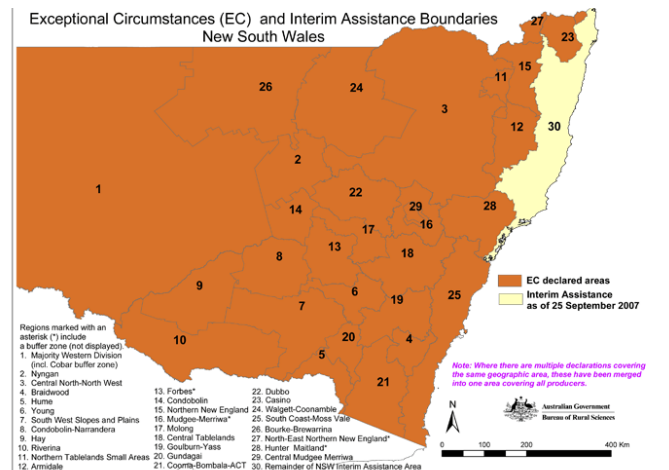


Issue

The June 2008 drought figures indicate a continued worsening in conditions, with 62.7% of the state now 'in drought' (up significantly from 48.4% in May 2008), with a further 23.7% of the state considered 'marginal'. It should be noted that only 13.6% of the state is considered 'satisfactory' from a climate perspective, much lower than the 28% reported in May, and down dramatically from the 45.6% reported in April. With so much of the state still in drought, the scheduled expiry of Exceptional Circumstances (EC) declarations over the coming months remains a priority issue for the Association.

Current EC Status

- The map (right) illustrates in brown the areas of NSW that are currently EC-declared.
- With the exception of Bourke/Brewarrina (26), which was revised in June 2008 and Hunter Maitland (28), which is due to expire 31 March 2009, all EC-declared areas of NSW are due to expire 30 September 2008.
- The Bourke/Brewarrina EC declaration was reviewed by the National Rural Advisory Council prior to its scheduled 15 June 2008 expiry, with the boundary revised 13 June 2008 to allow a 12-month extension of the EC declaration for the Bourke Rural Lands Protection Board area only.



NRAC Tours

- The National Rural Advisory Council (NRAC) is a skills-based independent advisory council to the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.
- As part of the EC review process, NRAC assesses information from a number of sources, including the National Agricultural Monitoring System ('NAMS' – see www.nams.gov.au for further information), analyses provided by the Bureau of Rural Sciences and Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics, State and Local Governments and local producers. Additionally NRAC may undertake an inspection tour of the area.
- In the case of NSW, the Association works closely with the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) to provide local drought area information to NRAC through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. This information ranges from rainfall data to stock water availability to irrigation requirements. The Association's Policy staff and Regional Service Managers are closely involved in this process.
- NRAC is currently inspecting a number of areas of NSW in the lead-up to the scheduled expiry of EC declarations in September 2008 as follows:
 - The tour of the New England area (Armidale, Northern New England, North-East Northern New England and Northern Tablelands small areas) took place 10-13 June 2008
 - The tour of the Central Tablelands and surrounds (Central Tablelands, Molong and Mudgee-Merriwa areas) will take place 23-27 June 2008
 - The tour of the Walgett-Coonamble area will take place 2-4 July 2008
 - The tour of the Braidwood area will take place in the first week of July 2008.
- The Association's Regional Service Managers are working closely with local DPI staff to assist with these tours, which allow an opportunity for farmers to explain the local drought conditions first-hand.
- An announcement on the fate of the remaining EC declarations in NSW is expected in late August/early September 2008.

NB: This update should be read in conjunction with the Association's 'Drought Overview' briefing note (released 29 May 2008), which provides background information on the EC process; the national drought policy review and drought assistance currently available.