

BURNT

Useful links & associated research

Drought is ... ?

A drought is a prolonged, abnormally dry period when there is not enough water for users' normal needs. Drought is not simply low rainfall; if it was, much of inland Australia would be in almost perpetual drought. Because people use water in so many different ways, there is no universal definition of drought.

Meteorologists monitor the extent and severity of drought in terms of rainfall deficiencies. Agriculturalists rate the impact on primary industries, hydrologists compare ground water levels, and sociologists define it on social expectations and perceptions.

Drought's impacts:

During climate extremes, whether droughts or flooding rains, those on the land feel it most. Agriculture suffers first and most severely - yet eventually everyone feels the impact.

Drought disrupts cropping programs, reduces breeding stock, and threatens permanent erosion of the capital and resource base of farming enterprises. Declining productivity affects rural Australia and the national economy.

The risk of serious environmental damage, particularly through vegetation loss and soil erosion, has long term implications for the sustainability of our agricultural industries. Water quality suffers, and toxic algae outbreaks may occur; plants and animals are also threatened. Bushfires and duststorms often increase during dry times.

Its causes?

Australia has one of the most variable rainfall climates in the world. Over the long term we have about three good years and three bad years out of ten. These fluctuations have many causes, but the strongest is the climate phenomenon called the Southern Oscillation. This is a major air pressure shift between the Asian and east Pacific regions - its best-known extreme is El Niño.

In recent years, the Bureau of Meteorology's greater understanding of El Niño has improved its ability to predict seasonal rainfall and help authorities and individuals with early drought warnings.

More information is in the Bureau's brochure *Climate Variability and El Niño*, or on the World Wide Web at <http://www.bom.gov.au/> .
<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/livedrought.shtml>

99.5 per cent of NSW in drought

Figures just released by the New South Wales Government show 99.5 per cent of the state is still in drought, despite the rain which lifted hopes in February.

There's been no follow-up to speak of, and farmers inland are seriously worried about feed and the prospects for winter crops.

The Government is paying out nearly \$700,000 a week in transport and fodder subsidies, and the Department of Community Services is reporting a surge in requests for help.

State disaster recovery manager, Peter Olney, says he's getting about 200 calls per week asking for assistance. "It's clearly telling us there are people out there that are hurting, particularly in relation to putting food on the table and they're looking for assistance. They're looking for assistance with telephone bills... electricity ...water... and they're also adding things to their credit card bills. Those sorts of added extras which they'd normally be able to cover, but because of the downturn and the problems associated with drought, are making it difficult." <http://www.abc.net.au/rural/news/stories/s828246.htm>

Despite rain in some parts of Australia, the nation continues to battle the worst drought in 20 years. Forecasts for agricultural production have been massively cut. Experts predict it will take up to four years for many industries to recover.

ABC Rural compiles these stories and images to keep you posted. <http://www.abc.net.au/rural/drought2002/>

Drought blamed for increase in suicide rate of farmers

November 13, 2008

Article from: The Australian

PROLONGED drought and increasing social isolation are being blamed for a rate of suicide among male farmers that is almost 50 per cent higher than the average in rural communities.

Figures from a new study show 34 in every 100,000 male farmers commits suicide -- well up on the 24 per 100,000 among rural men generally.

Female farmers had the same low suicide rate as other rural women: six in 100,000.

The South Australian study, the first to estimate the nation's farming-related suicides, used death statistics from 1997 to 2001.

The researchers, led by Keith Miller from the School of Social Work at Flinders University in Adelaide, warned current figures would be higher still. "We knew depression was a problem in rural Australia but this is the first time we've had a figure to show the repercussions of that depression," Dr Miller said.

He reviewed the state's 1033 suicides over the five-year period for the study, published in the latest *Australian Journal of Rural Health*.

AAP

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/business/story/0,,24643934-36418,00.html>

Drought is a significant cause of mental stress for farmers and rural communities

Drought is associated with many of the major causes of suicide and mental illness, including financial pressure, social isolation and family strain

•Suicide rates amongst farmers are even higher than those for the regional and remote population

•Australians living in rural areas tend to seek help for mental illness less than those in metropolitan areas

Questions

Who will the future generation of farmers be?

What can be done to better enable rural and regional economies to thrive?

What can be done to maximise land-use productivity while simultaneously minimising land degradation?

How can we extend the lessons learned from a generation of land care programs?

What are the options for dealing with increasing areas of marginally productive land?

What support do farmers need in order to prepare for climate change while ensuring Australia remains agriculturally productive in 2020?

<http://www.australia2020.gov.au/topics/docs/rural.pdf>

Farmer suicide rates worry GPs- Tuesday, October 24, 2006. 7:00am (AEST)

The peak body representing general practitioners says the drought in rural Australia is causing widespread depression in rural communities, and increased services are urgently needed.

Australian Divisions of General Practice chairman Tony Hobbs says high suicide rates among farmers are linked to the worsening drought.

"On average, one male Australian farmer is taking their lives every four days or so," he said.

"Now that's actually based on some research that was done in 2003, and we anticipate that with this drought that is affecting a lot of rural Australia that the figures could possibly get worse, and that's why we want to intervene early."

Dr Hobbs says the group is working with the national initiative Beyond Blue to ensure services are rolled out to tackle the problem.

"We need to make sure in particular the male farmers are accessing these services," he said.

"They are a group that traditionally don't interface with medical help very early on and we need to try and turn that around.

"So particularly the community resilience groups and the mental health first aid training are really important."

Dr Hobbs says the plan will involve offering mental health first aid training to people in drought-affected areas.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200610/s1771783.htm>