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FLOCK TALK

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Climate considerations

Looking forward, looking back

AS WE move towards the warmer months, it's important that Queensland sheep producers look ahead and accurately assess climate risks to develop clear action plans for their businesses.

Jed Sommerfield, extension officer with the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries said that past trends and climate outlook considerations are critical to effective planning and a producer's ability to maximise productivity.

"While recent weather conditions have been positive for many Queensland sheep producers, some are still facing the impacts of ongoing dry conditions," Mr Sommerfield said.

"Considerations need to be taken around both predicted rainfall variability and seasonal temperatures, as both have a significant impact on productivity, water and feed availability, and profitability.

"One of the best strategies to tackle the risks associated with Australia's variable climate is to strategically incorporate climate trends and outlooks into planning and on-farm decision making.

"Producers can utilise various tools to help assess their climate position and plot out their key decisions and trigger points ahead of summer.

"Online rainfall and climate forecasts help give an early indication of what

the season will be like and the impact it will likely have on businesses."

To access the three-month forecast for your region, head to the Bureau of Meteorology website and search for 'climate outlooks' and click the outlook video. This will offer a short video with a review of the previous conditions and upcoming forecast.

Accuracy of forecasts is critical, and the BOM website has forecast accuracy maps that show how outcomes have measured up to forecasts in the past. This helps producers to be more confident in the forecast in their region.

The accuracy of the forecast varies at different times of the year. As the majority of Queensland is a summer-based production system, it is fortunate that the accuracy of the summer rainfalls is higher coming out of autumn.

For producers interested in assessing the past accuracies in their region, search for 'past accuracies' on the BOM website and click through the top result.

"On a large scale, accuracy maps show that these forecasts are mostly accurate and can help inform short and long-term management strategies," Mr Sommerfield said.

"Another useful tool is the Australian CliMate application, which is available to download for iOS and Android devices and on the



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website. This resource is very user-friendly and has a large amount of data that can answer a lot of questions and provide you with infor-

mation for the upcoming season.

"One of the tools that I commonly refer to is *How's the Season?* With just three

mouse clicks, it lets me customise my scenario and displays on a graph how the current season is tracking compared to the median and all previously recorded seasons.

"I find this particularly useful as a reference point. It is a quick and easy way to see what type of season we are currently in compared to previous individual years and a median."

Mr Sommerfield said these resources help you to better assess your position and allow the proactive mapping out of key decisions and planning strategies.

"Careful management and planning is needed to effectively manage a business, livestock and land throughout dry times," he said.

"Understanding how climatic factors impact your region will help you set trigger points for action. This helps to maximise productivity and profitability even during dry times, whether by giving you time to destock at a good pricing rate or make plans around supplementary feeding.

"Our message is to look at what you did last year, what worked for you and what didn't. Assess what the forecast for early summer looks like and the historical probability of rain at key times of the year, and proactively plan strategies and key triggers.

"Climatic conditions are extremely varied and complex in nature, so it's important that producers are equipped with all the latest information that will help drive more productive and profitable performance, regardless of the season."

To assist Queensland sheep producers, Leading Sheep has developed an easy to use two-page template that will help you plan key decisions for the short term. The template also contains a selection of available resources to provide a good start to help with your planning. To view this template, go to leadingsheep.com.au and search for drought planning template.

Leading Sheep is a partnership between the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and Australian Wool Innovation and is supported by AgForce.