional Council</li> <li>• Cassowary Coast Regional Council</li> <li>• Charters Towers Regional Council</li> <li>• Hinchinbrook Shire Council</li> <li>• Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council</li> <li>• Tablelands Regional Council</li> <li>• Townsville City Council</li> <li>• Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council</li> </ul>
<p>Central Queensland RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Banana Shire Council</li> <li>• Central Highlands Regional Council</li> <li>• Gladstone Regional Council</li> <li>• Livingstone Shire Council</li> <li>• Rockhampton Regional Council</li> <li>• Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council</li> </ul>	<p>Greater Whitsunday Region RACC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isaac Regional Council</li> <li>• Mackay Regional Council</li> <li>• Whitsunday Regional Council</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2 Regional Agricultural Climate Committee process flow chart

Abbreviations: DAF, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; DCS, drought condition statement; DP&R, Drought Policy and Response .NACP, Northern Australian Climate Program; QRIDA, Queensland Rural Industry Development Authority; RACC, Regional Agricultural Climate Committee; RFCS, Rural Financial Counselling Service

## Appendix 3 Regional Agricultural Climate Committee meeting summary template

This meeting summary template (or similar) is to be used for RACC meetings. After the completion of the meeting, the outcomes and action items are to be distributed to RACC members. When a majority have responded in agreement, the outcomes and action items should be forwarded to the Director, Drought Policy and Response.

The meeting chair (a DAF employee) is to forward any other issues raised by RACC members to the relevant DAF contact or other agency for response. The RACC chair will email RACC member(s) to state who their concern has been passed onto.

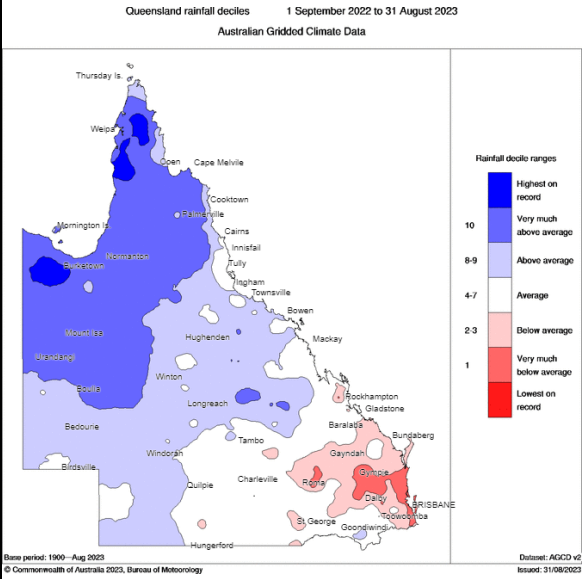
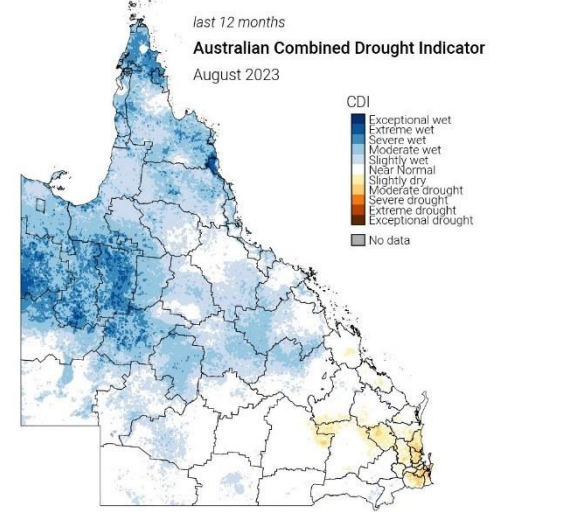
The RACC meeting summaries are used in the development of the Drought Condition Statement.

RACC meeting summary
RACC:
Date:
Chair:
Attendees:
Apologies:
Situation: Rainfall/CDI summary: Pasture response: Water availability (stock, irrigation, surface): Livestock condition (including level of drought feeding and drought-related livestock movements): Cropping conditions (including yields, failures, soil moisture): Community issues (as raised by RACC members, including market access, employment, biosecurity): Other input (as raised by external stakeholders, including local government, drought commissioners):
<b>Summary statement</b> (including general climate conditions):

## Appendix 4 Drought condition statement

The DCS will be published in June and November. It will be based on the previous 12-month rainfall deciles map and previous 12-month CDI map as well as the summary statement of the previous RACC meetings.

The below template or similar will be used for the biannual DCS.

<p>Drought condition statement</p> <p>As at (insert date)</p>	
<p>Map 1. 12-month rainfall decile map (including map date and source). Either Bureau of Meteorology or The Long Paddock maps could be used.</p> 	<p>Map 2. 12-month CDI map (including map date and source)</p> 
<p>Description: discuss rainfall patterns during previous 12 months, etc.</p>	<p>Description: discuss CDI patterns during previous 12 months, etc. Highlight areas of increasing drought intensity, improving seasonal conditions, etc.</p>
<p>Summary statement of RACC meetings at Queensland level</p>	
<p>Summary statement of RACC meetings (as taken from RACC meeting minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South East Queensland</li> <li>• Darling Downs Region</li> <li>• South West Queensland</li> <li>• Central West Queensland</li> <li>• North West Queensland</li> <li>• Far North Hinterland, Cape York and Torres Region</li> <li>• North Queensland</li> <li>• Greater Whitsunday Region</li> <li>• Central Queensland</li> <li>• Burnett Mary Region</li> </ul>	