

SOILLESS AUSTRALIA

Protected Cropping Australia Industry Trade Magazine



Capsicum production in Tasmania

SPOTLIGHT ON DRONES IN
PROTECTED CROPPING

Managing nutrients
in cucumbers

contents

FRONT COVER

Colourful capsicums are produced in a state-of-the-art glasshouse beside Bass Strait in northern Tasmania.

Read the full story on page 18.



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Weather forecasts confuse the punters

Are long-term weather forecasts leaving you more confused than ever? Jennifer Stackhouse looked at the varied weather experienced over summer and spoke to the Bureau of Meteorology about where to get more information.

Australia has experienced varied weather again this summer. For some regions, summer was hot and humid with periods of heavy rain, flooding and damage from strong winds and cyclones. Elsewhere, the summer was marked by extreme heat, lack of rain and drought.

Cyclones are a feature of Australia's weather during the wet season in northern Australia. Several large cyclones battered the Queensland coast causing flooding and massive damage to many regions. By contrast, many parts of Western Australia experienced bushfire. Wild storms also brought damage across parts of the West and southern Australia with areas of Victoria badly hit. Protected cropping facilities in the Sydney Basin were also damaged.

More detailed weather forecasts should at least give Australians a heads up as to what's looming on the weather horizon however some farmers are saying long-range forecasts received in 2023 were misleading and skewed their decision making. The much anticipated El Niño, which was declared late in 2023, didn't deliver the drought conditions many farmers expected over summer.

Instead, storms and heavy rain lashed their crops. Some growers also held off planting or made decisions to destock based on the anticipated dry conditions.

"We definitely understand that many growers would have been expecting a hot and dry summer," Meteorologist Jonathan How told ABC News in late summer. "And that, of course, is part of the challenge of some of this long-term forecasting."

Special support from BOM

To better cater for the demands of farmers, the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has formed a team to support agriculture. The BOM agriculture decision support unit was set up to offer farmers better climate insights. The team of two works with agricultural scientists and advisors to provide better support to farmers. The unit builds on the BOM's Agriculture Program established in July 2017. The agricultural decision support service is one of many teams within the Agriculture Program.

In a media statement to *Soilless Australia*, a spokesman for the BOM outlined the services offered to agriculture.

"In September 2022, a partnership with Agricultural Innovation Australia enabled additional services to be provided via the agricultural decision support service. The first briefings were issued in early 2023.

"The Agriculture Program works with partners in the agriculture sector to deliver impact and value by improving weather and

How did BOM fare this summer?

Guardian Australia took a look at how accurate the BOM's long-range forecast was for spring 2023 and summer 2023-2024. The online paper reports that records showed that Australia had its driest September on record, with eastern Australia registering barely a quarter of its average rain at just 7.39mm. October wasn't much better, coming in at the fifth-least rainfall for that month before November falls improved but spring rainfall was still 20 per cent below the 1961-90 average. (August to October was also the driest three-month period ever recorded by the bureau the *Guardian* reports.)

These figures do align with the BOM's forecast.

The next climate issue under discussion on the farm and in the headlines is whether El Niño will continue or breakdown and give way to the wetter weather pattern associated with a La Niña event. For now, the BOM suggests, El Niño is declining putting Australia into a neutral pattern.

"Climate model outlooks suggest El Niño has peaked and is declining, indicating a return to neutral in the southern hemisphere autumn 2024. The ENSO Outlook will remain at El Niño status until this event decays, or signs of a possible La Niña appear," states BOM on its outlook page.