

March 2008

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# Crop and Pasture Report



RURAL SOLUTIONS SA

Prepared by Rural Solutions SA for  
PIRSA Grains Industry Development



# CROP AND PASTURE REPORT

MARCH 2008

COMPILED 2<sup>ND</sup> APRIL 2008 BY PETER FULWOOD

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## Report Compilation

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### Murraylands

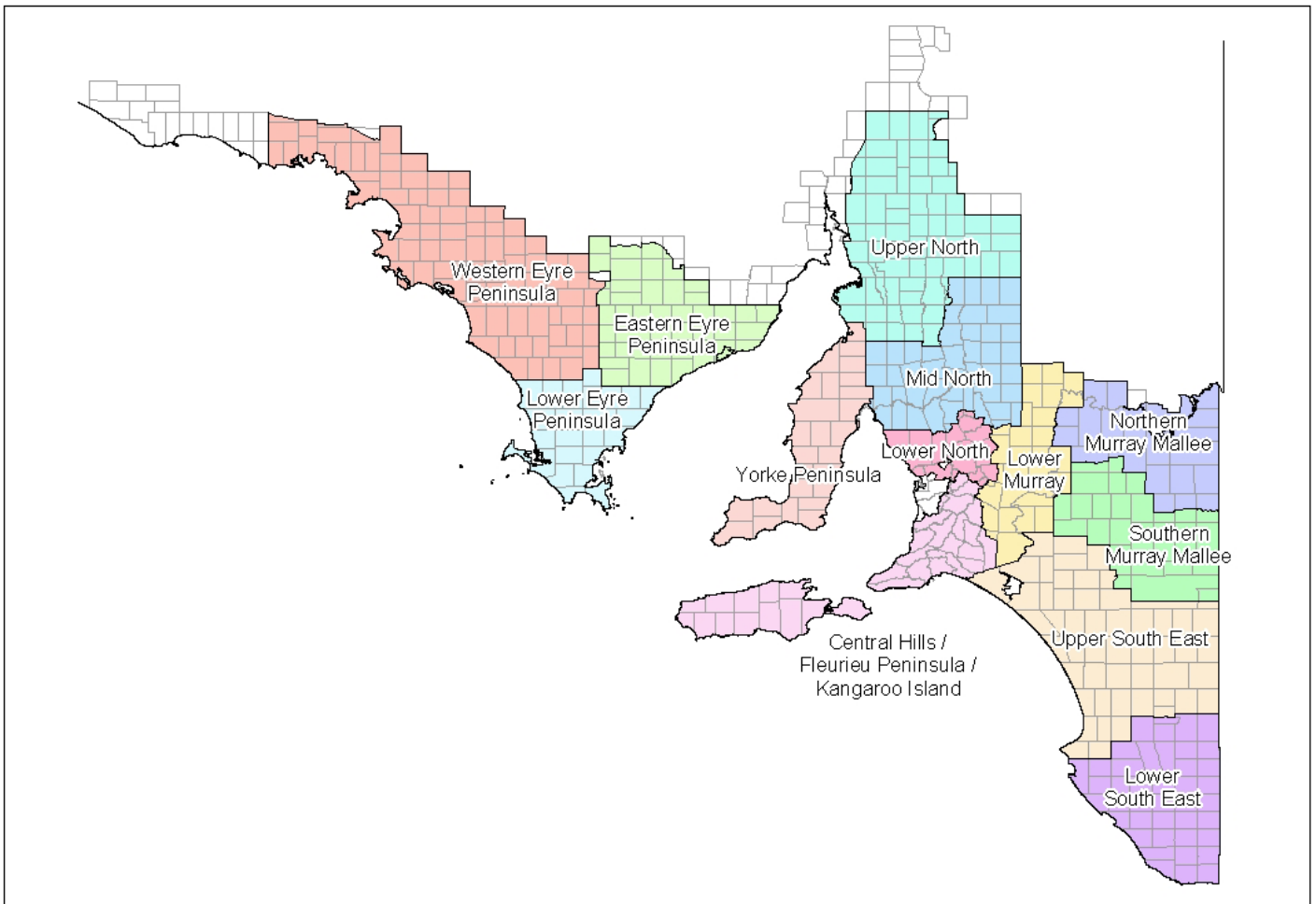
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## Crop Reporting Districts



## Drought Hotline

Phone 180 2020 or log onto <http://www.service.sa.gov.au/drought.asp>

For drought related information on support services, local rural financial counsellors, information on Centrelink payments and services, maintaining land condition, managing stock and crops in dry times, and the condition of the River Murray and Murray-Darling Basin.



## Summary of Crop and Pasture Conditions in South Australia March 2008

*Prepared by Peter Fulwood*

### WEATHER<sup>1</sup>

South Australian rainfall data for the last month is available from the Bureau of Meteorology website:

<http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/sa/observations.shtml>

- Temperatures were extreme, with unprecedented heatwave conditions during the first half of the month as many centres recorded 15 consecutive days above 35°C.
- During the latter part of the month temperatures were mild to cool.
- Mean daily maximum temperatures for the month ranged from 2-6°C above average.
- On April 2<sup>nd</sup> strong to galeforce northerly winds ahead of an approaching cold front raised significant amounts of dust from exposed paddocks in many districts.

### RAINFALL

- Mainly dry apart from some light, scattered falls in the last week and a few isolated heavier falls in northern districts mid month.
- Monthly rainfall varied from below average to near average, with most totals around 5-15 mm.

### CROPS

- Paddock activities were minimal given the very hot, dry conditions for much of the month, with many farmers busy feeding stock and preparing equipment for seeding.
- Stubbles were cabled or rolled in some areas during the hot weather for snail control.
- Some cultivation has taken place, especially in areas where useful rainfall was received.
- Recent price rises for glyphosate as a result of increased worldwide demand have led to an increase in cultivation for weed control in some areas.
- Reports of renewed interest in soil testing, particularly for phosphorus, in response to record phosphate fertiliser prices.
- Most farmers have secured supplies of fertilisers and herbicides to avoid delays and further price increases, in preparation for the start of the season.
- Limited dry sowing has commenced in the Upper North, with more farmers likely to start in early-mid April.
- Soil moisture levels are generally extremely low and significant rainfall will be needed to get the season underway.
- As reported last month, total crop area for the coming season is likely to increase slightly with more wheat in particular expected to be sown, however the final crop area and crop mix will vary depending on the timing and extent of the opening rains.
- Although wheat prices have been fluctuating and dropped towards the end of the month, farmer confidence in the coming season is generally high.
- Despite the high grain prices few growers are prepared to lock-in due to the losses some incurred last year.

### PASTURES

- Paddock feed continues to decline and most pasture paddocks now have fairly limited surface cover.
- Surface cover levels are still quite good in cereal paddocks, however pulse stubbles have largely finished and many of these paddocks are susceptible to erosion.
- Surplus stock have been sold because of limited feed in many areas and a need to conserve fodder for calving cows and ewes approaching lambing.
- Most farmers are now hand-feeding hay and grain either in paddocks or using confinement feeding systems, as paddock feed becomes more scarce.

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgment

Weather information:- Climate and Consultative Services Section of the Bureau of Meteorology: Internet: [Hhttp://www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)H



## DISTRICT REPORTS

### Western Eyre Peninsula

*By Neil Cordon*

#### WEATHER

- Rainfall for March was well below average for all areas with hot, windy weather predominant.

#### RAINFALL

- Recordings at selected centres (averages in brackets) were: Streaky Bay 4 mm (15), Penong 2 mm (15), Ceduna 3 mm (17), Wirrulla 1 mm (13), Minnipa 3 mm (14) and Nundroo 6 mm (13).

#### CROPS

- Hot weather has generally limited paddock activity with farmers conducting stone rolling, fencing, machinery maintenance and water checks.
- Farmer meetings which involve extension of research results and feedback for the 2008 trial program have been well attended with excellent discussion and farmer input.
- Farming issues range from input costs, impact of root diseases and independent analysis of crop varieties and chemicals.

#### PASTURES

- Dry pasture and cereal feed have rapidly deteriorated in quantity with resulting paddock cover at a level which is prone to erosion. This risk is across the range of farming systems including no-till systems.
- Confinement of livestock in feedlots is being utilised across the district.

### Eastern Eyre Peninsula

*By Joshua Telfer*

#### WEATHER

- March has seen soaring temperatures with very little rainfall, with Kimba recording 15 consecutive days over 35°C.
- This would be representative of all but the very coastal fringe.
- In contrast to the previous months there was a prevalence of hot, north winds as well.

#### RAINFALL

- The only rainfall occurrence was a small system which delivered 6-9 mm in the area around Cleve through to Cowell around the 30<sup>th</sup> of March.
- Further north and west there were only trace measurements.

#### CROPS

- Optimism for the coming season remains rather high, but this has been generated by commodity prices rather than on the ground conditions.
- Soil water levels will be very low with no significant rain for the last three months.
- Early indications seem to be that crop areas will be similar to last year, although this depends on the timing of the break.
- Cereals, particularly wheat, are seen as a very profitable option for 2008.
- It is expected that the trend of low pulse and canola areas being sown in the district will continue.
- It is assumed that there will be nutrients left over from poor crops in 2006 and 2007.
- There has been noticeable renewed interest in soil testing, particularly phosphorus, on the back of record phosphate fertiliser prices.

#### PASTURES

- The growth of summer pasture and weed species has been slow and in some cases they have died.
- The high temperatures have led to increased stock movement which has damaged some standing crop residues that were being grazed.



- Containment feeding is occurring across the district where farmers have actively removed livestock from land that is at risk of erosion.
- There are a number that are not containment feeding with the idea of avoiding high feeding costs or only providing supplementary feed in the paddock.
- Many farmers had water supply issues resulting from the large demands from stock with the high temperature during this period.

## Lower Eyre Peninsula

*By Kieran Wauchope*

### WEATHER

- Warm to hot weather was experienced early in the month followed by milder conditions later in the month.
- Winds were moderate to fresh for most the month.

### RAINFALL

- Port Lincoln received 10 mm (decile 4) and Coles Point received 8.8 mm.
- Many areas did not receive significant falls.

### CROPS

- Little paddock activity throughout the month.
- Some spreading gypsum and lime on soils, most near completing their spreading program.
- The warm to hot weather allowed farmers to roll or cable snails.
- Canola and wheat still seem to be the focus, pulses and barley area may be reduced.

### PASTURES

- Soil cover is still sufficient to avoid erosion in most areas.
- The upper parts of the east coast were assisted by some good rain, but many in those areas still lacking good paddock feed.

## Yorke Peninsula

*By Peter Treloar*

### WEATHER

- A very hot spell to start the month.
- After Easter the season changed to much colder conditions, with scattered rain towards the end of the month.

### RAINFALL

- Rainfall was varied across the district with northern YP receiving about 6 mm in two rainfall events while lower YP had 10-14 mm.

### CROPS

- Even though we haven't had a lot of rain some farmers are beginning to cultivate paddocks, but only where the higher rainfall readings were recorded.
- There is a range of cropping intentions with some farmers looking to increase areas, particularly of wheat and canola, while others are looking to sow more barley.
- A lot of stubbles were cabled during the hot weather for snail control, but some farmers have turned to cultivation.

### PASTURES

- Feed is very scarce and some farmers are supplementary feeding stock.



## Lower North

*By Peter Fulwood*

### WEATHER

- Unprecedented heatwave conditions during the first half of the month with some centres having 15 consecutive days above 35°C.
- Temperatures during the latter part of the month were mild to cool.
- Mean daily maximum temperatures for the month were 3-4°C above average.

### RAINFALL

- Mainly dry apart from some light, scattered falls in the last week of March.
- Monthly rainfall was below average to near average, with totals ranging from 1.0 mm (Owen) to 21.6 mm (Eden Valley).

### CROPS

- Paddock activities were minimal given the very hot, dry conditions.
- Some farmers have been spreading bio-solids and chicken manure as an alternative to synthetic fertilisers.
- Summer weed numbers remain very low.
- Many growers are securing supplies of fertilisers and herbicides to avoid delays in preparation for the start of the season.
- Soil moisture levels are now extremely low and significant rainfall will be needed to get the season underway.
- Final crop area and crop mix will depend on how and when the season starts, hopefully during the coming month.

### PASTURES

- Paddock feed continues to decline and most pasture paddocks now have limited surface cover.
- Surface cover levels are still quite good in cereal paddocks, however pulse stubbles have largely finished and many of these paddocks are susceptible to erosion.
- Farmers continue to provide supplementary feed for stock either in paddocks or using confinement feeding systems.

## Mid North

*By Tom Yeatman*

### WEATHER

- Temperatures were very hot for the first half of the month being mostly over 35°C, quickly moving to cool days for the second half of the month with cold nights.

### RAINFALL

- Rain fell during the last week with showers bringing around 10 mm to add to the 1.5 mm prior to March for the year.

### CROPS

- With no rain and no weed growth, there was little paddock activity during the month.
- Farmers are planning for next year with concern at rising fertiliser and some chemical prices.
- Cropping intentions are likely to favour the planting of wheat and canola in particular, due to their current and forecast high prices.
- There is likely to be an increased focus on cropping due to the high prices currently for all grains.
- Most will not change their rotations and proportion of crops in their program greatly.

### PASTURES

- The quantity of pasture feed has suffered due to the season and not having a spring flush.
- There is some concern that overgrazing pastures after stubbles are grazed out will result in eroded areas in autumn.



- The value of most stubbles has been fully utilised.
- Soil cover is mostly adequate but minimal on most paddocks, especially those being grazed.

## Upper North

*By Michael Wurst*

### WEATHER

- Conditions during March were extremely variable, from heatwave conditions during the first few weeks to cool days with several frosts in the eastern parts of the district.
- Several cool fronts in the last week of the month brought light showers to most of the district, with some isolated heavier falls around Port Pirie and Melrose.

### RAINFALL

- Rainfall has been well below average across most of the district.

### CROPS

- Most growers are well prepared for an early break.
- Some dry sowing has already commenced with more growers likely to start in early to mid April.
- Although wheat prices have been fluctuating and had dropped towards the end of the month grower confidence is high.
- Glyphosate price and availability is of concern, although most growers have sufficient stocks on hand for the coming cropping season.
- Crop break-even prices have risen significantly in the last few years and grain prices will have to remain high for many to remain viable.
- Despite the high grain prices very few growers are prepared to lock-in due to the losses they incurred last year.

### PASTURES

- Many growers have been forced to sell excess stock as they have run out of feed.
- Growers with ewes due to lamb in April are in a difficult situation due to the lack of feed, and lambing percentages may suffer.

## Kangaroo Island, Central Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula

*By Tim Prance*

### WEATHER

- Temperatures have been unusually warm to hot.

### RAINFALL

- March rainfall has been about average, typical summer low rainfall with around 10-30 mm.

### CROPS

- Stubbles are being grazed on farms with livestock.
- The high price and lack of availability of fertiliser is causing many farmers to rethink their fertiliser programs for this year.

### PASTURES

- Pasture growth, even on perennial species, continues to be nil throughout the district as we continue in a normal Mediterranean dry summer weather pattern.
- Feed availability for livestock is still adequate and is of high quality for dry feed.
- Farmers are optimistically awaiting an April break to the season.
- Some (but not all) livestock are being supplementary fed.
- Livestock are in good condition.
- Soil cover is declining, but adequate.
- Water supplies for livestock are short, but adequate.



## Northern Murray Mallee

*By Richard Saunders*

### WEATHER

- March was unseasonably hot with 14 (13 consecutive) days over 35°C, which is well above the average of 3.4 days for March.
- There were a few days of strong wind that resulted in raised dust in those paddocks that have been worked up.

### RAINFALL

- Very dry conditions continued through the Northern Mallee in March.
- The Loxton Research Centre recorded 0.4 mm which is well below the March average of 11.4 mm. Total rainfall for the first three months of 2008 was 12.8 mm compared with the average of 44.2 mm.

### CROPS

- With little rain summer weeds have generally been kept under control with a little spraying and stock grazing.
- There appears to be slightly more cultivated paddocks at this stage this season, most likely due to increased prices for glyphosate.
- Sowing intentions for 2008 will be strongly influenced by the good grain prices, but decisions to increase sowing areas may well depend on autumn rain.
- It is expected that lower fertiliser rates will generally be used again, due to dramatic increases in fertiliser costs.

### PASTURES

- Paddock feed levels are reducing, as well as soil cover levels on some well-grazed paddocks.

## Southern Murray Mallee

*By Grant Johnson*

### WEATHER

- Hot and dry conditions have again been the norm across the Southern Mallee for March.
- Like most of the state, the Southern Mallee sweltered under 13 consecutive days over 35°C.
- Highest temperatures recorded for the month were 42°C at Karoonda and 41.7°C at Lameroo.

### RAINFALL

- Rainfall recorded for March was 2.6 mm at Lameroo and 2.0 mm at Karoonda.

### CROPS

- As a break to the season nears, plans are well in place for seeding.
- Many farmers have taken delivery of fertiliser requirements, although there are still some who are agonising over decisions on how much to order at higher than normal prices.
- Any unsprayed summer weeds in paddocks are looking like they are almost dead from a lack of moisture.
- Farmers are preparing equipment ready for seeding, with some getting their heads around the possibility of sowing dry to get their program underway.

### PASTURES

- Pasture paddocks are still bare, with little available feed.
- Hay stacks and grain stores are quickly diminishing as livestock continue to be supplementary fed.

## Lower Murray

*By Craig Bell*

### WEATHER

- Temperatures for March were warmer than the long term average with a string of days over 40°C early in the month. The mean temperature was 32.3°C well above the average of 26.4°C.



- Wind speeds were generally moderate during the month, however there were some higher speeds associated with the increased temperature mid March.

#### RAINFALL

- No significant rainfall was again recorded during the month, with light, scattered showers late in the month totalling only 4.5 mm.

#### CROPS

- Paddock activity was slow during the month with only some summer rolling taking place.
- Farmers have generally been busy feeding stock and preparing seeding equipment.
- No or little summer weed spraying was required due to the lack of rainfall.
- Most farmers now have their fertiliser ready for seeding and have their cropping plans worked out pending the break of the season.
- Cropping intentions seem to be similar to last year, with perhaps a slight increase in wheat sown to capitalise on the high prices.

#### PASTURES

- Hay is still being fed readily to maintain stock condition.
- Stock are being shifted between cropping paddocks to clean up any late summer weeds prior to seeding.
- Cereal stubbles are now mostly void of feed, only providing minimal roughage.
- Farmers are eagerly watching the weather channels for the chance to sow early feed for stock before opening rains.

## Upper South East

*By Peter Fulwood*

#### WEATHER

- Heatwave conditions during the first half of the month with some centres having several days above 40°C.
- Temperatures during the latter part of the month were mild to cool.
- Mean daily maximum temperatures for the month were 3-5°C above average.
- Windy conditions on the 13-14<sup>th</sup> caused raised dust in some paddocks.

#### RAINFALL

- Mainly dry apart from some light, scattered falls in the last week of March.
- Monthly rainfall was below average to near average, with totals ranging from 2.8 mm (Coomandook) to 22.0 mm (Wolseley).

#### CROPS

- Paddock activities were minimal given the very hot, dry conditions.
- Reports of cultivation in a number of paddocks on the heavier soils near Bordertown.
- Some clay spreading was carried out.
- Summer weed numbers remain low.
- Soil moisture levels are now extremely low and significant rainfall will be needed to get the season underway.
- Final crop area and crop mix will depend on how and when the season starts.
- Harvesting of irrigated lucerne crops has generally finished.

#### PASTURES

- Paddock feed continues to decline, however most soils remain adequately covered and stable.
- Most farmers are providing supplementary feed for stock.
- Surplus stock have been sold because of limited feed in some areas.



## Lower South East

*By Peter Fulwood*

### WEATHER

- Heatwave conditions during the first half of the month in inland areas with a few centres having several days above 40°C.
- Temperatures during the latter part of the month were mild to cool.
- Mean daily maximum temperatures for the month were 2-4°C above average.

### RAINFALL

- Mainly dry apart from some light to moderate falls in the last week of March.
- Monthly rainfall varied from below average to near average, with totals ranging from 7.8 mm (Naracoorte) to 29.6 mm (Mount Gambier).

### CROPS

- Paddock activities were minimal in many areas given the very hot, dry conditions.
- Farmers have been securing supplies of fertilisers and herbicides to avoid delays in preparation for the start of the season.
- Soil moisture levels are now extremely low and significant rainfall will be needed to get the season underway.
- As reported last month crop area may increase by up to 20% this coming season with the major increase being in wheat, however the final crop area and crop mix will depend on how and when the season starts.
- Harvesting of irrigated lucerne has finished with mostly above average yields and very good returns from the current high prices.

### PASTURES

- Paddock feed has declined during the month and surplus stock have been sold.
- Most farmers are now hand-feeding hay and grain as paddock feed becomes more scarce.
- Need to conserve fodder for calving cows and ewes approaching lambing.

## Crop Production Estimates

Crop production estimates will resume with the May report due out early June 2008.

