

EPARF Member Technical Newsletter

August 2018 – No 4



Recent rains on EP have given EPARF members some relief from the frustrating dry conditions, and prompted a flurry of late season spraying activity. Unfortunately, not every area received the higher falls, and crops and pasture condition in some regions remains poor. Severe winds also continue to damage some exposed paddocks.

Kyancutta, Kimba, Wudinna, Lock, Minnipa, and Penong are all now in the decile 3 growing season rainfall bracket (lowest 30% on record). The Darke Peake to Cleve and Cowell region remain in decile 1 territory, while parts of lower EP have now had decile 6 GSR and are on track for a good season.

Crop condition

Many wheat crops are a bit thin with few tillers. The dry spell and associated nutrient deficiencies (plants take up nutrients in soil water, so no soil water = no nutrient uptake) has stressed crops sufficiently, and they were running for home.

Later sown crops and barley generally have the better structure – i.e. more tillers, than early sown wheat.

Can we expect some late tiller formation from this rain? It is possible. The tillers from the base of leaf 1 and leaf 2 usually carry the majority of the yield in wheat when combined with the grain from the main stem. It is likely that these tillers have been permanently aborted.

We might see a tiller emerge from the base of the third or fourth leaf if water and nutrient supply are adequate and conditions remain mild. However, there is not a lot of time for these late tillers to develop, put out a head, flower, and fill grain before hot conditions prevail on October. We have seen it happen before, but most years later tillers on upper EP do not add significantly to yield.

Pasture condition

Medic and vetch growth has been rapid in the past week. Removing stock from a few paddocks is essential if you wish them to bulk up and provide full ground cover and feed into spring. Monitor for aphids as things warm up, as maintaining pasture bulk is a priority for most with livestock this year.

Hay supplies are likely to be slim for quite some time, so consider all your options. Cutting cereals other than oats is one option that has been used in the past. Identify dirty areas of paddocks, and earmark them for a hay cut – you will stop the weeds from setting seed and also provide some valuable stock feed. Wheat and barley hay is often not as palatable as oaten hay, but oat crops on EP have a long way to go before there is any guarantee of sufficient bulk to bale up. Cutting the outside lap of cereal paddocks for hay can be a good strategy as the lap against the fence often contains the most grass. While not an ideal feed source, it looks like there will be a bit of barley straw also baled this season.

Herbicide application window

We have cereal crops anywhere from 3 leaf to full head emergence on EP, but most are in the late stem elongation phase. Last year many were caught out by rapid crop growth and missed the ideal window to control weeds. Application of most herbicides post later jointing/early booting is not advised. Check your labels carefully. The window for late 2,4-D amine application can be very short.

Remember to consider potential residues for following crops and pastures when applying amine plus Ally or Lontrel late in the season.

Grasses in pastures

For best results, grasses should have been removed from pastures by now. Barley grass and brome grass is heading on upper and eastern EP and ryegrass is running up. Grass selective sprays work best on grasses up to early tillering. None are reliable from late tillering, and reliability further decreases once grasses reach stem elongation stage.

Broadleaf weeds may now be too big or old for reliable control with Broadstrike®/flumetsulam – remember this product only controls group B susceptible weeds anyway. Group B resistant brassica weeds are common on EP.

As a general rule, mixing anything except an adjuvant with a grass herbicide reduces its efficacy. If you are already pushing the boundary with respect to the growth stage of the grass weeds, maybe avoid mixing any broadleaf herbicide with the grass selective herbicide.

Nutrient disorders

Attendance at recent seminars on EP has prompted a rush of crop inspections to assess nutrient disorders. Remember two things - many of the nutrients crops require are concentrated in the topsoil (i.e. where we put them), and crops take up nutrients in the soil solution. If the topsoil is dry, then crops cannot access many of the nutrients they require for growth. It is common in seasons with prolonged dry topsoil to have various nutrient deficiencies manifest themselves in our crops. Not all of these deficiencies can be corrected by a foliar application, especially late in the season.

Tips for the next month

- Monitor for insects in all crops and pastures – they become more active as it warms up and as the seed dressing insecticides wear off.
- If re-sowing bare areas in paddocks for cover, make sure you use some fertiliser with the seed to encourage maximum vigour.
- Diseases generally like warm, humid weather. Check pulses every few days, and cereals every week for foliar diseases.
- Check for weed control failures and grass levels in crops – they will influence your rotation choice and management for 2019. Prioritise paddocks for herbicide resistance testing. If you don't test grasses for herbicide resistance, you are only guessing what chemicals still work on your farm.
- There is only 8 weeks until harvest starts somewhere on EP – get your gear ready.

MAC Field Day change of date

Thursday 20th September is now the date of the Minnipa Agricultural Centre Annual Field Day.

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