Northern muster
Information for rural business in North Queensland

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info for rural business in North Queensland

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NQ prices rebound

MSA Index

BOS indicus cattle breeds – there is good and bad news on your cattle grading Meat Standards Australia (MSA).

The good news? Bos indicus breeds can consistently achieve MSA grading, MLA project manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data analytics, Jessira Perovic, told the recent Beef Australia 2015 MLA manager for eating quality data 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Exciting surrounding market movements is providing optimism for producers still affected by drought conditions across more than 80 per cent of Queensland. The state government has increased the maximum amount of funding available under the Drought Relief Assistance Scheme (DRAS) to assist producers as the drought continues. Maximum DRAS support was lifted from $30,000 to $40,000 a year for property owners in their third and/or subsequent year of drought, and with an approved Drought Management Plan in place. This increase was effective for the 2014-15 financial year and as long as the current drought continues.

Hopefully, the additional funding will assist livestock owners with the rising costs of transporting fodder and water supplies over increasing distances. As the Emergency Water Rebate is a part of DRAS, the increase also applies to eligible water infrastructure.

Producers wanting to apply for DRAS assistance, including the Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate, should contact the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries on 13 25 23. DRAS claim forms and Individually Droughted Property (IDP) applications can also be found at www.daf.qld.gov.au.

A reminder for those in drought declared regions – all fodder freight and water supplies, Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebates claim forms must be submitted within six months of the date of purchase.

With the Bureau of Meteorology officially declaring a major El Nino event producers are encouraged to plan ahead using the latest forecasted information. The potential impacts of the El Nino pattern include a later start to the wet-season and monsoon onset. Industry abuzz on upswing

PRICKLY acacia (Vachellia nilotica subsp. Indica) is widespread throughout north-west and central-west Queensland. The prevention of its spread at a local and regional level should be a management priority for all livestock businesses. Livestock eat green and dry seed pods and pod seeds as part of normal grazing habits, with high proportions of ingested seed remaining viable and passing through the animal’s gut.

Recent research by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) Tropical Weeds Research Centre revealed the seed has potential to be viable as soon as a pod starts to change from green to grey, and this can be as early as July. The findings have surprised graziers and weed managers as this occurs well before pods dry out and fall from trees, which is when management actions intended to prevent the seed spread are generally performed. Most seed spread prevention actions relate to stock movement and restriction of stock movement between clean and unclean areas is still the best way to reduce risk of seed spread. However, when in the spread management is required, it is recommended stock that have had access to prickly acacia pods are held in a pod-free paddock for a minimum of six days to allow for the passage of the seed. This paddock should be chosen based on the ability to diligently monitor and control any prickly acacia that grows from seed deposited in manure. The soil seed viability will continue throughout 2015 as part of the War on Western Weeds (WoWW) project. The five-year project, managed by DAF, aims to reduce the incidence and spread of prickly acacia. A separate research plan for 2015 involves a trial to confirm the maximum time it takes for the seed to pass through cattle.

The study on seed viability will continue with the relevant provisions of the Competition and Consumer Act and with the Australian Association of National Advertisers Code of Practice. The advertisement of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is subject to the advertisement of any product in the Northern Muster.

For the latest research-based information, tips, tools, events and recorded webinars, visit www.futurebeef.com.au

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Talking business

THE Department of Agriculture and Fisheries’ popular beef business app, Stocktake Plus, has been updated for Android devices. Forget the pen and paper, GPS, camera and land type sheets – a smartphone and a new Stocktake Plus app are all a grazier needs to determine stocking rates and carrying capacity in any paddock.

The app was developed by DAF’s FutureBeef team after extensive industry consultation, and is designed to be a practical, work-anywhere (including outside telephone range), decision-support tool. Supported through FutureBeef and Meat & Livestock Australia, the app is available to all northern Australian producers.

The new Android update makes the app more user-friendly and accurate, and brings it in line with the updated Apple version. It includes:

1. Add ‘Available Pasture’ to the reports section.
2. Create a home screen on start-up instead of defaulting to properties tab.
3. Export data to a .zip file of a CSV, email or transfer file.

It is also timely to remind all users to routinely back up data and here is how to do this:

1. Once logged in, navigate to ‘Secure Backup’ via ‘More’ on the navigation bar (at the bottom), or

Should you encounter any problems, let me know.

Greg Bath, DAF, Toowoomba
Phone: (07) 4688 1212
Email: greg.bath@daf.qld.gov.au

The potential impacts of the El Niño pattern include high price movements coupled by the breakthrough market analysts predicting an extremely rare event – uncharted territory from a price prospective with a later start to the wet-season and monsoon onset.

Northern muster

Industry abuzz on upswing

Zanda Award winner Emma Hegarty with runners-up Luke Wright and Athol New.

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Northern heifers monitored

LOW heifer pregnancy rates in northern Australia are quite common. The MLA-funded breeder project, CashCow, has reported median heifer pregnancy rates of 67 per cent in Australia’s tougher northern forested areas. The findings aligned with results a local Charters Towers beef producer was seeing in his heifers. With his co-operation, a Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF)/MLA Producer Demonstration Site (PDS), began on his Droughtmaster/Euro-cross type herd in December 2013.

The three-year study testing the hypothesis that low liveweight during the mating period is the primary cause for low pregnancy rates in heifers. Data collection on the host property, Mr. O’Neill’s Station, formally began in December 2013 with weighing and ultrasound ovian scanning on 341 No.2 heifers. Mating started in mid-January 2014. Before mating bulls were vaccinated for vibriosis and veterinary checked for structural soundness. Semen was tested for motility (movement) and morphology (percent normal). Only four bulls were mated to the 341 heifers (177 heifers). It is interesting that in many cases a reduction in bull numbers is a sound way to cut costs without affecting reproductive performance.

Pregnancy testing (fetal ageing) on the heifers occurred on May 3, 2014. Bulls were also removed on this date. Blood samples from the heifers were tested for pestivirus activity. Results from weighing, pregnancy testing and blood samples were quite interesting:

- Average pre-mating (December 2013) weight of the group was fairly low (239kg) and only 30pc had begun cycling (mated puberty and receptive to mating), with another 20pc close to cycling.
- Average weight at pregnancy testing (May 2014) was 397kg.
- Pestivirus tests were negative (no exposure to virus).
- A pregnancy rate of 70pc was achieved.

Data for the heifers confirmed there is a weight threshold to understand. Graph 1 shows the pre-mating average weight of heifers needs to be about 340kg to have about 80pc of animals cycling. Alternatively, Graph 2 demonstrates that weights of at least 400kg at pregnancy testing are required to achieve a substantial pregnancy result.

BULL POWER

A major study led by former state government researchers Dick Holroyd, supported by a host of specialists, ran from 1992-97 looking at bull selection and management to enable a reduction in bull numbers. The study crossed eight commercial properties and four research stations in Queensland and the Northern Territory included 1000 bulls. The report can be found at the Northern MUSTER website.

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Wambiana field day looks at long-term stocking strategies

DAF project

In 1997 the first research paddocks were erected on the Lyons family’s property Wambiana, south-west of Charters Towers, to compare different stocking strategies in a variable climate.

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries’ staff, Peter O’Reagain and John Butcher, started and ran the project to get a better understanding of the research – implementing and monitoring stocking strategies season after season, after season. “Strategies include heavy and light stocking, flexible stocking, rotational wet season spelling and combinations thereof, in large, replicated paddocks,” Dr O’Reagain said. “After 18 years there are dramatic visual differences in land condition and animal condition between treatments. This is supported by long-term data on animal production, profitability, pasture condition, water run-off and-tunnel biodiversity, as well as carbon sequestration.”

With 2015 the fourth year since records began in 1991, there could hardly be a better time to witness the long-term effects of the different management strategies.

A field day will run at Wambiana on August 20. A full wrap-up of the day will be available in Issue 39 of the Northern muster for those who are unable to attend. You can also order or download the 60-page booklet from MLA, phone 1800 023 100 or visit www.futurebeef.com.au/resources/projects/wambiana-grazing-trial/. The Wambiana Research Project has been co-funded by the Queensland government, Meat & Livestock Australia, and continued support of the Lyons family.

Fertility rates under study

A major study led by former state government researchers Dick Holroyd, supported by a host of specialists, ran from 1992-97 looking at bull selection and management to enable a reduction in bull numbers. The study crossed eight commercial properties and four research stations in Queensland and the Northern Territory included 1000 bulls. The report can be found at the Northern MUSTER website.

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Thirty-five families are closely examining the stacking rates, herd productivity, operational costs and profitability of their beef businesses through the SavannaPlan-BeefSense program. These SavannaPlan-BeefSense ‘business health checks’ are funded by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Northern Gulf Resource Management Group and Southern Gulf Catchments. This confidential service includes a whole-of-business analysis.

With poor equity a major concern, we are spending considerable time helping beef producers develop debt management and servicing strategies. Many families are caught on high fixed interest rates and the interest bill is the largest annual expense. If you are in a similar position, try to renegotiate interest rates with your current lender or look elsewhere for a better rate.

So what is the program achieving? SavannaPlan-BeefSense is assisting beef producers to:

- Understand their business position, credit risk rating and current lending rates.
- Use financial and herd performance benchmarking to link decision making with business performance.
- Optimise sell-down strategies and better match cattle numbers with available feed and water.
- Investigate agistment options to reduce overgrazing, feed costs and mortality.
- Weigh up the feasibility and affordability of on-property infrastructure projects with that of off-farm investment options.

SavannaPlan-BeefSense customers interested in investment options were able to participate in the Noel Whittaker ‘Golden Rules of Wealth’ forums in May 2015. Gerainte Whittaker, Greg Ryan (Greenhill) and Noel Whittaker at the Georgetown forum.

- Examine cost effective supplementation and production feeding programs.
- Combine safe stocking rates with wet season spell ing systems.
- Explore heifer segregation and targeted supplementation programs.
- Use cash flow budgets to identify income deficits when transitioning from weaner to 18 month turnout.
- Convene family meetings to improve family communication, clarify roles/responsibilities and negotiate asset transfer.
- Test the viability of business exit strategies, including the sale of some or all business assets.
- Examine the feasibility of establishing improved pastures (Sica, Verano and/or Leucaena). Compile and analyse pasture stocking cost, establishment timeline, predicted liveweight gain improvement, additional carrying capacity and projected cash flows.
- Compare the feasibility/affordability/profitability of capital improvements versus off-farm investments.
- Compare the profitability of weaner vs older turnout.
- Improve their herd and financial records.

There are many things we can assist you with under SavannaPlan-BeefSense, so don’t be shy to make contact and ask to be involved. It is really about trying to get a better understanding of your financial position and what this means for your future.

Business analysis is even more valuable when fully integrated with practical herd and grazing management knowledge.

If you are interested in being involved in SavannaPlan-BeefSense please contact any member of the delivery team.

For the Northern Gulf:
- Mike Stan, 0499 077 999
- Joe Rolls, 0427 374 812
- Bernie English, 0427 146 063
- Tim McGrath, 0427 405 011
- Melissa Bethel, 0499 059 907

For the Southern Gulf:
- Emma Hegarty, 0467 808 340
- Jon Viles, DAF Fundraiser Team, Mareeba, jon.viles@dfat.gov.au
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- (07) 4062 1330
- Tim McGrath, 0427 405 011
- Melissa Bethel, 0499 059 907
- Bernie English, 0427 146 063
- Joe Rolls, 0427 374 812
- Mike Stan, 0499 077 999

Melissa Bethel.

The Northern Gulf Resource Management Group (NGRMG) welcomed a new member to their team in June with the appointment of Melissa Bethel. Melissa will be working in the role of regional Landcare facilitator / sustainable grazing officer. She was born and raised in Georgetown before heading off to the University of Queensland to complete a Bachelor of Applied Science (Animal Production and Equine Science).

After completing her studies she undertook various roles, working for six months for a leading Australian stock horse trainer and five years contract mustering. In 2012 Melissa was awarded the Edgar Hudgins Memorial Scholarship. This enabled her to spend three months in the US visiting various Brahman studs and making many valuable industry contacts. She also completed a Pregnancy Testing and Artificial Insemination course through Bovine Elite in the USA.

Upon returning to Australia a change of pace was needed and she was successful in securing a position in the Elders Charters Towers office as Farm Supplies Sales Representative. Melissa held this position for over two years and thoroughly enjoyed her time working with the Elders team and living in the Charters Towers community.

Melissa Bethel
Regional Landcare Facilitator / Sustainable Grazing Officer
rfl@northerngulf.com.au
(07) 4062 1330

NGRMG welcomes Melissa Bethel to the team

The camp included tours to Bush Creek Farm, the Henning-White Coca Farm and Skybury Farmgate. While on tour students got an insight into practical on-farm applications such as rotational grazing, layered planting, biodynamics, regenerative grazing and soil health.

While most of the students have an interest in cattle, these farm visits showed them different aspects to agriculture that they may not have been exposed to previously.

A full program was also held at Wetherby Station looking at low stress stock handling, pasture monitoring, stocking rates and mapping technology, updating students on some of the best management practice techniques used in the cattle industry.

The camp also coincided with sale day at Mareeba, where the students were introduced to the sale yards by Mareeba Saleyards chairman Gerry Collins.

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries’ (DAF) Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) staff also gave the students an insight on requirements for moving cattle and animals.

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VISA concentrated on developing leadership, communication and teamwork skills. A highlight of the camp was the ‘moment with a mentor’ sessions, giving participants one on one sessions with a range of different mentors, discussing career ambitions and opportunities.

For more information on the VISA camp contact:
- Erica Bloomston
- Education Officer, NGRMG
- 0488 499 266
- educcontrol@northerngulf.com.au
WITH bull buying season just around the corner here are some points to consider when purchasing new bulls.

SET CLEAR BREEDING OBJECTIVES

Predetermine what traits you are looking for when purchasing a bull. Select bulls with traits that are of economic importance, satisfy customer/market requirements, complement herd production targets, will lift current herd performance and are in line with your breeding goals and selection criteria. It is important that you apply a ranking to your selection criteria by order of priority. This will be beneficial in deciding between bulls that generally meet your selection criteria.

GET AS MUCH INFORMATION AS YOU CAN

Request dam history, that is, information about the mothers of the bulls you are looking to buy. This is particularly important if you are looking at breeding replacement females. Dams that can rear a calf every year are more fertile than those that only rear a calf every two or three years.

Where data is available, use Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs). Always use the data appropriately. Look at the accuracy of the figures and consider what has actually been measured on the animal (traits observed) and know the breed average. While some figures may look good, they may be either low or high when compared to the breed average.

It is important to understand when figures need to be either above or below average. This depends on the particular trait. For example, a bull with good figures for 200-day weight will have a figure above the breed average. However, a bull with good figures for days to calving will have a figure below the breed average.

For more information on EBVs visit the BREEDEPLAN website http://breedplan.une.edu.au/index.php

LOOK AT THE INDIVIDUAL DATA AVAILABLE

Individual data available may include weight, age, scrotal circumference, ultrasound scanning data (eye muscle area, rib fat and P8 fat) and dentition. Scrotal circumference is important as it is correlated with earlier age of puberty of bull and heifer progeny. Scrotal size also has a small favourable relationship with days to calving such that bulls with a larger scrotal size tend to have daughters with shorter days to calving. For a guide to average or better scrotal circumference by weight visit http://futurebeef.com.au/resources/newsletters/futurebeef-ebulletin/

BULL BREEDING SOUNDNESS EVALUATION

Make sure the bull has passed a Bull Breeding Soundness Evaluation (BBSE). This assessment indicates whether the bull has met the standards for key fertility components. The evaluation indicates whether a bull has a high probability of being fertile. It will also provide an indication of any possible physical limitations that will impact on fertility.

One of the fertility components within the evaluation is morphology, or structure of the individual sperm cells. Always ask for semen morphology data. While most bull breeders will now provide you with motility data, unless the semen is normal (morphology) and can fertilise the egg, motility is of little use. As a guide it is best to purchase animals with a per cent normal of 70pc or above to ensure optimal fertility in both the bull and subsequent progeny.

Where possible use a combination of visual appraisal and data to make your bull selection. Using one or the other alone is undesirable. Just because a bull has four legs, a head and a set of testicles, it does not necessarily mean he is permanently a functional bull. How he is handled, what stressors he has undergone, the level of nutrition available and other factors can all have a strong effect (either positive or negative) on the ultimate fertility and functionality of that bull. His fertility is dynamic, meaning it can change due to these and other stressors / circumstances.

Relocation to a new environment, subjecting bull to new viral and bacterial challenges, fighting and other issues associated with establishing new social groups, could all have unforeseen impacts on semen quality. These impacts then flow through to fertility in the herd.

Where possible, incoming bulls should be kept with animals of similarity, and bulls coming from very different geographic and climatic environments, should be relocated much earlier in their life than those animals brought from a similar environment to your herd. Some bulls adapt to more stressful environments more readily than others – these being more likely to have their semen quality affected.

Selection of bulls that meet minimum fertility standards has been a difficulty to many beef producers for a long time. Limited reproductive information has been included in sale catalogues, because many seedstock producers only supply the information that buyers either ask for or are prepared to pay for. Regardless of whether you have sourced bulls out of the paddock or the sale ring, the need for some objectivity in selection remains the same.

It is strongly recommended that bull buyers request a complete BBSE when sourcing bulls.

Remember the bull with unknown fertility (and genetic merit for fertility) is going to affect herd function and profitability well into the next decade.

For more information on bull selection and fertility matters-part-2-beef-crc-outcomes/

Northern rainfall onset service provides planning assistance for producers

THE Bureau of Meteorology introduced its northern rainfall onset outlook service in late June, in time for this year’s wet season.

The northern rainfall onset outlook provides guidance on the timing of rainfall onset for the coming northern Australian wet season. That is, useful rains likely to start earlier or later than normal at locations across the Northern Territory and northern parts of Western Australia.

This information will provide an important and useful service for many industries across northern Australia that need to look ahead for their planning, particularly the agricultural sector.

The Bureau has defined the northern rainfall onset as the date after September 1 when a location has received a total rainfall accumulation of at least 50 mm. This amount is roughly what is required to stimulate plant growth after the dry season. This outlook will be issued monthly from late June through to the end of August. Generally, the closer to September an outlook is produced the higher its accuracy will be.

Typically, coastal parts of northern Australia accumulate 50 mm of rainfall by October, with locations further south and inland reaching the onset threshold over the following weeks.

Southern parts of the Northern Territory and western parts of Western Australia usually have the latest northern rainfall onset; around mid-January. The rainfall onset as defined here is different from the Australian monsoon onset, which is characterised by a reversal of the prevailing winds and widespread heavy rainfall. The Australian monsoon onset can be viewed at http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/about/lookat/beef-mark-monsoon. The north Australian monsoon usually begins in late December.

Looking at the rainfall data for the last 27 years showed that there is high variability in rainfall onset dates. For example, the expected rainfall onset may not arrive until November and just because you missed a month of rain in any one year does not mean that the overall season will be under rainfall.

In an optimum season, the northern Australian wet season begins in late August, and by the end of September, 70 per cent of the expected rainfall has usually been recorded.

The northern rainfall outlook service was developed with support from Managing Climate Variability (http://www.managingclimate.gov.au/research/), a consortium of primary industry research and development corporations.

The northern rainfall outlook complements the Bureau’s broader Climate Outlooks service, which indicates likely temperatures and rainfall variations over the next three months, driven by large-scale shifts in the climate such as El Niño / La Niña events. Check the northern rainfall outlook http://www.bom.gov.au/media/northern-rainfall-onset/sub-sub-topic=months-Outlooks

His fertility is dynamic, meaning it can change due to these and other stressors / circumstances.

Selection of bulls that meet minimum fertility standards has been a difficulty to many beef producers for a long time. Limited reproductive information has been included in sale catalogues, because many seedstock producers only supply the information that buyers either ask for or are prepared to pay for.
El Niño, La Niña unpacked

LARGE parts of Queensland have been affected by drought over the past three years. Rainfall from July 2012 to June 2015 has been low enough to be classed as being a ‘serious’ or ‘severe’ deficiency over many inland areas of the state, extending to the northern coast around Townsville and in the Gulf Country.

Rains in June and July have been welcome and locally useful, especially around the Queensland-New South Wales border, but have had only a marginal impact on long-term rainfall deficits.

The most significant features of the current drought have been its length, and how large an area it has covered. Rainfall averaged over western Queensland has been low normal in each of the past three wet seasons:
- 2012-13 – 41 per cent below normal
- 2013-14 – 25pc below normal
- 2014-15 – 26pc below normal

None of these individual seasons was especially extreme on its own – 2012-13 ranks eleventh driest on record, with more than double the rainfall of the two worst wet seasons on record (1901-02 and 1934-35). It is unusual to get three wet seasons in a row as dry as this that without any recovery in between.

The most severe long-term drought on record in western Queensland occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. During this time, the dry conditions we have seen in western Queensland occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. It is unusual to get three wet seasons in a row as dry as this that without any recovery in between.

The state of ENSO is determined by the interactions between the atmosphere and ocean circulation.

ENSO transitions between El Niño, Neutral and La Niña. Sustained periods of warming or cooling in the central and eastern tropical Pacific is referred to as El Niño or La Niña, respectively.

El Niño is the negative phase of ENSO – the El Niño Southern Oscillation. An El Niño is associated with an extension of the tropical eastern and central Pacific Ocean resulting in a major shift in weather patterns over the Pacific.

HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY AN EL NIÑO?

There are changes to the atmosphere and ocean circulation during El Niño events. These include:
- Sustained warmer than usual sea surface temperatures across the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.
- A decrease in convection, or cloudiness, over tropical Australia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, where the focus of the convection migrates from the Australian and Indonesian region eastwards towards the central tropical Pacific – that is, the convection

WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL IMPACTS OF EL NIÑO?

In Queensland these include:
- Reduced rainfall
- An increase in the number of frost days during El Niño
- A tendency to see an increase in both individual and daily or weekly values.

Forecasting El Niño

THE Bureau of Meteorology issues monthly seasonal forecasts – Climate Outlooks – which include outlooks on the state of ENSO for the upcoming months.

The accuracy of long-term forecasts varies with the type of year and decreases the further out we look. The outlooks can give guidance on when an El Niño (or La Niña) is likely to occur and how long it may go on for.

Forecasts of the likelihood of El Niño events take into account temperature patterns across the tropical Pacific Ocean at the surface and sub-surface, variations in trade wind (‘easterlies’) strength, atmospheric pressure and ocean currents.

Indian Ocean sea surface temperatures are also a significant contributor to the outlook. Information on these is available fortnightly in the ENSO Wrap-Up (http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ensou).

Climate Outlooks http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/outlooks/ shows the likelihood of the next three months being wetter or drier or warmer or cooler than usual. While weather forecasts predict what the rainfall or temperature will be tomorrow, the climate outlooks are not this specific as they look further ahead and attempt to model a chaotic system.

AUGUST-OCTOBER OUTLOOK

The current outlook is for the August to October period. The rainfall outlook shows an increased chance of a drier three months over far northern Queensland and a roughly equal chance of wetter or drier August to October in remaining parts of Queensland.

Historical outlook accuracy for the August to October period is moderate over most of Queensland, but low over parts of central Queensland.

The outlook includes a maximum (daytime) and minimum (overnight) outlook. For August to October, daytime temperatures are likely to be warmer than average across a large part of Queensland except in the far north. Accuracy for the August to October period for maximum temperature is moderate to high over most of Queensland but low in the far west. Overnight temperatures are very likely to be warmer than normal for most of Queensland, apart from the far southern Cape York Peninsula. Historical accuracy for the August to October period for minimum temperature is moderate for most of Queensland, except in areas in the southeast.

Jess Carey
Agriculture and Water Management Queensland Regional Office, Bureau of Meteorology.

EL NIÑO POTENTIAL IMPACTS

In Queensland these include:
- Reduced rainfall
- An increase in the number of frost days during El Niño
- A tendency to see an increase in both individual and daily or weekly values.
- Reduced tropical cyclone numbers
- Central Queensland has a tendency to see an increase in both individual and daily or weekly values.

The ‘trade winds’ (or the ‘easterlies’) in the tropical Pacific will weaken, or even reverse, during an El Niño. There are sustained negative values of the SOI (Southern Oscillation Index), typically below -1. This means there is higher pressure than normal over Darwin and lower pressure than normal over Tahiti. It should be noted that daily values of the SOI can fluctuate markedly because of daily weather patterns rather than change in a broad-scale pattern, so we look at a thirty day moving average of the SOI, not daily or weekly values.

When an event significantly exceeds these thresholds the event is referred to as ‘strong’, while events that maintain close to these thresholds are referred to as ‘moderate’ or ‘weak’.

However, the strength of an event does not correlate directly with the impacts over Australia. That is, a weak or moderate event can have greater impacts than a strong event.

WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL IMPACTS OF EL NIÑO?

Historically, El Niño events are associated with a higher risk of low winter and spring rainfall, and a delayed start to the wet seasons in many of the drought affected areas. While El Niño increases the risk of drought it does not guarantee it.

For long-term drought in western Queensland, perhaps more important is the absence of La Niña. In particular, the 1920s and 1930s-longest period of severe drought occurred in the absence of La Niña events.

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